

Civil Society



WINNING THE WATER CUP

How the Paani Foundation fights drought in Maharashtra



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Harvesting Rain for Profit

Name: Shri Muniraj,
Village: Muthur, Krishnagiri district, Tamil Nadu

Muniraj, a marginal farmer with seven acres of land from Muthur village of Krishnagiri district, had a greenhouse where he practiced floriculture. However, a falling water table meant that irrigation became a problem – especially during summer months even for drip irrigation.

To overcome the problem of insufficient water, Srinivasan Services Trust (SST) encouraged Muniraj to save every drop of rainwater falling on his green house. SST provided technical information and engineering support for creating a pond, next to the greenhouse, large enough to collect six lakh litres of rainwater. To prevent loss by seepage, the pond was lined with a polythene sheet and a shade net was used as cover to help arrest loss by evaporation. The pond gets filled up with 3 days of rain. The water saved in this pond is sufficient for the crop needs for one season.

IMPACT: Muniraj is now financially secure and earns more than ₹30,000 per month. He has built a pucca house and also bought a car. He has become an expert on rainwater harvesting and offers advice to several villages in the area.

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COVER STORY

Winning the Water Cup

The Paani Foundation's Water Cup is in its second year with drought-hit villages in Maharashtra competing to build water harvesting structures in time for the monsoon showers.

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Civil Society

READ US. WE READ YOU.

Mission mode is needed

OUR problems don't go away mostly because we lack the resolve to address them. The bigger the problem, the more important it is to be in mission mode, working to deadline, straining every sinew to fix it. Nothing less will do. Countries like China, South Korea and Japan are examples of what targeted efforts can achieve. The shortage of water in India is one such problem that needs to be looked in the eye and dealt with.

Our cover story this month is on the Paani Foundation's work in Maharashtra. We bring you the story of a unique initiative to mobilise tens of thousands of people to harvest the rain and change their lives forever. For years together, tankers have been the source of supply to villages. But in just the second year of the Water Cup, there is hope that the simple act of catching the rain when the monsoon breaks and putting the water back into the earth will liberate villages.

The Water Cup, with a substantial cash award and government recognition, is a great idea for motivating people and injecting enthusiasm into an effort which may otherwise seem onerous and hopeless given the long history of water shortages that Maharashtra's villages have lived with.

Through the Paani Foundation's work, Aamir Khan and Kiran Rao have concerns that go much beyond their lives as film people. To Dr Avinash Pol, on whom we have written before, also in a cover story, must go the recognition of being the driving spirit behind the campaign. It is he who has been the gamechanger, motivating people and being at hand to deal with doubts and conflicts.

It is tempting to think that the Water Cup is a device other regions in India can easily adopt. The hope is that it can inspire similar initiatives elsewhere. But the reality is that every successful effort has its own chemistry. Perhaps it can help people weighed down with water shortages to aspire for solutions. It can give them hope. But finally, they must summon the courage to do what only they can do for themselves.

On another note, Anil Swarup, the redoubtable bureaucrat who is now Secretary for School Education and Literacy, tells us that he has seen good work happening in government schools. While there are well-known problems, it is also true that many teachers make the effort to connect with children and come up with innovations. He has been travelling to distant corners of the country and he is often surprised. Voluntary organisations are also making an important contribution. The question is how can these efforts be recognised and rewarded and mainstreamed.

A committee's report on vocational training deserves attention for the excellent recommendations it makes. Skill training should have a better status than it enjoys at present. It should also be suited to industry's needs. Young people learning skills in India should be employable elsewhere in the world — which also means that Indian industry should seek to be globally competitive. With millions of young people entering the job market, what India does with vocational training will be key to the growth of the economy.

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IN THE LIGHT

SAMITA RATHOR



LETTERS



Tiger profiles

Your cover story, 'Living with Tigers', was fun to read and educative. Thapar's commitment to the tiger is truly noteworthy. His knowledge has been gleaned from real life experience acquired over decades. All state governments must listen to what he has to say about wildlife protection.

Asmita Sarin

The tiger population has been steadily increasing in India thanks to measures taken by the government and persistent lobbying by wildlife experts like Valmik Thapar. But our tiger numbers are still not good enough. To boost it we need better protection and a much healthier habitat for wildlife.

Suman Sahi

I would like to flag concerns about a road proposed to be built through the Corbett National Park for better

connectivity between Kumaon and Garhwal in Uttarakhand. The road will lead to accidents and decimate wildlife. It is a disastrous idea that local activists have been protesting. They have worked out another route which bypasses Corbett but politicians just don't listen. First they destroy wildlife and then spend millions to bring it back. A road was built through Sariska and see how it destroyed the tiger population there.

Shanta Pokhriyal

Zonta's way

Your interview with Raj Kumar of Zonta Infratech, 'How a dump can be a dropbox', cleared many misgivings we have on waste-to-energy plants.

There is a lot of opposition to such plants by environmentalists because of the air pollution caused. So, one has been wary in suggesting this option. But we should still insist on segregation at household level, recycling by waste pickers and only then should the remainder waste be sent to a waste-to-energy plant.

Nikhil Padhi

I think questions needed to be asked on the cost of individual items like bins, flue treatment and the waste-to-energy unit. I would also like to know if neutralising flue gas has been certified as environmentally safe. Does it have any other side effects?

Anil Kapoor

Ken-Betwa link

Nearly 1.8 million trees will be cut for implementing the infamous Ken-Betwa River Link. The viability and desirability of transferring water from the Ken to the Betwa with the help of a dam and a 250-km canal has been questioned from day one, along with the unnecessary displacement of several villages and the endangering of the habitats of many threatened animals and birds including tigers, gharials and vultures.

A letter signed by 30 experts and activists was sent to the environment minister to strongly protest against the Ken-Betwa project and the arbitrariness of its implementation. This letter says: "The project has been plagued by sloppy, intentionally misleading and inadequate impact assessments, procedural violations and misinformation every step of the way."

Further, information about water availability in the two rivers has not been made available. Information has been held back from project-affected people. The adverse impact on groundwater recharge in the downstream areas of Bundelkhand region is being ignored.

Why waste Rs. 18,000 crore and why cut 1.8 million trees for a project with uncertain and dubious benefits?

Bharat Dogra

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'A lot of good work is being done in govt schools'

Anil Swarup says the challenge is to promote innovation and scale it

Civil Society News
New Delhi

INTEREST in government schools has been growing. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan has sought to ensure that every child is in class and enrolment is considered to be 98 percent. The right to food movement, through Supreme Court orders, has brought in midday meals. Infrastructure is still lacking but has, in fact, improved considering what it used to be with governments providing funds for basic facilities like toilets and drinking water. Teachers are also well paid.

But government schools are still a long way off from being associated with imparting quality education. Children might be enrolled, yet the dropout rate is high, mostly because teaching is poor. Those who go through the system most often learn very little and can barely read and write.

So, how can government schools be made to improve? Are all of them equally bad or are there those teachers and principals who perform but go unnoticed in the general mess? What can be done to ensure accountability and reward effort? How can a momentum be built to get government schools out of the rut into which they have fallen?

Anil Swarup took over about six months ago as Secretary, Department of School Education and Literacy in the Ministry of Human Resource Development. He has been travelling extensively to see for himself what works and what doesn't.

Swarup is upbeat about what he has found despite the many problems that exist. He says there is more commitment and innovation in government schools than is acknowledged. He sees NGOs and community groups having an impact. If the dots could only be joined, significant improvements would be possible, he says.

Swarup is a high-performance bureaucrat who is known to be a problem solver. He carries people along and motivates officials right down to the district level. With 14 months left in this job, will he leave a lasting impact on the government school system? Excerpts from an interview in his office at Shastri Bhavan:

You have been travelling across India, looking at government schools. What are your concerns?

First, let me tell you why I went to see government schools. When I took over as Secretary, there was



Anil Swarup holding up a mobile enlarger: 'The pivot of the education system is the teacher'

no dearth of ideas and suggestions on how education should be handled in the country. The question that arose in my mind was: why weren't all these ideas implemented all these years? Nobody had a cogent answer because the approach was theoretical.

So these were assumed solutions?

Let me give you an example. Many people looked at solutions available in Finland. Now, the objective conditions in Finland are totally different from the objective conditions in India. I don't have to look at Finland for solutions. So, I thought, let me travel across India and see what the scenario is at the

grassroots. And I was pleasantly aghast to see what wonderful work was being done by NGOs and government functionaries.

It wasn't limited to one state. When I went to Bastar and Sukma I saw hostels for girls in the back of beyond and people very satisfied with what was going on. I drove from Pune to Goa and found schools that had adopted lovely innovative practices. I drove from Shimla to Dharamsala and found NGOs doing a wonderful job. Solutions to our problems are all available here.

So what is the challenge?

The challenge is how do you scale up these

solutions? Most NGOs are working in one district or a few blocks. Probably, they weren't recognised or identified or approached to scale up.

So what do we do? We set up seven sets of workshops with around 100 NGOs and listened carefully to what they were doing, whether it was possible to scale up their models and what would it take. A large number of NGOs responded. We then launched five regional workshops. Two have taken place. We have taken the NGOs to states to roadshow what they have done.

I am not trying to invent anything new. If a good practice can happen in one area why can't it happen elsewhere? I walked into a school close to Lucknow during the midday meal. I was pleasantly surprised to see the high quality of food served. I asked where the food came from. They said, from Akshaya Patra. I called their local representative and asked him in how many districts they were supplying the midday

'In the forested Thane district of Maharashtra, a teacher was using a ₹200 gadget as a teaching aid. It enlarges the screen on your mobile phone. Ten teachers spent their own money to come there and learn from him.'

meal. He said, two. I asked him, can you scale it up? He said this decision is taken by our headquarters in Bengaluru. I flew to Bengaluru, talked at length with their managing committee and they have agreed to scale up their operations to 12 districts in UP.

So the idea is to put NGOs in touch with the states. Each NGO has formulated a draft MoU that is circulated in advance to the states. When we go for regional workshops, on the sidelines there are discussions going on. So this is how we are trying to upscale.

What, to you, seems to be the problem with the education system?

I think our real success story is that we managed to get the child into school. The problem is that learning outcomes are not commensurate with the effort that has gone in. We tried to understand what the issues were. We clearly concluded that the pivot is the teacher. So we looked at the entire continuum of the teacher. Where does the teacher study to become a teacher? What is the process by which he enters the school system? What are the problems he faces in school or the school faces on account of him? Then we worked out a strategy. The National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) has already worked out the accreditation details of all B.Ed and D.Ed colleges. No college that is not accredited by NCTE will be allowed to function.

So thus far colleges were not accredited but allowed to function?

No, they were not accredited but recognised. They

filed an application and were given the go-ahead. There were no systems for accreditation. Now, an affidavit has been sought from them asking for certain details. There is a third party that will evaluate them and only then allow them to function. Many of them had come up without adequate facilities. Some sort of racket.

Just 60 percent of them have responded so far. From next year only accredited colleges will be allowed to run.

The second issue is the process of people getting into the teaching profession. We are thinking of running a CAT or SAT exam for teachers. We can give aspiring teachers the opportunity of appearing for a central exam. We will then have a merit list and leave it to schools, including private schools, to pick up teachers from there.

Currently there is a short, unstructured induction course that teachers go through when they join the

teaching profession. We are planning an induction course of a month or two to inculcate certain values and methodologies.

The next issue is that in several states, teachers don't go to the school. We even hear of teachers engaging someone else. We plan to use technology to ensure school attendance. In every school in Chhattisgarh we are giving a tablet which will have the biometric impressions of teachers. It will be GPS connected. The teachers will have to give biometric attendance in their schools. Of course, you can't rule out people getting the better of technology. If it works, we will take it to other states.

The tablet will also house teaching literature for the teacher and video material for students. There isn't internet connectivity in many places but the tablet is portable. Once a fortnight the tablet can be sent to a location where there is connectivity and data can be downloaded.

Who will train the teachers?

A full-fledged training schedule is being worked out. The role of the DIETs (District Institutes of Education and Training) is being reconsidered. The plan is as follows. We feel that DIETs are spending a lot of time training pre-service teachers. Now, there is a lot of private sector engagement in that field. So we don't have to spend so much investment and time on pre-service. Our recommendation to the states is to route DIETs into training in-service teachers. Modules can be worked out and accommodation provided for in-service training. Right now pre-service students stay in the hostels and in-service teachers stay in some *dharamshala*.

Training of trainers has been worked out as part of the schedule for training teachers.

Who will train teacher-educators?

It has to be a Public-Private-Partnership. For example, the Aurobindo Ashram trains teachers and leaders. Until three months ago they were working only in UP. Now they have signed an MoU with four states. They are going to scale across northern states because they are into the Hindi-speaking belt. Their focus is on understanding the problems that teachers face in terms of training and while in operation. Teachers come up with their success stories and share them.

We are creating an active enabling environment and encouraging replication. We are showcasing what the NGOs are doing regionally and maybe nationally and by that creating aspiration.

We had a workshop in Pune. The day before, 50 people from the zone travelled to schools in the interiors where I had gone to see how local technology was being used to teach children. I walked into one school and saw the teacher teaching a child to write on sand. The child was thrilled. It was play for him.

In Pastepara, 120 km north in the forested Thane district of Maharashtra, a teacher was using a ₹200 gadget as a teaching aid. It enlarges the screen on your mobile phone. Ten teachers spent their own money to come there and learn from him.

I have been spending sleepless nights, thinking of the sheer potential of this sector.

How will quality in education be assessed?

We have been identifying quality norms and placing learning outcomes on a portal. We are also going ahead with a mass survey based on quality parameters so that learning outcomes are clearly defined. For instance, what do we expect a child of Class 3 or Class 6 to know in maths? Such outcomes have not been defined for the past 10 years. We will measure everything on the basis of learning outcomes for each class and subject.

There is also a huge number of teacher vacancies with UP and Bihar topping the list. Will those be filled?

That's the easier thing to do. You work out the details and the vacancies will be filled.

We are trying to replicate the Rajasthan pattern. There were schools with 15 children and two teachers. Rajasthan is going ahead with consolidation. But they are not putting children to any inconvenience because they are going to give them an allowance for travel. It isn't infrastructure but accessibility that is important. That's an experiment that is doing very well. In the workshops we have a representative from Rajasthan explaining how they are consolidating. It is catching on.

Several School Management Committees (SMCs) have been formed. How do you propose to involve parents with the school?

Getting parents on board will help us. In Sukma, I saw a crowd near a school. They told me they were having a parent-teacher meeting. They hold it once a month and the school provides a midday meal to the parents as well. One parent said he couldn't study but he wanted his child to get an education.

Continued on page 8

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Another parent said if his child studied he too could learn from him. The engagement with parents is so important because we are handling a generation whose parents did not study.

But to ensure parents assert themselves?

Parents will become demanding if they are engaged. The first step is to get parents to school. Once they see what is happening they will become demanding. That is the beauty of democracy.

We are also considering recruiting a teacher from the district itself for the schools. The teacher spends his lifetime there and will owe his job to the SMC. That single decision will transform many things. The teacher will be beholden to the SMC and the school and not be looking out for transfers. This whole racket of transfers can be dispensed with. I have spoken to several states and they agreed.

‘Some drudgery is on account of the midday meal scheme. If we can ensure that the midday meal is taken care of by NGOs then that will lighten the teacher’s burden.’

But would there be downsides to this?

