

Civil Society



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A partnership model

WE chanced upon the Smile Foundation about a decade ago and did an early story on its innovative efforts to make philanthropy meaningful. Smile's founders were professionals with good degrees who had come from humble backgrounds to do well for themselves. They wanted others to come up like they had. Smile's approach was to get funds for good causes from companies and help NGOs use the money purposefully. We liked the idea because it served the dual purpose of helping NGOs access funds and companies identify NGOs. Such bridges were needed. Moreover, NGOs working with Smile would come to understand the need for accountability and transparency.

Over the years, Shantanu Mishra, Smile's CEO and one of its founders, remained a friend. He would drop by to chat or seek and give advice. But we didn't consider another story on Smile — not even when they produced the inspirational and much awarded film 'I Am Kalam'. So, when this month's cover story got off the ground, we were pleasantly surprised to see how much Smile had achieved quietly and consistently. In its chosen areas of education, healthcare and skilling it has valuable experience which governments would do well to draw on. The Smile Foundation is a great example of how an umbrella organisation can empower individuals and small groups to bring change. Far too often well-intentioned people with great ideas peter out for want of timely handholding. Smile provides that support and more organisations like it are required.

From Goa, we have an interesting story on how the garbage problem needs to be addressed. Goa is probably the only state with a serious zero-garbage plan. Of course, it is some distance from achieving that goal on the intended scale, but the plant at Saligao shows that it is off to a good start. Efforts to clean up garbage need both technology and social awareness. Segregation at the household level is essential. People need to be involved. The health hazards of having garbage lying around are such that governments can no longer sit back. The world over landfills are gone. Garbage is recycled or incinerated or composted close to source. This is the way for India to go and soon — because time is running out. Not only is garbage lying around the source of diseases, it doesn't do India's image any good. No country with aspirations of being a big economy has streets and neighbourhoods as filthy as ours.

We are delighted to have Chetan Maini back in our pages. We chose him for the opening interview to comment on the government's big but belated push to go in for electric mobility. Maini's vision for battery-operated vehicles was sadly ignored and his outstanding Reva car didn't get the government support it should have. If governments had listened, we would have had two decades of lead time to develop clean mobility, which in turn would have given us less polluted cities. We would also have been a manufacturing hub for electric vehicles supplying the rest of the world.




COVER STORY

What a Smile can do

In 15 years, the Smile Foundation has successfully used corporate funds to help small NGOs scale up in education, health, skilling and empowerment of women across the country.

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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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TVS MOTOR COMPANY

Post Box No. 4, Harita, Hosur, Tamil Nadu Pin: 635109

Phone: 04344-276780 Fax: 04344-276878 URL: www.tvsmotor.com

Publisher
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New Delhi -110049.
Ph: 011-46033825, 9811787772
Printed and published by
Umesh Anand on behalf of
Rita Anand, owner of the
title, from A-53 D, First Floor,
Panchsheel Vihar, Malviya
Nagar, New Delhi -110017.

Printed at Samrat Offset Pvt.
Ltd., B-88, Okhla Phase II,
New Delhi - 110020.

Postal Registration No.
DL(S)-01/3255/2015-17.
Registered to post without
pre-payment U(SE)-10/2015-17
at Lodi Road HPO New Delhi -
110003 Registered with
the Registrar of Newspapers
of India under
RNI No.: DELENG/2003/11607
Total no of pages: 36

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OUR COMMITMENT

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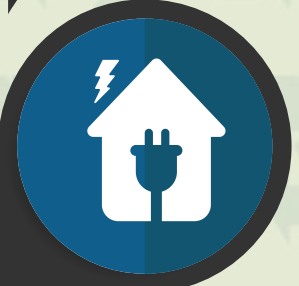
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VOICES

IN THE LIGHT

SAMITA RATHOR



With reference to the excellent article written by Shree Padre on Dr Venugopal titled, 'Pepper Doctor', I would like to say that the country needs farming. It is a gift to our children. Dr Venugopal at his age is doing wonderful work by helping farmers. May God give him health and happiness to continue his work. I am a social worker for four decades. All marginal farmers take his advice which he gives gladly.

Jahnvi Devi

I was thrilled to read Shree Padre's article, 'Reader of Plants', about the remarkable work done by Dr Ganesh Babu. Although I have trained in allopathy and I am a practising gynaecologist, I am keen to learn about useful herbs which were the mainstay of our forefathers. My niece in Secunderabad has 10 acres where we plan to grow medicinal plants. We would like to raise medicinal plants that would enable village women to earn an income.

Dr Padmini Raghavan

I thought your article on Laxman Singh titled 'Wizard with Water,' was superb. Is it possible to get in touch with him?

Rajeev Sharma

I would like to congratulate Mohammed Gafur Chhipa, 'Titri's Headmaster,' for his unflinching devotion to his school. He is a rare person.

Mukesh

LETTERS

Bank of Canada. Aziza is our mentor and guide. We still speak to her quite often. I am so proud to be associated with AURED.

Bhramara

Aziza is one of the best teachers I have known and one of the finest human beings in India. Kudos and a big bow of gratitude from all the children she has taught so far -- not to forget the love she has given each one. Aziza really deserves this acknowledgement. She has made us all proud.

Dalenavaz Umrigar

AURED is carrying out a very noble service. My heartfelt wishes to Aziza for her dedication to serving needy

children. She is a very empathetic and gentle lady. God bless her and her team. During my short interaction with her I learnt the deep value of humility.

K. Girija Sarma

Congratulations to Aziza and the whole AURED team! They have done wonderful work by helping children get back their sense of hearing. I pray that the AURED team will always have the strength to do more work and help children who are hearing impaired.

Nina Jhaveri

Thank you AURED. I am one of those who benefited from you.

Ishita Posani



Hall of Fame

I would like to congratulate Aziza and everybody at AURED for all that they have done and continue to do. The comprehensive article, 'The AURED way,' published in *Civil Society's* annual Hall of Fame issue, highlights the ongoing importance of AURED's work and the significant difference that spoken language can make to the lives of children with hearing loss and their families. It can affect all aspects of their lives. May AURED's important service continue to attract support from the community.

