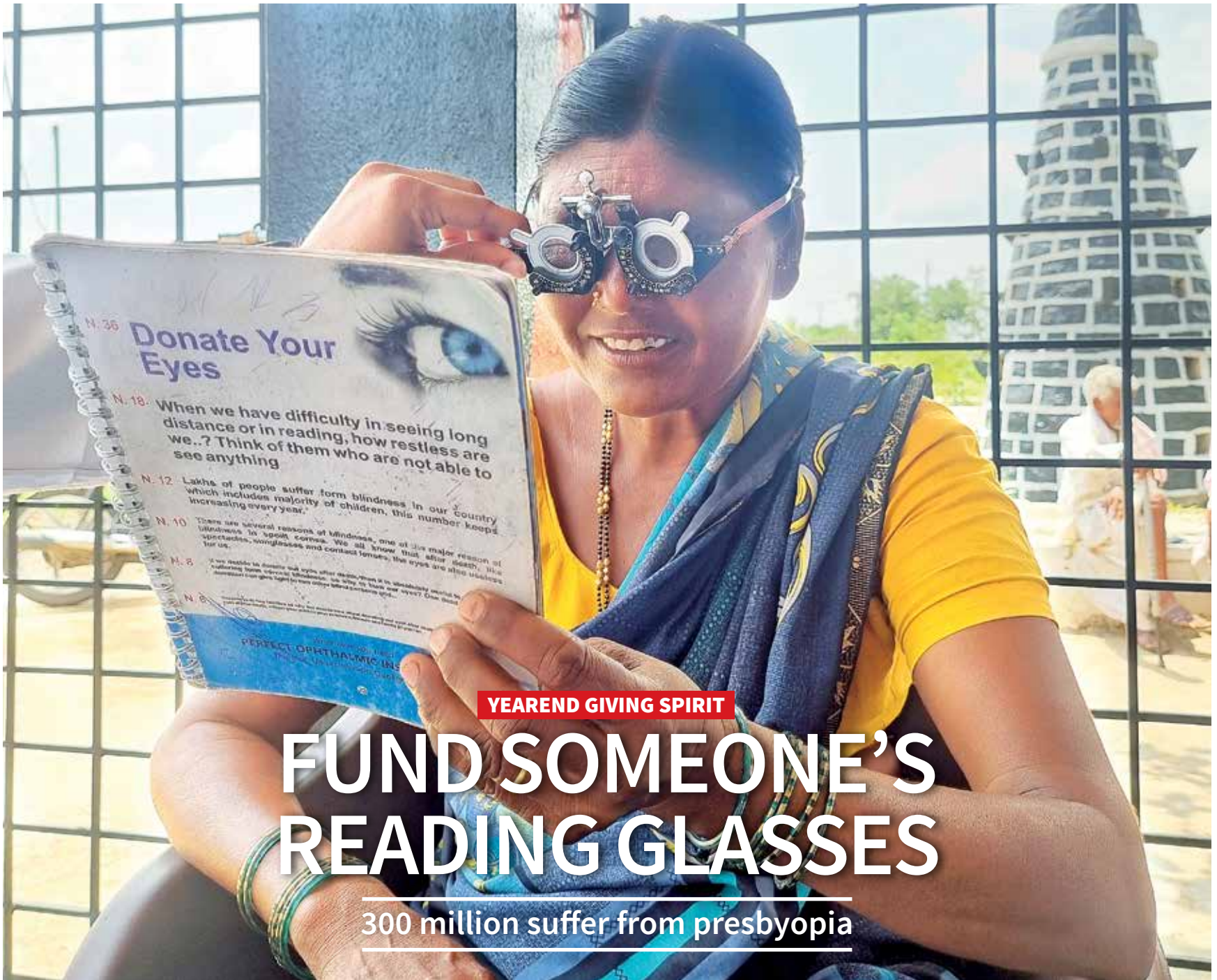


Civil Society



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300 million suffer from presbyopia

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Neglect of healthcare

THE shortcomings in public healthcare are now showing up more starkly than ever. Disease burdens are rising and health infrastructure is cracking up in those parts of the country where investments in medical talent and facilities haven't been made. A case in point is the deplorable state of government-run hospitals in West Bengal. Young and feisty doctors have kept the heat on the Trinamool Congress administration and succeeded in highlighting a long-festering issue.

Why hasn't a new party like the Trinamool done better at providing efficient health services and taking care of doctors so that they perform at their best? Whatever the answer to that question, the agitating doctors have served the public well by sticking to their guns and making the state government accountable. In this issue we speak to doctors and visit a Kolkata hospital.

Government has a role to play in providing dependable and affordable healthcare because not everyone can afford private services and sickness, we know, can send people tumbling into poverty. Healthcare is also a complex terrain. Cleanliness, nutrition, sanitation, housing and air and water all determine how healthy people will be. There are afflictions that affect large numbers of people but get overlooked.

For instance, presbyopia — on which we have our cover story. There is also our story on the little-known problem of vaginismus which is a cross that a great many women carry. A rising tide of cancer cases deserves better attention. Such concerns should be addressed by medical institutions supported by the government.

We highlight issues pertaining to the mountains again in our interview with Ravi Chopra who believes strongly that the environmental issues in the Himalayas are at a tipping point.

We are also back with a stray dog story. The Delhi High Court has correctly pointed out that the capital can't be handed over to dogs and monkeys just to please animal lovers. It doesn't happen this way in cities elsewhere in the world. In this case a disability rights group has gone to court.

Finally, we bring you our columnists and our Living section with an enquiry into toothbrushes, some travel and opportunities to volunteer and donate. We wish our readers a happy and peaceful new year and enjoy you to start it off by giving to many of the good causes that find their way into our pages.



COVER STORY

FUND SOMEONE'S GLASSES

The inability to see near objects affects millions of Indians. They find it difficult to pursue livelihoods. But it is a problem that can be easily fixed. The/Nudge Institute has a plan.

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LETTERS



Beyond Ladakh

Your cover story, 'Listening to Ladakh', made me stop and think not only about Ladakh but the discriminatory manner in which all Himalayan and other mountain states are being treated. It is appalling that they have been ignored for so long. A very important issue has been raised.

Kavita Shaji

Sonam Wangchuk articulates the unique issues his region and people face in a clear and lucid manner. It's time we listened to such voices of reason. It isn't every day that a man of his stature decides to walk to Delhi. Clearly, his plea was being ignored.

Lalit Manocha

If the disasters happening in Uttarakhand could not teach us a lesson, what will? We will be left with no safe and serene piece of earth. Mountain regions are always the ones that suffer most.

Udit K.

Ravi Chopra's words, "There are certain kinds of disasters sitting over there. I can see them. And I need to be prepared today, if there is a disaster tomorrow," really stayed with me. I think we are already too late.

Veenu Mehra

(Ravi Chopra's important interview appears in full in this issue. The Ladakh story quoted him in part.)

Cleaning India

I enjoyed reading your interview with Raees Mohammad, 'People should be getting into the business of sanitation.'

His idea of removing the stigma associated with sanitation by making such work respectable is a new perspective. He saw stigma up close while growing up, so it was really moving to see the way he channelized it by getting into the very profession that was the

cause of discrimination he faced.

Naina Jaiswal

In the 21st century we still have caste violence, discrimination and marginalization — but Raees Mohammad's ideas bring hope. If the work is respectable and made into a business, as it should be, why would people dare point out regressive notions?

Karuna Goyal

Precious road

I read about this road in Gurugram which your reporter, Sukanya Sharma, wrote about, 'Gurugram gets a road people can walk on', and I made it a point to visit it. I was really impressed. The pavements are clean and convenient to walk on and the road is a pleasure to drive through. The pavements are also really safe and you can cycle through calmly. It was a treat to visit public infrastructure of such high standard anywhere in the National Capital Region.

Ramesh Naidu

Gurugram really needed this. All of us do. There are accidents every second day, rash driving, bad roads, laws wound up in never-ending issues. A road like this comes as a breath of fresh air.

Gauri Mohan

To see a road with gender-sensitive and inclusive infrastructural design makes me feel noticed and heard. A big thank you from all women to all

the corporations, companies and individuals involved.

Niharika Popli

Goa sojourn

Your article on Three Waters in Goa was brilliant. I have stayed there myself and it felt like I was visiting the place again while reading this piece. Such a lovely idea.

Geetanjali Mohan

A non-hotel that is also a museum for seashells? Three Waters is my next stop when I'm finally in Goa. It sounds absolutely fascinating. The details were soothing to read and I found myself getting lost in the serenity and picturesque quality seen in the photographs.

Meghna Tiwari

The idea that Goa is all about the noise is so clichéd now. It was pleasantly surprising to read your story on Three Waters, a quiet, serene and calm getaway spot in Goa. Lovely idea and seems to be very well managed.

Kashvi Dubey

Helping hand

The first time I came across SBI's Youth for India Fellowship was in your article, 'From fellowship to rural startup', and the idea made a lot of sense. There are so many people who want to do good and make a difference in our country but financial constraints and obstacles get in

the way. Initiatives like these go a long way in helping to break that barrier.

Kanish Menon

Hill music

Very happy to read Rakesh Agrawal's article, 'Pahadi bands make merry'. This should inspire other such bands to enrich our diverse culture.

Soumitra Ray

As someone who plays classical instruments, I found it particularly interesting to read about the revival of old instruments. This made for such a good read. I can never stop marvelling at how much talent our country has.

Jyoti Huria

Mysuru sights

Really liked reading Susheela Nair's piece, 'Looking for a getaway? Try Mysuru'. I especially loved reading about Ibis Styles. A modern hotel with contemporary style is rare these days. Nature lovers will enjoy the Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary.

Their pet-friendly atmosphere will attract all animal lovers. The Rail Museum is worth a visit. Also, shopping for Mysore silks, sandalwood and carved items is such a pleasure.

Nalini Krishnankutty

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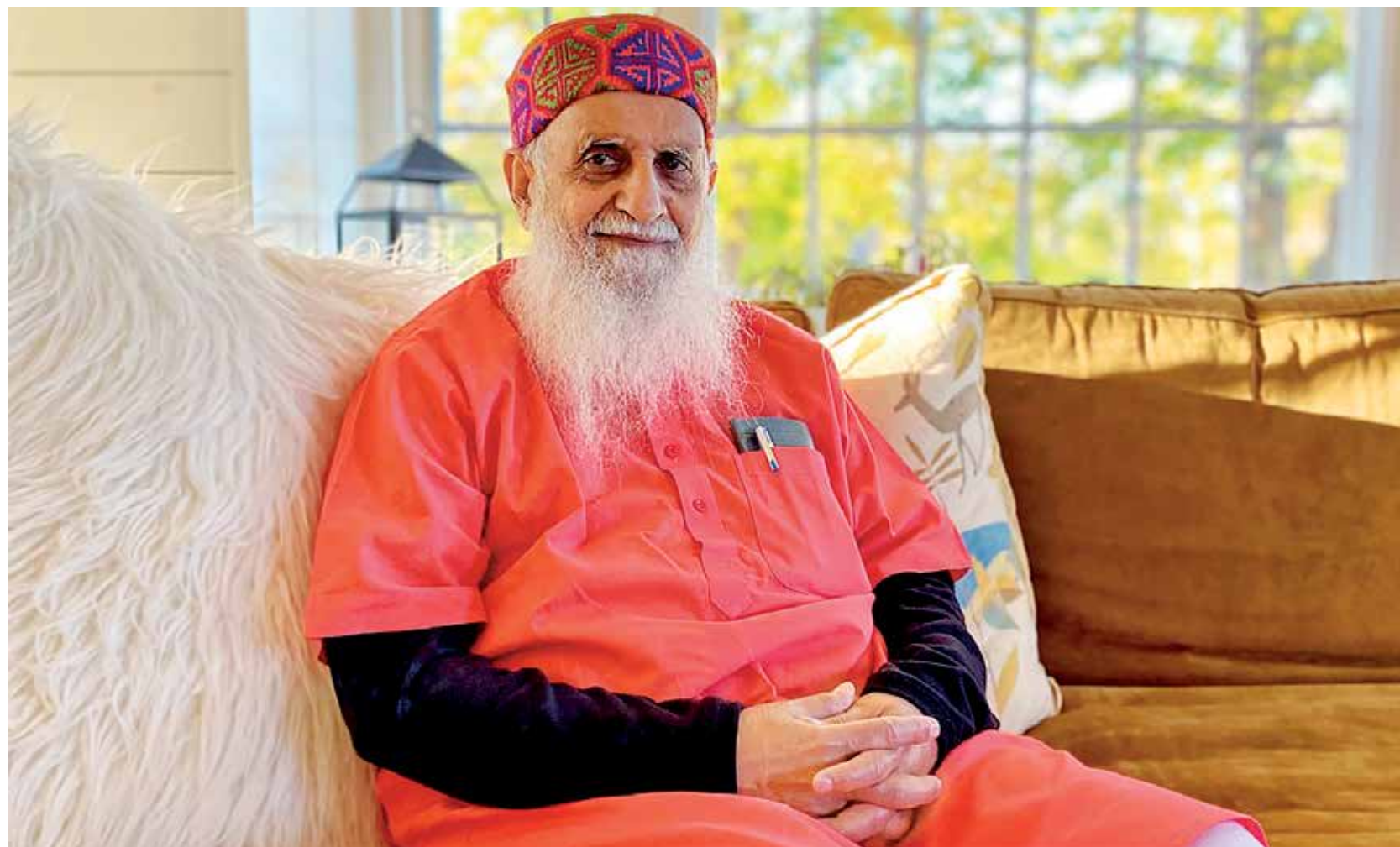
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A NEW POLITICS IS NEEDED, SAYS RAVI CHOPRA



Ravi Chopra: 'It's very hard to be heard anymore'

'In the mountains we are now at a tipping point'

Civil Society News

New Delhi

WHEN he set up the People's Science Institute (PSI) in Dehradun all of 40 years ago, Ravi Chopra, with an IIT degree to boot, was well ahead of his time in his concern for the Himalayas.

He remains one of the most honest, socially driven and scientific minds on the needs of the mountain states, which are now faced with a growing environmental crisis.

Chopra has served on an empowered committee appointed by the Supreme Court. It is to his credit that he has always been eager to engage with government. It is also his hallmark that he stands up for communities and their rights.

Civil Society spoke to him about the Ladakh agitation and more. Here is an edited version of our interesting interview.

Q: What did you think of the protest in Ladakh, Sonam Wangchuk and others walking all the way to Delhi, going on a hunger strike?

What is most striking for me is that people feel compelled to do these desperate acts in a country that is supposed to be a democracy. We have

elected representatives. We have governments. And yet, the only way we can be heard is to hit the streets. And most often, even that doesn't work.

We must recognize the courage that these people have taken and they're sticking to their principles. They have been very orderly. They have been very systematic and they are totally non-violent. Those things have to be appreciated.

Q: As an environmentalist and an engineer, you have gone out of your way to engage with people in authority who might not be seeing the world your way. Why is it difficult to engage?

That depends on the government. Until 10 years ago we had governments that always gave people a place where they were heard — and I am not saying one government, I am including the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government and state governments.