Yes, you may not be able to get anybody for schools in remote areas. Currently, we engage a local person on contract. If we hire locally the person on contract will get regular employment. His commitment levels will be much more since he belongs there. He can be trained. If I am not answerable, if I have political pull to get myself a transfer, why should I commit myself?

Teachers also complain of being overloaded with extraneous duties...

Very simply, they are being overloaded unnecessarily. When they collect data they first write it down. Then somebody goes to the centre and writes it all out. If I give them a tablet the job will get done in minutes. Some drudgery is on account of the midday meal scheme. If we can ensure that the midday meal is taken care of by NGOs then that too will lighten the teacher’s burden.

There is also a demand for pre-primary education.

I am looking at education as a continuum from pre-nursery to Class 12. But we are structured differently so how are we going to do it? Rajasthan has integrated classes from pre-primary onwards and is doing very well. It’s the states who have to do it. They don’t need me for that.

Is the no-detention policy going to stay?

We will be changing it either by taking it to the Cabinet or through an ordinance. Children must be tested on how much they have learnt. They can’t go from class to class without learning anything. ■

Give cows pastures not plastic, say Dalit protesters



A huge replica of a cow, its insides stuffed with garbage, led the protest rally

Tanushree Gangopadhyay
Ahmedabad

DALIT activists in Gujarat took out a unique rally in Surendranagar on 10 May, Buddha Purnima, in protest over atrocities against them for suspected cow slaughter. They filled 182 bottles with plastic extricated from the stomachs of dead cows and then presented them to the District Collector. They requested the District Collector to hand over the bottles to the 182 MLAs of the Gujarat Assembly and ask them who should be held responsible for the deaths of those cows.

The protesters pertinently pointed out that the issues cows were facing were lack of land for grazing and availability of water. Instead of feeding on green grass in open pastures, cows were being forced to survive on filth and garbage.

“Cows are deprived of *gauchar* (grazing land) because their pastures have been transferred to industries by these legislators,” said the Dalits.

The protesters said that several Dalits in Gujarat have been beaten up and even killed by *gau rakshaks* or cow vigilante groups in the recent past. In July last year seven members of a Dalit family were mercilessly beaten with iron rods and sticks for allegedly skinning a dead cow in Una town in Gir Somnath district. The incident shocked the nation.

In April, the Gujarat Assembly amended the Bombay State Animal Preservation Act, 1954, making cow slaughter an offence punishable with

life imprisonment along with strict punishment for ferrying cows for slaughter.

Leading the rally, Natubhai Parmar of the Navnirman Trust, an organisation fighting for Dalit rights, handed over a plaque with a memorandum to the District Collector. Dalit activists from 12 states, including Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh, walked five km in the blazing sun with temperatures hovering around 44 degrees C, with a steel replica of a cow, measuring eight feet by seven feet and containing 182 kg of plastic extricated from the stomachs of dead cows.

Ashok, one of the four brothers flogged and dragged along the road in July last year in Una, joined the rally. “We are penalised for cow slaughter, but more cows die eating plastic,” he remarked.

Dalits have a special place for Lord Buddha in their hearts, hence Buddha Purnima was the day chosen for this special programme, said Parmar. At the head of the procession was a statue of Lord Buddha and a poignant Buddhist verse was chanted.

En route Parmar, with a loudspeaker, kept explaining to people who had lined up along the road to refrain from dumping plastic. Last year, he dumped truckloads of cow carcasses at the District Collector’s office in Surendranagar, Una and other district offices. “As much as 25 to 50 kg have been extricated from the stomachs of dead cows. We displayed the plastic garbage in a tractor,” he said. “Protecting grazing land will protect the cows and respect their sentiments,” he announced. “The cow



The rally was held on Buddha Purnima



Protesters presenting a plaque to the District Collector

says: I give you milk which I cannot drink. You may get tuberculosis drinking my milk, considering all the filthy garbage I eat.”

Dalit activist Martin Macwan said cows were compelled to eat vile and dirty stuff left behind by people.

In the old days, he explained, it was compulsory for every village to have 40 acres of *gauchar* where cows could graze on fresh, green grass. So cows were healthy and had no problems. The Nawab of Khabhat, 400 years ago, set up the first *panjrapole* or

cow shelter for old and infirm cows.

The government has been giving away *gauchar* land to industries and *panjrapoles*, thereby reducing grazing land for cows, said the activists. Dakor, an important pilgrimage centre for Lord Krishna, has 2,000 acres. The state government allocates a daily allowance of ₹20 per cow. But this amount is too little so most *panjrapoles* are in bad condition, say the activists.

“We demand that every village gets back all the *gauchar* land it has lost since 1960, the year the state

of Gujarat was formed,” they said.

However, how much *gauchar* land has been really given away by the government is disputed. Dr Vallabh Kathiria, Chairman of the Gujarat Gauseva and Gauchar Vikas Board, insists that only 20 percent of *gauchar* land has been handed over to the *panjrapoles*. The District Collector of Surendranagar denies that a lot of grazing land has been handed over to industry. But it is a fact that Surendranagar is in the Narmada Command area and is heavily industrialised.

The Maldhari Rural Action Group (MARAG), an NGO working with pastoral communities, investigated. In 2013 MARAG filed several RTI applications and discovered that the Gujarat government had allocated 81.95 crore square metres of *gauchar* land to industries at a paltry price.

Subsequently, the state government took a policy decision not to give *gauchar* land to industry. But *gauchar* land has been steadily encroached upon. In 2014 a report recorded 11,950 registered cases of encroachment on *gauchar* land. Gandhinagar, with

The protesters pertinently pointed out that the issues cows were facing were lack of land for grazing and availability of water.

1,776 cases of encroachment, had the highest number. Also, the report said 424 villages out of the 18,000 villages in Gujarat have no *gauchar* land at all.

The denotified tribes, who comprise eight percent of the population, are the worst affected since they are mostly pastoral communities who earn their livelihood from rearing cattle and sheep.

Another issue for cows is water. Chhaganbhai Desai, who rears cows, said cows were seriously affected by the lack of drinking water. “But we look after our cows. We don’t feed them garbage,” he pointed out.

“We demand *gauchar* land and village ponds,” said the protesters.

In the old days, the land revenue code provided an acre for 40 cattle as *gauchar* land along with a village pond for cattle. “Although the number of cattle has increased in the state, *gauchar* land has depleted,” says Parmar, “One needs to recall the Charotar Sarvasangrah, a 1954 chronicle, which makes interesting reading: It says the Muslim Nawab donated 1,000 *bighas* of land for cattle grazing to 300-year-old cattle shelters or *panjrapoles* of Khambhat.”

Bystanders at the rally were shocked by the amount of garbage cows carried in their bellies. “How can *gaumata* have 50 kg of garbage in her belly? This is real *paap*,” said Lila and Sumi, two bystanders. ■

Small sewage solution is here

New policy prods states to decentralise

Civil Society News
New Delhi

LOCALISED sewage treatment systems for as little as ₹1 crore and catering to just a few score households are now a reality, making it possible for rapidly expanding urban areas in India to become cleaner and less prone to diseases caused by faecal contamination.

A Faecal Sludge and Septage Management (FSSM) policy announced by the Union government in February has received little public attention, but it is a major step towards improving urban environments and encouraging state governments and civic bodies to deal with the problem of sewage disposal.

Access to infrastructure funds has been tied to adoption of the policy and distributed solutions envisaged under it. States have been asked to include FSSM in the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT), which seeks to provide sewerage facilities and septage management in 500 cities.

With distributed systems in place, it will be possible to handle the sewage of households locally instead of having extensive and costly centralised sewer systems with distant outfalls.

As happened with solar power, this could be a turning point for sewage treatment. Policy prescriptions, new technologies, falling asset prices, entrepreneurial involvement and financing mechanisms could soon be coalescing to deal with the problem of human waste.

The FSSM policy comes in the wake of the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) which seeks to end open defecation by promoting the setting up of household toilets. As more and more toilets get built, the problem is what to do with the sewage.

From Census 2011 it is learnt that India's urban population is expected to grow from 377 million in 2011 to 600 million in 2031. The census also says that in 4,041 statutory towns, 7.9 million households defecate in the open because they do not have access to toilets. The SBM expects that 80 percent of these households will get toilets and the remaining 20 percent will use community facilities.

But the huge increase in the urban population will require a corresponding expansion of the capacity to treat sewage. Currently there is capacity to treat just 37 percent of the 62,000 million litres of human waste that is generated in urban India. Of the 816 municipal sewage treatment plants, only 522 are operational in some form. In the absence of sewer systems, 47 percent of urban households depend on septic tanks and pit latrines.

With the urban population rising and more household toilets getting built under SBM, it is expected that, in the absence of sewerage facilities, the onsite disposal of sewage will grow exponentially. So, while SBM might reduce open defecation, it will do nothing for treatment of sewage, which if it is not disposed of safely will continue to endanger public health in much the same way open defecation does.

Standards exist for the construction of household toilets but they largely go unsupervised. Households do not report the cleaning of septic tanks for years together. Since standard design parameters are not enforced, septic tanks get built without soak away and drain fields, which eliminate contamination.

The FSSM policy expects to connect central government programmes like SBM, AMRUT and Smart Cities on the important issue of human waste disposal.



A toilet on the beach in Goa! Where does the waste go after it flows into the tank at the back?

It recognises that urban local bodies lack the expertise to deal with sewage management on their own. But by spelling out priorities, standards and contexts, the FSSM policy expects to be able to mainstream these civic concerns by 2019.

The policy covers all projects of the central government. It also enjoins state governments, local urban bodies and private facilities to ensure that the provisions of the policy are implemented for onsite sanitation services.

The policy does not cover network sewerage systems, but, interestingly, it explores the possibilities of onsite sanitation services and networks. What this essentially means is that waste collected from onsite facilities can be disposed of and treated through the systems of the network.

Tamil Nadu, Odisha and Maharashtra already had their own FSSM policies in place. As frontrunners, these are states to learn from. A central policy, however, has its own heft and importance and brings together all the available experience to fashion a model for the states which do not have policies of their own.

The policy makes technological suggestions which can be easily adopted. But, more importantly,

it emphasises the spreading of awareness about the importance of sewage management and its implications for public health. It calls for engagement with communities so that they are supportive of initiatives taken up by local administrations. If people can be helped to understand how harmful open defecation and dumping of sewage is, they will adopt systems that keep their neighbourhoods clean.

The policy stresses the need for standardisation of design and construction. Supervision and regulation

are particularly important because the entities involved will range from private players to the government.

A major challenge will be the implementation of the FSSM policy in dense urban areas which are already hooked to sewerage systems, but where the disposal of waste remains a problem. Getting onsite solutions to work in such situations will require innovation.

It also remains to be seen how large urbanised and rapidly expanding areas like Gurugram, which have a serious problem with sewage disposal, can be brought under FSSM. These are areas which have already seen runaway construction without controls. Much will depend on mobilising public opinion and the policy's success will require the involvement of NGOs and community groups.

The FSSM policy has itself come out of a combined effort by civil society such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Centre for Science and Environment, the National Institute of Urban Affairs, among others. These organisations combined their efforts to help the government shape the policy. Its future success will depend on more such collaboration. ■

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Roadmap for skill training

Civil Society News
New Delhi

THE snobbish divide between academics and skills should end and vocational education should be transformed into an aspirational university system closely linked to industry, says a report submitted by a committee of experts set up by the Union Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE).

The committee's recommendations have urgency in the light of concerns over how India is going to reap the benefits of the demographic dividend. The number of the educated unemployed will climb from 7-8 million to 10 million per annum by 2020.

The committee's report says India should set its targets high and aspire to make young men and women getting vocational training here employable anywhere in the world. India can become the 'skilling capital of the world,' says the report.

Vocational Education and Training Colleges (VETCs), on the lines of medical and engineering colleges, can be set up that offer certificate, advanced diploma and degree level courses. Students should alongside learn at least two academic subjects and soft skills. The ITIs, nursing colleges and other diploma colleges can become VETCs.

The VETCs should be affiliated to a National Vocational University. The Indian Institute of Skills in Kanpur, for instance, could become a university. For dropouts the VETCs can have Skill Development Centres but those who join would need to achieve a certain level of competence.

For people from the informal sector, prior learning can be evaluated, gaps identified and training provided.

The VETCs should be close to industrial clusters so that students can get hands-on apprentice training while they are learning.

At the top, students and trainers can aspire to go to an institute like the Apex Hi Tech Institute in Bengaluru which offers courses in mechatronics, instrumentation, industrial automation. Nanotechnology, artificial intelligence and robotics can be added here.

The government's current architecture for vocational education and training is large and chaotic with low standards, no accountability and overlapping functions. There is the National Skill Development Agency (NSDA), National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), National Skill Development Fund (NSDF), 40 Sector Skill Councils (SSCs) and 267 training partners. There is also the Directorate-General of Employment and Training (DGE&T) with 12,412 ITIs and many more agencies. About 17 ministries conduct their own vocational training programmes.

To keep pace with industry's changing needs, the National Skill Development Council was set up in 2008 followed by its sister agencies. The idea was to raise resources and help industry skill, train and absorb youth in jobs.

Unfortunately, the present system is not owned, led or financed by industry. Instead, financed by the government, vocational education is churning out



On the job training is vital for vocational education

The committee's report says India should set its targets high and aspire to make young people getting vocational training employable anywhere in the world.

unemployable youngsters after putting them through shoddy short-term courses, creating a supply-driven system. For instance, under the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana, which focused on dropouts, only 8.5 percent got employment.

Vocational education and training have also suffered because it has been stigmatised as being inferior. It was seen as a career path for dropouts and the economically and socially disadvantaged. Those who joined got low-paid jobs with no upward mobility. Academics and skills weren't converged. So the smart set went to college and acquired knowledge but no skills. This is the reason why India produces millions of unemployable graduates even as industry complains about lack of skilled manpower.

The committee recommendations include a slew of reforms including changing the institutional framework.

The starting point of all skilling schemes is the status of the job market. The committee has recommended that the Directorate-General of

Training set up a National Labour Market Information System (LMIS) and modernise all 978 Employment Exchanges across the country to provide counselling, guidance and facilitate employment. For this, the Directorate-General of Employment, which traditionally tracks the job market, be shifted from the labour ministry to the MSDE.

A Central Advisory Board on Skill Development with ministers of all departments which offer skilling programmes and heads of regulatory bodies can ensure coordination across ministries.

Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) were formed to gauge the manpower needs of industry and the skills required and to ensure these were fulfilled. Forty SSCs have been set up by the NSDC, with 26 sectors being taken from the Planning Commission's priority list of important industries. The rest have been formed in an ad hoc manner. Strangely, the education and skill development sector has been left out.

But the SSCs seem to be awash with confusion. They have contradictory responsibilities such as setting standards and also testing them. They have also been outsourcing the setting of competency standards to consultants who often don't have the expertise. The report calls into question the credibility of the SSCs.

The report suggests that the SSCs be streamlined. They should be owned and funded by industry but also financed by the government to ensure social inclusion. Instead, they are currently populated with representatives from industry associations and no representation from worker unions. Their funding comes through the NSDC for which there is no oversight.

The committee would like the number of SSCs whittled down. It has identified 21 critical sectors which have been further broken down into sub-

Continued on page 14

AJIT KRISHNA



ONE GLOBAL FORCE POWERS DIVERSE BRANDS

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Leadership with Trust

For more information about the Tata group, visit www.tata.com

Continued from page 12

sectors. The SSCs should migrate to the states and fulfil their skilling needs especially in agriculture.