Alan Kelly

My son, Nikhil, was trained by Aziza. We migrated to Canada in 2000. Nikhil graduated from the University of Toronto. He also did his MBA. He works as an IT manager in the Royal

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‘There is no reason why India can’t go electric by 2030’

Chetan Maini on how the govt’s electric vehicle push now can transform mobility

Civil Society News
New Delhi



Chetan Maini: ‘Sun Mobility will put up battery swap stations. Consumers will pay only for what they use, when they use it’

CHETAN Maini is the pioneer of the electric car in India. His Reva was an iconic, cutely designed four-seater packed with technological innovations. It was a frontrunner in clean mobility — admired and feted all over the world but ignored in India where traditional car companies called the shots with policymakers despite their dirty engines.

Maini was roughly two decades ahead of his time. The Reva went from being a great little start-up offering transformational possibilities to limping into collaboration with the Mahindras. Basically, lack of government support in India killed the Reva.

Now, as pollution levels soar, Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari has put auto companies on short notice to go electric. An order for 10,000 cars has been placed with Tata Motors and Mahindra to prime pump the sector.

Civil Society, which has reported on Maini many times, caught up with him to find out how he sees these new developments. Is India finally on the threshold of big-time change in mobility?

Maini has in the meantime set up Sun Mobility with Uday Khemka to create infrastructure for electric vehicles — as in charging stations, and affordable and swappable batteries. Once again, he is in an exciting space and it seems that his timing is just right. We spoke to him about the new company as well.

Is there a transformation happening in the automobile industry? Is it poised for real change?

The government’s plan of going electric by 2030 will be phenomenal from the country’s perspective, even if we achieve a 70 or 80 percent switchover. There seem to be early signs of the government putting its money where its mouth is. If we want to go electric, we have to start using electric vehicles ourselves.

The country needed a demand stimulus. One way of creating it was to think of government procurement in aggregating demand for buses and other applications. You now have a tender that has created multiple players. A company which has never made electric vehicles has an order. Such demand will encourage companies to invest in electric vehicles. They would then need to buy components for manufacturing their vehicles which means the components industry too would have to behave and invest. When you are going through a

transformation which is going to need billions of dollars over the years, you need a lot of people to come together.

From India’s perspective it makes tremendous sense to go electric. Think of the fact that we have over 200 million vehicles on our roads — two-wheelers, three-wheelers, four-wheelers, buses — and by 2030 we will probably have over 300 million vehicles. To power all those vehicles, you will need around 275 KW of renewable energy. India is targeting 300 KW of renewable energy by 2030. Our oil import bill which is about \$80 billion could rise to around \$150 billion by 2030. This bill could be reduced to zero if we become self-sufficient in energy. It would also enable us to meet our climate change commitments.

The cost of solar energy has been falling and most recently was quoted at around ₹2.50. Over the next 10 years, renewable energy could cost less than gasoline. As a country which needs its people to travel at low cost with zero pollution, being energy independent is very empowering. We have one million pollution-related deaths and here we are

giving up pollution. It’s a win-win situation.

What are the challenges?

This is going to pose some short-term challenges to the industry. But think of it as an opportunity. India can not only create a strong domestic market for electric vehicles, but if we really take this on we can become an export hub for electric like we became for IT services and small cars. There’s no reason why that can’t happen. In 10 years some Tata electric company could globally have valuations as big as the largest companies in the world. It doesn’t need hundreds of years. Companies have created this kind of wealth in 10 years.

If we think that by 2030 we want to do it, there is no reason we can’t. If there is a domestic policy that drives it, we can create that long-term capability as a nation.

So this is truly transformational, then?

It will be. I think it’s one of those things that happens in a lifetime. Energy, mobility, pollution and climate change are coming together. In the past, think of it,

these have been in conflict and never on the same plane. If you create a shift to sustainable mobility it is transformative.

As a country we need to grow at eight to 10 percent, but if we can grow sustainably that would be wonderful. This is one of those rare areas where it can really happen. It’s not a figment of imagination. On one side you have government policy. Second, you have energy prices declining. Third, people’s thought processes are changing. We are today much more open to the concept of shared mobility. There is a shift in culture. A multi-dimensional change is happening in society and technology.

Battery prices used to be \$1,000 a few years ago. Now prices are around \$250. Renewable energy costs used to be ₹15. Now it’s ₹3 or so.

These are transformational changes and they are happening in different domains. All of them are coming together and that to me is exciting.

What is the kind of infrastructure you see your new company planning to build for cities as they turn electric?

Three or four fundamental challenges still exist and you have got to recognise that. Electric vehicles, whether two-wheelers or buses or cars, still cost more than their internal combustion engine counterparts. A lot of this disparity is still driven by the cost of the battery. So, the first challenge is that the vehicle cost structure has to change.

The second key concern for consumers is range anxiety. Consumers will say, listen, I have limited range, what do I do about this area?

The third challenge is the refuelling time. Regular electric cars typically charge for five to eight hours overnight. They can also fast-track and charge in an hour. But the consumer is mentally used to five minutes at the petrol station.

The fourth challenge is infrastructure. Billions of dollars have probably been spent in creating an IC engine infrastructure all the way from oilfields to transportation to refining and then to your petrol pump. If you think of it, there isn’t an equivalent infrastructure for electric mobility.

How do we meet these challenges?

We formed Sun Mobility with the idea that unless you address these imbalances this transformation is not going to happen. If you want that kind of sustainable growth, separate the battery from the vehicle and the price of electric vehicles becomes similar to other vehicles. If you can get the cost of energy to be lower than that of petrol or diesel and you can refuel in a couple of minutes, then you won’t have anxiety over range anymore. You can do that by swapping the battery.

In a market like India, if you can give people a cost-neutral product at lower energy and lower maintenance costs than petrol and diesel vehicles, and everything else is better, people will begin to shift to electric. Indians are very value conscious.

Sun Mobility is going to own the battery. We will put up battery-swap stations. So people will pay only for what they use, when they use it. Separating the battery from the car gives them a cost advantage

and range.

To start off we will be focusing on three-wheelers and buses. We think the larger impact in society is going to be in transportation modes that drive a lot and pollute a lot. It also makes business sense. Over time we will go to cars, two-wheelers and other forms of transportation. So the core proposition is to address these three challenges and give the customer something that is faster, cheaper and more convenient than what he or she is using today.

What is it that the customer can expect? Battery design has been formidable till now. Has design, for instance, changed?