There were all kinds of representatives and you could walk into their homes, whether they were MPs or ministers or whatever. You could go up to the government, or governor in your state. We still do that. And you could be heard. But in the past 10 years, I'm sorry to say, the NDA government shows no willingness to interact with the common people, to listen to their problems and complaints. And this has been a systematic

record. The farmers, the wrestlers, the environmentalists....

Q: The oversized presence of corporations in our lives is not new. But is there a preponderance of corporations influencing decision-making and coming together with the political class? Do you think you've reached the point where you can't talk to anybody because the quantum of power that you're dealing with is so enormous?

Yeah, there are a lot of people who believe that to be a factor, the coming together of certain very large corporations and the political class is needed. That's there. But I think (this attitude) has gone down the ladder. We find that our chief minister doesn't have time to talk to protesters who come from Joshimath. He gives them about two minutes late in the night. The district magistrate doesn't have time to talk to the people of Joshimath. So it's just going down the ladder now. It's very hard to be heard anymore. News media, you know better than me, is captured by one side.

Q: The solution to this, therefore, is to have a different kind of politics. Yes, it's far more important to have a different kind of politics than different political parties because, you know, when they function within a given milieu they all tend to become like this. I mean, you see the Congress-run governments.

Q: Sonam Wangchuk has raised the issue of not just Ladakh but the entire Himalayan region. And he has said that we need to ring alarm bells about the environmental issues that affect all the states in the Himalayas. What would be your primary concerns?

My primary concern is that we are standing at the very edge of a tipping point, beyond which are catastrophic impacts and possibly irreversible climate change. And I don't think the government is displaying a good understanding of what's in store for us. It may have that understanding. I don't care about that. It's not displaying it. It's not there in its words and actions. To begin with, the whole Himalayan region is geologically fragile and ecologically sensitive. Extreme impacts on it are going to be devastating.

Q: So, what you are saying is that you have climate change, a fragile Himalayas and a government that is not responsive?

Can I elaborate on this? We know that there are certain kinds of disasters that are sitting over there. I can see them. And I need to be prepared today if there is a disaster tomorrow. I need to be in disaster mitigation mode. I need to have disaster resilience built into the development, so-called development programmes. We don't see a comprehensive understanding.

Q: Is the government living in denial?

To a large extent, yes. It's basically an anti-environment government to begin with.

Q: What is it that you fear in the next few years for the Himalayas, especially where you are in Uttarakhand?

What we see are two major manifestations of climate change in the Himalayan region. One is temperature change and the other is precipitation pattern change. There are rising temperatures everywhere. If you look at the foothills, the habitations below 1,000 m or so, temperatures are soaring to 40°C in the summer. And for extended periods. Are we preparing to meet this challenge? By the end of this decade, we could hit 50°C. Are we thinking in terms of heat shelters? I haven't heard the word. Are we thinking in terms of decongesting our concrete jungles? Or relocating economic activity, dispersing it, dispersing tourism, lowering temperatures?

You take the precipitation pattern. We have less winter precipitation. The rainfall in summer is becoming more intense, in shorter spells. And the phenomenon of western disturbances, which used to be primarily a winter event, is now there also in summer. When the western disturbance

collides with the summer monsoon clouds, it produces disasters. Are we redesigning our roads? No. Are we redesigning our dams? No. Are we trying to reforest and green our cities? No. So I don't see the mitigation measures that could have been possible.

Q: Paint some kind of a scenario. What would you see happening?

Let's begin with what's happening at the top. Glaciers, we are told, are melting. But, you know, many of the glaciers are small. The ice pack is not uniformly thick. So, some parts of it where the ice pack or ice mass is less, they are melting and forming lakes. As a result, there's fragmentation of glaciers. Lakes are being formed. The number of lakes is increasing and therefore the probability of GLOFs (glacial lake outburst floods) is increasing. GLOFs will increase. And the attention of researchers and the governments is on that. Poor Sikkim tried and it couldn't do anything because their machine wouldn't work at that height. You need to prepare disaster prevention plans now. What is going to happen in the river valleys when that flood comes down?

If you come down to slightly lower levels, let's say 1,500 to 2,500 metres, that's where our hill stations are located. And these are areas where we used to have lots of springs and small mountain streams. Now, warmer winter and spring, less snowfall, less precipitation in the winter and the springs are drying up. What has the government done about it? In the past decade, NGOs with local communities and some state governments

'The Himalayan region is fragile. Extreme impacts on it are going to be devastating. I don't think the government is displaying a good understanding of what is in store for us.'

in the Himalayan region have revived thousands of streams. Himanshu Kulkarni (a hydrogeologist) gave me a figure of 10,000 springs being revived. Where is the government programme on this?

If the aquifers and the springs dry up then the base flow of rainfed rivers disappears. Then what happens to the paddy nurseries that have to be created around the end of May? You know there's no water in your rainfed river. The Kosi in Uttarakhand does not have water at that time. So, it affects agriculture. If water supply in those rivers is reduced, it affects water supply to the nearby areas for domestic purposes.

In urban areas, we are creating heat islands. Citizens for Green Democracy in Dehradun went around the city on May 28-29, recording temperatures at various locations. At Clock Tower, on the tarred surface of the road, the temperature was 65°C. What was the temperature of the ambient air? 42°C. Under the big peepul at Clock Tower, it was 37°C. And I have several such recordings made by them at different locations which indicate very clearly that we are creating heat islands. The shade of a building is much hotter than the shade of a tree.

We have approved plans to cut down 65,000 trees in this valley. Several thousand have already been cut in Dehradun. And my figures are that about 25,000 trees throughout the valley have been cut already. This number will go up to 100,000 trees or more if the pending plans are approved. Doon Valley was the first eco-sensitive zone that was created in the country. Does anybody care?

Q: What would be the mechanisms you would propose for better decisions to be taken?

The first thing I would propose is to push the forest department back into reserve forests. That's all that they can manage. I'm not saying that

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they can do a great job, but they can manage it. At the time of Independence, the area under the forest department was roughly about 33 to 35 million hectares. Today it is 70 million hectares.

Where did that come from? From the Rajwade and the community forests. They have gradually weakened community institutions and taken over their forests. The *van* panchayats of Uttarakhand have been ruined. When forests are ruined, there is no water and you can't cultivate, so what will people do? They will migrate to the city.

We can put in checks and balances and you can work with people because their lives depend on those forests. I'm advocating community ownership of natural resources, both of jungles as well as of water.

Q: The government needs to build roads on the border, right? What kind of consultative machinery do you think should be used?

Well, in most of these issues you are going to impinge on some natural resource base in some region, right? If you had community control, let's say in PESA [Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act] areas, at least on paper people have those rights. So at least include those community representatives in your decision-making bodies. And not just one or two representatives. I have found repeatedly that in decision-making bodies, people's representation is just a token one and therefore very weak. They have to be a majority.

Q: Wouldn't this be unrealistic? I mean, these are decisions which involve national security. Can you imagine a situation in which the government is in a minority and communities are the majority and control decision-making?

Such decisions would impact the communities staying on the border more than anybody else, right? It's a well-established fact that our borders have to be protected by citizens living there who are dependent on that land. Look back and think. When an Indo-Pakistan war breaks out, who supplies food to the Army, putting their own lives at risk?

Why is the government so scared of Sonam? My guess would be that Sonam has probably better information about the state of our border in Ladakh than the Government of India (GoI) does.

The government makes noises about bringing development to border areas. You need people settled there and their lives are going to be affected. They are not going to fight with the Defence Department. People are willing to give and take. I don't see unreasonableness by them.

Q: If you don't have a politics which trusts people, works with them and understands their needs you won't be able to achieve a stable form of development where environment truly matters, right?

Yes. Look at the whole story of Char Dham. The committee gets set up. It's heavily in favour of the government. Ultimately, the HPC (high-powered committee) report reaches the Supreme Court. The judge says all that the minority is saying is to implement your rules and regulations.

He passes an order that instead of having a 10 metre-wide tarred road surface, according to your own rules and regulations, come down to a five-and-a-half metres tarred road surface. At that hearing, the Defence Department submitted an affidavit, in September 2020, saying they needed only seven metres of tarred road surface.

Tushar Mehta, the solicitor-general, tells the court, since Mr Chopra is saying five and a half metres, we are willing to agree to seven metres for defence purposes. After that, when we try to get that five-and-a-half metres order implemented, there is stonewalling. A new appeal is filed by the GoI. Another hearing date is fixed. The Defence Department files a new affidavit asking for seven metres. The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) files an affidavit saying it wants 10 metres.

The judge says, you are two departments of the same government. Can you please sit down and resolve your differences? Fifteen days later the meeting takes place between the two departments. And what do they do? They supersede the old regulation of MoRTH on the five-and-a-half-metre regulation for the hills and the new regulation now is 10 metres. ■



Dr Bipresh Chakraborty at SSKM's 'resting room'

Citizens come out for a march in support of doctors' demands

Dr Sayantani Ghosh Hazra at the art exhibition organized by junior doctors

'I won't be able to give you a glass of water here'

In a Kolkata hospital little has improved

Aiema Tauheed
Kolkata

THE resting room in the School of Digestive and Liver Disease at the SSKM Hospital is cramped and grim with broken locks, two beds and a single table. A mattress perched on another two tables serves as a third bed. There is no attached toilet. This is where doctors are supposed to catch their breath during long shifts.

"If you ask me for a glass of water, I won't be able to give it to you. This building has only one Aquaguard," says Dr Bipresh Chakraborty, a DM Gastroenterology resident at the IPGME&R and SSKM Hospital.

"The lack of drinking water is astonishing. If you check the sodium levels of most resident doctors, including myself, they're often raised. That means we're dehydrated," he says.

Ninety days after the brutal rape and murder of a young junior doctor at RG Kar Hospital, nothing much seems to have changed in Kolkata's dismal government-run hospitals, despite protests by doctors joined by supportive citizens.

The agitation was called off briefly. But it resumed when doctors felt their demands for justice and improved working conditions were not being met.

On November 9, the West Bengal Junior Doctors' Front (WBJDF) called for a citizens' march from College Square to Esplanade. They set up a 'Droher Gallery', or Gallery of Rebellion, displaying write-ups, artworks and photographs by doctors, staff, and citizens

on medical college campuses. A public 'charge sheet' was presented by the Joint Platform of Doctors, asking for accountability and listing government failures related to the case.

"From day one, our demands have remained consistent," says Dr Chakraborty, looking haggard after a 42-hour shift at the SSKM Hospital. "Initially, there was no formal WBJDF. We were just an outraged group of medicos who gathered to protest. We organized ourselves into individual Resident Doctors' Associations (RDAs) and began holding meetings, which eventually led to the formation of the WBJDF."

Dr Chakraborty has been a vocal and steadfast participant in the protests. He also demonstrated compassion when he helped a police officer who fell ill during one of the demonstrations.

He explained that their original list of five demands focused on seeking justice for Abhaya, the name used for the young woman doctor who was brutalized and killed in the RG Kar seminar room. They wanted the government to address systemic failures that resulted in the tragedy.

"The primary demand was justice for Abhaya," he says. "The other points were about holding accountable those in power — be it the principal, police officials, or others — whose actions or inactions played a part. We also aimed to maintain a democratic environment in medical institutions where every voice could be heard."

As some demands were partially met, such as the transfer of key officials, the group refined their demands into a 10-point charter without altering their core message.

Dr Chakraborty discussed the few steps that have been taken to improve security. "It's true that many CCTV cameras have been installed, but the way some have been placed is suspicious. Zones that could be covered by a single CCTV camera now have four or five at the same angle," he says. "We laugh about it, but there's a deeper concern. Could there be corruption tied to these installations?"

'Even basic facilities have not been provided as yet. There are no separate restrooms for male and female doctors. There is no attached washroom. Biometric locks are missing.'

He emphasizes that corruption has become ingrained in the system. "They're happy to fulfil demands if it means more money can be made. But despite all this, biometric locks haven't been installed. There are only basic locks, not the biometric ones we need for safety."

Requests for police personnel have also fallen on deaf ears. "The same old contractual guards, mostly uncles in their late fifties or early sixties, continue to be deployed. If something happens, we might need to save them," remarks Dr Chakravarty. The 'civic police', basically ordinary people in uniforms, have also been put on duty at the hospitals.

Even basic facilities have not been provided as yet. "There are still no separate restrooms for male and female doctors," says Dr Chakraborty. "Anyone can access common rest areas without notice, even patients' relatives. There's no attached washroom, and the biometric locks are absent."

He stressed that this normalization of substandard conditions has gone on for too long. "Our seniors accepted it, and now we're fighting to make sure our juniors don't have to," he said. "Not everyone

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protests. Many just adjust. We're among the few trying to change things. Some of these are very small demands such as functioning air conditioners and drinking water. Yet, these issues persist."

Dr Chakraborty's disappointment highlights how the hospital system fails doctors. "Junior doctors are the backbone of the healthcare system. When the system depends so heavily on trainees, it's a sign of deep structural flaws. And the government's indifference only makes it worse," he says.

The canteen situation remains dire. "SSKM includes several annexe hospitals where we're required to work, such as PG Polyclinic and Shambhu Nath Pandit Hospital. PG Polyclinic is an annexe hospital, and SSKM itself is an exclusive gastro hospital," he explains. "When we are on duty in these hospitals, we face the same long working hours, but there's no canteen available. The PG hostel has a canteen, and the MBBS hostel has one as well, but the food quality is poor. This forces all MBBS students, postgraduates, and post-doctoral students to rely solely on the PG hostel canteen."

The terrible condition of the canteen forces doctors to either order food online, which is difficult to afford on a meagre stipend, or go without a proper meal. Dr Chakraborty also points out that ordering food is not a healthy option.

Dr Sayantani Ghosh Hazra, a third-year postgraduate trainee doctor in pathology at KPC Medical College and Hospital, fasted during the hunger strike days of the agitation, putting her health at risk.

She expresses cautious optimism about the changes taking place as she walks through the vast campus of KPC Medical College and Hospital which is splattered with artworks and slogans demanding justice.

"We do look at it hopefully. Some changes may take time and some are expected to happen. We are aware that our final-year examination is going to be held under CCTV cameras. Other strict measures have been introduced. We are hopeful about these changes," she says.

Several security protocols have been put in place for the exams. For example, anyone entering an examination hall will be thoroughly checked for any objects that could be used for cheating. Additionally, there will be live CCTV monitoring of the examination, which they had asked for.

She also noted significant changes in how the exam papers will be reviewed. Previously, the exam papers were checked by in-house faculty. Now, all papers will be checked at a central location, with the assessment being done in a double-blind manner.

"This means that neither the person reviewing the papers will know whose paper they are checking, nor will the students know who is reviewing their papers," she says.

She is of the view that the state has responded to the all-pervasive "threat culture" in the hospital. "Those who voiced their concerns were often threatened with supplementary exams, failure, or harassment," she says. Implementation of the new exam Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) should put an end to the hospital's threat culture, she concedes.

The main purpose of the agitation, both Dr Hazra and Dr Chakraborty say, was to ensure that another Abhaya incident does not occur.