Third, the NSDC, which finances new vocational training centres, depends heavily on government funding. Several training institutes it has lent money to haven't paid back. The report recommends the NSDC be given the status of a Non Banking Financial Company (NBFC) under the Reserve Bank of India. Instead of financing sundry institutes it could help modernise the ITIs.

Fourth, the report recommends that the NSDA become the 'sole regulatory authority for skill development in the country'. So it's important for it to be headed by a person of unimpeachable reputation. The SSCs could be formed by this regulatory body.

The biggest flaw in the system, says the report, is that "we have not been able to ensure quality of training to international standards".

The vocational education and skilling system is plagued by low standards. Testing and certification don't meet global benchmarks. There is a poorly staffed National Skill Qualification Committee which produces complicated standards and qualification requirements which are hard to understand and full of jargon.

The report has recommended an independent National Board for Assessment and Certification

The biggest flaw in the system is that 'we have not been able to ensure quality of training to global standards'.

manned by experts from industry, training and education. "This is the single most important step to ensure quality and credibility of the whole VET system," says the report. There should be one agency providing certification.

To finance vocational education and training, the committee recommends that industry pay a Reimbursable Industry Contribution (RIC). The amount would work out to two percent of the firm's payroll. Funds can be routed through the industry-specific SSC or NFDF. Students can be trained in-house or sent to vocational training centres.

The RIC would apply to all registered large, medium and small, private and public enterprises which employ 10 or more workers. Twenty percent of funds would be set apart to train people from the unorganised sector.

The committee, chaired by Sharda Prasad, former DG of the Directorate-General of Employment and Training, has amongst its members, Santosh Mehrotra, Professor of Economics at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, R.L. Singh, former DDG at the DGET, Professor Ashok Chandra, former Special Secretary in the HRD Ministry, Jawaid Ashraf, Executive Vice President, HR, JCB, Ballabgarh, Kuldeep Goel, Vice-President at L&T, and Sunita Chhibba, DG of NSDA. ■

The report can be downloaded from www.skilldevelopment.gov.in/report-ssc.html

AJIT KRISHNA



Shaleen Rakesh with the eNGO Challenge trophy awarded to VSO for SMS Story

SMS Story is making it easier to teach

Kavita Charanji
New Delhi

A story sent on SMS with just 160 characters along with a lesson plan is helping teachers in government schools improve the way they teach English. The methodology, called SMS Story, was tested by Voluntary Service Overseas, a development agency, in Papua New Guinea and then tried out in Bundi in Rajasthan. In both cases, it proved effective.

In February this year, VSO India won the eNGO Challenge trophy awarded by Digital Empowerment Foundation for its SMS Story project.

SMS Story has now been introduced in select government schools in Delhi, Mumbai and Deogarh in Jharkhand. VSO India has plans to take SMS Story to 23 cities in 21 states across the country.

"The SMS approach involves a curricula delivered using SMS for 10-14 weeks. The text messages are sent in sequence, using the principle of phonics, a technology that uses the sound of words to teach rather than letters alone," says Shaleen Rakesh, executive director, VSO India. "This is particularly successful for children from poor and marginalised communities who begin to learn English in Classes 4-7 without a foundation at nursery level in alphabets, consonants, spelling and so on."

The SMSs are targeted at teachers whose own command of English may falter. The teachers receive three to five days of training during which they are acquainted with the SMS methodology. They receive



A teacher in Bundi using flashcards to teach English



A student reading out an SMS story



Alison Gee, a VSO volunteer, with girls from a government school in Bundi district

the story and the lesson plan a day in advance so that they are well prepared to teach the next day.

In 2015, VSO India partnered with the district administration of Bundi, the state government and well-known NGO Pratham to introduce teachers in 25 government schools to SMS Story. The content was developed by Alison Gee, a volunteer from the UK. The project was designed to sharpen the ability of children to read English, speak and improve their vocabulary.

The teachers received two daily text messages at 2 pm. One message contained the story which they were instructed to write on the blackboard. They read the story to the class, pointing to every word. Then they read the story with the class, again pointing to every word, and finally the class read the story to the teacher.

The second message contained a lesson plan. If new sounds and words were to be introduced, then these were taught before the story was read to the

Stories are sent to teachers on SMS with a lesson plan a day in advance. The teacher writes the story on the blackboard and then reads it to students.

class. Teachers were given flashcards and a poster, with all instructions.

The results were very encouraging. Twice as many children in the schools that took part could read words and sentences in English as compared to the schools that did not participate. Just 48 percent of

children in the non-participating schools could tell the meaning of sentences compared to 62 percent of their peers in schools where SMS Story had been used. All this was attained at a cost of approximately 10 paise per child per day.

Enthusied by the success of the Bundi pilot project, VSO India has scaled up the SMS Story model in rural areas in Jharkhand and in Delhi and Mumbai. The Delhi pilot that runs in 15 schools in Southwest Delhi is being implemented by Society for All Round Development (SARD). VSO India's Mumbai intervention has been implemented by Unnati. Both the Delhi and Mumbai pilots have taken off with funding from Vodafone Foundation.

The partnership with Vodafone Foundation, the development arm of telecom giant Vodafone, is proving to be very useful to VSO India. Vodafone's flagship programme for employee engagement in developmental projects, World of Difference, will now focus on educational initiatives. As part of the collaboration, VSO India is introducing the SMS Story approach in 23 Vodafone circles across the country.

"SMS Story uses technology which of course makes it more exciting for Vodafone because they are a tech company whose primary line of business is mobile phone intervention. So I think it is a good match from many perspectives," says Shaleen Rakesh, executive director, VSO India.

Against the scenario of globalisation and an increasing emphasis on skilling young people for employment, VSO India's SMS Story intervention is likely to have a major impact on the teaching and learning of English. Says Sachal Aneja, Asia-Pacific Corporate Engagement Manager for VSO, "English is really the language of the present and future. SMS Story works because it is really simple, doesn't burden the teacher and makes classrooms exciting and interesting. When a teacher pulls out a mobile phone, the children are intrigued because it is like a magic box where a new story emerges every day."

"There has been roughly a 20-25 percent jump in learning outcomes and comprehension abilities across the programme where it has been implemented and impact assessments carried out. So it reinforces the fact that the programme works," says Rakesh.

With good network and connectivity, SMS Story can prove useful in teaching English, provided every teacher has a mobile phone. ■

Samita's World

by SAMITA RATHOR



Kashmir always on edge

Jehangir Rashid
Srinagar

THE death of Hizbul Mujahideen commander Burhan Muzaffar Wani initiated a long phase of violence and insecurity in the Kashmir Valley. Life has still not returned to normal and people are wondering what the future holds.

A few trends are especially worrisome. Stone pelting, for instance, has become a routine phenomenon and Friday protests a permanent feature. It is now students who have taken to pelting stones on the police and soldiers. Pictures and videos of girls taking to the streets and throwing stones went viral on social media, becoming an embarrassment for the state government which was claiming the situation had normalised.

The student protests were sparked when security forces entered the premises of the Government Degree College, Pulwama, in South Kashmir — a hotbed of militancy — despite the principal appealing to them not to. The students began an agitation that soon spread to other educational institutions.

“One fails to comprehend why security forces entered the premises of the degree college. What work did they have there? It is equivalent to playing with fire. A single mistake can at times lead to an uncontrollable situation,” remarked Mohammad Altaf, an educationist.

The irony is that the state government has no plans to deal with the protesting students. The obvious thing to do was to counsel them.

Nazir Ahmad, a teacher, said that the Department of School Education should have called the parents of the students and informed them about the misdeeds of their wards. He said the lack of accountability at home is the basic reason for some students resorting to stone pelting.

“It has been observed that some of the stone pelters mingle with the students and then pelt stones on the police and security forces. It is the duty of the law-enforcing agencies to identify such stone pelters so that action is taken against them while no action is taken against the students,” said Ahmad.

In the past year or so, at least 100 youths have joined the ranks of the militants in the Kashmir Valley, after the death of Wani. Most of them are from the South Kashmir districts of Shopian, Kulgam and Pulwama. These militants make their presence felt on a regular basis, more so when one of them gets killed in an encounter.

“The worrying trend is that educated youth, some of them professionals, have taken up militancy since July last year. These youths got motivated due to the active role played by Burhan on social media



Students from a women's college in Srinagar throwing stones at the police



A student taking part in a violent protest

networking sites like Facebook and Whatsapp. Educated youth are highly motivated and don't fear death. This is a huge challenge for all of us,” said a police official.

The other disturbing feature, especially in South Kashmir, is the open support to militants.

“When a particular village or area is cordoned off for carrying out search operations, people create obstacles. At many encounter sites people come out in huge numbers and begin protests against the anti-militant operations. This has resulted in civilian casualties and safe passage for the trapped militants,” said Shakeel Ahmad, a resident of Chadoora.

Third, violence has been spreading. Even Central Kashmir, which is relatively peaceful, has witnessed bouts of violence and protests. In fact, for the first time in Kashmir's history of militancy, the election to the Anantnag Lok Sabha seat was cancelled due to the law and order situation.

On 9 April, when the byelection for the Central Kashmir parliamentary seat was held, eight persons

lost their lives in Budgam district during polling day violence and several others, including J&K police personnel, were injured. Dr Farooq Abdullah of the National Conference emerged victorious from the Srinagar Lok Sabha seat with just seven percent turnout.

Last, the government of Mehbooba Mufti is losing the people's support. Her government has been ordering the closure of educational institutions in different areas of the Valley on a regular basis ever since the protests broke out. As a result of this lackadaisical attitude of the government, students have lost precious time during this academic session.

“People had a lot of expectations from Mehbooba Mufti when she donned the mantle of chief minister. She has failed miserably and people are angry with her. The protests being held, more so by the student community, are a manifestation of this anger. Once a votary of the revocation of AFSPA, Mehbooba nowadays trains guns at militants,” said Abdul Rahim, a retired government employee. ■

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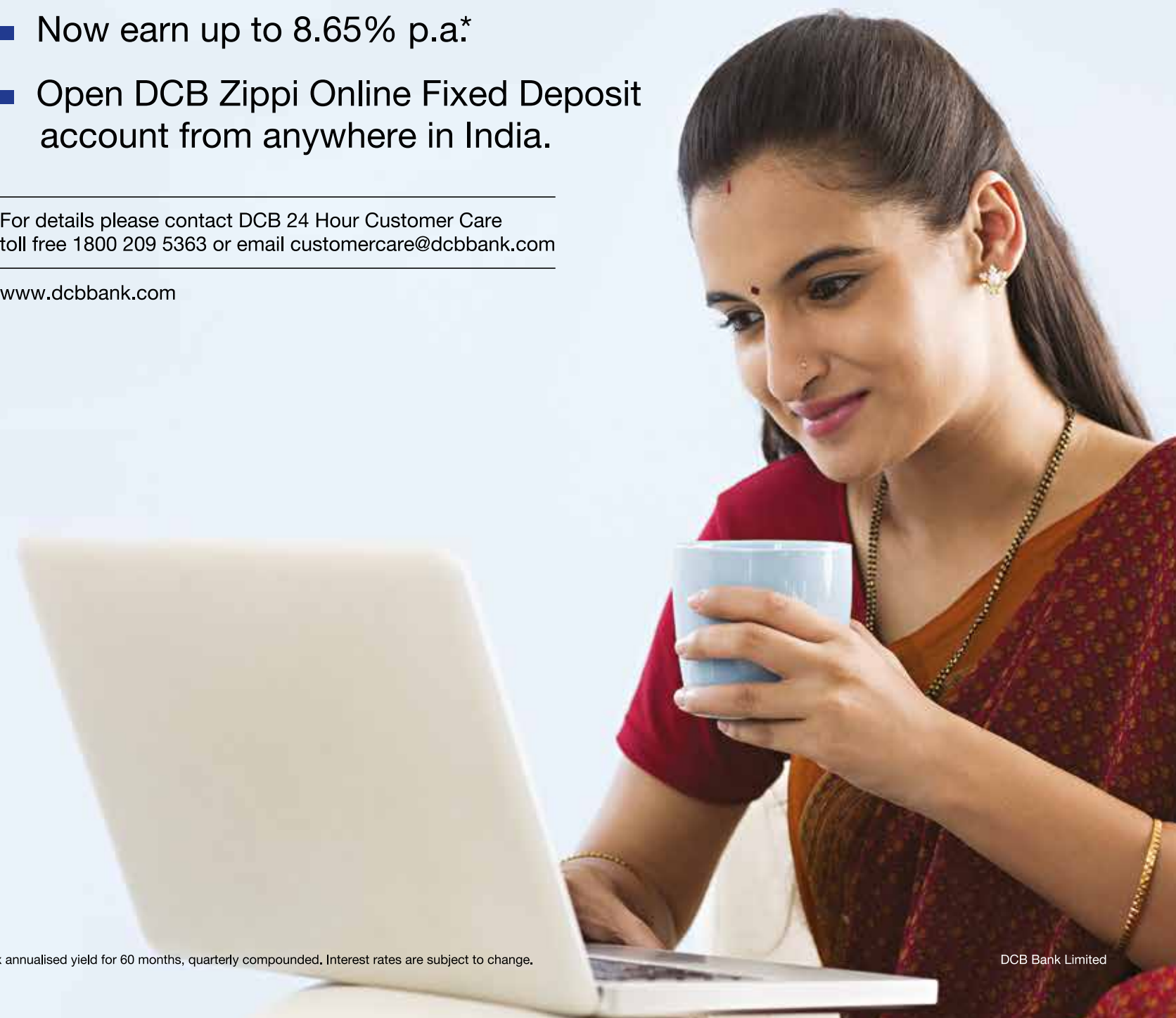
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SHREE PADRE

People responded enthusiastically to a call to do manual labour voluntarily and dig trenches for harvesting water

WINNING THE WATER CUP

The Paani Foundation helps villages fight drought

Shree Padre
Satara

At sunrise every day, across 13 districts in Maharashtra, thousands of villagers set out to dig trenches and build earthen dams. This has been their early morning routine for the past 45 days. From able-bodied men and women to little boys in shorts and frail grandfathers, everybody chips in. There is no time to be lost because they are getting ready for the monsoon and the third round of the Satyamev Jayate Water Cup, which offers cash awards for villages in Maharashtra that drought-proof their settlements.

The cash awards are just an incentive. Water harvesting and watershed management come with serious benefits that transform the lives of farming communities which have been haunted by drought — often despite receiving some rain.

This year, parched villages hope to catch as much rain as possible and put it back into the earth — thereby reviving the water cycle that can sustain farming. It is a desperate effort by villagers to save themselves from the chronic drought which has wracked their lives.

The Satyamev Jayate Water Cup gives the top three villages ₹50 lakh, ₹30 lakh and ₹20 lakh, respectively. There is also a prize for sustainability. Started two years ago by actor Aamir Khan and his wife, film producer Kiran Rao, the Paani Foundation has one ambitious objective — to drought-proof Maharashtra.

Dr Avinash Pol, a dentist, now popularly known as the 'paanyache (water) doctor', is the foundation's inspiration and helps guide its policies and

programmes. From the historic Ajinkyatara Fort, Dr Pol began a *shramdaan* or voluntary work initiative to restore water levels in Satara town and showed the difference this could make across the district (see *Civil Society*, August 2016).