Our focus initially is on shared mobility. An e-rickshaw owner would go to one of our stations and manually take out his battery, which is easy because it’s lightweight. He would get one or three batteries, depending on how much range he wants. He would put it back in his vehicle, pay, and drive off. The whole process is smooth. From the

‘We can be an export hub for electric like we became for IT and small cars. There’s no reason why that can’t happen.’

consumer point of view it’s not very different from refuelling at the existing petrol station.

For larger vehicles like buses, we have a fully robotic solution because battery packs would be heavy, around half a tonne. So they would need to be robotically swapped. We would have our robotic swap stations that buses can come up to and we swap the battery pack in a couple of minutes. By swapping, you end up using a little less battery.

You don’t need a battery to last you the whole day. You can come after a few hours and swap the battery again. By doing this and reducing the battery size you also reduce vehicle costs. The hot temperature in India has an impact on the life of the battery. By charging it perfectly you extend the life of the battery.

The combination of using smaller batteries and extending the life of the battery using technology allows you to pass on the benefit to the consumer and, therefore, makes it financially viable for them.

How much has battery mileage improved?

Battery mileage has changed significantly. For example, the best cars in the world have a range that’s over 400 km. In fact, even buses have over 300 km range. The issue is to get 400-km range in a car or 300 km and above in a battery. That is expensive.

But if you are doing shorter distances you can use a smaller battery and swap it. So a typical taxi in India does 200 km a day. If you give him 400 km you give him a battery that is four times what he needs. Instead, you give him a battery that does 100 km and he swaps it once a day, which is not that

difficult, and then he uses one-fourth the battery. By using one-fourth he gets a cost advantage. But you couldn’t use one-fourth of the battery if you didn’t have the infrastructure. If the infrastructure is there he can say, I can swap in a couple of minutes and I am independent of this area.

You would need spaces to set up such stations. Will you be using the existing petrol pumps?

We are going to be demonstrating all these technologies by early next year. By the middle of next year, we will be piloting them. This does require a certain amount of minimum infrastructure to be set up. We are starting in markets of e-rickshaws and three-wheelers where you know what their population is.

It’s not essential for our swapping stations to be in petrol stations. These are all shared mobility entities. The infrastructure required is much smaller. All it needs are transformers and wires for charging stations. The stations can be in multiple locations. For buses we would leverage spaces like depots.

Mass deployment over time could probably be in a petrol station. It would have petrol, diesel, CNG and electric. Refuelling solutions could be integrated or separate. For fossil fuels you need to fill large tanks but for electric you just need transformers and wires.

What about costs? How much would an auto or e-rickshaw be saving?

I think eventually the consumer, between maintenance and energy costs, would be saving at least 20 percent as we reach some maturity.

Any particular city Sun Mobility plans to begin in?

From the e-rickshaw point of view the National Capital Region is a very relevant area. But we are looking at other cities and states. We aren’t just selling one product. We want to bring in an entire electric ecosystem and a set of partners.

We can provide the city a solution. For example, we have teamed up with Ashok Leyland to power electric buses. We provide the energy solutions and the battery swapping services. The idea, over time, is for all of us to come in. On one side you have people who are OEMs (Original Equipment Manufacturers) who build petrol, diesel and now electric vehicles. On the other side are the pollution providers. In the middle is the energy source and infrastructure that companies like us are helping to bridge. We will take away range anxiety and give the consumer a cost advantage. For such a transformation you need a shared vision. It’s a huge business opportunity.

Ten thousand cars for Tata Motors. You made a beautiful car and it was so difficult to sell?

If I think about it in 2001 when we launched the car, the government doubled taxes and removed subsidies. Now they want to order 10,000 electric vehicles. As a country we have moved in the right direction. Yes, I wish there had been far more support in the earlier stages. It would have helped companies like ours and others to create much stronger global positioning. Many countries — the US, in Europe, and China — supported it. In many ways we are much ahead of the pack. I hope we don’t make mistakes like this again. We have a lot of entrepreneurs, the right technology and the financing. I hope we capture the second wave of turning electric. ■

SALIGAO START TO GOA'S ZERO GARBAGE PLAN

Derek Almeida
Panaji

WHEN Sanjit Rodrigues, managing director of the newly-formed Goa Waste Management Corporation, says the Rs 140-crore modern waste treatment plant at Saligao, which he personally oversees, is power-surplus, it makes one sit up and take notice.

This ultra-modern facility generates 7,000 units of electricity every day. Of this, 4,000 units are consumed by the plant and the remaining 3,000 are pumped into the grid.

But this is not the only reason bureaucrats and political leaders from other parts of the country make it a point to see and understand the working of this bio-methanation plant. It is a beacon of hope in a state overwhelmed by garbage.

Goa is home to about 1.5 million people and it plays host to around six million tourists every year. It generates over 1,000 tonnes of garbage a day and coastal villages and municipalities are struggling to cope with it. The 1,400 hotels along the northern coastal belt alone generate 100-150 tonnes of garbage per day.

Goa first suffered a garbage shock in 2005 when the High Court shut down the dump at Curca-Bambolim which is located around nine kilometres from the capital. Then, it was a struggle, especially for Panaji, to collect and dispose of 50 tonnes of garbage generated each day.

This eventually resulted in a system of over 100 composting pits scattered across the city to take care of wet waste. Rodrigues was the commissioner of the corporation of Panaji when this happened and together with a waste treatment expert, Clinton Vaz, who was hired as a consultant, he mapped the city and built a system of sorting centres and composting pits which held the city in good stead.

But few believed this solution could be replicated in the rest of Goa and the search for an ideal waste treatment plant never stopped. While towns like Cuncolim, Margao, Bicholim and Mormugao have small plants, the big one eluded Goa for a decade. Not having a single entity at the apex level to coordinate all waste management efforts was also a hurdle.

A SINGULAR VISION: In December 2016, the state government set up the Goa Waste Management Corporation (GWMC) to deal with all garbage related issues including dump sites. Explaining the brief of the GWMC, Rodrigues says, "Waste collection and disposal is a subject that is dealt with by the local bodies. Somewhere down the line the

government felt that, barring a few local bodies which are rich, the others cannot handle the issue. An agency is required to hand-hold local bodies in terms of technology and methodology. We need a change in mindset. All this needs to be piloted through an agency. The GWMC was formed to do this job."