"The fact of the matter remains that it's been 90 days, and we've all heard the phrase 'justice delayed is justice denied'. It's very painful to witness this, especially after all the protests," Dr Hazra says. ■

The terrible condition of the canteen forces doctors to either order food online, which is difficult on a meagre budget, or go without a proper meal.

BODY & MIND

The way to cure vaginismus is to talk about it

Aiema Tauheed
Kolkata

FOR four years a healing programme conducted online has been helping Indian women deal with a little-understood condition called vaginismus which makes them involuntarily freeze when they are at the point of having sex.

Like the eye blinks to keep out even a speck of dust, the vagina closes down and becomes a wall at the time of penetration. The buttocks and thighs also contract.

Dr Taru Jindal, a gynaecologist who conducts the course, says it has been attended by 500 women who couldn't understand their situation and found it difficult to explain it to their partners.

Making it more complicated, vaginismus does not result from lack of desire. So, there can be foreplay, intimacy and a peaking of the urge for sex, but a complete shutdown at the time of consummation.

Dr Jindal herself suffered from vaginismus. Though married to a psychiatrist and batchmate, it took her seven years to deal with her condition.

She says since talk about sexual dysfunction and sex itself is uncommon, women with vaginismus, of whom she was one, don't seek help and end up taking the blame for deteriorating relationships.

Dr Jindal estimates that in any society 10 to 15 percent of women have vaginismus. But there is little recognition of their number. Even if women do want help, physicians who can diagnose vaginismus and treat it are tough to find. As a result, women live under its burden.

It is also not restricted to sex, but any kind of vaginal penetration such as a gynaecologist's finger, an ultrasound probe or a tampon.

"It's very important to focus on the fact that it is involuntary because a lot of men feel that women are doing this deliberately or they are not trying hard enough, which is not true. It is beyond one's control. Vaginismus is not the woman's fault," says Dr Jindal.

"Funnily, many gynaecologists who see vaginismus patients, given its relation to the vagina, are often not trained to treat it. Despite 12 years of medical education and an MD in gynaecology, I don't remember 'vaginismus' being covered in our textbooks. On the other hand, psychiatrists, who study it in their training, usually lack practical experience with the condition because they don't see many patients with it," she explains.

She herself encountered conflicting advice from various specialists. Mental health professionals focused on trauma, while gynaecologists and physiotherapists emphasized physical treatment like pelvic floor relaxation. This disjointed approach, combined with the emotional burden of shame, made it challenging for her to find effective treatment.

In 2015 she quit her work to focus on her recovery. She researched extensively and developed a comprehensive healing plan. In around four weeks, she healed her vaginismus herself. Determined to help



Dr Taru Jindal: 'Social media has been a game-changer as far as treatment is concerned'

others suffering from this condition, she took this up as a cause.

In 2020, Dr Jindal launched a two-month online vaginismus healing programme in partnership with Proactive for Her. This programme, based on her personal four-step formula, integrates both mental and physical aspects of treatment. In January 2024, the programme was recognized as the 'Best Digital Healthcare Project' at the 3rd Digital Health Awards in Delhi.

"Social media has been a game-changer as far as treatment is concerned," notes Dr Jindal.

Earlier, women could only google "painful sex" and scour the internet to find a diverse range of search results. But vaginismus is a specific type of sexual pain. Knowing the term is crucial for proper treatment. Traditional healthcare systems can be dismissive of it. However, Instagram has opened doors to a wide audience, allowing posts about vaginismus to reach many people. This visibility has helped individuals identify their condition and seek help through Dr Jindal's programme.

"Vaginismus direly impacted my marriage. After seven years, we were on the brink of separation when I focused on treating my vaginismus," Dr Jindal says. The condition can be a home-wrecker, leading to frequent arguments with a partner. Initially, the partner may try to be supportive but over time frustration can build. This can transform the relationship from one of intimacy to that of mere roommates. The impact on reproductive life is also significant, as the desire for parenthood may be hindered. In a desperate bid to become pregnant, couples might turn to IVF. "Personally, I experienced these challenges, and as a gynaecologist who delivers many babies, it was a constant reminder of my own inability to overcome this issue."

While sexual frustration is a direct consequence, the impact goes far beyond the bedroom walls. In Indian culture, a woman's identity is often linked to her ability to procreate, provide sexual pleasure, or nurture children. Vaginismus challenges this very core of that identity, as it prevents consummation of the marriage or relationship.

Devanshi, one of 500-plus women who overcame vaginismus through Dr Jindal's programme, says, "The biggest impact of not understanding what was happening or where I was going wrong was a severe drop in self-esteem and a deep sense of guilt for not fulfilling

my role in the marriage."

Seeing others able to engage in sexual activity can lead to feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt, causing a loss of self-confidence and self-esteem. This often leads to irritability, sadness, anxiety, and depression.

THE REASONS Yet Dr Jindal called this condition a protective response. But why would the body perceive penetration to be a threat? There are various causes identified by Dr Jindal, especially in the Indian context.

The foremost cause is the widespread belief that sex is painful. Many women hear stories about the first night being painful, involving bleeding and hymen rupture. Such narratives about pain and sex being unsafe become deeply ingrained in our system. Thus, the body responds by contracting, as it senses danger and signals that it is not safe.

The second is shame. In India, sex is approached with great conservatism. Premarital sex is disapproved of. This creates a scenario where something that has been considered morally illegal for the first 25 to 30 years of life must suddenly be embraced and enjoyed overnight. Such a drastic shift is challenging for the body and mind to reconcile, leading to vaginismus.

The third reason is bad touch. Abuse while growing up can leave an indelible mark that continues into adulthood. Instances of sexual violence such as the Nirbhaya case of 2012 have been etched into the psyche of many young girls with no sex education. Sex and violence have been conflated.

"When we treat people now, the first thing they mention is the Nirbhaya case. Its impact was so profound that it has led many to instinctively view anything sexual or penetrative as unsafe," says Dr Jindal. She proceeds to explain, "The severity of the initial stimulus does not necessarily determine the extent of its impact. The crucial factor is how the individual processes the experience. It becomes essential to differentiate between violence and sex. Reframing the understanding of sex as pleasurable, painless and consensual rather than as dangerous."

Another reason is the impression that sex comes with painful consequences such as painful pregnancies, diseases and unwanted foetuses. Some people who hear of such stories come to see sex as actually being dangerous.

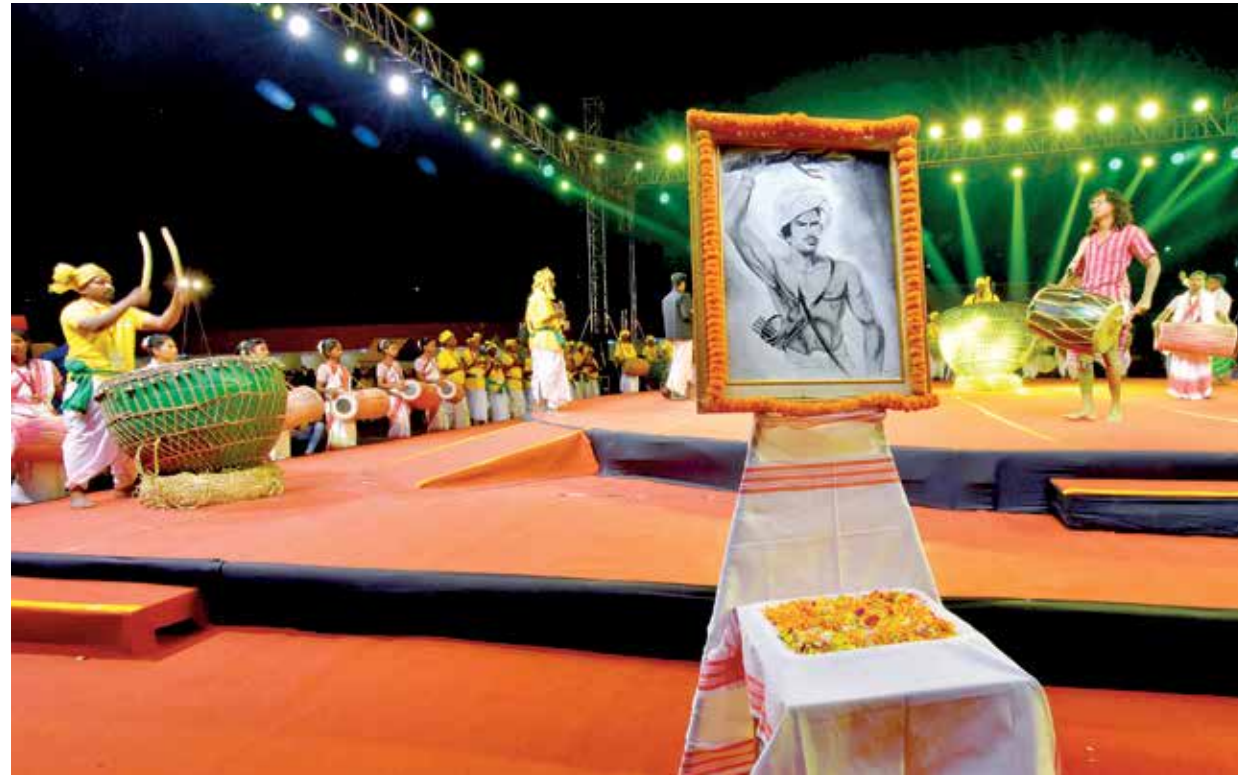
Thus, a combined mind-and-body approach is crucial for effective treatment. It should address both emotional and physical healing. Emotionally, it involves revisiting and healing past trauma. Physically, it focuses on pelvic floor relaxation to ease the tension in the vaginal muscles. This includes vaginal training with dilators of increasing sizes, starting small and gradually progressing, to help patients learn to relax while inserting them.

Vaginismus often decreases libido and desire. Initially, many women with vaginismus experience high levels of desire, but repeated failures and disappointments with penetration can cause their body to shut down desire as a protective response. The good news is that it is just a temporary reduction of desire because of loss of hope.

"Don't waste time. Come to us for help," says Dr Jindal's message to anyone who thinks they might be suffering from this condition. One can reach out to her at @tarujindal on Instagram.

It is not as though everyone gets cured. Dr Jindal's success rate is 51 percent. It is because of the complexities of treating someone with vaginismus. Trauma apart, not everyone is willing to adopt vaginal dilators and do pelvic floor exercises with the same dedication. Successful cases take six to 12 weeks.

Proactive for Her offers a queer-friendly, inclusive and judgement-free space to heal. The programme avoids using terms like "marriage" or "husband", opting instead for "relationships" and "partners" to be more inclusive. They also ask for and use participants' preferred pronouns, having treated queer folk. ■



Homage to Birsa Munda with the traditional beating of drums



Drummers in full flow



Enthralling women dancers from the Paraja tribe in Odisha

Happy space for tribal people

IN THE decade that Samvaad has been held, it has become a happy and special space for tribal people to come together.

More than 2,500 showed up this year, asserting their unique identities through music, dance, prayer, sport, literature, films and more.

As tribal cultures get wiped out, it is an achievement to be able to bring them to one focal place to reenergize and keep them alive.

Making it possible is Tata Steel, which hosts Samvaad at Jamshedpur each year. The 11th edition was held in November. A passionate young team led by Sourav Roy at the Tata Steel Foundation works all year round to make Samvaad a huge celebration, perhaps the only one of its kind in India.

The modern world recognizes that its future lies in the balance to be found in these ancient cultures. Samvaad helps tribal people grasp their own importance in the survival of the planet.

Over the years, Samvaad has not only brought people to an event, it has reached out to them as well. There are small regional Samvaads too.

When people come to Jamshedpur for the event it is because they know from others in their communities that this is a place where they can safely express themselves, Roy explains.

"They come in trust and over the years that trust has only grown," he says. Ashoke Chakraborty of *Civil Society* was there to shoot these pictures ■



T.V. Narendran, managing director of Tata Steel, inaugurates Samvaad



A fusion band from Meghalaya



A range of cuisines were on offer



All the way from Ladakh's Nubra Valley



A tribal healer's stall



Traditional sports had their moment under the floodlights

Doon's forest of many memories

Rakesh Agrawal
Dehradun

A Remembrance Forest or Smriti Van is emerging on a three-acre patch on the outskirts of dusty Dehradun. It is likely to become the densest forest near the city. From 250 trees in 2020, this young forest now has over 6,000 trees, including 2,000 fruit-bearing ones. People have been steadily arriving here to plant a sapling in memory of a near and dear one who has passed away.

Located in Maldevata, around 15 km from Dehradun, the Smriti Van is close to a free-flowing canal. Dhad, a voluntary organization which promotes the culture and heritage of Uttarakhand, came up with this idea.

"The city has lost 75 percent of its greenery. And our mandate is to protect our *jal, jangal, jameen* (water, forests and land). We spoke to the government on starting a Remembrance Forest and they agreed. The forest was inaugurated on Harela, Uttarakhand's folk festival, day in July 2020 by the then chief minister, Trivendra Singh Rawat," says Tamany Mangain, general secretary of Dhad.

Planting saplings has become a routine affair. Every year on Earth Day, Environment Day and Harela, saplings are planted with much fanfare by politicians and celebrities only to be forgotten. Sometimes, the young plants shrivel up and die.

"We realized that for plant survival it was crucial to involve people. And that could be achieved by involving them emotionally. So, we started this urban forest, where people can plant saplings in memory of their deceased ancestor or friend," says Neena Rawat, secretary of Dhad.

An iron protector is placed around the young sapling to protect it and a placard naming the deceased person is hung on it. This has prompted people to come here and plant saplings. But more than just raising a plantation, it was important to get people to take care of the plants so that they could survive. So, whoever wants to plant a sapling must contribute ₹100 per month or ₹1,200 per year for its upkeep.

"It's a small amount to pay. I have planted hundreds of saplings elsewhere too. But it is here that we come every Sunday since we are emotionally attached to our saplings. It's my duty," says Ashutosh Mishra who works with the forest department in Dehradun.

From this amount, a *chowkidar*, Sanjay Kumar, has been hired. He lives in a two-room

set on the premises and keeps an eye on the young plants. "I water them regularly and I save them from wild plants," he says. "After a year the saplings are strong enough to take care of themselves. They become small sturdy trees that can survive for life."

Sanjay Kumar's daily vigil has resulted in a high survival rate of these plants. "The survival rate of our saplings is about 93 percent today," affirms Lokesh Navani, director of Dhad.

Vinod Nautiyal and his wife, Preeti, arrived here on a Sunday from Dehradun with their two children to plant saplings in memory of his parents. They were warmly welcomed by Virendra Khanduri, coordinator of Dhad. "Let's spend a green Sunday," he remarked.

While Vinod and Preeti chose saplings of sal and Himalayan poplar, the children preferred fruit trees and chose litchi and guava. They picked up shovels, trowels and spades and began digging pits for the plants.

Vinay Anand Baudai, former principal, Shri Guru Ram Rai Degree College, also arrived to do *shramdan* with a few others. "Every Sunday, I reach here early morning to do digging, weeding and soil bonding so that the earth is ready for the new plants," he says.