For the Water Cup, villages are assessed on watershed management and water conservation works. Last year, 116 villages entered the competition. This year, as word spread, around 1,300 villages from 13 districts in Vidarbha, Marathwada and western Maharashtra are competing.

In 2016 Velu village won the Satyamev Jayate Water Cup. Before the monsoon broke the villagers had worked hard to drought-proof their village. Then, in June, it rained. Just 275 mm. It was enough for the village to say goodbye to water tankers. After 20 years.

The *rabi* crop was good too. Each of the 350 families in the village harvested five to eight quintals of grain, says Duryodhan Panduranga Nanavare, 63, one of Velu's trainers who learnt to catch the rain from Paani Foundation last year.

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, who gave away the prizes on Independence Day, added another ₹20 lakh to the ₹50 lakh that Velu village won. Another NGO put in an additional ₹5 lakh.

"Eighty percent of the villages that participated in last year's competition bid goodbye to the water tankers they had been dependent on for years," says Dr Pol.

Last year, water harvesting and watershed management carried out across villages made it possible to save more than a billion litres of water, which would otherwise have arrived in 1.3 million tanker loads. And ₹272 crore worth of water is now being annually conserved, according to estimates by the Paani Foundation.



PAANI FOUNDATION

Results of last year's work: a shimmering stream and a pond brimming with water



PAANI FOUNDATION

A tank being readied for the monsoon

Three technical trainers are stationed in each taluk. After last year's competition, the Paani Foundation called for applications for the job of technical trainer. Out of 200 applicants, it selected 40.

Alongside, the Paani Foundation has produced over 130 educational videos on different soil and water structures, success stories, discussions and a fiction series on water. Its water heroes series has 25 inspiring success stories in Hindi and Marathi.

Any villager can see these videos by downloading Paani Foundation's app. During training, the five representatives are taught how to upload photos and file daily reports via the app.

Villagers can also ask Dr Pol for advice. He attends gram sabha meetings and interacts with thousands of villagers via satellite. During each episode a film or theatre personality joins the doctor. A caravan from village to village facilitates this online gram sabha. Aamir and Kiran take keen interest and visit villages from time to time.

Shramdaan is what brings people together. Once technical plans have been worked out, people voluntarily offer their labour. To avoid the scorching sun, *shramdaan* starts early in the morning. Volunteers do their quota of work and leave. But Paani Foundation's dedicated workers continue. They plan the next day's work, mark contour lines and send a report to the foundation's office for approval.

Forty-five days' *shramdaan* doesn't magically create the watershed and soil conservation work every village requires. Invariably, earth diggers have to be hired to dig deep continuous contour trenches, ponds and so on. The village can raise resources from government programmes such as MGNREGA, IWMP (Integrated Watershed Management Programme), trusts or individual donors.

"*Shramdaan* is a strategy to bring people together," says Dr Pol. "Unless the community is united, you can't do this task effectively. The competition is very transparent. The marks card is published on the website. But we emphasise quality, not just quantity."

VILLAGE OF ONIONS

The revival of farms and villages depends on water. Take Bidal, the onion village in Satara district. For 17 years Bidal has been dependent on water tankers. The survival of its famed onion, the Pune Furusangi, is at stake.

Pune Furusangi is a tasty onion variety that can be stored for six months. About 10 onions make a kilo. Wholesale traders have settled in Bidal so that they can buy the Furusangi and sell it all over India.

Spread over 2,468 hectares, Bidal has a population of 5,974 and no water. The farmers here are hard-working and if they have water they produce a record crop. One example cited is of a 38-year-old farmer, Bapurao Jagadale. He has 10

PAANI FOUNDATION



Dr Avinash Pol and Aamir Khan greeting a gram sabha via satellite

acres. Three years ago he grew onion all over his land and harvested 20 tonnes. That year, onion prices hit the roof. Jagadale earned Rs 1 crore from his onions.

Bidal has 375 open wells. Due to persistent drought, farmers have been abandoning half-grown crops in their fields. Outside every house there is a drum for storing water from tankers. Each family is rationed 40 litres per day. Water is used very judiciously. Bath water flowing from the bathroom is collected in a basin and used for washing clothes.

"This year our tanker dependency began as early as January," says 50-year-old Vilas Jagadale, a farmer. The village generally gets its quota of rain in September, a phenomenon that locals call 'return rains'.

After joining the competition for the Satyamev Jayate Water Cup, a wave of enthusiasm has swept the village. Over half its residents have done their bit for making water harvesting structures. "We will finish two years' work in 45 days. Then we will supply water to other villages," says Appa Deshmukh, a farmer, optimistically.

Bidal has a historical precedent in social mobilisation. Around 50 years ago a bitter fight broke out during panchayat elections. Many were physically injured and many more psychologically.

The village elders felt regretful and took steps to end the bitterness. At a meeting held in the temple the entire village decided to select their panchayat members unanimously. This tradition is still followed. The village gathers at the

It isn't easy to get people to work together shoulder to shoulder and realise that the solution to their problem lies in their own hands. Social mobilisation is the lynchpin of success. But when the rains fail, crops fail and the only solution people can think of is to migrate to the city.

THE STRATEGY

The Paani Foundation has worked out a very careful strategy to enthrone half-abandoned villages into battling drought. First of all, the foundation does not give a single rupee to any village. "We give you knowledge instead," the foundation tells the villagers.

Aamir Khan writes a personal letter to every gram panchayat, inviting the village to join the water competition. This year the deadline for applications was 31 January. Each competing village then sends five representatives, including two women, for training. A four-day residential training camp is organised. The five representatives return to their village and prepare an extensive watershed development plan. They are also expected to mobilise people by organising gram sabhas to explain the competition and why everyone must get involved.

The Paani Foundation arms the representatives with solid technical resources. The Watershed Organisation Trust (WOTR), based in Ahmedabad, is Paani Foundation's knowledge partner. WOTR has provided a regiment of 40 Panilots Sevaks — barefoot watershed technicians — to the foundation for field guidance.



Devendra Fadnavis, Chief Minister of Maharashtra, and Aamir Khan at last year's Satyamev Jayate Water Cup award ceremony. Velu village won the first prize.

temple before elections and selects members by consensus.

"We want to win this competition and we will," says a government officer, requesting anonymity. He returns to Bidal every weekend and gets involved in planning. "When people here are working so hard and with so much harmony, how can I happily sleep in the city?" he asks.

He has explained the marks card to all the villagers and helped them set up committees to oversee the work.

Bidal came to know of a village called Satara Road which had taken part in last year's water competition and built a range of soil and water conservation structures. An 80-member team from Bidal went on an exposure visit to study Satara Road's structures.

"We have unity, we have money power, we lack motivation," concluded the government officer after studying Satara Road. They put their heads together and came up with an idea.

Like Paani Foundation, Bidal too announced a competition. The *basti* that did the most voluntary labour and built the best structures would get the first prize of ₹50,000. Those coming second and third would get ₹30,000 and ₹20,000. An additional prize of ₹11,000 was for the *basti* doing the best overall work.

The idea has caught on. Another village has announced prizes for water works too: the first prize is a fridge, the second a mixie and the third a fan! Like Bidal, about a dozen villages have shown great enthusiasm and made substantial progress in the competition.

THE PEOPLE WHO JOIN

The water movement has attracted diverse people: farmers, middle-class professionals, urban labour, the handicapped, government officials. At the grassroots, it is providing technical expertise that converts into jobs. Old disputes in villages are getting resolved as people come together.

Satara's three taluks — Man, Khatav and Koregaon — are all starved of water. They get only 400 to 500 mm of rain. All the six villages I visited depended on tankers.

Nhavi Budruk is a tiny village in Khatav taluk, inhabited by 357 families. Voluntary labour has attracted around 1,000 people of all ages. "The number keeps rising day by day. When we began it wasn't like this," says Mohan Rao Laad, taluk coordinator.

Political parties, which want credit for work done, are the biggest obstacles to unity. The Paani Foundation has trained some local people as social coordinators to address such issues, but it is tough.

At Loni a few physically challenged persons have shown spirit and spunk. Namdev Dattu Kale, 73, lost his left leg in an accident decades ago. Yet he is a regular volunteer.

"You should see him working. While digging, he keeps his normal leg in the trench and the amputated one on the ground above. He does all the work able people do," says Chandrakanth Phadtare.

Subhash Sadashiv Shinde, 40, was born without the left half of his hand. He works in a cooperative bank in Mumbai. "We want to improve the lives of those who live here," he says.

Pune and Mumbai are close to these villages. Water scarcity has forced people to head for the city. Around 100 painting contractors in Mumbai are from Kumthe in Khatav taluk. Bhosre has 700 families and most work for meagre salaries in Mumbai.

Kumthe has 147 open wells and 700 bore wells. For six years, water tankers have been doing the rounds. And since February, Kumthe gets water only on alternate days.

All the villages in Khatav taluk are raising funds. Kumthe has started a WhatsApp group. "Each family has contributed ₹1,000 to the fund. We haven't compelled anyone. Our people who have migrated are also contributing," explains Dr Mandave Kundlik Shamrao of Kumthe. They collected ₹3 lakh. A team from Kumthe was getting ready to visit Mumbai because there has been a lot of migration there.

"Painting is a job that doesn't need much training. I am also a painting contractor. My grandfather took to this line of work. It was scarcity of water that drove us to Mumbai," recalls 41-year-old Sandeep Mandave.

Sixty-year-old Bhimrao Baburao Phadare, a well-known advocate, lives in Satara but returns to Kumthe every weekend with his wife, Bharathi, to participate in *shramdaan*.

"Both of us enjoy doing this for our village," says Bharathi. Phadare had erected a *shamiana* in front of their house. The couple offered a meal to *shramdaan* volunteers at noon. The villagers decided to do *shramdaan* for another two hours in the evening.

PAANI FOUNDATION

"In most villages, this is turning out to be a people's movement. The rest won't be difficult. If all villagers work hard for two to three years, we will not suffer water shortages for 50 years," says Laad. He is excited to be part of many surprising developments. "The unity we are achieving is paving the way for solving very old disputes in some villages," he says.

In Padali Station village there was a stalemate over construction of a road to the crematorium. The issue came up for discussion when the villagers had assembled for *shramdaan*. With a little effort by activists, the villagers who had been objecting to the road for years agreed to its construction and it was completed in three days.

Ankush Anna Mandave, a captain in the merchant navy, is from Kumthe village where his family owns agricultural land. Ankush earns very well from his job. But he is so attached to his village that he returns on weekends to work on the farm. He now takes part in *shramdaan*.

"I am used to manual work, so after three hours of *shramdaan* in the scorching sun, I don't feel tired. Instead, I feel thrilled that I could work for my village. Forget me. You should see my 80-year-old mother, Savithribai, working with us," he says. His wife, Meenakshi, and 10-year-old son, Ashwith, join him. He estimates it will take 10 years to reach the groundwater level his village used to have.

The movement has snowballed. On 1 May, Maharashtra Day, organisers appealed to people to take part in a special *shramdaan* and 17,000 people from all walks of life, unconnected with the competing villages, took part.

"This is the biggest people's movement after independence," says Amol Mandave, a young Assistant Commissioner of Police designate from Kumthe.

"The lessons I learnt during four days' training at Paani Foundation are the most valuable in my life," says Dayanand Nikam, a trainer at Navi Budruk. "If we fully practise what was taught to us, within three or four years we can attain the water table our forefathers enjoyed, provided there is good rainfall."

Vishwas Gujar of Bhosare village is a tehsildar who works in Mumbai. He has taken 45 days' leave to do *shramdaan*. He says 700 people have migrated to Mumbai from his village. "Once my village is drought-proofed, I think most migrants will return. They earn around ₹200-300 per day working 10-12 hours a day and living in abysmal conditions. If they can peacefully cultivate their fields, why will they migrate?"

But not all villages are enthusiastic. "In my jurisdiction of six taluks, there are a few villages where work hasn't started despite our best efforts. One reason is that there is a festival going on in some villages. In others there was a by-election and the scars of that fight are still fresh," says Balasaheb Shinde, district coordinator.

THE INSPIRING SPARROW

Padali village in North Solapur taluk is a typical case of lethargy. First, a five-member team trained by Paani Foundation backed out. Then, a second team was trained. The only one inspired by the idea was Vishnu Bhosale, a 45-year-old farmer. On the first day, he was the lone volunteer doing *shramdaan*. Bhosale tried getting other people interested but without much success. But he didn't get discouraged. He carried on desilting a pond with determination. Two old men joined him after a few days.

News reached Aamir. Without making any arrangements, he, Kiran and Dr Pol arrived at the percolation pond where Bhosale and the two elderly men were digging away. "I am impressed by Vishnubhai's determination," said Aamir. "I too want to follow in his footsteps." Aamir then dug soil for half an hour till the tractor trailer was full. The video crew was called and they produced a short success story in Marathi titled, *How a villager from Solapur waged a war against drought*. The latest news is that 22 volunteers have joined Bhosale.

What made Bhosale battle all alone? A story narrated while he was training with Paani Foundation, inspired him deeply. Here's the story:

A huge fire engulfs a forest. Many animals get charred inside. Neither the elephant, the cheetah, the lion or even humans on the other side of the jungle do anything to extinguish the fire. A sparrow flying above sees the raging fire and notes the pathetic state of the animals. The sparrow plunges into a pond nearby, flies to where the fire is and drops a few dribbles of water. The bigger animals

ridicule the sparrow. "How can your drops of water put out the fire?" they laugh. "Yes, I know the reality. My efforts can't. But when the history of this tragedy is written, my name will be listed under doers. And yours as dumb spectators," replies the sparrow.

A NEW LEXICON

Several factors make Paani Foundation's work strikingly unique. First, it believes staunchly in community-based development and has designed programmes accordingly. Right knowledge and right action are motivating people. This knowledge, explained in simple terms, is understood and disseminated from village to village.

Second, the foundation's strategy of empowering stakeholders with knowledge and motivation is more result-oriented than the subsidy and sops approach to development. It is likely to raise a non-political rural leadership that is badly needed. Such opportunities don't exist in the subsidy-sops system.

"Watershed development is continuous work. We can't say that all villages will work enthusiastically. The percentage of work that is completed depends on their unity and tempo," says Dr Pol. "The main difference in our work is that, unlike the government or the NGO sector, we aren't giving a

PICTURES BY SHREE PADRE



Shankar Rajaram Dhane of Bidal village with his onion crop

Namdev Kale and Subhash Shinde

The technical expertise the foundation is providing to people in the villages is converting into local-level employment.



Villages have been depending on water tankers for decades

single rupee to the villagers. Given the right chance, we believe our villagers can do their work by themselves."

"This is a movement from below," says Sathyajit Bhatkal, CEO of the Paani Foundation. "If you motivate and give knowledge to people and they decide to change, that becomes so powerful that no one can hold them back. After reviewing this year's performance, we will scale up. Our single vision is to create a drought-proof Maharashtra."

"This is an interesting experiment," says Crispino Lobo, Managing Trustee of WOTR. "See the timing of the programme. It just precedes the monsoon. Once the rains shower the earth, the hope in the hearts of communities will turn into conviction. That itself will be motivation to carry out the rest of the work."