The aim of the GWMC is to create a zero-waste Goa by 2020. "We have one philosophy. We have to have a zero-waste community and a zero-landfill society," asserts Rodrigues.

It's an ambitious plan which will bring together a complex collection system and four treatment plants, three of which are yet to be built.

The biggest hurdle faced by the state is the reluctance of households to segregate waste at source. This was emphasised by Prassana Nagvenkar, sarpanch of Reis Magos, a village located opposite Panaji, but across the Mandovi river.

"People are reluctant to segregate at home because they have to keep two bins. Second, there is a clash of timing between the garbage collector and the office," says Nagvenkar.

'An agency is required to hand-hold local bodies in terms of technology and methodology. All this needs to be piloted through an agency.'

Reis Magos, like some other villages in the state, has put together a system of eight workers and one van to collect garbage and deliver it to the Saligao plant, which is about 10 km away. "This costs the panchayat nearly ₹1,00,000 per month," says the sarpanch. The panchayat has now submitted a ₹25 lakh proposal to the director of panchayats for covering 2,500 households spread across 11 wards.

The panchayat requires at least two workers per ward and each is paid approximately ₹6,500 a month. This, then, is the broad economics of waste collection at the village level. All the waste is sent to the treatment plant at Saligao.

Earlier, contractors were hired to dispose of the garbage. No one knew where. No one asked. Now, the Saligao plant seems like a solution, perhaps the only solution.

Rodrigues agrees that all municipalities have



A view of the ₹140 crore waste treatment plant at Saligao



Sanjit Rodrigues, Managing Director of GWMC

collection systems, but not the right ones. "We need to have a system which has segregation at source and very few have them. All our concepts of waste treatment are going to fail if there is no segregation at source."

The government's thinking on garbage collection and disposal, to a great extent, is guided by the Panaji experience. Initially, Panaji was like any other town. Garbage was collected through community bins. From concrete bins it went to metallic bins. "Today an open community bin is the last thing that my department would want," asserts Rodrigues. "In order to get rid of the bin, Panaji worked on a door-to-door collection system and we got rid of 1,200 community bins."

While Panaji got a robust collection system, it still lacked a place to dump the garbage and this led to installation of composting pits. "We worked on a



Muriel D'Souza and Mario Mascarenhas who spread the message of segregation of waste

treat-your-own-waste system," says Rodrigues.

CHANGING MINDSETS: So which is better? A decentralised system with composting pits or large plants?

Saligao, which is adjacent to Calangute, is probably the place to look for an answer. It was here that the segregation and collection model was born, thanks to the spirited effort of activists and residents led by Muriel D'Souza and Mario Mascarenhas, their two children and members of the Saligao Civic and Consumer Cell (SCCC).

It was in 1988 that Mario and Muriel first noticed that garbage generated in hotels in Calangute was being freely dumped in a laterite quarry on the Saligao plateau, now used to construct the plant. Gradually, all garbage generated in the coastal villages found its way into Saligao.

"The place became a colony for over 200 dogs," says Mario, "and kites would pick up the garbage and drop it into the village. During the monsoon water would turn the garbage in the quarry into a toxic soup and it would percolate into the aquifers."

This situation eventually led to the formation of

PICTURES BY DEREK ALMEIDA

the Saligao Civic and Consumer Cell under the panchayat. At one point it was decided to block access to trucks bringing garbage by putting concrete obstacles across the route. But this failed after the block development officer ordered their removal.

After formation of the Cell it was decided that something had to be done about waste collection. A system comprising two trucks and a group of volunteers started collecting dry waste once a month from all the wards of Saligao. The waste was then handed to a contractor who dumped it in Tivim, 13 km away. This system was later handed to the panchayat which instead dumped the waste at the quarry which had become a garbage site for literally everyone.

About this time the Waste Management Committee of the Saligao panchayat, along with villagers and members of the SCCC, launched an educational drive in the village, where segregation and local treatment of bio-degradable waste was demonstrated with kits by Muriel, Mario and their children. This quickly became popular and the duo was called to schools and neighbouring villages to give demonstrations. This kick-started the awareness programme and collection of dry waste in other villages

commenced. From this was born what Mario called the blueprint for segregation and treatment of all waste. Sadly, it never picked up.

"People from all over Goa came to borrow the blueprint and there are many people who are treating their bio-degradable waste, but not the large mass of people," laments Mario. "If this blueprint were implemented we wouldn't need a plant."

But even as Mario and Muriel continued to give demonstrations on the benefits of segregation at source, in the capital plans were being drawn up for construction of two treatment plants, one at Saligao and the other at Curcholem in the south. To silence the naysayers and kill the not-in-my-backyard attitude, Chief Minister Manohar Parrikar took a huge delegation of bureaucrats, representatives from Saligao and Curcholem, and journalists on a Europe tour.

This would eventually result in a legal clash between Mario and the Goa Foundation on one side and the government on the other. And so, Mumbai-based Hindustan Waste Pvt Ltd, which won the tender, began construction of the plant on 1.18 lakh sq m in the backdrop of two cases — one in the

High Court and the other before the National Green Tribunal.

"The plant was built on a 25-year-old dump," says Rodrigues. "It was as high as this building and we remediated 55,000 tonnes of garbage before commencing construction. The covered piles outside are remediated waste comprising plastic which will be sent to Karnataka for co-incineration."

Goa sends all its plastic waste for co-incineration. Between January and May this year an average of 300 tonnes was transported each month to Vasavadatta Cement at Sedam, Karnataka. Each month an average of 30 truck trips are made at the cost of ₹22,000 per trip. "It's a small cost for a big return," says Rodrigues. The big return being zero landfills.

The GWMC also collects non-recyclable waste from villages and municipalities and sends it for co-incineration. "We encourage panchayats to remove recyclable material and sell at their own level," says Rodrigues. The corporation also runs a programme where it collects waste directly from 400 high schools called 'zero waste school, home and community'.

The plant has a capacity of 100 tonnes per day which can be raised to 180 tonnes in two shifts. The government pays the company ₹7 crore per quarter for handling 100 tonnes per day for 365 days. According to the tender, the company has to handle up to 120 tonnes at no extra cost.