Since a considerable segment of the population of the state migrates for work, people arrive from different states and countries to plant saplings in memory of their loved ones.

Seventy-year-old Usha Gusain, who lives in Texas, US, came to plant a flowering plant in memory of her husband.

"Many hill people aren't able to come here themselves. They request us to plant saplings in memory of their relatives, which we are happy to do," says Khanduri.

The only downside is the warped legal status of the land. "When Rawat was chief minister he ordered the district magistrate to find land to create a district forest. He asked the Thano Forest Ranger of the forest department, who identified this land. It was then handed over to us," says Khanduri.

He is hopeful that there will not be any change in its status. "Since hundreds of people are now involved with Smriti Van, the government will not destroy it due to social pressure. In any case, they have lots of land in this area."

Hopefully this newbie forest will be left alone to thrive, despite the government's penchant for felling trees to build roads, airports and whatnot. ■

BRINGING SMART 'YOUNG TINKER' TO IIC

In Rohini Nayar's name a rural prize

Civil Society News
New Delhi

WHEN Anil Pradhan earned a degree in civil engineering in Bhopal you could say he had safely transitioned to a life that might never have been his without a college education.

He was born in a family of modest means in underserved rural Odisha. His village, Baral, is actually an island in 42 Mouza. Little happens there.

Pradhan's father being in a Central police force, the family managed to relocate — escape, as it were, from the island and the captivity of its backwardness. Having graduated as an engineer, many opportunities presented themselves. He could well and truly dream big and put a yet greater distance between his new life and the past. Yet it is not the way he played the hand that had been dealt him.

Pradhan did dream big, but he did so in his own style. He turned down well-paying job offers and instead returned to his village with the lofty mission of helping schoolchildren take to maths and science and discover technology. He was looking to create a STEM revolution at the grassroots.

In 2017 he set up the Young Tinker Foundation which he runs with Vaishali Sharma as co-founder. It is an initiative based on the simple idea that children who tinker and make things with their hands lose their fear of learning especially with regard to STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) subjects.

Pradhan reasons that if India is to grow and develop, people in villages should have better education in the sciences and this can come through doing things as opposed to learning by rote. In a short time, he has reached thousands of schoolchildren and is going beyond Odisha as well.

For this unique initiative, the Tinker Foundation was chosen for the third Rohini Nayar Prize for rural innovations which is given by the Nayar Family Foundation for Social and Economic Purpose. It goes only to young people under 40. Pradhan is all of 28.

On the evening of November 6, Pradhan, accompanied by Sharma, received the



Anil Pradhan with schoolchildren who are encouraged to learn as they tinker with technology

award at a ceremony at the India International Centre (IIC). Presiding was Dr R.A. Mashelkar, who has celebrity status in the tech space.

The Young Tinker Foundation has been recognized before, most notably by NASA. But for Pradhan and Sharma to be feted at the IIC has its own significance. In so many ways the IIC is at the heart of Lutyens' Delhi. Bureaucrats, politicians, journalists, lobbyists, academicians and policy wonks converge here. They don't all score well when it comes to being mindful of the realities in the peripheries of India such as the backwaters of Odisha where the Young Tinker idea so brilliantly took shape.

But then that is the purpose behind the Rohini Nayar Prize. Many years after she passed, the Nayar Foundation was set up by her husband, Deepak Nayar, the well-known economist, and her sons, Dhiraj and Gaurav, both economists in their own right with public roles to their credit.

Rohini was herself an economist of high standing with several academic achievements and important research. But it was to rural change, going beyond academic pursuits, that she was devoted. To this extent her world vision was her own and even perhaps somewhat different from the rest of her family.

When a loved one passes on how can a family keep their memory alive? Families instal park benches, open libraries, offer scholarships, support patients, build places of worship.

A prize for rural innovation was the perfect way to remember Rohini because of her



Rohini Nayar worked for rural development

lifelong dedication to addressing rural change.

Rohini Nayar worked through government and had her say at its highest levels. She belonged to the rarefied circles of Delhi, but it was in the villages that she was interested.

Having initially been in the IAS for five years, she moved on to pursue a doctorate and later served for two decades in the Planning Commission.

She played an important role in the framing of the first India Human Development Report. State Human Development Reports followed. She was involved in establishing the systems for integrated rural development through the panchayats. Her understanding of rural wages and employment led to the conception and design of the landmark national rural employment programme.

"She didn't talk about her work. Not much even within the family," recalls Deepak. It is

fitting that she is now remembered through a prize given to low-key action-oriented people taking up rural challenges.

The Nayar Family Foundation for Social and Economic Purpose was created two years ago. The prize of ₹10 lakh each year goes to an original project which has an impact on rural life. Many applications come in and, since the cut-off age is 40, it is heartening that there are young people pursuing rural solutions.

The prize has an active jury consisting of Rajesh Tandon, Ashok Khosla, Renana Jhabvala and K. Seeta Prabhu. They are each well known for their social and academic involvements.

Whose idea was the foundation and the prize? It came about while talking with friends like Khosla and Tandon. Finally, it was a family decision most likely driven by Deepak. The foundation is a Section 8 company. A corpus of ₹2 crore created by Deepak generates the ₹10 lakh and other expenses annually. "Of course, I had to ask Dhiraj and Gaurav because it is their legacy," he says.

Setting up a foundation comes with its complexities. There are legal decisions to be taken, paperwork is involved. When it comes to giving a prize there is selection of candidates, convening of the jury, holding an event and more that doesn't happen easily. Remembering a loved one is wonderful, especially when it makes the kind of difference that the Rohini Prize does, but for all the heart that one puts into it, serious work it is too. ■

Dogs, monkeys and disability rights

Civil Society News
New Delhi

MATTERS pertaining to dangers emanating from snappy street dogs continue to do the rounds of the courts with monkeys now being added to the complaints by citizens.

So, what is happening to Indian cities? Polluted, congested, strewn with garbage and now overrun by animals, it would appear.

A petition before the Delhi High Court has sought protection for the rights of disabled people who have to contend with domestic and stray animals, companion animals and livestock like cows in the streets.

It has been brought to the court's notice that people with visual impairment who use canes run the risk of upsetting animals such as dogs who attack them. It is ditto with monkeys which have been hanging around in public places, including hospital premises such as the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences.

The petitioners say that the rights of disabled people are being infringed upon because they cannot move around freely and are incapable of defending themselves when attacked. Can the rights of animals to occupy public places supersede those of disabled people is the question being asked.

But the problem of stray animals, particularly stray dogs, flows from the Animal Birth Control Rules or ABC Rules as they are known.

The lawyer appearing for the disabled underlined that the ABC Rules don't address the rights of the disabled. The lawyer, Rahul Bajaj, is visually impaired himself.

The Delhi High Court's response has been sympathetic towards the disabled but the judges have gone further to question urban management and the quality of life in Indian cities.

Said the judges: "The city has been taken over; nowhere in the world will you find a whole city taken over by dogs and monkeys. Today it is impossible to walk on the main streets. Try taking your pet out for a walk and the strays will attack you."

"There is a misplaced public sympathy and a notion of love for these animals. People who claim to be animal lovers are going about it in the wrong manner. Strays have taken over public parks. Can children go to play there? It is a genuine problem, and we cannot have this situation where children are bitten by stray animals and cannot play in parks," Chief Justice Manmohan and Justice Tushar Rao Gedela said.

"A person with disability also has a fundamental right to move on the main streets without being attacked by the strays. Let's not



A desperate citizen uses a mat with spikes to discourage stray dogs from climbing onto his car overnight

go to the other extreme that only dogs and monkeys will have a right over the city and not citizens," the judges said.

The judges also called out NGOs who campaign for animal rights, saying they "owe a duty to respect the rights of those with disabilities".

The court directed the chief secretary of Delhi to convene a meeting of all concerned and seek a solution. The outcome of the meeting was awaited as we went to press.

These ABC Rules make it impossible to remove a stray dog from the streets, even if it bites someone. It also allows public feeding of dogs in public places.

The rules were framed by Maneka Gandhi when she was culture minister in 2001. In a somewhat bizarre turn, the rules violate the very law under which they were framed — the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act.

The PCAA specifically penalizes failure to provide an animal with food, water and shelter. It also prohibits the abandoning of dogs and other animals in the streets where they might suffer. Nor can a diseased animal be allowed to roam or die in the streets.

The law says animals should not be out on the streets, and they should be picked up and put in shelters and, further, can be put to sleep if required. But the Rules say the opposite, that stray dogs cannot be removed from locations they occupy.

The reason for this contradiction has never been adequately explained. But it has resulted in the Indian capital becoming the rabies capital of the world.

Innumerable children have been killed in stray dog attacks and dog bite numbers keep rising. People feel terrorized by strays and

animal activists emboldened by the Rules push ordinary citizens around.

The Supreme Court brought all stray dog matters under itself. But after 14 years, innumerable petitions and more than 100 hearings, all it did was send petitioners back to the high courts.

The disability issue was raised in the Supreme Court itself at the time of the final hearing by Bajaj, which was impactful because of his own impairment. But, instead of taking it up, the apex court offered no response.

It is the ABC Rules that keep the issue in the courts when municipalities should be allowed to deal with stray animals and make public spaces safer for citizens, people who approach the courts say. Municipalities that have wanted to act have been restrained.

While ordinary citizens, particularly the poor families who have lost children, have no recourse to justice, animal rights activists seem to have ample funds to hire lawyers and engage in protracted litigation, raising the question of who benefits from dogs being on the streets.

Many activists are backed by international NGOs in whose countries strays are put in pounds and, if they aren't adopted within a stipulated time, are euthanized.

The first case was filed around 20 years ago by Dr E. Menezes, a Goan paediatrician who attended a child whose nose had been bitten off by a stray dog. So moved was he by that case that he gathered like-minded Goans who felt the stray dog problem had to be dealt with.

In all these years it hasn't and is seen to have worsened. The ABC Rules which stipulate birth control have clearly not worked. The number of stray dogs has been rising, as have attacks. ■

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There is a shortage of optometrists in the country and the task of testing vision and dispensing glasses needs to be passed on to grassroots-level health workers

YEAREND GIVING SPIRIT

FUND SOMEONE'S READING GLASSES

300 million suffer from presbyopia

Civil Society News

New Delhi

IT is comforting to end the year by giving. Yet, even as you get your debit card out, choosing a beneficiary can be a challenge. Putting money where it works well for someone is invariably a complicated call.

But it is possible with just one modest donation, well directed, to help transform a life forever. For instance, a few hundred rupees spent on an eye check-up and reading glasses can instantly improve the quality of life of someone afflicted with presbyopia or the inability to read and focus on nearby objects.

It is estimated that close to 300 million Indians suffer from presbyopia which has not been addressed. The reason they live with weak vision is that there aren't the facilities where they can easily get their eyes tested and have access to an affordable pair of spectacles.

Presbyopia has a direct impact on livelihoods. It diminishes the capacity to work. People begin fumbling around — be it an artisan, farmer, security guard, machine operator or tea garden labourer. Since presbyopia sets in mostly after the age of 40 it accompanies the other effects of ageing and is doubly unnerving for people who might want to

feel reassured that they can continue to be independent and bring in an income.

Presbyopia has all the makings of a public health crisis given the numbers and the disruption that it is causing in people's lives. But it passes under the radar with government taking scant note of it.

Some amount of attention is paid to presbyopia in the voluntary sector. But no effort is really known to be on a scale that is significant and it is not among the hot buttons that private donors press.

A combination of government and voluntary sector initiatives and private enterprise could address the problem. But such a combined effort is as yet not happening, perhaps for want of an effective catalyst.

The spectacles business has gone through pathbreaking changes. New-age ventures by dynamic entrepreneurs make it easy to get a pair of spectacles. They are delivered home, frames are stylish, lenses are state-of-the-art, and prices have come down. These are start-ups on steroids. They have changed the way spectacles are bought and sold but they don't address the base of the market where poor vision impacts the capacity to earn.

Chains of eye-care clinics are flourishing. But these businesses are all geared to serving the middle class. Left out of the market are millions of

Indians who don't have the money or the social reach to be counted in as consumers.

There are systemic problems that result in their exclusion. For instance, India suffers from a serious shortage of optometrists — one for every 180,000 population or thereabouts. In the developed world it is one for 10,000. Even in their paltry number, optometrists in India are skewed to cities. The rural population, as a result, is at a disadvantage. Someone in a remote village has to trek to a town or city for an eye-check and then wait for glasses. It all becomes too much. Consequently, they live with sub-optimal vision.

In cities, the middle class and well-off have the awareness and know where to go to get their eyes checked. But those lower down the economic ladder, workers in the unorganized sector, for instance, tend to ignore vision problems and even when they do want them attended to, they don't have ready access to vision testing facilities and a basic pair of glasses.

The/Nudge Institute, based in Bengaluru, has put together a paper on presbyopia to set rolling an effort to do something about it. We are told that the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates there are 800 million cases of uncorrected presbyopia in the world of which 150 million to 300 million are in India.

"Looks like it would be closer to 300 million because we are such a populous country," says Amit Gupta, COO of The/Nudge Institute.

In the absence of a detailed study, the numbers are all estimates. Since the industrialized world has dealt with presbyopia, it can be assumed that the majority of the 800 million cases would be in the developing world. Of which India's share would be around 300 million.

Gupta goes on to say that the global loss in productivity because of presbyopia is estimated at \$24 billion annually. Of which India is seen as accounting for \$14 billion. Once again, this is a back-of-the-envelope calculation that comes from the *Indian Journal of Ophthalmology*. But, inexact as these figures might be, it can be safely assumed that presbyopia, as so many other health conditions, has a sizeable impact on India's GDP. It is a truism that for an economy to shine people have to be healthy.



Amit Gupta of The/Nudge Institute

Should presbyopia be seen as a public health or livelihoods issue? It ranks among a range of eye diseases such as cataract, glaucoma and diabetes-related loss of vision.