Scores of dedicated local people have joined the movement: Balasaheb as technical trainer, Surekha Phadke as social trainer, Bharathi Phadke as village trainer and so on. "Talk to them for 15 minutes, it will be difficult for you to believe they are not engineers," says Dr Pol. ■

There is wealth in culture banglanatak.com converts villages into craft hubs

Subir Roy
Kolkata

WHEN banglanatak.com first started working among the Chhau dancers of Purulia district in West Bengal there were barely a dozen troupes. Today there are 150. Not all of them are connected with the banglanatak.com initiative. The revival that it created caused teams to come up spontaneously from within the community.

The dancers initially earned a negligible amount. For record-keeping, banglanatak.com put down their income as ₹500 per month. By 2013, the median income had gone up to ₹3,500 per month, with the top 10 percent earning more than ₹30,000. There are some Baul singers who have programmes 25 days in a month. Some among them have a monthly income of ₹80,000-90,000. In a Pattachitra (scroll painting) village the average family income now is ₹25,000.

Some who never left their village have in their own way become globe-trotters. For 2017-18, banglanatak.com has already secured their participation in eight festivals across Europe. The climax of their annual calendar is the Chhau Utsav held in Purulia which keeps attracting an increasing number of tourist visitors.

Banglanatak.com was started in 2000 by an IIT Kharagpur graduate and former resident of the Bay Area in the US, Amitava Bhattacharya, 50, who, after 10 years with software, decided to return home. "I got a bit bored with software. Becoming a millionaire was not a motivation. We were expecting our first child whom we did not want to be born in the US. Also, as a working couple, we missed the family support system here."

On coming back, he started travelling and found in rural areas a harsh reality — tremendous poverty and social exclusion of practitioners of traditional art forms. The internet and mobile telephony had not yet spread. Then he realised that "culture was a great tool in connecting, especially the media dark areas". So he started banglanatak.com "as a tool to communicate, to connect to the rural marginalised people". Their first vertical was C4D or communication for development. The aim was to get people together and empower them so that they could lead better lives. The focus was on areas like women and child health, sanitation and the environment.



Amitava Bhattacharya, founder of banglanatak.com in his office

Then, around 2004, Bhattacharya realised that just communicating was not enough. So he shifted focus from using culture to convey the message of development to trying to see whether local culture could be used to fight poverty. That year banglanatak started 'Art for Livelihood' and four years later (2008) renamed the vertical 'Art for Life'. This was because the understanding of what was livelihood had itself changed. "Earlier I used to think livelihood meant economic empowerment or improvement. Now, with 17 years of experience, I realise livelihood also means economic engagement. Engagement with the world around you plays a great role in a community and can be even greater than empowerment."

Explains Suman Mukhopadhyay, Director and Vice-President, "The aim was to monetise culture as an asset" so that traditional performers and craftsmen could earn decently and lead better lives. This is art and culture-led rural development which seeks to establish working models that help artist communities gain recognition, safeguard their art forms, improve their incomes and transform their marginalised villages into cultural destinations.

Art for Life has three components: capacity building, providing direct market linkage, and

facilitating exchange and collaboration. Adds Bhattacharya, "We have been doing this for 12 years now and it is the flagship initiative of banglanatak. UNESCO evaluated it in 2008 by visiting many villages and started looking at the model very seriously under 'close observation'."

A key finding is that it is not just incomes that have improved. So has sanitation. The artistes and performers were mostly illiterate but they all now send their children to school. "The most significant thing was that among the 15,000 people we have worked with, none has left the village and gone to the city in 12 years. We found that once a community travelled up the ladder, their confidence increased and they were able to work in their own way."

In 2013, the West Bengal government, in partnership with UNESCO, decided to construct 10 rural craft hubs, with banglanatak handling design and implementation. These are centred around traditions like Pattachitra, narrative visuals (Paschim Medinipur), *katha*, embroidery (Birbhum), terracotta work (Bankura), *Chhau* masks (Purulia), clay dolls (Nadia), *mukha*, dancing mask (Dakshin Dinajpur), *sitalpati*, weaves from reeds (Cooch Behar), *dokra*, non-ferrous metal casting (Bardhaman), and *madurkathi*, woven floor

PICTURES BY PRASANTA BISWAS



Suman Mukherjee, Director and Vice-President of banglanatak.com

One such hub, for *katha* stitching, is set between two rivers, the Ajay and Mayurakshi, in Nanaor in Birbhum district, known for its terracotta temples. The embroidery created through running stitches has artistic content and social significance. It offers women a chance to sit around and socialise after attending to household chores. It is also an art practised by both rich and poor. The art element plus the social bonding factor make *katha* stitching a tradition worth preserving.

Jaba Chitrakar, 38, the Pattachitra painter, learnt her art (the painting as well as the narrative singing while unfurling the scroll that makes up a public performance) from her husband after she got married at 15. The whole family, including her married elder daughter, lives in Noya village of Paschim Medinipur district and is engaged in the work. Earlier, just four or five households in the village were devoted to Pattachitra, now it is the entire village.

In between, from the early 2000s, banglanatak came in with its work. The financial status of the family changed unrecognisably in these years. After meeting all expenses, the family makes a net ₹30,000-40,000 a month. They have been able to buy a bit of land and build a pucca house. Earlier, Jaba's husband would hawk his scrolls on foot across villages. Today, there are three *melas* where they sell their work.

Earlier, they produced only scrolls on traditional themes like *Krishna leela* and the epic story of *Manasamangal*. Now, themes include the tsunami of 2004, Nirbhaya and 9/11. IIT Kharagpur commissioned them to do works on public health, malaria and vaccination. An Australian university got them to tell the stories of Rupert Murdoch and Julian Assange. Recently, an assignment has come from the state government for a scroll and performance for its Kanyashree programme on girls' education.

Perhaps the biggest change is what the Pattachitra creators produce. From traditional scrolls it is now coasters (₹60), greeting cards (₹100), T-shirts

his father and then from his guru, Sadhan Bairgi, with whom he lived for a time. He has been performing in public with his father since he was a child. Now his father is part of his team. For the last 10-12 years he has been performing on his own with his team of accompanists. He is sure his son, now three-plus, who can already handle instruments, will take up the tradition.

The repertoire of old Mahajani songs has not changed. But the rendering has. Being able to afford a harmonium with which to practise has improved tunefulness, practice with percussion instruments has improved rhythm. A change which has a plus and a minus is the need to be away from home for the better part of the month, performing across the state and the country. From having to mostly perform in neighbourhoods and seldom onstage, now, sometimes, during a festival, an entire evening is devoted to Baul music. Income, which was earlier barely ₹500 a month, is now ₹30,000.

As these hubs have taken root, banglanatak has discovered a new byproduct. These villages have unknowingly evolved as cultural destinations. Visitors, desi and videsi, are going to these villages according to their own schedule, staying there,



Baskets made from sabai grass in Purulia



Attractive masks



Dokra art from Bankura



Wooden masks, a speciality of Dakshin Dinajpur

(₹400), girls' *kurtas* (₹800), *dupattas* in fabric colours (₹1,200). A sari of Kerala cotton is priced at ₹3,500.

Jaba can barely sign her own name. Her father died when her mother was carrying her. She recalls how as children they would sometimes seek alms in the village to get by. Today, her younger daughter, who is 15 and has studied up to Class 8, is fluent in Hindi and English and does the job of interacting with tourists.

Sumanta Das Baul, 27, from Subhas Palli in Birbhum district, belongs to a Baul family which is part of the Sahajia sect among Bauls. He learnt from

interacting with artistes, placing orders, the income going directly to the artiste cluster. So the hubs and tourism have got interlinked, giving rise to a new vertical, TourEast. Under this, to support the visitors, banglanatak has built community museums incorporating the history of the village, the story of the artistes, their family charts.

As soon as cultural tourism emerges — banglanatak now organises 16 tours round the year at craft hubs — a village's perspective changes. You need a meeting place for visitors, guides to indicate what is public and private space. So banglanatak has

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The income of Pattachitra painters has increased and their villages have been transformed

added tourism-related capacity building to its agenda. This includes new media which is not only helping the marketing but changing the aspirations of the local youths. The younger generation, who were drifting away from the old vocations, are returning. There is a rise in income, recognition and reaping the fruits of new media, making up an inclusive, sustainable road map for development.

Initially the average age of Baul singers was 57, now it is 43. A unique transformation has happened in a village where women practising the art of Pattachitra initially lived virtually on alms. Now each house has a toilet, can offer homestay to tourists and the village is so clean and tidy that it is in great demand for holding marriages.

Banglanatak.com began with a staff of 12, now there are 90 people. It has offices in Kolkata, Delhi and Goa. Entirely funded by grants, in its first year it secured grants of ₹14 lakh, last year (2016-17) it secured ₹8.5 crore. In 2009 its work reached 3,200 families in West Bengal, today it reaches 15,000 and in Bihar 1,500. This means affecting the lives of around a lakh of people. It operates through two legal outfits, Island Informatics Ltd, set up in 2002 as a for-profit organisation, and Contact Base, a



Sumonto Das Baul. This form of singing was fading away

not-for-profit society.

An engagement which banglanatak likes to remember is organising over 10,000 shows (each with a performing team of seven had an audience of around 250) across eight districts in Bihar in 2012 on safe motherhood. It was part of a project of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation with the Bihar government, for which the BBC Trust handled the communications portion. banglanatak came in for last-mile delivery and scored credibly in the post assessment done by ORG-MARG.

banglanatak is trying to put to good use what it has learnt from its own processes by introducing a new vertical, development consulting, from 2012-13. IIM Kolkata has a course on media and entertainment which was entirely commercial entertainment-oriented. banglanatak has helped them reshape the curriculum a little by incorporating a small part on rural culture. It has worked with a Korean organisation, a UNESCO tier two partner, Ichcat, to organise a conference on NGOs working in South Asia on culture and development. Thereafter it worked with them on learnings to be gleaned from the best among the NGOs through case studies. The consulting also supports the government on policy and IIM Kolkata in raising the profile of social entrepreneurship.

Another recent initiative is MusiCal, an offshoot of Art for Life. When banglanatak saw city youth singing Baul songs to their guitar accompaniment it decided to create a forum to connect them to the traditional masters, the grameen Baul. This would strengthen both. The grameen Baul is a challenge for the city youth as he (the grameen Baul) can drift away from the tune but his emotional content and presentation remain powerful. The urban youth, who is not part of the Baul tradition, needs a reference, a celebrity stamp.

So banglanatak took over the courtyard of Soumen Thakur's home on south Kolkata's Elgin Road and has been holding cultural programmes there every weekend. It gives an opportunity to both the unrecognised city performer and the village artiste. That space, named Akhra Baitanik, has emerged as a folk hub in the last six years. Those who perform well are helped to go forward. The hub festivals are organised by Art for Life while the teams are selected by MusiCal which also managed the international collaborations. ■

Important to sell the idea of toilets better



THE ad on TV features Vidya Balan, the Bollywood star and ambassador of the Government of India (GoI) programme for building toilets in homes. She asks the mother-in-law, who is lengthening her *bahu's ghunghat* at her son's wedding, "Do you have a toilet at home for your daughter-in-law?" Mum-in-law replies: "No." Balan retorts: "Then why are you extending your *bahu's ghunghat* if you can't provide her a toilet at home?"

It is the smartest ad for toilets — smarter than any other *sarkari* ad you might see on TV. But is the message getting through?

India leads the world in open-air defecation with about 600 million people defecating outdoors every day. This is 60 percent of the total open defecation (OD) in the world. It is more than the OD in all of sub-Saharan Africa.

Women and children are the most affected. Close to 300 million women and young girls sit out in the open in the heat, cold and rain, and under constant threat of being watched, molested and raped.

This is not only a national shame. It is a human tragedy. Open defecation is a cause of under-nutrition due to poor absorption, and of illness, stunting and poor school performance. It damages immune systems and impairs mental development, reducing future earnings and human capital.

It results in stunting: half to two-thirds of stunting is because of open defecation, most of all where OD and populations are both dense, as in the Hindi belt. School midday meals are eaten up by intestinal worms, or lost in diarrhoea or in fighting a host of sicknesses. The 2,12,000 children who die of diarrhoea each year are only the tip of the iceberg.

The costs (6.4 percent of GDP estimated in a 2010 World Bank study) and suffering are immense.

A recent survey in North India found the belief widespread that OD is healthier than having a toilet in or near a dwelling. More than half the people with a government-constructed toilet defecate in the open. Constructing toilets is no solution. Only a revolutionary change in collective behaviour can achieve a Swachh Bharat.

PAST MISTAKES

How did earlier programmes fare? The Central Rural Sanitation Programme (CRSP) of 1986-1999, the Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC) of 1999-2012, and the Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan (NBA) of 2012-14



Vidya Balan in the government ad for promoting toilets

More than half the people with a government-constructed toilet defecate in the open. Constructing toilets is no solution. Only a radical change in collective behaviour can achieve a Swachh Bharat.

failed. The TSC, started by the previous NDA government, had 2012 as the target date for a Nirmal Bharat. Instead, with population increase, eight million more rural households were defecating in the open in 2011 than in 2001 (Census data). The share of rural households with toilets increased from 21 to 31 percent between the two Censuses. At

this snail's pace, it will take nearly 70 more years for India to become free of OD.

This situation, 70 years after independence and three decades after the first programme started, indicates basic design weaknesses in the approach. The focus on individual financial subsidies to build toilets has continued. As in many other countries, the policy of individual toilet subsidies/incentives has failed. Previous governments have successively increased the subsidy/incentive.

Corruption is compounded by misreporting. The Ministry of Rural Development reported that the government built toilets for 68 percent of households. But Census 2011 found that 60 million toilets reportedly constructed weren't found on the ground in 2011. Disbursements were taken as a proxy for construction.

The information, education and communication (IEC) component of the TSC/NBA (of the Vidya Balan ad variety) has failed to trigger behaviour change. Research evidence is that people defecate in the open because they do not see a reason to change their centuries-old behaviour. But bureaucrats actually believe that villagers don't build and use toilets because they are too poor. So

then how come Census 2011 reported that a higher proportion of households own TVs rather than toilets?

Poverty is not the issue. Open defecation is rampant even in Haryana and Punjab where most well-off farmers defecate in the open. The great majority could build toilets for themselves if they really wanted to. Crores of people have mobile phones rather than toilets. All community members have to want to end open defecation.

NOT RADICAL ENOUGH

With Swachh Bharat there was indeed a radical revision of policy at the GoI level during the design of the new national sanitation programme.

Its key elements were:

- Appointment of youth, including girls, to be 'triggers' (Swachhata Doot) of collective behaviour change. This requires training of youth to trigger behaviour change in each village. Instead of the government constructing toilets, households would construct and then use their own toilets, monitored by the triggers.
- Giving rewards to credibly OD-free habitations, gram panchayats, blocks and districts following independent verification and certification of the actual use of toilets (not the mere building of toilets).

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WHERE ARE WE BEING READ?

Civil Society is going places...

Kutch, Porbandar, Chamoli, Bhavnagar, Ahwa, Tiswadi, Amritsar, Sabarkantha, Valsad, Sirsa, Hamirpur, Aizwal, Kinnaur, Dhanbad, Dumka, Palamu, Chamarajanagar, Haveri, Madikeri, Malappuram, Jhabua, Amravati, Kolhapur, Osmanabad, Bishnupur, Dimapur, Rajsamand, Mokochung, Mayurbhanj, Bathinda, Fatehgarh Sahib, Hoshiarpur, Jhalawar, Auraiya, Farrukhabad, Lakhimpur Kheri, Pratapgarh, Burdwan, Murshidabad, Pauri Garhwal, Cuddalore, Sivaganga, Kancheepuram, Varanasi, Bellare, Erode, Ramanathapuram, Kanyakumari, Perambalur, Pudukkottai, Shahdol, Tiruvannamalai, New York, Nalgonda, Domalguda, Tezu, London, Chicago, Cambridge....