While the government waited with baited breath for the plant to start, the legal battle took a different turn with the NGT ordering both parties to sit across the table and resolve the issue. The demands of the petitioners were simple: a) shift the plant 700 m away, b) remediate all the existing garbage, especially the waste lying in the old laterite quarry, c) instal CCTV cameras, d) allow a committee of Saligao residents to inspect the plant to ensure that it is running.

All the demands were met by the government, except shifting the plant because construction had already commenced and the final hurdle to its inauguration was cleared.

For the government, the construction of the plant was a way of showing Goa that systems which are clean exist. It has now set its sights on constructing a 250 tonnes per day plant at Bainguinim, which is around eight km from the capital. The GWMC has already written to the directorate of municipal administration to hand over 1.71 lakh sq m.

The GWMC is at present working on a waste disposal policy envisaging four zones with one plant each and regional centres to collect and dispose of waste from all over Goa. "Our model will be a mix of regional (plants) and local community efforts."

For Mario and Muriel, who spent a decade spreading awareness about segregation at source and treatment of bio-degradable waste at the local level, the construction of a plant in Saligao represents partial failure of their method.

Their success, however, is that the GWMC has realised that segregation at source is indispensable, even though the Saligao plant is touted as having the capability to treat mixed garbage. Says Rodrigues, "The only way to improve the efficiency of the plant is by segregating garbage at source."

In a way, Goa appears to have chosen the best of both methods and, as Rodrigues says, "It's a work in progress." ■

Palam Vihar's birds

Civil Society News
Gurgaon

GURGAON is infamous for many terrible things like its wicked developers, rising crime, broken roads, blocked drains, a falling water table, mounds of garbage, polluting autos and endless traffic jams.

It can be grim and depressing for people who put their savings into building homes and buying apartments here. They had done so in the belief that they would have a quiet life in the suburbs. Instead, their dream has steadily gone to pieces. It worries them because where can they go from here?

But occasionally, Nature's tidings offer relief from the horrors of an urban meltdown. For instance, in the neighbourhood of Palam Vihar, thanks to the efforts of Dr Sonal Malhotra, residents are beginning to appreciate a variety of beautiful birds who visit them.



Sonal Malhotra

Dr Malhotra, a microbiologist, has been documenting birds for more than five years. He has been photographing them at different locations in Palam Vihar while tracking them through the day and sometimes at night as well.

There are more than 80 different species of birds who are regular visitors to Palam Vihar, he says. There are many which are, in fact, permanent residents. Being territorial, they choose to stay in certain trees and stick to locations. He has more than 5,000 pictures of these birds and a small selection appears along with this piece.

Dr Malhotra is 50, thickset and rides a bicycle. When he was teaching in Ethiopia, he would ride uphill to take classes and that ensured he stayed fit and just the right

weight at 70 kg. Back in Palam Vihar, and staying with his parents, he has been fattened on "Mummy's paranthas".

But he is nimble and persistent. More than skill, photographing birds requires reverence and genuine respect for their ways. If you admire them, they will admire you back. Dr Malhotra has got what it takes for such an esoteric equation. He is a birdman — a natural and intuitive insider to the avian world.

He carries a camera, wears a cyclist's helmet, and when out at night uses a light strapped to his bicycle. He has a quiet and unobtrusive manner that allows him to access the habitats of birds without disturbing them.

Tracking birds means going to great lengths to find them on trees and in open plots. In a Gurgaon neighbourhood like Palam Vihar it can be hazardous. While trying to get close to a Purple Sunbird in an open area behind the Palam Vihar Vyapaar Kendra, he ended up being bitten by a stray dog who found his movements suspicious.

Over time relationships have been built between him and the birds. There are individual birds he can recognise, having sighted them multiple times. It is almost certain that the birds recognise him as well. But there are also some very rare sightings, like the Black Winged Kite, which, Dr Malhotra says, he has spotted only twice.

New birds also come to his notice — such as a family of Speckled Owlets who inhabit the hollow of a tree near the Mother Dairy booth. When he first sighted them, the family consisted of the mother, father and two babies. Now the babies have grown up.

When he visited the owl family one night, they were missing from their usual tree and he thought they must have moved on. As he proceeded on his cycle and took a few pictures, he suddenly heard an owllet make a loud chirring sound.

"The owllet had seen me," says Dr Malhotra with a knowing chuckle. "They have very sharp hearing and can pick up the sound of a camera's shutter. The owllet had also almost certainly seen the light from my cycle."

Palam Vihar tends to attract birds because it has a lot of trees, open spaces and mostly low-rise structures. It isn't the concrete jungle that the rest of Gurgaon has been transformed into. Palam Vihar is also just a couple of hours from the Basai wetlands and the Sultanpur bird sanctuary.

So, birds have found it easy to adopt the neighbourhood and move into natural habitats among human beings. As of now, there is space enough for birds and people. Perhaps it is an example other areas in Gurgaon could follow to restore the balance with Nature.

Civil Society chanced upon Dr Malhotra some years ago when he was out birdwatching. Recently, *Civil Society* organised a presentation by him on the birds he had been watching, their sounds and behaviour patterns. This is a first step in getting to know beautiful neighbours and make living in Gurgaon less onerous. ■



Ashy Prinia



Coppersmith Barbet



Cattle Egret



Spotted Owllet



Brahminy Mynah



Black Winged Kite



Purple Sunbird



White Breasted Kingfisher



Common Hoopoe

PICTURES BY SONAL MALHOTRA



Dr Ravikant Singh at a Rohingya Camp

DFY rushes to Rohingya camps

Civil Society News
New Delhi

AS people of the Rohingya community continue to flee persecution in Myanmar, a major health emergency is unfolding in refugee camps set up in Bangladesh.

The camps are overflowing with people, most of them women and children who are undernourished and vulnerable to contagious diseases — prompting humanitarian physicians from all over the world to rush to Bangladesh to provide medical aid.

India's Doctors for You (DFY) founder, Dr Ravikant Singh, has been among the physicians staying at Cox's Bazaar and travelling 30 to 40 km to the camps each day. When we spoke to him on WhatsApp from Delhi, he had been there 10 days.

"I have been attending to people at the Hindu Rohingya camp, which has fewer inmates. But the overall numbers in all the camps are swelling and are expected to touch 800,000," Dr Singh said.

Rohingyas are mostly a Bengali-speaking Muslim minority community in Myanmar. There are however a small number of Hindu Rohingyas. Myanmar has never accepted the Rohingyas, saying that they came during the turmoil of Partition in the subcontinent as illegal refugees and have no proof of having settled in the country before 1948.