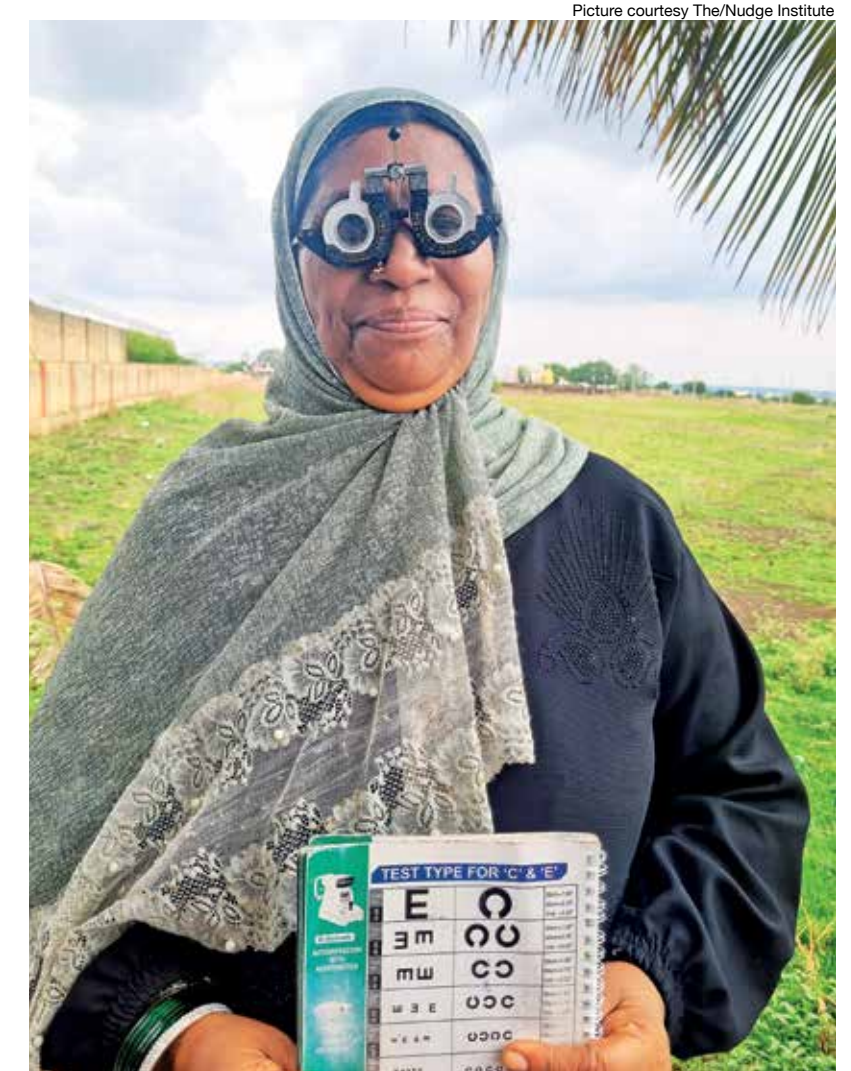
Of these, presbyopia is the easiest to deal with but if left to a lumbering and ill-funded public health system, the solutions might just never show up. On the contrary, categorized as a livelihoods issue, lithe ways forward are possible.

Says Gupta: "People have other vision problems. Those things need to be solved, for sure. However, if we look at presbyopia as low-hanging fruit we can deal with it while working on solving other problems, right? So, there's no adverse effect as such on other problems."

The social returns on spending on presbyopia are immediate and not inconsequential, explains Gupta. A dollar invested in reading glasses is around \$36 in returns, according to WHO. In India it would be closer to \$50, taking into account various sources of income including the rural employment scheme, he explains.

On the other hand, waiting for the healthcare system to come up to scratch and perform will mean passing up the opportunity to deal with the problem quickly and simply.

India's per capita expenditure on health is notoriously low. It has the largest number of cases of preventable blindness in the world, but of the entire amount spent on healthcare no more than \$100 million



Livelihoods are affected by presbyopia

'People have a range of vision problems. Of these presbyopia is the easiest to solve. It is the low-hanging fruit which can be dealt with as a livelihood issue.'

gets spent on vision care.

Says Gupta: "Now out of this \$100 million within vision care from a public health standpoint are cataract, glaucoma, myopia — those are the things which are more important. Quite frankly, they will cause bigger problems than presbyopia. So, while presbyopia is a health issue, there are bigger issues which will get precedence over it."

He continues: "If we will rely solely on the healthcare system, I'm afraid that we will not be able to solve the problem at scale. To give you a few more numbers, in India on average, there's one trained optometrist for 180,000 people versus about 10,000 in the developed countries. We don't produce as many optometrists in the country. Even if you do, it's not a sustainable livelihood for them to just focus on presbyopia and then, too, go to rural areas. It's just not possible."

The/Nudge Institute would like to see a few targeted moves making a difference. Since glasses are not on the list of medical devices, the process of screening for presbyopia and dispensing of glasses can be handled by the large number of community workers who are already meeting the health needs of communities. There are millions of self-help groups, ANMs (Auxiliary Nurse Midwife) and ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activist) workers who can be trained to fulfil this role.

"They are working in the community already. They have that trust and



Loans can be given to microentrepreneurs to set themselves up in screening vision and providing spectacles

if we leverage that then we can scale. And that's the model we are trying at Nudge. We are not depending only on the healthcare system which has currently many other things to worry about," says Gupta.

With presbyopia there is the possibility of quickly dealing with a health issue and providing relief. The numbers are so large that speed is of essence for a meaningful impact to be made. Going through the healthcare system slows things down. It is even so in the southern states where there are higher and more efficient standards of public healthcare.

"The moment one (goes through the health system) one requires far more trained people. An ASHA can do the initial level of screening, then somebody will have to go for a second screening, or somebody will have to go for surgery and so on and so forth. That addresses the problem (of providing eye care holistically), but it puts a constraint on how rapidly we can solve the problem (of presbyopia)," Gupta explains.

What is The/Nudge Institute's strategy? It is seeking to bring about policy changes, more government funding, community initiatives and partnerships.

POLICY CHANGES Currently, most government schemes require a doctor's prescription if one is to avail of a pair of glasses under the scheme. Nudge, through advocacy and citing of examples from other countries, is trying to bring about a policy change.

FUNDING The Centre and state governments should allocate funds for presbyopia for helping meet the cost of a pair of glasses and investing in community initiatives. It could be through the health ministry or the livelihood-centric ministries. It should be at the Central and state levels.

PARTNERSHIPS The government and other players can together experiment with different screening and distribution models and see

which one will scale right. One way would be through the community and the use of health workers. Another would be an entrepreneurship-based model in which loans are given for two-wheelers and smartphones to microentrepreneurs to set themselves up in screening and dispensing of spectacles.

CATALYTIC PHILANTHROPY Nudge is ready to commit its own resources to initiatives in which it is partnering with the government. It will do capacity building for screening and distribution, provide programme management support and finally invest in technology solutions that bring scale.

A robust funding model will have to be at the heart of any plan. A mix of government and philanthropic funding together with a market-driven model is envisaged. But any such coalescing of resources would have to be first driven by philanthropy.

Gupta explains: "Let's assume that there are 300 million people who need a pair of reading glasses, right? And then these people will need another one in two years. And so on and so forth. "Let's think of it as a two-phased approach.

Phase 1 will be the first five years. We look at the unmet demand for, let's say, about 150 million pairs of glasses. We believe that there can be 10-12 × leveraging from the catalytic philanthropy to unlock government funding and to utilize government community cadres. And we believe that we should also experiment during this time with a market-based model. It will generate some revenue even if it will not be significant."

In Phase 2, when the demand for the next 50 percent — 150 million — will be met, the market-based solution would have begun to generate more funds. "Again, we require catalytic philanthropy and unlocking of government funds. But by this time there would be an increase in revenue from the market-based model," says Gupta.

A robust funding model will have to be a mix of funds from the government and philanthropists, along with a clear market-driven mechanism.

GIVE IT HERE

Small donations can go a long way. You can fund a patient in need at the five facilities listed below. And if you want more opportunities to donate as well as volunteer, you could write to *Civil Society* at support@civilsocietyonline.com

CHILDBIRTH REFERRALS

In rural south Rajasthan women with complicated deliveries are taken to hospitals for a safe childbirth by Basic Healthcare Services (BHS).

There could be 30 such cases in a year and each one involves an expense of ₹25,000 which BHS incurs to save the lives of the women.

BHS runs what it calls AMRIT Clinics where it provides high quality healthcare with dignity to remote rural areas.

Normal deliveries are handled at these clinics. But complicated ones require hospitalization to save the mother and child. BHS refers them and gets them there, which might not otherwise have been possible.

Go to <https://bhs.org.in>

GENERAL SURGEON WITH HEART

Dr D.P.S. Toor is a general surgeon who never turns a patient away merely because they can't meet some expense or the other. He funds the surgery and medicines from his own pocket.

As a donor you could help out when a needy patient must go under the knife for a hernia or an appendix — or a similarly small procedure which has to be done.

Dr Toor practices at the Rural Medicare Centre (RMC) and has been a friend of *Civil Society* for almost two decades.

RMC is located at Saidullajab in Delhi and provides affordable medical care to patients who can't access government and private hospitals.

Check out ruralmedicaresociety.org.

Or call Dr D.P.S. Toor at +91 9810711640

VELLORE FOR MANY IS THE ONLY HOPE

The Christian Medical College (CMC) in Vellore is known for well-qualified doctors and high-quality care. It is a public-spirited medical institution at an arm's length from commercial interests and profit-making.

People turn up here in huge numbers for treatment of diseases that other hospitals

can't handle. But there are costs involved and you can help fund a patient by directly reaching out to CMC on its website.

It is called the person-to-person programme. For every rupee you give, CMC multiplies it five times. So, if you give just ₹10,000, the patient ends up getting ₹50,000. Many lives have been saved and in all 2,500 patients have benefited.

Log into www.givecmc.org

MAKING PRIMARY CARE AVAILABLE

For all the tertiary stuff happening in medicine, it is primary healthcare that makes a difference to people. It needs to be easily accessible. How can that be made possible in remote locations? Doctors will have to go to them despite the odds.

Mary and Rajkumar Ramasamy are two such doctors who have shown the way by setting up a facility at K.C. Patty, a village of 800, about 50 km from Kodaikanal. The catchment for the clinic has around 15,000 people of which some 6,000 are tribals.

Patients get the first line of treatment at the Ramasamy's health centre. In case they have complications, they are stabilized and sent to a secondary hospital.

Get in touch at ramasamy.rajkumar@gmail.com

Or call Rajkumar at +91 6382432344

RURAL HOSPITAL IS A LIFELINE

Villages sometimes end up getting the quality of care that can't be found in cities. Chinchpada and its surrounding areas are fortunate in this way.

The Chinchpada Christian Hospital run by Dr Deepak Singh and Dr Ashita Singh, is an example of how well-qualified doctors going to rural areas can make a difference.

They run an OPD where the charge is just ₹20 for a visit. A five-day stay in hospital for a procedure is around ₹5,000. When we last reported on them, they had seen 25,000 patients in that year and 4,000 of them were in-patients. Write to them to know how you can help.

ichinchpadachristianhospital@gmail.com

Or call +91 9403692977

Trump and India



WHAT precisely the second presidency of Donald Trump will mean for India depends on which of the two views of India within the American strategic community comes to dominate the thinking within his administration. Both perspectives have one thing in common, namely, the United States intention to counter China's growing global influence. In other words, US antagonism towards China is the framework within which both schools of thought view India. However, the difference in the approach of these two rival schools lies in their understanding of India's role.

The first school of thought understands Indian desire to retain an independent foreign policy and not enter into any explicit alliance relationship with any other power. However, knowing full well India's concern about China's growing power and rising profile within Asia and around India's neighbourhood, this school of thought believes that helping India emerge as a stronger economy and a more capable power in Asia can only help the US in dealing with China.

In short, what's good for India is seen by this school as good for the US. This perspective gives India some policy space and allows it to be seen globally as an independent player. As one American analyst put it, "India's rise as a geo-economic power is in the interests of the United States."

The second US perspective takes a more instrumental view of India. India's rise, it believes, should be favoured only if India will play the role of an ally, a military ally, moving strategically closer to the US. Those who hold this view expected India to support the West in the Ukraine war. They were disappointed that India not only refused to fall in line and oppose Russia but that it has in fact deepened the economic relationship with Russia by buying oil. India continues to maintain a defence

relationship with Russia, even as the US-India defence relationship grows, albeit more slowly than is widely imagined and commented upon.

The US approach to India has swung between these two poles. The Indian political leadership never misses an opportunity to remind American leadership that the rise of a democratic India is in the larger and long-term interests of the democratic West, as opposed to the autocratic East — China, Russia, Iran. However, this claim stands on weaker legs given the global perception that India's own democratic credentials have become weaker over the past decade. Those in the US, and the West in general, who question the first school



President Donald Trump with Prime Minister Narendra Modi

of thought want to know why the US should be supporting the rise of an India characterized by 'majoritarianism' and one pursuing more insular economic policies. Donald Trump has among his supporters those who ask this question.

Those who expect India to move closer to the US as a military ally not only expect India to buy more defence equipment from the US but also be prepared to work with US forces. India has made it clear to the US that it reserves judgement on what would constitute shared strategic concerns. India certainly shares the US perspective about the challenge, if not threat, posed by China's rise as a military power in the Indo-Pacific region. However, it has so far not revealed what role it would be willing to play if China were to attack Taiwan and the US became kinetically engaged in that conflict.

There is then the entire issue of trade. Trump's decision to reappoint Robert Lighthizer as the US Trade Representative is a

signal not just to China but to the entire world. Lighthizer represents what trade economics guru Jagdish Bhagwati refers to as the 'Reciprocitarians'. Their view was best expressed by President Ronald Reagan who famously said, "We are always willing to be trade partners, but never trade patsies." Reagan said that in 1987 when the US launched an intense trade war against Japan. Lighthizer came into prominence in the late 1990s as an opponent of the Clinton administration's decision to grant China 'permanent normal trade relations' (PNTR) status and eventual membership of the World Trade Organization.

The trade actions that Trump took in his first term against China also hurt India. It remains to be seen if the trade actions he now proposes to take, like increasing tariffs, would be China-specific or end up hurting India as well. In his campaign speeches Trump has said nice things about India, Hindus and Modi, but has also identified India as a potential target for action on trade and tariffs.

All those in India celebrating Trump's victory, merely because he was warm in his references to India and Hindus, and has now appointed Tulsi Gabbard to an important office, should wait and watch what he and his administration do. Will they accept

the view that the rise of an independent, self-willed, strategically autonomous India, with its own cultural personality, is in the interests of the United States, merely because of the shared concern about China? Or, will Trump expect India to fall in line, as he expects the Europeans to do?

Then there's immigration policy. Trump will get tough. Last year the US government reported that close to 100,000 Indians illegally entered the US. Trump will stop this but is likely to keep US doors open to the highly skilled Indians who have played and will continue to play an important role in giving currency to Trump's campaign slogan — MAGA (Make America Great Again).

Indian Americans and Non-Resident Indians in the US have played a significant role in bolstering the American knowledge and services economy. Trump will have no problem with more 'brain drain' out of India. ■

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

Employment through services



MAKE in India is the slogan and policy call of the day, reflecting the philosophy of *Aatmanirbharta*. Promoting manufacturing in the country is seen as an essential element for both economic growth and employment generation. For well over a decade, the aim has been to boost manufacturing to the level of 25 percent of the GDP; yet, it has continued to stagnate in the upper teens for all these years.

The share of agriculture has, as expected, declined. With slow growth rates in agriculture and a languishing share contributed by manufacturing, the driver of growth has been the services sector. The tardy growth of manufacturing has caused concern, and policy initiatives to change this have come thick and fast, including production-linked incentives (PLI), and efforts to increase India's share in global supply chains.

The geopolitical situation is seen as conducive, given the desire of many countries to reduce their dependence on China, the major source and often the biggest supplier for so many products — especially in the booming electronics sector. Indian companies, encouraged by government policies, seek to ride on this. As global companies espouse a China+1 policy in supply chains, India wants to be at least the alternative to — if not replacement for — China.