Civil Society
READ US. WE READ YOU.

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Evaluations until 2014 had shown that a few months after the President of India gave a village a Nirmal Gram Puraskar for achieving ODF (Open Defecation-Free) status, the village was back to defecating in the open as there was no genuine behaviour change. It was all done to win the financial reward.

Similarly, the significant ramp-up in spending on sanitation through the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan is also going to create more work in rural areas in the building of toilets.

There have been four transformations, thanks to the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, in the nation's 40-year-old programme to create villages without open defecation.

- Rural sanitation is on the national agenda as the PM himself has focused on it and speaks on the subject regularly.

- A campaign or movement on sanitation is visible in each state. Thus, many Collectors are emerging as champions.

- Counting toilets is stopping. This is a hugely important development as the earlier focus under the Nirmal Bharat Abhiyaan (the UPA programme) was very much on simply building toilets, and the administrative machinery focused on reporting the number of toilets built. That is not the same goal as creating communities who are counted as being free of open defecation, are proud of that status and can sustain that status. Simply building a toilet in households that did not have one does not lead to whole communities actually becoming ODF. Now, the Government MIS system is counting ODF communities — villages, blocks, districts — not merely the number of toilets built.

- The focus is on behaviour change through appropriate information, education and communication strategies.

At the same time, the status today with regard to toilet construction is as follows:

- Increase in percentage of households with toilets since 2 October 2014 is 10.31 percent.

- Percentage of households with toilets is 52.44 percent.

- Number of ODF villages is 61,850.

This is again thanks to the increase in financial allocation since 2014, as compared to the period before that. Thus, expenditure on the Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan was ₹2,250 crore in 2013-14. It had increased to ₹2,850 crore in the first year of the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan but jumped to ₹6,524 crore in 2015-16. The allocation for the financial year 2016-17 is ₹9,000 crore.

There are contradictory elements in the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM). International evidence strongly indicates that giving individual subsidies to households to construct toilets does not encourage toilet use, which has been corroborated in India. Yet the SBM continues with such subsidies. At the same time, the SBM does recognise, finally, the need to trigger behaviour change at community level through interpersonal communication. One can only hope that the money set aside for such IEC and “triggering” does not remain unutilised, while the money for construction is absorbed rapidly — as happens so often in government programmes. ■

Santosh Mehrotra is Professor of Economics at Jawaharlal Nehru University and the author of Seizing the Demographic Dividend: Policies to Achieve Inclusive Growth.

It is possible for midday meal scheme to improve



BACK TO SCHOOL

DILEEP RANJEKAR

MY son fell sick on his first birthday and we were rather disappointed since he was in no mood to play with the children who had been invited home. Even his pictures taken on the occasion clearly showed the discomfort he was experiencing. This was the beginning of an infection in his alimentary canal that went undetected for a few months. He became a cranky child, totally disinterested in normal activities. The infection grew out of control and one night he had to be hospitalised. After four days in hospital and a month of recuperation, he was back to being his joyful self. This was our first-hand experience of what ill health can do to a child.

During my visits to several thousand government schools and classrooms I have observed children who apparently looked sick and were therefore unable to focus on classroom activities. It took some time for me to realise that the key reasons for their ill health were malnutrition and various infections. I was shocked when I first learnt that over 44 percent of Indian children below the age of four years are malnourished.

India's commitment to the Midday Meal Scheme has to be viewed from this perspective. This programme is among the most important programmes contributing to child development at an appropriate phase in life.

A BRIEF HISTORY

The movement to provide meals or some kind of nutrition began as a trickle in parts of India in the mid-1920s. Madras Corporation was among the first to launch a nutrition programme. On 15 August 1995, a National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education was launched across 2,400 blocks which was then expanded to all blocks in the country by 1997-98. Initially, the programme consisted of only free supply of foodgrain at 100 gm



P. ANIL KUMAR

per child per school day, and subsidy for transportation of foodgrain up to a maximum of ₹50 per quintal.

On 28 November 2001, the Supreme Court passed an interim order consolidating the eight food security schemes into entitlements of the poor. Its most significant component was the directive to the state governments to implement the Midday Meal Scheme by providing every child in government primary schools (including aided schools) with a prepared midday meal that included 300 calories and 8-12 gm of protein each day for a minimum of 200 days per year.

In September 2004 the scheme was revised into a 'cooked midday meal programme', with the same

nutritional value; this was in addition to supply of free grain. There was also a provision for midday meals during the summer vacation in drought-affected areas. In October 2007, the name of the programme was changed from National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education to National Programme of Mid-Day Meal in Schools. From 1 April 2008, the scheme was extended across the country for Classes 1 to 8. By 2014, about 104.5 million children in 1.2 million elementary schools were covered by the programme. Many states have extended the scheme up to Class 10. It is common knowledge that in addition to the children enrolled in school, their younger siblings often accompany them and are served the same meal by schools.

CURRENT COMMITMENT

The current specifications prescribed by the government under the programme are: For many children, the midday meal is the only decent meal that is assured to them. The evening meal depends on whether their parents, often daily wage earners, get employment on that day. However, the implementation of the midday meal programme differs vastly in various states and, while this important programme has moved in the right

ENTITLEMENT NORM PER CHILD PER DAY UNDER THE MIDDAY MEAL PROGRAMME

Item	Primary (Classes 1-5)	Upper Primary (Classes 6-8)
Calories	450	700
Protein (in gm)	12	20
Rice / wheat (in gm)	100	150
Dal (in gm)	20	30
Vegetables (in gm)	50	75
Oil and fat (in gm)	5	7.5

direction, it suffers from non-adherence to the commitment, primarily for two critical reasons — inadequate budgets and execution deficiencies.

CENTRAL AND STATE BUDGETS

The allocation from the central government last year was Rs 9,700 crore. In 2016-17 there was a marginal increase from the previous year (2015-16), but a significant drop from the first couple of years of the Twelfth Plan period, despite increase in cost

of living. In 2013-14 and 2014-15 the allocation was over ₹13,000 crore.

The current budgetary pattern stands thus:

In addition to the above budgets, separate provisions are made for the honorarium of the cook or cook-cum-helper ranging from ₹1,000 to ₹2,500 per month per school.

SOME CRITICAL ISSUES

Enhanced budget: The Azim Premji Foundation runs six schools in rural areas of four states on exactly the same basis as government schools run for the children of disadvantaged communities. Based on our experience on the ground we can state that current government budgets need to be enhanced by more than double. Even the cost of the Akshaya Patra meal (one of the largest private programmes providing midday meals) with an efficient centralised kitchen is much more than the government budget. Budgets have to be provided for every component of the programme from foodgrain and vegetable purchase, storage costs, cook and assistant cook's salaries, fuel for cooking, and so on.

Delivering nutritional commitments: Under no circumstances should we forget the original purpose of the midday meal programme: nutrition of a certain threshold level — 450-700 calories, 12 gm of protein and micronutrients. We must ensure delivery of these nutritional values by systematic structuring of menus each day — to include these nutrients. The health of the children is supreme.

Management of midday meals: Logistics and hygienic storage of foodgrain for the purpose of cooking a healthy meal is critical. Most schools do not have adequate storage facilities and necessary staff to cook hot meals. There are intricate issues of head teachers and teachers spending significant time ensuring the meal. It is often stated (sarcastically) that for the education department, the criticality of the midday meal is far higher than the learning levels of the children. There are issues such as delays in reimbursement of expenses, quality of grains, absence of vegetables, pilferage of allotted grains, and the like. It is possible to streamline all these through robust management systems and decentralisation of responsibilities coupled with effective deployment of technology.

Monitoring and grievance redressal: Effective management of any programme includes providing for management/monitoring mechanism and costs for the same. It needs a will to act on the findings of the monitoring organisation. It needs frequent rationalisation of various arrangements involving logistics, storage, indexing of costs and actual delivery of nutritional values. The monitoring committee must also listen to the grievances of stakeholders and act on them. Best practices across states and schools must be shared with all.

The Midday Meal Scheme is an integral part of the holistic development of the child in the early years of growth. The nation has made a commitment and the implementation so far is in the right direction. We must make it work under any circumstances! ■

Dileep Ranjekar is CEO of the Azim Premji Foundation

REVISED COOKING COST PER CHILD PER SCHOOL DAY (w.e.f. 1.07.2016)

Stage	Total Cost	Non-NER States (60:40)		NER-States (90:10) & 3 Himalayan states		All UTs (100%)
		Central	State	Central	State	
Primary	₹4.13	₹2.48	₹1.65	₹3.72	₹0.41	₹4.13
Upper Primary	₹6.18	₹3.71	₹2.47	₹5.56	₹0.62	₹6.18

Regime change in Delhi?



**DELHI
DARBAR**

SANJAYA BARU

THREE summers ago a routine Lok Sabha election, 16th in a row in independent India, threw up a slightly unexpected result with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) riding yet another wave of what Indian political analysts have come to dub as “anti-incumbency”. I say ‘slightly’ because most expected the BJP would once again form a coalition government, but few expected the party would secure an absolute majority of its own. Thanks to a vigorous and imaginative campaign launched by the irrepressible Chief Minister of Gujarat, Narendra Modi, the BJP secured 282 seats in the 541-member Lok Sabha.

A change of government, that too after the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government had a decade-long run in office, would normally have been par for the democratic course. Winning and losing is part of the electoral game. However, Prime Minister Modi did not view his victory quite that way. He was not taking the view that this time the BJP had won, and next time around someone else may win.

Savouring his victory, Mr Modi declared that his ultimate objective would be to ensure a “Congress-mukt Bharat”. This bold assertion was based on the assessment that the Sonia Congress had run its course and there was not enough steam left in the Nehru-Gandhi family engine to revive the party’s momentum. The Sonia Congress’s dismal performance finally revealed to all how deep was the rot that had set into the Congress. Mr Modi saw the Congress as a party on the verge of disintegration. He did not view his victory merely as a turn of the electoral cycle. He saw it as signalling regime change.

Looking back at the last three years, it is clear that there has been a fundamental shift in the political preferences of a large number of Indians. Sure, the BJP’s vote share in the Lok Sabha election has not yet crossed a third of the votes polled. Sure, the Congress still has a one-fifth share of votes polled. But the numerical gap is not the point. It’s the trend that one should focus on. The share of Congress votes is declining. That of the BJP is rising. More than numbers, it is the ideological dominance of the BJP that has come to define the regime change in the Delhi Darbar. If Atal Bihari Vajpayee’s strategy

was to co-opt the ruling elite of Delhi, Mr Modi’s has been to marginalise them.

What exactly does this so-called ‘regime change’ imply in terms of policy? Interestingly, there has not been much change in two key areas of policy — economic and foreign policy. Whatever the spokespersons of the BJP may say, Mr Modi’s economic and foreign policy more or less follows a path set by his predecessors over the past two decades. If there is a change it is more to do with the manner in which policy is articulated rather than in the policy itself.

Consider first the government’s key ‘flagship programmes’ — Make in India, Swachh Bharat, Skill India and so on. Most of these initiatives were first thought of by the UPA government. Mr Modi has repackaged them and has been more



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with members of his Cabinet

Mr Modi’s economic and foreign policy more or less follows a path set by his predecessors over the past two decades.

energetic in implementing them. Second, there has been no change in the broad direction of macro-economic and external economic policy. True, there has been a change of emphasis or priority but much of that has been about responding to a changing global and national economic environment. With the singular exception of the demonetisation move there is no other economic policy initiative that a non-BJP government would not have adopted as a matter of principle.

There has also been a remarkable continuity in

Indian foreign policy. The difference has been in its articulation, especially with respect to India’s neighbours. Sure, there are some interesting departures from the recent past — a tougher line on China, for example — but if one were to ignore the rhetoric on Pakistan, there are few other areas where a third Manmohan Singh government would have reacted any differently from the Modi government. I am not even referring to a ‘Rahul Gandhi government’ because there would never have been one, and never will be!

The real point of departure has, understandably, been on the cultural and ideological front. Since the BJP views the Modi victory as heralding ‘regime change’ it has pushed hard to bring about changes on the more visible cultural and educational fronts. Some of it is understandable and one must compare

Mr Modi’s moves with those of governments elsewhere in the world that came to power as a consequence of ‘regime change’ rather than normal electoral cycles. Iran in 1979, for example.

While the shortage of talent on the BJP’s side that is available to replace existing stakeholders in the spheres of culture and education is understandable, some of the appointments made have been done without thinking through the consequences. It is one thing to replace a Left-wing ideologue with a Right-wing ideologue, or a ‘pseudo-secular’ with a Hindutva believer. It is quite another to replace a competent person with an incompetent one — as has happened in several institutions of higher

education and research. But, that is what a regime change can often be all about. The chaff gets in with the wheat!

This mix of continuity on the economic policy front, with a focus on development, and discontinuity in the social, educational and cultural space is what I have dubbed as “developmental Hindutva” (*The Indian Express*, 14 April 2017). Mr Modi’s regime change is best described in these terms. How then does one sum up the experience of the first three years of the Modi government? In its essence there has not been much of a policy shift on either the economic or foreign policy front. The change has been in the manner of articulation of policy, not even in the manner of its implementation. The instruments remain the same — the civil service machinery. What has changed are the tone and tenor of the political discourse. In part, that is on account of the fact that the regime change of 2014 signalled an ideological shift in Indian politics that the Congress and its fellow-travellers are still trying to come to grips with. ■

LIVING

BOOKS | ECO-TOURISM | FILM | THEATRE | AYURVEDA

Why Bandipur is special Jungles, animals, birds and rustic living



Entrance to the Bandipur Tiger Reserve



A temple dedicated to Lord Krishna on top of the highest peak in Bandipur

Susheela Nair
Bandipur

APRIL is the cruellest month at the Bandipur National Park but a slight mist in the early hours enhanced the mystery of the jungle. Shadows loomed large and dark. As the sun began to filter in, the jungle came alive with the twittering of birds. Spotted deer loped all over, rushing across our path and then grazing in small clearings with

their fawns.

After a decade, I was on a wildlife jaunt to Bandipur, an enchanting forest that never ceases to delight me, no matter the season. Once the hunting preserve of the erstwhile Maharaja of Mysore, Bandipur is now the favourite haunt of wildlife enthusiasts and photographers. Set against the picturesque backdrop of the enchanting Nilgiri range with its mist-covered peaks, it sprawls over 874 sq km of diverse and dense vegetation.



A chital saunters through the forest



A tiny hare

The National Park, which was brought under Project Tiger, forms a contiguous stretch of forest with the neighbouring Rajiv Gandhi National Park, and the Mudumalai and Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuaries. Together they form the vast Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve, India’s most significant biogeographic zone, sharing the wilderness of the Western Ghats, the Nilgiris and the Deccan plateau.

Comprising a mix of dry, deciduous and evergreen forests with scrubland vegetation, Bandipur is fed by the Moyar river which drains the Nilgiri hills along with the Nugu and Kabini that originate from the Western Ghats. The spectacular Moyar gorge forms a natural boundary between Bandipur and Mudumalai.