"Most Rohingyas are Muslims and a few are Hindus, but I don't see any evidence of religious



Women and small children largely make up the inmates of the camps



Dr Ravikant Singh, centre, with other relief workers

There is danger that if conditions at the overcrowded camps don't improve and the disease burden increases, infections will spread in Bangladesh and to India.

antagonism or of the Rohingyas being terrorists and so on as has been reported in certain quarters. What is happening in Myanmar is genocide of the community," Dr Singh said.

"The refugees, as far as I can see, are just innocent women and children. Their physical condition is very weak, having had to escape from Myanmar on foot and in boats. Many of them haven't eaten in days. Since Myanmar didn't invest in their health and education in the first place, their state now after being uprooted and having to flee their homes is extremely serious. There are many pregnant women and lactating mothers. Since they are physically weak and lacking in nutrition, their condition is particularly precarious," said Dr Singh. The only shelter that the camps provide are under

plastic sheets and tarpaulins, which essentially means people are virtually living out in the open. There are about 100 people to one toilet, which is about five times the acceptable ratio.

"Malnutrition, diarrhea, lung and chest infections are widespread. If there is a cholera outbreak, the disease will spread rapidly. What is immediately needed are vaccination and nutritional initiatives," said Dr Singh.

There is danger that if conditions at the overcrowded camps don't improve and the disease burden increases, infections will spread in Bangladesh and to India and other South Asian countries. Rushing medical supplies, doctors and para medical staff to the camps to contain outbreaks is therefore essential.



An elderly woman gets attention

Bangladesh has kept its borders open to the refugees at the request of the United Nations. It has had camps for Rohingyas since 2015. But the current flood of asylum seekers following developments in Myanmar has exacerbated the situation and escalated it to crisis proportions.

DFY was founded 10 years ago in Mumbai's KEM Hospital by Dr Singh and other young doctors to provide medical assistance during disasters and other crisis situations. DFY's members have served in Nepal after the earthquake, during floods in Uttarakhand and Kashmir, floods in Bihar and Assam and a great many other such situations. They have also served after the Kokrajhar riots in Assam.

DFY has received innumerable national and international awards for its humanitarian work. It is a recipient of the SAARC Youth Award and the British Medical Journal Award for the best medical team in a crisis zone.

DFY's strategy is to first send in a team to make an assessment of what is required and the role it can play in the aftermath of a crisis. It then gets its resources together and ensures it has local linkages to be effective.

DFY's involvement at the Rohingya camps will have to be an extended one. Dr Ravikant is currently assessing what it will entail. DFY already has important partner organisations in Bangladesh like the Coast Trust and the Dhaka Community Hospital. ■

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Battling corruption in MGNREGA

Narinder Bedi & Ganesh Iyer
Anantapur

NIKHIL Dey of the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sanghathan (MKSS) has raised an important task ahead for NGOs in his interview in *Civil Society's* August 2017 issue. The experience of MKSS as narrated by Dey is an eye opener for all NGOs.

The Young India Project (YIP) has been fighting corruption in Andhra Pradesh at gram panchayat level since 1983. The kind of corruption we have been opposing is fraud relating to funds meant for the rural working poor and denial of their rights. This is our top priority in our struggle against corruption.

But YIP's strategy has a unique history. Since 1970, when Narinder Bedi and his wife gave up their jobs in Los Angeles and came to Anantapur district in Andhra Pradesh to work with the rural poor, senior IAS officers befriended them and provided them every support to help them build a base for their work on advocacy of rights.

The support of the many IAS officers we came across became crucial when we began organising struggles by landless labourers from 1983. From then on we started relating with unions of rural labour organised by us on the one hand, and with senior IAS officers (District Collectors, Principal Secretaries and Chief Secretaries of Andhra Pradesh). On the other hand, we got the IAS officers to accept our methods of enabling the rural poor to protect and enforce their rights.

The result has been unbelievable. Andhra Pradesh became the only state in which the government partnered NGOs to train and organise rural labour into Gram Panchayat Samakhya (GPSs) and enable them to demand and receive rights given to them under MGNREGA. The state accepted the outcome of our experiences that unless the rural poor are organised they will not be able to enforce their rights. Today, GPSs are a reality in most gram panchayats in Andhra Pradesh. No other state has organised the rural poor at panchayat level.

We would like to share an incident with readers. In 1983, 600 families from five villages of CK Pallimandal came to YIP for help. They said they had been cultivating 1,500 acres for generations, but the land had been registered in the names of the relatives and friends of a rich land owner who had bribed revenue officials. We did not have a strategy against corruption. We consulted the Joint Collector of Anantapur district and he said, Organise them, collect data on the lands, and inform us when you are ready; we will do a physical verification of who is in possession of those lands; on the day of the

verification the families must be by their lands. We formed our first agricultural labourers union and made the 600 families members.

We would visit the villages at night, because the landlord had threatened us. We talked to the villagers about how they must be strong and united to fight for their lands. We built their union over six months and in May 1984, the Revenue Department, backed by a van of policemen, came with the Joint Collector to Venkatampalli, the first of the five villages to be verified. One hundred and forty-five families, inclusive of wives and children, were standing by their respective lands with *lathis* in their hands. No family members of the registered owners were present. The Joint Collector was very pleased with the outcome. Before leaving he promised us that they would cover the other four



A protest by MGNREGA workers at Jantar Mantar in Delhi

villages within a month. He appreciated the fact that YIP had united them. "Unless the poor unite and fight for their rights there is nothing the bureaucracy or NGOs can do for them," he said.

Those words helped us to create our strategy and it was to 'inform, organise and enable'. Our strategy became to inform the poor of their rights given by the Act under which they want to struggle, organise them into gram panchayat organisations, and guide their struggle through monthly meetings.

Since 1983, our strategy worked in every case where the rights of the rural working poor were denied: land rights, bonded labour freedom, property given by the government under anti-poverty programmes to be registered under joint names or in the name of women, and MGNREGA.

Take MGNREGA. You have states such as Rajasthan, UP, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and many more who are committing fraud by violating every right given to job card-holding families under the Act and they are getting away with it. In the case of UP, Rajasthan and Karnataka, sarpanches are implementing MGNREGA through contractors. Tamil Nadu is not using MGNREGA workers to build permanent assets. They are giving 'easy' work

which women do and they are paid daily and not according to piece rate.