In addition, there is need for India to be self-reliant in key components and products, especially those that are strategic. Electronic chips, telecom equipment, key (active) pharmaceutical ingredients are examples that relate to industry and are being given a push by the government. While these have to be promoted for strategic reasons, such technology and capital intensive products are not really large employment creators. A chip fabrication facility (fab), for example, is strategically crucial but generates few jobs, while requiring huge investment.

Many thought that India could mimic the China model of mass production and mass employment: that we could manufacture toys, garments, or other consumer goods for export — in addition to domestic consumption — and, through that, create mass employment while boosting exports. The fact is that other, nimbler, countries, with low-cost labour, have

already taken up that space (our neighbour, Bangladesh, is one example). More important, there is already increasing automation in such industries and, in future, it is clear that robots, AI, and automation will rule the roost. For example, a combination of new technologies now makes it possible to feed yarn into a machine and get a ready-made garment (stitch-less) at the other end. Similar developments are already taking place in other areas too.

The result: a massive reduction in the need for humans in the factory. Jobs will be further affected by the fact that the lower component of labour cost reduces the attraction of using developing countries as a source for cheaper imports. In short, following the 1990s China/South East Asia model (massive job creation through export of goods at low cost) is past its sell-by date.

Major manufacturing powers — Germany and China — are rapidly automating and are setting up ever-more robotic factories. Humans cannot compete with robots in terms of

The industry of tomorrow is going to be highly automated and filled with robots rather than workers.

efficiency, consistency or work quality. With decreasing costs, economic trade-offs too are changing in favour of automation, even in low-labour-cost countries. Clearly, industry of tomorrow is going to be highly automated, filled with robots rather than workers.

If manufacture of high-tech, strategic items, and even of consumer goods, is not going to create jobs at scale, how then do we create mass employment, especially for low-skilled workers who are surplus to the agriculture economy? The first step may be to recognize that, in the times ahead, manufacturing is not going to create anywhere near the 10 million jobs a year that are needed. Whatever jobs are created will be only short-term, as rapid automation — with its greater efficiency and its decreasing cost — will mean large-scale retrenchment.

While decentralized production and industrialization of the agri sector (through packaging, processing, and value-added products) could create a fair amount of employment, here too automation will soon displace labour, through superior capabilities and cost-efficiency.

The answer will lie in services. Despite scepticism in some quarters, it is here that one sees very good prospects for India. Over the past two decades, it is this which has been the saviour: for the economy and for jobs. Today, India's biggest foreign exchange earner is the IT services sector. It is also the biggest employer in the organized private sector. While data is unreliable, it is likely that more jobs have been created in the past few years in new areas like app-based taxi services, food and grocery delivery, e-commerce and the like, than in manufacturing. Private security services, beauty parlours, and entrepreneurial start-ups are other areas that have bloomed in terms of employment opportunities.

Looking ahead, one sees tremendous possibilities for greater employment in these and other areas of services. Government security services (including the police and paramilitary), as also organized and unorganized private ones are, sadly, likely to be big job generators. The education sector, which saw a boom in the 1990s and noughties (2001-2009), through private engineering, management, and IT training institutions, may see a new resurgence focussed on artificial intelligence. Repair of devices — and training for this — could be a big new area, as environmental policies push repair over immediate replacement.

Driven by growing needs globally and ageing populations, healthcare — through doctors, nurses, paramedics, ancillary staff, and care-givers — can provide employment to millions, including unlimited opportunities abroad. Another high-potential area is domestic and international tourism, which too will see a boom, creating jobs in restaurants, transportation, and hotels. Personal care, through beauty salons and gyms, and construction will continue to grow. In addition, like IT from the 1990s, there may be unforeseen new areas. Importantly, unlike in manufacturing, most of these jobs cannot be automated, at least for a decade or more. However, most of the new jobs will be in self-employment or gig mode, re-emphasizing the urgent need for a universal social safety net including healthcare, education, unemployment and old age pension, and upskilling.

All in all, while manufacturing is an essential component of the country's development, employment at scale will come primarily through services. Policies, and concrete initiatives, need to gear themselves to this, rather than being focused only on manufacturing. ■

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

Fish in troubled waters



LIVING RIVERS

VENKATESH DUTTA

A river has a unique connection with gastronomy, culture, and diplomacy. Hilsa or *ilish macch* is not only a cherished delicacy but also a symbol of auspiciousness and fortune. When the river has an abundance of native fish like hilsa, the river is considered to be in good health.

Durga Puja often coincides with the end of the monsoon season, which is also when hilsa is most abundant. Hilsa spawns throughout the year, but the peak harvest season spans September and October. The fish is at its best quality during this period, making it a highly sought-after item for festive meals. Hilsa from the Padma river (the lower segment of the Ganga that flows in Bangladesh) is considered the best. The peak spawning season when fishing is traditionally banned happens to be an 11-day period around the full moon in the month of October which is the Bengali month of Aswin. The days are calculated as five days before, five days after and the day of the full moon itself.

This year, the Bangladesh government decided to temporarily suspend the export of hilsa to India a month before Durga Puja to ensure that there was an adequate supply for local consumers. The demand during this period was met from Myanmar which increased the price.

Earlier, in 2012, Bangladesh imposed a ban on hilsa export to India due to differences over the sharing of Teesta river water. The Ganga Water Treaty of 1996 and the ongoing Teesta River water-sharing negotiations are key aspects of India-Bangladesh relations, in terms of transboundary river management. The unresolved Teesta water-sharing agreement is still an intricate geopolitical challenge.

Bangladesh is the largest producer of hilsa, contributing around 75 percent of the global hilsa catch. About half a million fishers are directly dependent on hilsa catch. The country gets protein, employment and foreign currency — all from the export of this single species. India contributes approximately 5 percent to the global hilsa catch, with West Bengal and Odisha being the main states. The

Bay of Bengal provides the ideal estuarine and coastal habitats for hilsa due to its nutrient-rich waters and the confluence of major rivers like the Ganga, Brahmaputra and Meghna, supporting the highest hilsa populations.

In the late 1990s, the hilsa population started declining. WorldFish started a programme to conserve its habitat. The government of Bangladesh began a campaign called Hilsa Fisheries Management Action Plan. The focus was on SAFE-ACT (Sanctuaries, Alternative livelihoods, Fishing ban, Enforcement, Compensation and Training).

It attempted to initiate several conservation efforts such as regulating overfishing and protecting the juvenile fish and restoring the migratory routes and river channels. Fishing is banned for several months a year along the



The hilsa is an astonishing migratory fish known for its long upstream journeys

Hilsa is a keystone species in the Ganga river ecosystem. Its decline has affected the entire food web, impacting predators.

coastal sanctuary areas. To compensate the fishing communities during these months, rice is provided to replace the income opportunity lost. As a result of all these campaigns and actions, the declining hilsa fishery revived with significant improvement in fish catch. The average size of hilsa doubled, so also the income of fishers. These interventions also improved other fish biodiversity.

The hilsa is an astonishing migratory fish known for its long upstream journeys. The

upriver migration of hilsa indicates connected river systems. Historically, hilsa have been known to migrate more than 1,000 km upstream in the Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna river system, reaching as far as Allahabad and even Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh. The extent of migration has reduced considerably in recent years, and hilsa rarely reach as far upstream as they once did. They spend most of their life in the sea but migrate to freshwater rivers to spawn. This is comparable to the migratory patterns of Atlantic salmon.

In the Bay of Bengal, adult hilsa mature into the coastal waters and migrate into the estuaries and upstream freshwater stretches of the Ganga river and its tributaries for spawning. Therefore, longitudinal connectivity of rivers is very important for the growth and survival of hilsa. The construction of barriers like the Farakka Barrage, which was completed in 1975, has severely restricted the natural migration routes of hilsa. The barrage was built to divert water from the Ganga to the Hooghly river to reduce siltation near Kolkata, but it also impeded the upstream movement of fish.

Today, the upstream migration of hilsa in the Ganga river system is mostly restricted to lower stretches. In Bangladesh, hilsa continue to migrate into rivers like the Padma, Meghna, and Jamuna, and spawning still occurs in freshwater zones.

Hilsa is a keystone species in the Ganga river ecosystem. Its decline has affected the entire food web, impacting predators such as dolphins and larger fish that rely on hilsa as a food source. Large-scale water extraction for agriculture and urban use has altered river flows, reducing water levels during the dry season when hilsa typically migrate upstream to spawn.

The decline in the migratory range and habitat of hilsa underscores the need for integrated transboundary river management to protect this iconic species and its critical habitats. One sign of a good gesture is that both Bangladesh and India have established hilsa sanctuaries in key riverine and estuarine zones to protect critical spawning habitats. These protected areas aim to reduce fishing pressure and allow hilsa populations to recover.

Engaging local fishing communities in conservation initiatives and providing alternative livelihoods during the fishing ban periods have been key strategies in reducing pressure on hilsa stocks. ■

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

Craft is about style



CRAFT EQUITY

SUMITA GHOSE

THIS year the arid desert regions of Rajasthan were blessed with adequate and timely rainfall. For the most part, farmers were harvesting a good crop. Which means that artisans we work with have less time for weaving and embroidery. We are aware that this may lead to delays in delivery deadlines. And we have to come up with a Plan B. At Rangсутra we are constantly navigating, trying to find a balance between the demands of the market, on the one hand, and supply side realities of the producers, the artisans who make products, on the other.

So, what is our Plan B?

First, to change the timings of work. Working in the fields is best done in the early morning, before the sun gets too strong. Some younger farmer-artisans work in their fields from five to nine in the morning, return home, and get to the craft centres around 11 am, and then work, if necessary, till five to six in the evening. Those who work till later are male artisans who do not have much work at home in the evenings. Most housework is done by women. As farming and embroidery work is very different, it does not get too taxing. The first is a workout for the body and the second exercises the hands, improving dexterity, with focus and repetitions calming the mind.

Secondly, we reach out to other artisans. And there are many. Of course, they would need practice sessions, which they are fine with doing as we provide the fabric and thread. But the big challenge is the lack of workspaces in villages. Giving artisans the pieces to take home is not a solution. In the past we did that, resulting in dirty pieces, incorrect embroidery, lost pieces, to name a few of the problems we faced.

Having designated workspaces for village women is essential if we wish to move ahead and showcase the intricate textile craft skills they still possess to the world. Sure, working at home, they will continue to make a few items for their own use, to give as gifts, and so on, but it will remain a hobby. Those who wish to take crafts ahead as a skill and profession need to come to a workplace where they can hone their skills, learn new skills, teach others, create new designs, and understand the needs of the changing market.

Social enterprises, including crafts and creative enterprises, already play a significant role in enabling millions of women to find expression for their talent and provide much needed income for themselves and their families. With some more help from the establishment and local government, less red tape, help from organizations working on the ground, and from large market players, both domestic and global, the positive impact could be much more. The choice need not be between agriculture and non-farming livelihoods. There is time and a need for both — agriculture for the family's own needs and sale of surplus if

and finished goods, well-lit and properly ventilated workspaces, access to piped potable water, and toilets. It wouldn't cost much. About ₹12 lakh to 15 lakh, including solar panels for lights and fans. This would enable 50 to 100 women to come and work.

Will the market and customer also understand the needs of the producer-artisan? That she is busy with harvesting and therefore the order may be delayed? Unlikely, and unrealistic to even consider this because there are deadlines and products should be in stores in time for Diwali or Christmas. This, too, is totally understandable.



A Rangсутra outlet

Having workspaces for village women is essential if we wish to move ahead and show the skills they have to the world.

created, and crafts for earning income needed for other expenses in today's world. It can be a good, healthy balance, preferable to migrating to crowded towns and cities and eking out a living as a construction worker.

An effective solution would be investment in infrastructure and appropriate equipment for the craft and handloom sector. There are government programmes for this, but they do not reach remote regions of the country, where they are most required. Infrastructure would include warehouses for storing raw materials

The answer lies in not catering to ever-changing fashion trends, but creating, crafting slowly and with care, products that can last a lifetime, like the saris that were passed down from one generation to the next, between siblings and friends, with no problem of body types and shapes. Or soft cotton saris that were regenerated into quilts or *kanthas* as they wore out. For practical, everyday wear the eternal *kurta* and kaftan silhouettes which adapt to our bodies, instead of the other way round. Catering to a new lifestyle — comforting yet vibrant.

"Each piece crafted by our artisans carries more than just fabric — it holds their story, skill and dreams...when you wear one of our artisan's creations, you are not just wearing something beautiful, you are carrying their journey, their passion, and a piece of their world," states Rangсутra.

As someone said: "Fashion changes from season to season. Style is deeper, eternal, it is an expression of who you are, without having to speak." ■

Sumita Ghose is founder-director of Rangсутra Crafts

The magazine that goes places Now make your connections

Shimoga, Theni, Ooty, Leh, London, Tezu, Wakro, Nadia, Bundi, Chennai, Gangtok, Puri, Mulaffinagar, Raigad, Bengaluru, Atur, Erode, Ravatmal, Vapi, Kolkata, Gurdaspur, Gadag, Mulshi, Sirsi, Taluka, Farnaka, Rewa, Mumbai, New York, Mount Abu, Fort Blair, Dhargra, Jammu, Mada, Patna, Chembur, Idukki, Indore, Dhenkanal, Varanasi, Barur, New Delhi, Kargil, Shimla, Panchgani, Ajmer, Tonk, Manchar, Ghaziabad, Nainital, Dehradun, Cambridge MA, Mussoorie, Dahod, Pune, Hassan, Gurgaon, Chennai, Kohima, Mandi, Jalpaiguri, Alwar, Salem, Shillong, Coimbatore, West Garo Hills, Guwahati, Dondaicha, Hyderabad, Bhubaneswar, Kasaragod, Muzaffarpur, Ranechur, Morapur, Virudhanagar, Nagapattinam, Gudalur, Proddatur, Shahpur, Banhatti, Tarikere, Kurnool, Mudgers, Duban, Kudal, Honavar, Gaya, Khopoli, Latur, Bhogpur, Imphal, Bandi, Bargala, Nagpur, Udhampur, Midnapore, Khandala, Azamgarh, Sonebhadra, Itarsi, Nandurbar, Shirwal, Dumraon, Nashik, Bhadravati, Karwar, Satara, Thirthahalli, Kangra, Kapurthala, Hingoli, Gulbarga, Katra, Manali, Loni Kalbhor, Bolangir, Shrirampur, Gachhirol, Kodagu, Hazarbagh, Thanjavur, Ladwa, Udupi, Bhandara, Ottobalari, Belgaum, Deesa, Sangli, Koraput, Cachar, Doddi, Bhandshar, Chikodi, Pottayam, Warvi, Chandagiri, Kurda, Chandigarh, Solapur, Biligiri, Garheda, Jaipur, Shahjahanpur, Budhiana, Rajkot, Fatehpur, Kodaikanal, Sivakasi, Porayar, Narsingpur, Chopda, Kovilpatti, Ahmedabad, Kalugamalai, Gandhinagar, Lucknow, Itanagar, Fontenay le Fleury, Brisbane, Naperville, Gundlupet, Aurangabad, Asansol, Hathrus, Singhbhum, Jabalpur, Dharmapuri, Ujjain, Gangava, Sidhi, Thiruvananthapuram, Birmour, Sambhalpur, Bhatinda, Patiala, Hospet, Tughalwala, Mangalore, Tenner, Narda, Santoshnagar, Gorakhpur, Jamsheer, Wayanad, Pudukcherry, Madocara, Mangao, Chandigarh, Bhilwara, Mysore, Penukonda, Hissar, Saligao, Raipur, Kashmir, Tezpur ...