What makes Bandipur a special experience is the sheer profusion of animals, enabling viewing at close quarters, the abundant beauty of the reserve and, above all, its easy accessibility.

Manoeuvring our way through the jungle, we reached a pond. A sambhar sauntered through the undergrowth and made his way to the pool of water to quench his thirst. Peacocks we saw in plenty, some strutting around with their feathers spread. A troop of bonnet macaques frolicked around, prancing from one tree to another. A monitor lizard crawled across the dirt track and vanished into the bushes.

Rides into the park on especially laid-out dirt roads, which usually pass close to grazing areas, salt

Continued on page 30

Continued from page 29

licks and water holes, offered excellent views of wildlife. When we asked our guide why sightings of elephants were rare, he explained, "As the bamboo that had flowered en masse died a few years ago, it will be several years before Bandipur's elephants taste bamboo again." We spotted only two elephants during our safari rides as some of them had migrated to the neighbouring forests in search of food and water.

We saw huge pugmarks, imprinted deeply on the soft track and, like all tourists, we waited in anticipation to see the elusive tiger. Though luck



Cottages at the rustic Windflower Resort



The bedroom at Bandipur Safari Lodge

was not on our side it was a delight to see other creatures of the forest.

The park is a great birding area and is home to more than 230 species of birds. Some of the commonly sighted ones are jungle babblers, peacocks, tawny eagles, woodpeckers, shrikes, egrets, parakeets, drongos, barbets, warblers, cuckoos, red-wattled lapwings and sunbirds. Bandipur also has its share of reptiles, including pythons and marsh crocodiles.

We headed to the misty forested mountain of Himavad and Gopalaswamy Betta (Lord Krishna's hill), the highest peak in the park, from where we had a bird's-eye view of the surrounding expanse. At the peak is Venugopalaswamy temple, dedicated to Lord Krishna and dating from the 14th century. Built by a Chola king, it was later patronised by the Maharaja of Mysore. Standing in the temple courtyard, I could see the vast expanse of the once green canopy of the National Park and the adjoining forests of Nagarhole and Wayanad.

The large reservoir of the Kabini river glistened near the horizon. The Nilgiris rose high at the

southern edge. Preparations were in full swing for the jatra. Locals throng here during the annual jatra. From the top of the hill we sighted a herd of elephants scouting for water holes.

The sprawling five-acre Bandipur Safari Lodge, a unit of Jungle Lodges & Resorts Ltd, has a gazebo where meals are served and a cluster of cottages offering privacy and seclusion. Each room revolves around a wildlife theme with walls behind the beds painted with animal motifs and is named after the animal painted on its walls. Accommodation is provided in simple but comfortable cottages which have sizeable bedrooms and en suite bathrooms.

SUSHEELA NAIR



Still from Kadvi Hawa

Searing film of a lost village

Kadvi Hawa has great acting and cinematography

Saibal Chatterjee
New Delhi

ON account of its big-picture theme, Nila Madhab Panda's *Kadvi Hawa* (Dark Wind), an independent cinematic essay that earned a Special Mention at the 64th National Film Awards in early May, stands well apart from the average Hindi movie. It probes the deleterious effect of global warming on ordinary lives.

But this is by no means the only distinguishing quality of a film that delves into the heat and grime of the Chambal region to emerge with a searing tale that underlines the inter-connectedness of natural



Kadvi Hawa is the story of an impoverished family in a poverty-stricken village in the Chambal region

calamities triggered by the indiscriminate exploitation of the earth's finite resources.

Panda, a New Delhi-based filmmaker who burst on the scene in 2011 with the critically acclaimed *I Am Kalam*, opts for a controlled and understated but emotionally engaging storytelling style to go with his bleak narrative located in a forbidding landscape where debt-ridden farmers have been battered by the consequences of mounting debt and dwindling yields.

"*Kadvi Hawa*," says Panda, "is set in a poverty-stricken Chambal village that has no roads and electricity, where survival is a daily struggle, where people are bankrupt and have no identity." But amid the all-pervasive privation, humanity continues to dwell here in the hope of better days.

Kadvi Hawa is a joint production of Dubai-based Odia businessman Akshay Parija, who has over the years bankrolled many commercial films in Odisha, and Panda's company, Eleanora Images.

Shot on 16mm Kodak film by cinematographer Ramanuj Dutta, *Kadvi Hawa* captures the sweltering heat and blistering sunshine of the location to perfection, all the way down to the last granular detail. "I deliberately chose not to shoot the film digitally. It would have been difficult to deal with the bright sunlight in which much of the shoot took place. Even after digital intermediate, the frames would have been either too saturated or too muted. Celluloid allows for finer detailing and contrasts," says Panda.

Kadvi Hawa is the story of a blind, impoverished 70-year-old man, played with profound empathy and conviction by the protean Sanjay Mishra, who hopes against hope that his farmer-son won't be driven by a huge debt trap into committing suicide. His relationship with his son is severely strained and the two men barely exchange a civil word. It is almost entirely through his sympathetic daughter-in-law that the old man communicates with his son.

In this unusual cinematic take on climate change,

the infirm protagonist, who has the family buffalo for company on his peregrinations around the dusty village that he knows as well as the back of his hand, is a forlorn figure who is sightless but has clearly seen enough in his lifetime to know that it is an ill wind that is blowing all around him.

"*Kadvi Hawa*," says Panda, "isn't only about farmer suicides and rural distress. It deals with



Filmmaker Nila Madhab Panda

climate change as an overarching, life-destroying phenomenon that isn't some distant crisis. It is right here on our doorsteps. It will spare nobody."

The old man's village hasn't received much rainfall for decades. His farming family simply cannot shrug off the resultant misery and misfortune. The old man lives with a brooding, out-of-work son, his wife and two daughters. Each day brings a new challenge. "In these villages, debt is passed from one generation to another," says Panda. "So, debt isn't a loan that you take in your lifetime but a crushing burden that you are born with."

An aggressive loan recovery agent (Ranvir Shorey) enters this scenario and aggravates the situation. The feisty bank employee, referred to by the loan-defaulting farmers as 'God of Death', has his own little back story, which is revealed in bits and pieces as the 98-minute film moves towards the climax.

What gives *Kadvi Hawa* its distinctive quality is

the way in which the screenplay introduces the recovery agent as a dreaded outsider who has no qualms about arm-twisting the hapless villagers into parting with their money.

But, as details about his life are revealed, it emerges that he is no different from the people that he is pursuing in the hope of the double commission that his bank has promised. He is a native of a coastal village of Odisha's Kendrapara that has been swallowed by the sea. After losing his abode to the rising waters, he now works in Chambal's drought-hit Mahua village. Here, he at least has a firm roof above his head.

The bank employee's life not only intersects that of the sightless old man, it also begins to mirror it in many significant ways. Back home, he has an ageing mother, a wife and two daughters whom he hopes to relocate to this Chambal village one day.

Similarly, the old man of Chambal has two granddaughters and a daughter-in-law (Tillotama Shome) and his only aspiration in life is to keep his son out of harm's way. To that end, he not only befriends the loan agent, but also becomes his informant.

The inspiration for *Kadvi Hawa*, says Panda, comes from true stories drawn from his experiences as a documentary filmmaker working on environmental themes for a decade, but the film is a fictionalised account crafted to show how global warming, the agrarian crisis, loss of livelihoods, and rising sea levels affect ordinary people.

"*Kadvi Hawa* is about an unlikely bonding between two disparate victims of extreme weather conditions — one comes from a place where storms and cyclones are a destructive yearly reality; the other belongs to a dry, barren landscape where death relentlessly stalks the living," says Panda.

The film contrasts the listless life of the villagers with the lively demeanour of the students of the school where the old man's granddaughter studies. One boy in her class, when asked to specify the number of seasons in a year, answers: "In my village, there are two seasons — summer and winter." What about monsoon, the teacher asks indignantly. The student replies: "It does rain three or four days a year, sometimes in summer, sometimes in winter."

The old man's conversations with his inquisitive granddaughter provide more specific details about what has gone wrong with the farmlands that once yielded two harvests a year but are now completely uncultivable. "The wind doesn't blow our way anymore," he tells the girl.

The authenticity of the film's setting — *Kadvi Hawa* was filmed on locations 15 to 20 kilometres from Dholpur, near Agra, under the watchful eyes of two ex-dacoits of the Chambal Valley — is enhanced by the chillingly realistic performance delivered by Mishra.

Says Panda: "He arrived on the location 15 days ahead of the shoot because he wanted to tan himself naturally rather than rely on make-up for the weather-beaten look." In fact, the entire cast of *Kadvi Hawa* went the distance for authenticity.

The film was shot in a 30-day schedule with temperatures soaring to 48°, but all the actors were on location for two-and-a-half months. "They used the preparatory time to get accustomed to the setting and the people," says the director. The time and toil devoted to the project is visible on-screen. ■

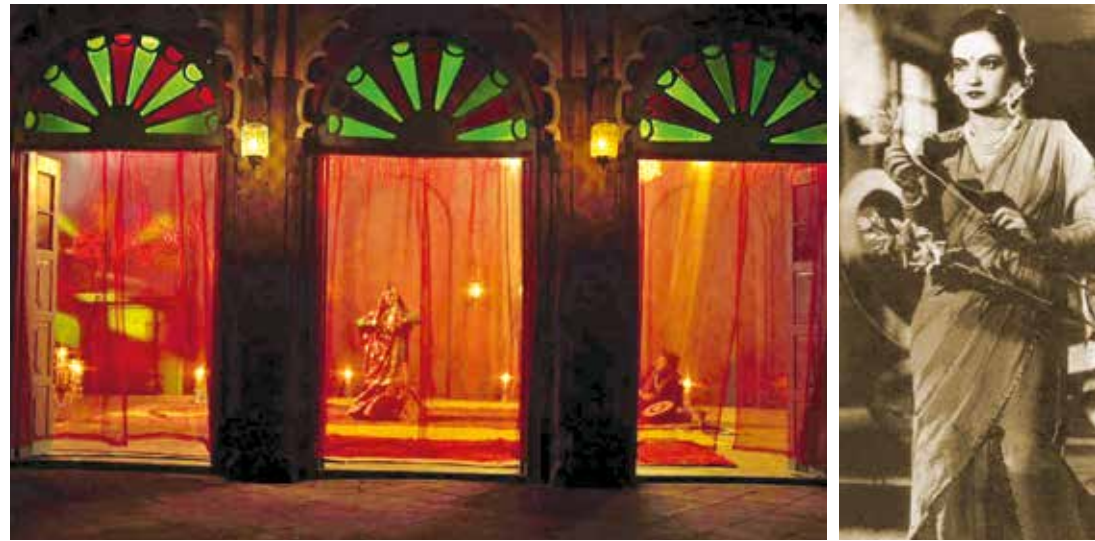
The soul behind the song

By Anita Anand

NIRMAL Chander Dandriyal's film, *Zikr Us Parivash Ka*, opens in the narrow bylanes of Lucknow in search of Begum Akhtar's home. The young don't really know who she is and the elderly only know of her by reputation. While she may not be remembered in the locality she lived and died in, she is the epitome of Urdu *ghazals*, *dadras*, *thumris*, and known as the 'Queen of Ghazals'.

Begum Akhtar (1914-1974) was born in Faizabad in Lucknow, the daughter of a courtesan or *tawaif*. The *tawaifs*, women who catered to the nobility of India, particularly during the Mughal era, excelled in and contributed to music, dance (*mujra*), theatre and the Urdu literary tradition, and were considered authorities on etiquette. They were largely a North Indian institution central to Mughal court culture from the 16th century onwards and became even more prominent with the weakening of Mughal rule in the mid-18th century.

Starting her career as Akhtari Bai Faizabadi, she



Each frame looks like a carefully orchestrated painting – with correct hues and spaces

Begum Akhtar

too was a *tawaif*. She married a lawyer, stopped singing publicly for about five years, and then emerged as a respectable Begum Akhtar.

The 64-minute documentary weaves through the times and tides of Begum Akhtar's life — as a young girl, her initiation into music, her training under various gurus, her rise to stardom and eventually her death — as seen by people around her.



Nirmal Chander Dandriyal

With carefully chosen black and white photographs and sound recordings from the All India Radio archives of her *ghazals* and interviews, Dandriyal takes us from the 1920s to

the time of her death in 1974, through the neighbourhoods she grew up in, performed in and lived in. He overlays the appropriate *ghazals* over rippling waves, sunrises and sunsets, thundering skies with rain, gardens, and old trees and *havelis* — existent and reconstructed.

The original and the recreated come together in artistic and visually pleasing ways. For example, several clips, in colour, pan a bedroom with personal items and period furniture. In the background, a black and white TV shows Begum Akhtar singing. She is there, but not there.

The English subtitles are gracefully placed in various positions on the screen, so they can be read. Each frame looks like a carefully orchestrated painting — with correct hues and spaces that call out to the viewer. Watch me, they say. The exquisite visuals and the high-quality singing compete for attention from the eyes and ears.

There are charming vignettes throughout the film. For example, Begum Akhtar recorded for the Kolkata-based Megaphone Recording Company in the 1930s. Her *ghazal*, "*Deewana banana ho toh deewane bana de*," was so popular that the company had to import another recording machine from England to meet the demand.

Dandriyal made the documentary for the Sangeet

Natak Akademi's celebration of Begum Akhtar's birth centenary in 2014. How did he make the film he did?

"In my research, I kept in mind she was a big star and known all over India. *Ghazals* have survived largely due to her and what she brought to them. But there was limited visual material. There were some Doordarshan video recordings. It was creatively difficult, but challenging. In addition, there was not much documentation about *tawaifs*. I had to look for people who could speak about this. For, without the *tawaif* there is no Begum Akhtar," says Dandriyal.

He wanted to focus on the emotionality of Begum Akhtar's work.

"The more people I met, the more I heard about the pain or *dard* in her voice. And for the *dard* to work, I too must understand it, and get it across to the audience so they feel it too. Thus, I wove the story around the interviews and her songs. I tried to build the connection between that pain and the need to draw in the audience. I had to find people who knew her and her music on an emotional level and build the story," explains Dandriyal, speaking about the process of putting the documentary together.

The excellent camera work by Ranjan Palit brings to life the essence of what he tried to do.

"When a poet writes a *ghazal* it is theirs. When Begum Akhtar sings it, it is hers. And, when I make the film, it becomes mine. And mine is a visual medium. On the screen, it must be different. Otherwise, why would people come to see the film? Not just for the music, but for the visuals as well. That is what brings the music alive."

The film does bring the music alive, in a monumental way. The documentary won the 2016 National Award for Best Biographical/Historical Reconstruction. ■

For further details on the film contact the director at chander.nirmal@gmail.com

Tracing India's art cinema

By Saibal Chatterjee

THE importance of this book, authored by V.K. Cherian, a film society activist and communications professional in New Delhi, is that it is the first serious attempt to write a history of the film society movement — a movement that helped alter the landscape of Indian cinema by fostering an appreciation of the works of filmmakers from all over the world and consequently understanding the aesthetics of the medium.

India's Film Society Movement: The Journey and its Impact is also significant due to the granular manner in which it goes beyond just history and paints a vivid narrative peopled with passionate individuals who saw cinema essentially as an art form, as a way of developing new ways of seeing and grasping, and as a means to understand societies and nations. Cherian does this on the strength of meticulous research and numerous trips to different parts of the country, not the least his hometown,

Thiruvananthapuram, and interactions with the men and women who were at the forefront of this post-Independence cultural movement.