The tragedy of the Bundelkhand mass migration in April 2016 is a powerful example of fraud through violation of rights of MGNREGA workers. The information you get under RTI for MGNREGA is changed to fit the Act. More important, the information made available to the public does not include any information on which MGNREGA rights were honoured and which were not. The only way to know what is actually happening at the gram panchayat level is by organising the families whose rights and interests are being violated by corrupt officials/politicians and help them to monitor their own rights. Information can expose corruption but it cannot stop it. For that you require the organised power of the rural poor masses.

AJIT KRISHNA

Andhra Pradesh is the only state which has done this by creating APNA (Andhra Pradesh NGO Alliance) which has made NGOs responsible for providing rights training to MGNREGA job card holders. They have to organise them into Gram Panchayat Samakhya, and conduct monthly meetings with them to solve their rights problems. There may still be corruption in Andhra but sarpanches, contractors, and machines are not being used in MGNREGA, and cement roads are not being built in gram panchayats, nor huge cement check dams being constructed.

Unfortunately, the majority of NGOs have not understood that in a democratic society

which has adopted the free market capitalist economy, which in its very functioning makes the rich richer and the poor poorer, the only hope for the rural poor are social, political, and economic rights legislated by Parliament in their favour: good examples are MGNREGA, the Food Security Act, the Right to Education Act, the Panchayati Raj Act of 1994, Procurement of Farmers' Land for Private Industries Act, 2013.

Our focus should be on organising the rural working poor to protect and enforce those rights. Andhra is the only state which has accepted that for MGNREGA, the Food Security Act and so on to be implemented without violation of rights and corruption, the rural poor must be informed and organised at the grassroots level, that is, in each gram panchayat, by non-government actors.

This is a revolutionary admission. What happened in Andhra Pradesh should be happening in every state in the country, if we are really concerned about the rights of the rural poor and the grassroots corruption which deprives them of those rights. And the northern and southern organisations should unite in this common struggle against grassroots corruption. ■

Caring service for elderly

PICTURES BY SATWIK PAUL

Subir Roy
Kolkata

MAMATA Dasgupta is 81, bright and cheerful. When our photographer and a Support Elders person visited her she herself got around and served them Bijoya sweets. Both her sons live abroad. Earlier she engaged the services of a succession of ayahs but that was not very satisfactory. Now, after engaging Support Elders, the biggest change is she has been relieved of all worries. She knows someone will be there by her side as soon as she calls.

Three social developments have come together in India in recent times. One, with people living longer, particularly among the better-off, the number of the aged is rising rapidly. Two, not only has the joint family given way to the nuclear family, grown-up and earning offsprings have tended to move away from parental homes. Three, after the fall of the Berlin Wall and socialist governments and the global spread of the capitalist system, a hybrid has emerged — social entrepreneurship. It seeks to merge the capitalist form of business with social concerns. This enables social objectives to be pursued without undue dependence on philanthropy, thus allowing them to become robust and self-sustaining. Some profit is sought to be made but profit maximisation is not the sole objective.

Support Elders has emerged in this relatively new space. It kicked off just over three years ago, in August 2014, in Kolkata and now has over 250 elderly people under its wing. Looking after them is a team of 35. Their primary aim is to enable elderly people to stay in their own homes independently. The focus is on their complete well-being.

Support Elders is not just addressing healthcare needs but adopting a more all-round approach, taking care of the quality of life of the elderly, explains Apratim Chattopadhyay, CEO and one of the founders. This becomes an issue as faculties deteriorate with age. A typical worry among the elderly is, 'what if something happens to me'. This fear and tension affects their quality of life even before an actual event takes place.

To take care of the situation where an elderly person feels there is an emergency for which help is needed, he/she is given a wrist band with a smart watch and trigger button. On pressing it the person is immediately connected to a centre which functions round the clock. A two-way voice system allows the person to converse and in case help is needed, the caller is located through geolocation tracking which is part of the alert system. Data on all members is stored in the system so that the caller is immediately identified and relevant details on the person are available to those attending to the call.

On receiving a call, and depending on the need, a person soon arrives at the location where the elderly person is and if hospitalisation is needed arranges for an ambulance and — this is important — accompanies the person to the hospital and stays there till the person is properly settled. To quickly enable this whole process, Support Elders has



Apratim Chattopadhyay, CEO of Support Elders



Mamata Dasgupta undergoing a check-up



arrangements with several city hospitals.

If there is no emergency, a regular routine is followed. Every member is called daily and is visited once a week, simply to make sure everything is all right. This serves the additional purpose of addressing an elderly person's loneliness when he or she probably has hardly anyone to call or speak to.

Other than the need to address emergencies and ensure that a member does not feel too lonely, the need to remain socially engaged is addressed by the Silver Circle which is described as a platform to help improve the quality of life of the elderly through "engagement and self-actualisation".

This offers an elderly person a chance to follow a hobby and also maybe pick up a new one. For example, if an elderly person always wanted to play a particular musical instrument but never got around to doing it, that need can be addressed. A person may even take up a profession considering the amount of time that he or she now has. Silver Circle is a joint initiative of Support Elders and the Calcutta Institute of Gerontology.

How much does Support Elders cost? There are several packages whose cost ranges between Rs 3,783 and Rs 11,150 per month, inclusive of taxes.

The services offered begin from the most basic medical emergency alert service. The add-ons include chaperoning, visit to bank, post office, yoga centre, paying bills, helping out with mobile phone, internet, email, online shopping, house maintenance, personal errands and general housekeeping.

Chattopadhyay, now 43, thought of creating something like Support Elders when he had to travel on work and kept worrying about the need to take care of his aged parents in his absence. He has several armed forces people among his relatives and, significantly, around 60 percent of the elderly members are ex-servicemen and their spouses. The round-the-clock contact centre is manned by many ex-servicemen.

Despite the social dimension of what it does, Support Elders is a business. It is constituted as a private limited company with a body of investors and is close to breaking even. Naturally, it is engaged in planning to expand. It is moving to a few West Bengal districts and its footprints will be in a couple of cities by the end of the current financial year. Key persons in its professional team are its head of Kolkata operations and head of technology.