WHERE
ARE WE
BEING
READ?



The toothbrush you buy has no real pedigree

How to choose a toothbrush

Bristles to handles, it's a bewildering range

SUKANYA SHARMA

ONCE a day, if not twice, at an hour when you aren't necessarily at your best, a toothbrush does your sleepy bidding. In the few minutes that you give to this personal ritual, gums and teeth and tongue get a scrubbing.

For the intimate task that your toothbrush performs, as it traverses the recesses of your mouth, the fact is there is little that you know about it.

Oral hygiene is an indicator of public health. So many diseases begin in the mouth and travel down from there. Having a good set of teeth is essential for being generally healthy.

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that oral diseases affect nearly 3.5 billion people worldwide. There are 514 million children who suffer from caries of primary teeth across the globe.

Most people, in fact, don't brush their teeth. They can't afford a toothbrush or toothpaste and settle instead for twigs or using charcoal dust which they rub in with their fingers.

Getting people to brush is important. A giant business opportunity presents itself to brush makers. There is a case for making dental care products affordable.

But for those already using toothbrushes, selecting the right toothbrush is important. Currently, choices are made in blind faith. No questions are asked. All kinds of bristles in different formations are on offer. Some

brands are better known than others, perhaps because of nifty marketing. Availability is also a factor — one tends to unquestioningly pick up what is being offered.

But is there more to toothbrushes than we care to know? Is there a science behind the way bristles cover a toothbrush head? Is the alignment of the handle important? Should the head be long or round or oval shaped?

Of the multiple types of brushes on offer, it is not known which combination of bristles is better for ferreting out particles of food or making tartar go away. Nor is toothbrush design public knowledge. So, how does one rate one over the other without trying them all — which, of course, is impractical.

Toothbrush manufacture is outsourced. Any entrepreneur could be into making toothbrushes. Ronnie Screwvalla used to make toothbrushes before he became a mogul of sorts in the Indian entertainment business.

The brush you buy has no real pedigree. Nor is there the regulation to ensure it is of a proven medical standard before it enters your life and finds its way into your mouth.

According to American Dental Association (ADA) specifications, the brush head size for adults should be one inch long and half an inch wide, with two to four bristle rows, five to 12 tufts per row, and 80 to 85 bristles per tuft. The right size is simple to identify on your own — it should be

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big enough to clean every tooth's surface without straining the jaw, and small enough to reach the back molars.

"Brush head designs vary from one country to another and there has been no conclusive research to indicate one as more superior than another as long as it cleans well and feels comfortable," remarks Dr Puneet Kumar, a periodontist with a practice in New Delhi.

For brush handles, grip is key. It should be comfortable to hold for a few minutes and ideally have rubber patches for better traction. For children, handles should be shorter and thicker, while adults can use longer ones. "A toothbrush with a secure grip and ergonomic handle is especially useful for those with limited dexterity, such as children or elderly individuals," explains Dr Rajiv Balachandran, assistant professor of orthodontics at AIIMS, New Delhi.

The first toothbrush, closest to the one we use today, was invented by William Addis in England around 1780. The handle was carved from cattle bone and the brush was made from swine bristles. The invention of nylon by Du Pont helped it evolve into a truly modern and more hygienic form in 1938. A decade later came the first electric toothbrush. Nylon bristles are considered superior and are most common.

CHOOSING RIGHT There are three things to keep in mind when looking for the right toothbrush. Bristles (texture and design), brush head (size) and handle (grip). Bristle type plays the biggest role. Varieties range from soft, medium to hard. Most dentists lean towards soft or, sometimes, medium. The ADA recommends super soft or extra soft bristles (0.0075 mm). "Quite a few people ask for hard toothbrushes these days, but the majority of our customers admit they have been advised soft or medium," says Rakesh Mittal, a chemist in south Delhi's Green Park Market. An ideal toothbrush must have soft or medium-soft bristles for adequate cleaning and plaque removal while being gentle on the gums.

Dr Ritu Duggal, chief of the Centre for Dental Education and Research at AIIMS, New Delhi, breaks it down: "For infants (0-3 years), a finger slip toothbrush with rice-sized toothpaste is ideal. As children grow (3-9 years), a kid-sized toothbrush with soft bristles is recommended, using pea-sized toothpaste from the age of six onwards. Once children reach the age of 10, an adult-sized toothbrush is appropriate," she explains. WebMD, a trusted online medical resource, suggests bristles should have rounded tips for better teeth protection.

"Between all designs — straight, criss-cross, zigzag, angulated — the angulated ones are considered best because they are both layered and at an angle so they can reach the hidden spots in between and scoop up the dirt. As far as the shape is concerned, dome shaped bristles are what I recommend," says Dr Khursheed Tuli, a leading dental surgeon whose clinic is in south Delhi.

Another common dilemma is whether a manual toothbrush is better than an electric one. While the electric one is more expensive, it does have an edge, according to some dentists. For people with mobility issues due to an injured arm, a disability or a geriatric illness, it does help by facilitating movement. But, while a good quality manual toothbrush can cost between ₹75 and ₹100, an electric one is priced at ₹500 upwards.

"The differences are mainly in user experience and brushing efficiency. While some features are genuinely beneficial like soft bristles, small head and ergonomic handles, others may appeal more to personal preferences than proven dental benefits. If used properly, the difference is insignificant," says Dr Balachandran.

DENTAL TIPS The rising trend of dental caries amongst young children has been cause for concern in India and globally. Dental diseases that earlier manifested in older children are now apparent in children as



For children, handles should be shorter and thicker with a secure grip

young as three to five years old.

"Avoiding sweet and sticky food, developing regular brushing habits at an early age and consulting a dentist as soon as signs of cavities appear, is important. For children who have had their primary teeth removed, following the suggested course of treatment to the dot is vital," says Dr Roshni Lekhi, a dentist, when asked for advice she would like to give concerned parents.

The Indian Dental Association recommends supervision of the brushing process till the child is about seven years old. "Parents should brush their child's teeth until they are around six years old to ensure it's done effectively," says Dr Duggal.

Making brushing a fun activity instead of a burden can help encourage positive hygiene habits. "If a parent brushes alongside, with some music and, if possible, uses an electric toothbrush that plays fun tunes for the two-minute brushing duration, it can make a difference," says Dr Tuli.

After picking out the right toothbrush, the question is — are we brushing right? Different oral conditions require diverse brushing styles but the one that is most widely used and recommended remains the Modified Bass technique. Under this method, the brush should be held at a 45-degree angle to the gums, followed by a combination of small circular motions and short back and forth strokes. Focussing on outer, inner and chewing surfaces of all teeth is a must.

For children, the Fones technique is often suggested. As per this method, the tooth surface is cleaned using gentle, simple circular motions.

The ideal brushing duration is two minutes — a time frame that is unanimously agreed upon. "During the two minutes spent on brushing, 30 seconds should be devoted to each quadrant of your mouth. Avoid brushing too hard, as this can damage gums and enamel," advises Dr Balachandran. The general recommendation is to change a used toothbrush every three months or when the bristles start to look frayed.

Tips for inter-teeth hygiene include regular flossing, mouthwash and visits to the dentist. The importance of flossing should not be underestimated. "While brushing and flossing each have their own role, it must be noted that floss focusses on interdental areas which are often neglected by patients and become the main cause of caries these days," warns Dr Kumar. A routine check-up should be a priority every six months and should not be taken lightly.

Brushing your teeth may seem like a mundane everyday task but doing it right can prevent the onset of serious oral diseases. An informed and scientific perspective helps people make healthier choices. "Beyond intricacies like brush types and styles of brushing, what is most important is consistency. Twice a day should be routine for all age groups. Consistency is key," says Dr Tuli. ■

'Brush head designs vary from one country to another and there has been no conclusive research to indicate one as more superior.'

Toy Bank has been growing up

AIEMA TAUHEED

A little girl who came from an abusive household would bang her head against the wall when she came to school. She wouldn't join activities with other children. To help her, teachers gave her puzzles to work on.

The little girl would sit alone in a corner and piece them together. Soon, her confidence grew. "She was even seen teaching other kids how to do the puzzles! It's amazing how a little support can lead to such a big change in a child's life," says Vidyun Goel, founder of Toy Bank, with a gleam in her eyes.

Toys are magic for children. Through toys, children learn how to hold, how to count, and how to navigate the world around them. Soft toys, games, puzzles, mechanical toys, sports equipment, origami sheets and colouring books are all joyous toys for children.

Toys also nurture social skills, forging friendships and teaching teamwork and cooperation.

"If toys can spark happiness in adults, imagine the profound impact they have on children," remarks a starry-eyed Goel.

She started the bank, she says, with "the simple concept of giving your own toys and sharing the joy we received".

As a little girl, Goel tagged along with her father who was working on a campaign urging people not to get lured by lottery schemes. The slums she visited as a child became a lesson in poverty. There, she would give away her toys to children in need. Growing up in a large joint family, she started collecting toys from her cousins and friends, spreading the joy of sharing.

In college, she transformed this simple concept into Toy Bank, a structured NGO. Back in 2004, without the aid of social media, reaching out for toy donations was a tall order. So, she placed logo-embossed collection boxes outside local shops and restaurants. Most of the owners were family and friends.

Determined to involve schools, she spent hours at her college PCO booth, making cold calls to private school principals. Her persistence paid off and she organized toy donation drives in these schools.

Today, Toy Bank proudly operates in about 150 private schools across Delhi-NCR. It has distributed 48,000 kits and created 5,425 toy libraries, which have benefited 529,201 children, mostly in anganwadis and government schools, whose parents are often daily wage labourers.

It now has a network of over 4,000 toy libraries — mostly housed in anganwadis, panchayat *ghars*, government and municipal schools, shelter homes, and orphanages, each thoughtfully tailored to suit the recipient community.

Now with a five-year-old of her own, Goel appreciates the importance of toys even more. "It really helps in the holistic development of children. So, while we do focus on the right to play, we also focus on learning to play. Both are equally essential," says Goel.

Toy Bank caters to children from birth to around 13-14 years of age. The organization works with anganwadis in villages and cities where children from zero to six years old come for day care, nutrition and early learning. Additionally, Toy Bank collaborates with government schools, where children range from four to 12 years old. They also operate in shelter homes and orphanages, accommodating a broader age group.

But where do these toys come from? "Anybody and everybody donates toys," Goel states. They conduct toy collection drives in collaboration with about 150 private schools, each with approximately 2,000 to 3,000 students. During these drives, they also educate students



Toys are distributed to children in anganwadis and government schools

on the importance of reducing, reusing, and recycling, as well as the value of giving.

If someone in Gurugram or Noida wants to contribute toys, they can visit the Toy Bank website at toybank.in to find the nearest collection centre. Volunteers then collect the toys from these centres when there's a large enough quantity ready for pick-up.

When Toy Bank receives donated toys from collection centres, they undergo a systematic process. First, the toys are segregated based on type. After sorting, they are cleaned and refurbished to ensure they are in good condition. The toys are then categorized according to the age and intellectual capacity of the children they will be distributed to, ensuring each child receives an appropriate set of toys.

Toy Bank also partners with toy companies, manufacturers, and retailers. These businesses donate surplus inventory, including items with minor packaging defects or unsellable products. Children in rural areas treasure these.

In its advocacy of Article 31 of the UN Convention on Children's Right to Play, Toy Bank has built Safe Playrooms in municipal schools in New Delhi. These rooms maintain a variety of toys to suit different tastes and interests. This way, each child can find something they enjoy.

Toy Bank also provides specialized toys for differently-abled and neurodivergent children, including those with autism. They use predefined mapping to match specific types of toys to various centres, based on the children's needs. For instance, centres serving neurodivergent children receive toys with lights, sounds, and motor skill activities, which can be engaging and supportive of sensory and developmental needs. The sorting centre uses these guidelines to ensure that each centre receives appropriate toys, with particular attention to textures, sensory features, and analytical aspects to cater to specific requirements.

"Toys are inherently gender-neutral. It is us who have created a pink and blue binary." To tell the children that the toys are for everyone, there's no separation between boys' toys and girls' toys. Kids are encouraged to unlearn any ideas that limit what they can play with. This approach empowers both girls and boys. ■



Vidyun Goel with her hands full of soft toys

Kairali's healing ecosystem

SUSHEELA NAIR

SWAYING palmyras, vast vistas of paddy fields, meandering roads and the undulating Sahyadri range heralded our welcome to Palakkad, the green getaway of Kerala. After a drive through idyllic hamlets in Palakkad, we entered a stately gateway. It led to a driveway and the reception area of Kairali — The Ayurvedic Healing Village that is situated on 70 acres amidst lush greenery and overlooks the magnificent Western Ghats.

Kairali has seen a rash of awards ever since K.V. Ramesh, managing director, and Gita Ramesh, joint managing director, forayed into the wellness and holistic treatment space in 1999. They strove to carry forward the legacy of their forefathers, who were ancient Ayurvedic *vaidyas*. The recent multiple awards bagged at the 18th Annual World Luxury Hotel and Spa Awards signifies global recognition for their efforts in the Ayurveda and sustainable luxury space.

What caught our city-weary eyes instantly was the lush landscaping and architectural beauty. The place has 30 exclusive villas set in tranquil surroundings which offer seclusion and privacy. Conforming to Vaastu norms, the reception faces east and has three split levels. The technology developed by Laurie Baker has been adopted here and the construction is very cost-effective.

The most remarkable feature is the landscaping. A gurgling stream meanders past colourful fountains and provides an apt environment for meditation. In front of each villa there is a water body, a motif that runs right through the property. Strategically placed boulders help you cross the stream as it weaves through lawns, bushes and coconut trees, of which there are said to be over 1,200.

Aesthetics is the focal point here whether it is the colourful fountains or the curved bridge leading to the Ayurvedic Centre. At the Healing Village, multi-hued flowers were in bloom, adding a burst of colour amid the greenery.

Kairali has embodied sustainability in every aspect of its making. The 30 cottages draw inspiration from Vaastu Shastra. No two are alike. Classified into deluxe villa, classic, royal and maharaja's suite, they are named after the Malayalam birth stars. They have red oxide flooring typical of traditional, ancestral homes in Kerala. This has natural cooling properties and follows traditional Ayurveda principles. The *valambari* conch placed in each room is believed to radiate positive vibration to the body.

Extensive usage of locally available laterite stones, red-tiled sloping roofs, walls made of



Civil Society picture/Susheela Nair

Cottages within a lush landscape offer seclusion and privacy

red bricks, and minimal use of cement in the villas, dining and treatment areas is discernible. Designed by the Nirmithi Kendra, known for its creativity and use of local material, each structure is distinctive yet complementary.