The book opens with a foreword by Adoor Gopalakrishnan, who pioneered the film society movement in Kerala (which now has a massive cluster of film societies), and a note by Shyam Benegal, who was instrumental in setting up a short-lived film society in Hyderabad in the wake of the release of Satyajit Ray's epochal *Pather Panchali*. It then places the early initiatives in this domain in the global context and traces the eventual setting up of the Calcutta Film Society (CFS) on 5 October, 1947, at a meeting in Chidananda Dasgupta's attic of 19 founding members led by Ray.

The author quotes Dasgupta thus to underline the purpose of CFS: "It was a period of discovery. Suddenly, we saw what cinema could mean and how different it could be from what went under its name." CFS was indeed a turning point. From there on, there was no looking back as the number and geographical spread of film societies increased steadily.

In his illuminating foreword to the book, Gopalakrishnan writes: "At a time when the cinemas

of Europe and the East were inaccessible to cinephiles of our subcontinent, film societies provided us with the special privilege of watching, relishing, debating and writing about the very best of world cinema."

The process of enrichment, hastened by the founding of film societies in many cities and towns of India and the eventual advent of the Federation of Film Societies of India (FFSI) in the late 1950s, led directly to the emergence of a new kind of cinema that went beyond the purpose of providing sheer entertainment to the masses.

Films cast in the popular song-dance-and-melodrama mould have continued to hold sway over India, but the film society movement as a force (that has galvanised makers and lovers of alternative cinema) has never lost relevance. Cherian brings that out, falling back on the reminiscences of the leading lights of the movement as well as on his own experiences as a film society activist forever committed to seeking out films and filmmakers not easily available in this country rather than being excited at the fads of the moment.

That spirit is central to his book as it traces, step by step, the progress of the film society movement. As film societies, with the active participation of enlightened personalities as well as governmental and institutional support, took root in Calcutta, Delhi, Bombay, Madras, Lucknow, Patna, Bhopal, Agra and Faizabad (yes, even Faizabad), it became clear that they were here to stay.

Cherian identifies British film scholar Marie Seton's eventful lecture tour of 1955-56 and the global critical success of *Pather Panchali* (1955) as the catalysts for various film societies coming under the umbrella of a

The book is the first serious attempt to write a history of the film society movement that altered the landscape of cinema.

federation and lending the movement sustained coherence. The illustrated lecture tour took Seton, who later wrote a biography of Ray, to Allahabad, Benaras, Gaya and Ahmedabad, besides Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta, Madras and Bangalore.

Vijaya Mulay, a key member of the federation for decades, remembers the historic day of the formation of FFSI (13 December 1959) thus: "I went to Teen Murti House and told Ms (Indira

Gandhi that she must become the vice-president of FFSI. She asked me who the president was and I told her it was Satyajit Ray. She readily agreed to be the VP and remained in the post till she became the minister for information and broadcasting in Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri's Cabinet in 1964."

Would any contemporary politician, no matter how insignificant, deign to work under a filmmaker in any federation? Politics has changed and so has cinema. Yet, all these decades on, there is no reason to believe that even though the world has been shrunk by technology and the means of delivery has changed dramatically with the likes of Netflix and Amazon the film societies have outlived their utility. They haven't: that is the unequivocal takeaway from Cherian's book. ■

Matters of the mind

By Anita Anand

AT the recent release in Delhi of a book featuring writings by various psychotherapists, somebody asked: Are all families dysfunctional?

A dysfunctional family is one in which conflict, misbehaviour, child neglect or abuse on the part of individual parents occur continually and regularly, leading other members to accommodate such actions. Often, children in such families think of such arrangements as normal. Dysfunctional families are primarily a result of co-dependent adults, and may also be affected by addictions such as substance abuse (e.g., alcohol or drugs), or sometimes an untreated mental illness. Dysfunctional parents may emulate or over-correct from their own dysfunctional parents.

In 2012, Jerry Pinto wrote *Em and the Big Hoom*, a book about growing up with his bi-polar mother, who, among other things, made several attempts to commit suicide. The book touched a chord with many, especially those who were raised in such and

similar families. In India, where mental health talk is still taboo, and seeking help even more so, in subsequent book release functions and discussions, people shared their own stories with Pinto and suggested such a book. *A Book of Light* was born.

The anthology makes an invaluable contribution to the growing issues in mental health in India. While still an off-limits subject, it is widely recognised that talking or writing about it helps the people experiencing it — as caretakers or otherwise. Most Indians are reluctant to do this, fearing judgement and shame. Putting together such a collected work could not have been easy. What was Pinto's experience?

"I still remember with sorrow some of the stories that did not happen. Many people have asked why I do not have voices of people who suffered mental illness. The original idea of this book was a two-part anthology: one section would be the voices of the caregivers and the other section would be the voices of the people with different minds. I just did not receive any of the pieces from the people who were

supposed to be writing in that section so finally I let it go. I did not want to harass the writers or to push them in any way. Those stories, I hope, will get told but they must unfold organically," says Pinto.

The book contains 13 stories written in the first person by men and women (under their own names or pseudonyms) who are daughters, sons, lovers, wives, husbands and relatives of people they love who have a 'different mind'. Inadvertently, they become caretakers, reluctant and often uninformed, dealing with the hand they have been dealt.

There are daughters and sons whose parents were professionals, seemingly 'normal' but tortured by mental health challenges, unable to cope with families and children. A mother who develops cancer and

her son nurses her in the final days of her life, giving up his job and assisting his aunt in caretaking. An adopted girl child who was discarded by her own birth mother for being female and dark complexioned, whose single mother gives care to her own mother — with the trials and tribulations of taking care of an older person. A single woman with four children by different men and two children who are manic depressive. A young girl who witnesses her not so successful and dispossessed uncle seek shelter under the staircase of their home.



A Book of Light: When a Loved One Has a Different Mind; Edited by Jerry Pinto Speaking Tiger ₹399

A father raising an autistic child. A woman who falls in love with a paranoid schizophrenic.

There are trips to psychiatrists, hospitals, psychiatric wards and therapists. There are prescriptions, drugs and after-effects. There is love, loneliness, defiance, hatred, shame, guilt, pity and plain hostility. So many emotions, separately and together, that people don't often understand themselves. And nor does the outside world.

The success of the anthology could be because of Pinto's own experience in writing *Em and the Big Hoom*. Was it hard for him to write about his mother's bipolar condition?

"All writing is difficult. It is work. It means effort and often repetitive effort that may come to nothing when the tempting idea that blows into your head one day turns out to be a mirage when you try to pin it down on the page. I wrote my family into the pages of *Em and the Big Hoom* as a novel; thus, each time it got too close, I could step away and say to myself: You're writing about the Mendes family, remember?"

In the age of Google, we can get information about the nature of dysfunctionality and what to do about it. It's understanding the emotionality of those suffering that is hard to come by.

Anita Anand is the author of, most recently, *Kabul Blogs: My Days in the Life of Afghanistan and Cholo Kolkata, an illustrated book for young people.*



**AYURVEDA
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Relief for dry eyes

I have been working with a call centre in Gurgaon for five years. Almost 90 percent of my time is spent at my desk, staring at my computer screen. I find my eyes have become dry and itchy and it is difficult to wear my contact lenses. So I have reverted to wearing spectacles.

Shweta Rajpal

Dry eye syndrome sees a generalised decrease in the production of tears qualitatively and quantitatively.

SYMPTOMS: Those with dry eyes commonly experience persistent dryness, itching and burning sensation in the eyes, sometimes accompanied by pain, redness and irritation. They usually complain of a feeling of having a foreign body in their eyes. Some may even experience sensitivity towards light and blurred vision.

CAUSES: Diminished secretion or faster evaporation of tears is the prime cause. Advanced age, hormonal changes and damage to tear glands may also be some common causes.

Insufficient blinking of eyes is also one of the reasons. Continuous staring at the television or computer screen for long hours worsens the condition.

Use of contact lenses may also cause dry eyes.

Living in dry, dusty, windy and hot climate or over-exposure to pollution, an air conditioned room or dry heating systems can result in dry eye syndrome.

Certain medications like decongestants, anti-histamines, anti-depressants, tranquilizers or birth control pills may lead to dry eyes.

Some health conditions like Bell's palsy and rheumatoid arthritis may also result in dry eyes.

LIFESTYLE CHANGES: Adequate consumption of water will be helpful.

Try to drink at least 8-10 glasses of water a day.

Rubbing of eyes should be avoided as much as possible.

Avoid exposure to dry air as it hastens evaporation of existing tears. Prolonged exposure to air-conditioned environments can also aggravate dry eyes, as this air is drier than natural air.

Indoor humidifiers / air cleaners can be helpful to a certain extent.

Wash your eyes twice daily. Blink 10-15 times in eye cups filled with filtered triphala decoction. You can make triphala decoction by boiling one teaspoon coarse powder of triphala in 100 ml water and then reducing the water to half. Filter the water using a triple layered muslin cloth or filter paper to get sediment-free triphala decoction. Wipe your eyes with a soft towel.

After the eye-wash procedure, place sterile pads dipped in rose water or cow's milk or thin slices of cucumber over the eyes for about 10 minutes.

People who work for long hours on computers and those who watch television for longer duration usually complain of dry eyes. Every 30 minutes, look away from the computer and 'palm' your eyes.

Palming: Rub both your palms together quickly for about five-six seconds to generate warmth.

Close your eyes and gently place your warm palms over the eyes for about a minute. Do not press the eyes — just let the palms gently rest there. Breathe in and out slowly.

Repeat two-three times.

NUTRITION / SUPPLEMENTS: Regular consumption of grapes and carrots will be helpful. Dry eyes are indirectly caused by a lack of essential fatty acids in the diet. Consumption of cow-milk ghee, almonds, walnuts, sesame, flax seeds and whole grains will help keep dry eyes at bay!

MEDICATIONS: As per Ayurveda, every patient suffering from dry eye syndrome needs a different approach as each individual's etiology and pathology differ. However, the following medicines should generally help in relieving dry eyes:

Triphala ghrita (Kottakkal Arya Vaidya Sala) — 5 ml twice daily followed by 30 ml of hot water, preferably on an empty stomach;

Eye drops — Ophthacare (Himalaya) / Itone (Dey's) — 2-3 drops in each eye, three-four times daily or during an emergency would be helpful.

In extreme cases, a specialised Ayurvedic therapy called netra tarpana done with a suitable medicated ghee helps relieve the symptoms. ■

Dr Srikanth is a postgraduate in Ayurveda and has been a consulting physician for the past 17 years. He is currently National Manager, Scientific Services, at The Himalaya Drug Company.

STANDING against a backdrop of his paintings, Santosh Kumar Paswan says he is at the exhibition of Geographical Indicator products at Dilli Haat thanks to a lucky draw. A Madhubani artist, he was one of four painters who won a prized stall.

Like most Madhubani artists, Paswan comes from a family of painters. He didn't have to go to an art college. His mother has won a national award for her skills.

Paswan's main clients are the middle class whom he meets at exhibitions. "I have adjusted my paintings to suit the décor of their homes," he says. "I find that people in cities prefer paintings of trees, birds and fish which represent good luck. Images from the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* continue to be popular."

Paswan also does customised paintings for which he charges a little extra. It takes him a week to paint and frame his work. He can paint a wall in your home or office too for which he charges around ₹1,000 per square foot.

He says the government has been very supportive. There is a service centre and a marketing centre for artists in Madhubani. Loans, at low interest, are readily available. The government also organises regular exhibitions for Madhubani artists. ■

Contact: Santosh Kumar Paswan, Village Jitwarpur, Madhubani, Bihar-847215 Phone: 09709781376

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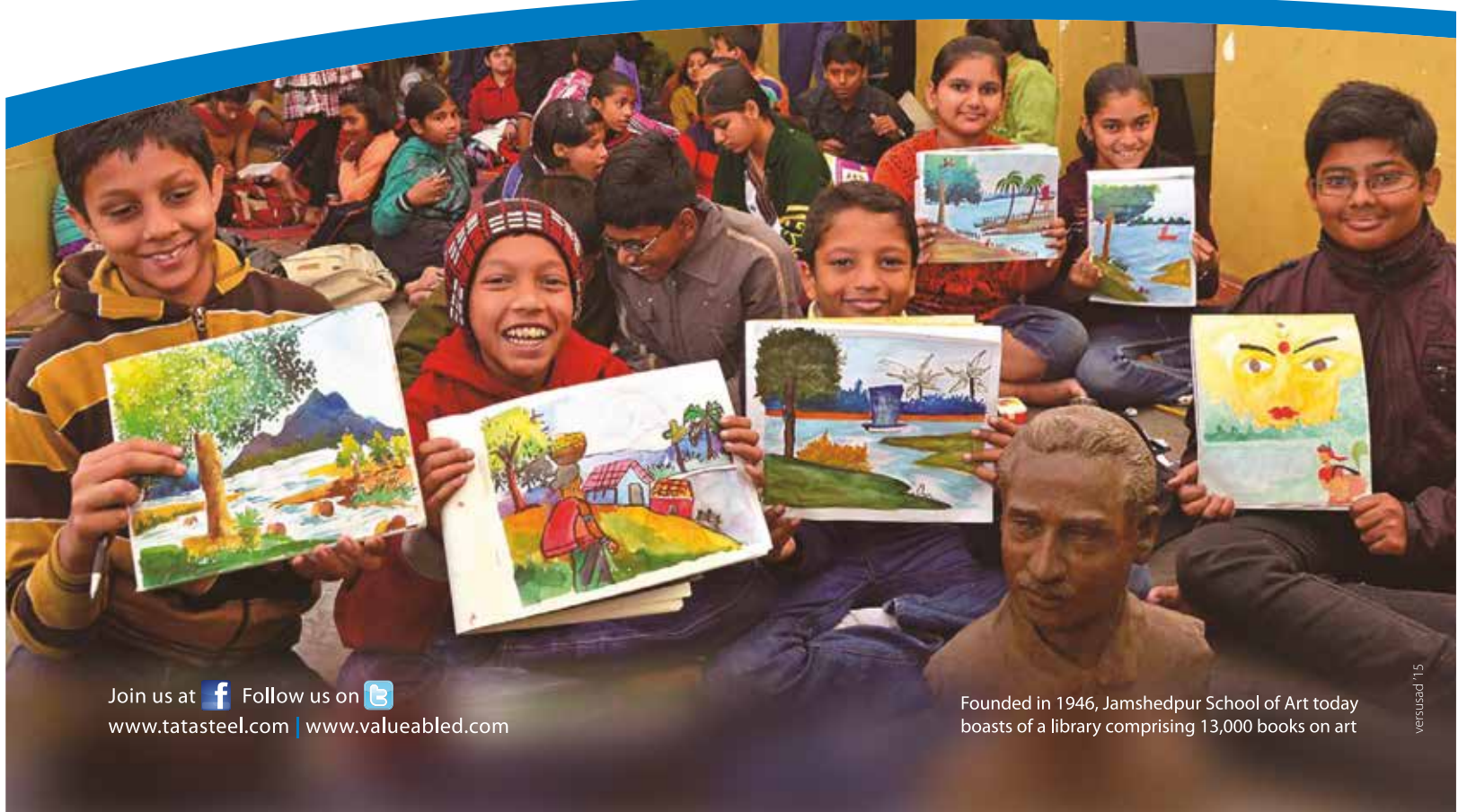


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