Other exquisitely designed buildings house various facilities such as an office area, an indoor games area, health centre, canteen, conference hall and so on. The huge tennis court and an elegant swimming pool will appeal to the more actively inclined. The water tank is unique, with the ground floor being used as a storeroom and the first floor serving as a cable TV operation room. The consulting rooms and the treatment block are equally aesthetically designed. A bridge over a stream leads to the yoga and meditation centre.

The canteen is tastefully decorated. One can feel positive vibes as one enters. Every dish here follows a 'farm-to-table' ethos and is entirely vegetarian and organic. The nutritious food helps to detoxify and bring about a balance in the *doshas* (*vata*, *pita* and *kapha*) of the body. The menu is curated specially for each guest by the doctor, as part of the treatment procedure. For lunch and dinner, light and clear vegetable soups with lentil curry, seasonal vegetable fries, *phulkas*, green gram *dosas*, finger millet *dosas*, red rice and desserts made with seasonal fruits are served. White sugar is taboo. Instead, palm jaggery is used. *Pathimugam*, a pink water known to be extremely good for gut health, is served here.

Rest and relaxation comprise the only agenda at Kairali. The gamut of treatment packages is, however, expensive and the duration varies from three to 21 days. The rejuvenation programmes offer to tone the skin, repair worn-out muscles and tissues, build immunity,

improve blood circulation, purge toxins from the body, help shed excess weight and increase longevity. The therapeutic programmes promise to cure chronic ailments such as headaches, insomnia, tension, rheumatic diseases, arthritis, spondylitis, sinusitis, bronchial issues and migraine.

For the beauty-conscious, a seven-day package combines head massages with herbal facials and face packs. Guests are introduced to a natural and healthy lifestyle that promises to retard premature ageing, improve vitality, and promote good looks. The Ayurvedic programmes include rejuvenation therapy that helps to restore and repair worn-out tissues, as well as specific programmes for weight loss, proven remedies for arthritis and spondylitis, as well as sinusitis and migraine treatment.

According to the doctor, a large percentage of the clientele comprises those suffering from diabetes, hypertension, asthma, migraine, and arthritis. Kairali also treats those who are chronically constipated. There are packages for post-natal rejuvenation too. The nimble fingers of the expert masseurs knead away body tension and eliminate insomnia. Aches and pains melt away as one lies on a specially made wooden bed and warm medical oils are applied all over the body. Classic *abhyangam* with brisk rhythmic strokes untangled the tense knots in our bodies. The massages are complemented by steam baths, hot packs, showers, yoga exercises and meditation.

A stay at Kairali is also peppered with cultural programmes, fortune-telling palmists and astrologers, cooking classes, yoga and meditation sessions. You can also stroll through the organic farms and herbal gardens, and watch birds and butterflies flit past. ■

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 of their attractive products.

A touch of holiness

Devotion, a unit of the Arpana Trust founded by Param Puja Ma in 2002, makes an array of attractive products crafted by Self-Help Groups (SHGs) of more than 2,500 rural women, organized by the trust.

There's a lot to choose from. For your home there is delicately embroidered linen in pastel shades. You can buy bedsheets, cushion covers, curtains and embroidered towel sets. Devotion also has comfy nightwear for mothers and children in delightful designs. Cozy sweaters, carefully knitted, make a great gift. Earnings are reinvested in helping women artisans.

"It is all Ma's doing. We are just instruments who act on what she created. We are blessed," says Abha Bhandari, a member of Arpana's governing body. You can shop at their outlet at E-22 Defence Colony, New Delhi.

Contact: +91 9871284847
Email: arpanadevotion@gmail.com

A khazana of tribal trinkets

Mandan Aruna and her cluster of 250 artisans make unique jewellery in Telangana. Her micro-enterprise, Aruna Tribal Jewellery, offers earrings, bangles, necklaces and other accessories. There's also Lambadi tribal jewellery which is made mostly from old coin metal, reshaped into trinkets. Most of her products are made with copper and then coated with silver for a smooth finish. Earrings are the most popular. Ethnic, attractive and well-priced, her trinkets draw customers from varied age groups. Prices range from ₹500 to ₹700 depending on style and size and from ₹800 to ₹1,900 for necklaces. Drop by at her stall at Dastkar bazaars or shop online on Dastkar's website.

Contact: Website: www.handsondastkar.com



Drape yourself in conscious clothing



Vatsala and Vedika Chopra launched Veaves to reach out to people who genuinely appreciate craft and strengthen the connection between weavers and consumers. Veaves makes 'conscious' clothing, which means garments that are made keeping sustainability and ethical norms in mind. They also focus on recycling used fabric. This is evident in their 'Wabi Sabi' collection that aims for zero waste products by making use of over 100 metres of leftover scraps.

Stoles, dresses and cotton tops are some of their popular products. Men can choose from a range of cotton and khadi shirts. Prices range from roughly ₹1,000 to ₹6,000. Veaves delivers across India. Take your pick from their website.

Contact: +91 7311116888; website: www.veaves.in



Santiniketan leather bags

Since the early 1980s, Nabakumar Karmakar has been handcrafting leather bags. "In the 1990s, our leather bags from Santiniketan were very popular. Not so much anymore," he admits. Still, his stall attracts young customers who browse through the bags on display. Perhaps the trend will be revived once again, Karmakar hopes.

The government of West Bengal funds his trips to crafts bazaars, including the Indian Trade Fair in Delhi. Karmakar has a master's in leather technology. His team of artisans have trained around 10 women in Santiniketan. Men handle the machines and women are in charge of painting the leather bags. Wallets are priced ₹150 upwards and bags start at ₹400. You can give him a call to enquire about where he's setting up his stall next.



Contact: Nabakumar Karmakar:
+91 8910389158

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.

OFFER SPEECH THERAPY SUPPORT

Suniye, an NGO in Delhi, has been providing services to speech and hearing-impaired children for 27 years. It has a school in New Delhi where such children are taught to listen to sounds with their cochlear implants and learn how to speak. The goal is to enable the children to learn how to listen, speak, read, write, and join mainstream society in practical ways.

Suniye offers speech therapy, parent counselling, and rehabilitation post-cochlear implants. The team engages with every person around the child — parents, neighbours and siblings. Efforts are made to seek affirmative action for the children through research and policy development.

To help their cause, you can sponsor a child's education for ₹3,000 a month or donate for a teacher's salary. Volunteering involves fundraising and teaching.

<https://suniye.in/>
+91 9873031973
contact@suniye.in

HELP WITH SEXUAL MINORITY RIGHTS

Founded in 1999, Sangama, an NGO in Bengaluru, works for economically and socially disadvantaged communities like transgender persons, sexual minorities, sex workers and the urban poor in Karnataka. It also works with their family members, friends and their social milieu.

Sangama helps them access their entitlements from the government like pensions and loans as well as benefits from the Construction Workers Board. It strengthens community leadership and sensitizes officials, industry, and elected representatives.

Their project, Breaking the Cycle, supports the education of children of sex workers. Sangama conducts health camps and has an active health programme. It helps the urban poor gain access to basic civic amenities.

Volunteers from all walks of life are welcome. Internships are available for one month or longer.
<https://www.sangama.org/>
+91 9972903460
sangama@sangama.org

NURTURE WITH NUTRITION

MCKS Food for the Hungry Foundation was set up by Master Choa Kok Sui, founder of Pranik Healing and Arhatic Yoga, to realize his vision of a world free of hunger.

Since early 2005, the foundation has delivered more than 12 million meals to people in need. It has a community kitchen equipped to serve 10,000 meals a day to schools, orphanages, old-age homes and hospitals.

Their Ek Muthi Anaaj campaign revives the traditional custom of keeping a portion of food for charity. The idea here is to implement it practically. Participants are given a bucket to collect grain and asked to put a fistful of any grain into it every day, which is then handed over at the end of the month.

Donations are welcome online. You can select a specific cause from their list and donate accordingly.

<https://mcksfood.com/>
+91 9873800500
info@mcksfood.com

SUPPLY NUTRITIOUS FOOD TO ALL

Annamrita Foundation in Nagpur supplies mid-day meals to government schools and non-aided schools, with donor support, for the education of children. It also provides food to

the relatives of patients in government hospitals. Annamrita means 'food as pure as nectar'. The aim is to supply food that is nutritious to those who need it.

The charity's Khichdi Drive is a unique initiative where companies hold a tasting event at their offices and all employees eat the *khichdi* being served to the kids at school. This serves the dual purpose of raising funds and awareness.

Kit of Joy is an initiative that delivers ration kits to children. Each kit has a mix of grains, pulses, oil and spices. Eight crore kits have been delivered to children from eight states so far.

The NGO accepts donations and volunteering involves raising awareness, helping in kitchens, celebrating special occasions with charity and more. They are also in search of CSR partners.

<https://annamrita.org/contact/>
+91 9323111690
info@annamrita.org

TEACH CHILDREN IN REMOTE SCHOOLS

In 2011, Satish Vishwanathan and Venkat Sriraman from Microsoft got together to start eVidyaloka, an NGO in Bengaluru. Its mission is to bolster the education of children studying in rural government schools by crowdsourcing volunteer teachers and linking them to rural classrooms through information technology.

Digital classrooms have been set up in remote government schools where volunteers teach children for two hours a week in the regional language. Science, maths and English are taught along with the basics of artificial intelligence.

Teaching aids are available including lesson plans, presentations and videos. eVidyaloka works in 14 states, 67 districts and 734 schools.

The NGO also runs a Teach

Through Television project that connects volunteer teachers with rural children virtually. With digitally revitalized classrooms, lessons, in the form of videos, reach rural households through local cable networks on select channels. Donate online or volunteer for two hours a week from your home or office.

<https://www.evidyaloka.org/>
080-31223000
talktosomeone@evidyaloka.org

SEEK JUSTICE FOR SEX WORKERS

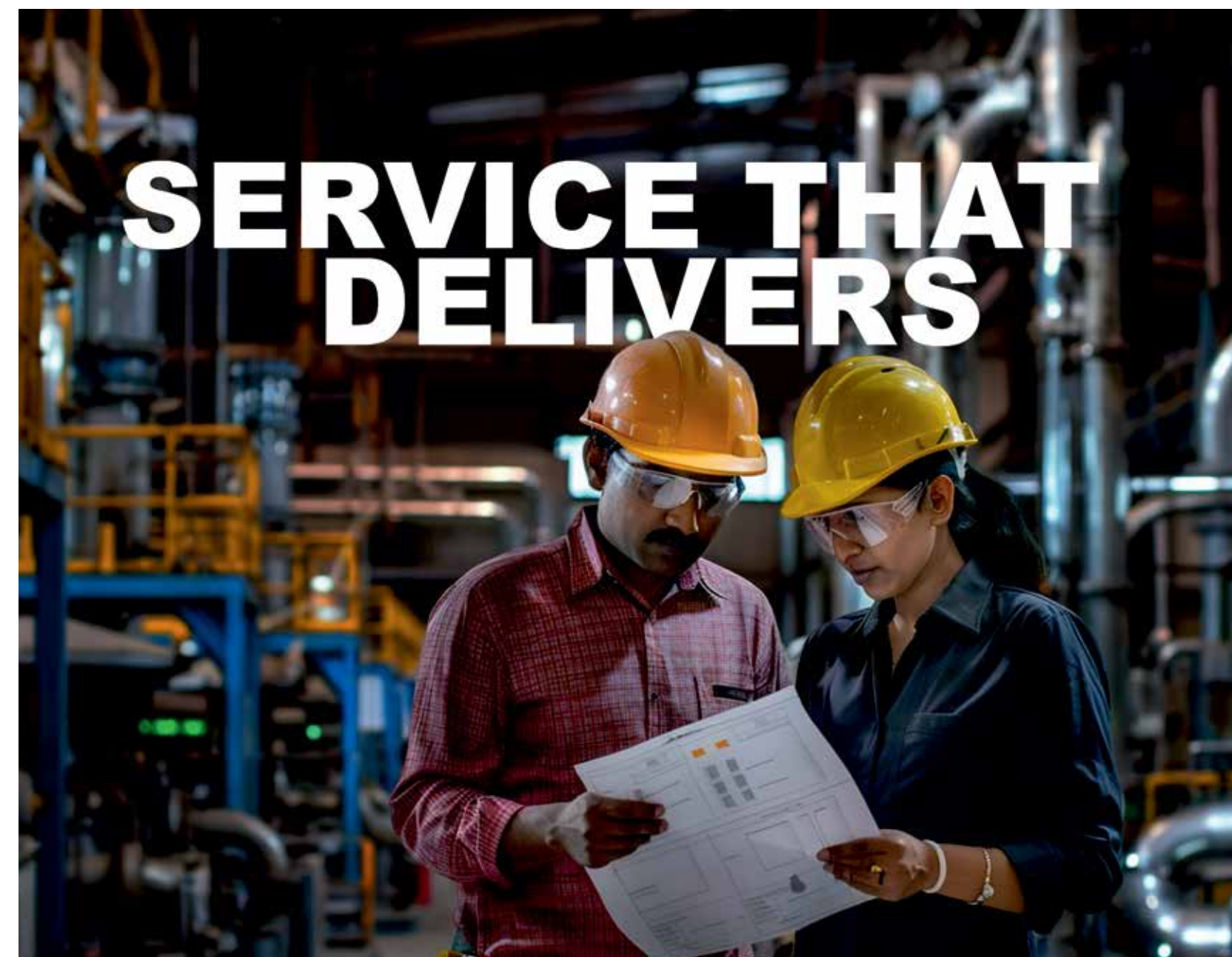
Freedom Firm's mission is to rescue and rehabilitate minor girls sold into the sex trade. Based in Ooty, it rescues the girls, restores their identities and seeks justice against those responsible. The investigation team travels across villages and towns, identifying victims and documenting such crimes.

The next step is to involve the police, get medical check-ups done of the girls and accompany them to government and private shelter homes. The team visits the girls to conduct life skills training, art and craft activities and vocational skill development. The girls learn how to heal and look forward to a better future.

The NGO tries to create systemic change through consistent monitoring, assisting in court trials and pursuing each case until a verdict is announced.

The organization works with communities that are plagued by rampant sex trafficking through generations such as the Bedia, Devadasi and Kanjar communities. To date, 1,004 girls have been rescued. Donations are needed for legal documentation and rescue operations. Volunteering and internship programmes accommodate many skill sets.

https://www.freedom.firm.in
+91 4232443053
contact@freedom.firm.in



Service is our foundation built on the ethos that "It pays less to talk about the product and more to understand the customers' problems". It's our daily practice, through over 1,250 customer connects, applying our knowledge, to understand what customers truly need for real, tangible long term benefit.

It drives our actions to Improve Uptime, Improve Plant Performance and Sustain Benefits, and enables us create lasting customer partnerships.





Conserving Languages, Unifying Tribal Voices

Preserving tribal heritage through linguistic initiatives

The Tribal Language Preservation Project

- ➔ Works towards preserving the linguistic heritage of the tribal communities.
- ➔ Mentored more than **40,000** tribal language learners in **10 languages**.
- ➔ Fostered an **ecosystem** of constructive dialogue, change and changemakers for tribal communities.