When Support Elders was brand new, it faced a lot of scepticism. There was uncertainty on how the elderly would adapt to the idea of constantly wearing a wrist band and a watch. But they have taken to it nicely. Now some of them call on their own to share thoughts. Critically, over time trust has been created.

Support Elders conducts periodic surveys asking members to rate their experience and indicate if they would recommend the organisation to others. On a scale of one to 10, the score has been consistently above 9.2. Chattopadhyay proudly asserts that there has been virtually no voluntary attrition, other than of course a member passing away. ■

Farmer's Siddu jack is an ace

Shree Padre
Bengaluru

S.S. Paramesha's farm in Chellur has a 35-year-old jackfruit tree which yields unusual fruit. It is small, red, flaky and very tasty. While scouting around for unique varieties of jackfruit in Tumkur district's Gubbi taluk, Dr Karunakaran and his team from the Central Horticulture Experimental Station (CHES) came across Paramesha's farm and his extraordinary tree. They were most impressed.

The CHES is at Hirehalli and is a sub-station of the Indian Institute of Horticulture Research (IIHR) in Bengaluru. The IIHR decided to propagate Paramesha's jackfruit, honour him for conserving a unique variety and ensure that he received an income from his genetic wealth.

In September, Paramesha was presented the Custodian of Novel Jackfruit Type Award by the Governor of Karnataka, Vajubhai Rudabhai Vala, in Bengaluru. For the first time in India, a jackfruit variety is being registered in a farmer's name. Paramesha's red-fleshed variety has been named the Siddu jackfruit after his father, S.K. Siddappa.

The CHES has entered into an MoU with Paramesha to produce grafts of Siddu jackfruit for the next three years. The station proposes to sell the grafts at ₹200 per piece. Seventy-five percent of the revenue earned by selling the grafts will be paid to Paramesha. Yet, this milestone event was missed by the general media. There is huge demand for this tasty fruit with attractive coppery red flesh.

The first instalment of 1,000 Siddu grafts is ready and was formally launched at a simple function organised at the CHES premises in Hirehalli.

This pioneering move by IIHR is very significant. It will become a model and precedent for many more excellent farmer varieties to be registered in the name of their custodians. The second important impact is that their initiative will showcase the red-fleshed jackfruit — an untapped genetic wealth of Karnataka — to the rest of the world.

The mother tree at Paramesha's farm yields fruit that weighs just 2.5 kg. The average number of bulbs

it produces is 30. Scientists at IIHR believe that this variety of jackfruit is very convenient for small families because of its tiny size. The shape of the fruit is irregular. The estimated yield of the tree per annum is 1,098 kg. The tree's fruiting season is from March to July and the average number of fruits produced is around 450.

In fact, Tumkur Gubbi is emerging as a hotspot of the red-fleshed variety of jackfruit. "This region has several jackfruit varieties. We went around looking for the best ones," says Dr M.R. Dinesh, director of



Paramesha receiving the award from the Governor

IIHR. "Dr Karunakaran came across Paramesha's excellent variety with its pink flakes and small fruits. While conserving such varieties we also want the farmer to get economic benefits. Since Paramesha doesn't know grafting, we offered to graft his jackfruit variety and pay him 75 percent of the proceeds."

The colour of bulbs in jackfruits found in Gubbi taluk and in Toobugerehobli in rural Bengaluru varies from orange-yellow to light red to dark red. No serious evaluation or survey of these varieties had been carried out until now to assess the number of trees or identify the best red jackfruit cultivars.

The red-fleshed jackfruit isn't well known. People in Bengaluru and Tumkur are familiar with it. During jackfruit festivals, if red flaked fruits are on sale, buyers crowd around those counters.

Kerala has two noted red-fleshed varieties. There is Sindhoram, released by Kerala Agriculture University, and Pathamuttam. Interestingly, red-fleshed jackfruit doesn't generally grow in heavy rainfall areas. In Karnataka, Mankale red, a famous variety, is found in Sagar, a heavy rainfall area.

But in the Toobugere and Gubbi belt, around 10 percent of trees have red-fleshed fruit. This probably makes Karnataka or India, for that matter, the place with the highest number of red-fleshed jackfruit.

For the past three years, CHES, Hirehalli, has been making efforts to identify the best jackfruit varieties in the Tumkur region, including the red-fleshed ones. In June, due to the efforts of Dr Karunakaran and his team, an exhibition of jackfruits was held at IIHR, Bengaluru. Out of the 65 varieties of fruit displayed, 42 were red-fleshed. A majority of these were from Tumkur. For the first time in the country so many varieties of red-fleshed jackfruit were exhibited under one roof.

"Tumkur belt has a lot of outstanding red varieties," confirmed Dr Karunakaran. "Vendors at Dabaspet (about 72 km from Bengaluru) once in a while sell such fruits. I have tried to trace the location of the mother trees through them. I have even offered to pay Rs 1,000 for such tip-offs. But they fend me off by making excuses."

Dr Karunakaran says the best red-fleshed varieties he has tasted were fruits that were small and irregular in shape. There was one large-sized variety of around eight to 10 kg he tasted that belonged to a farmer called Mylarappa. Jackfruit experts like Ananthamoorthy Javali, Gururaj Balthillaya and Channegowda have also appreciated this variety. Tragically, it is feared that the mother tree will die shortly. "There are at least 10 best varieties in the areas I have covered in Tumkur. Much more of the region needs to be combed," explains Dr Karunakaran.

The red-fleshed variety is in season from May to July. In June and July, the fruit floods the market and a few consumers get to enjoy the luscious red jack. ■

Contact: CHES, Hirehalli; 0816-224 3214 / 3792
Email: chestumkur@iihr.res.in

Samita's World

by SAMITA RATHOR



Water for Life.

Project Neer at Hirve village was started in Mokhada block, Palghar district of Maharashtra which faced the issue of acute water shortage – resulting in seasonal cultivation and low-income levels, which forced the villagers to migrate in search of employment.

To help solve this problem, here's what we did with our implementation partners and contribution from local communities.

The project set up a water pump along with 1,700 metres of pipelines and also developed drip irrigation grid farming through solar-powered lift irrigation system. This forced the untouched waters from the valley up into the hills, and provided water for daily consumption as well as farming.

The implementation has been a success. Farmers gained access to almost 90,000 litres of water and were able to extend their cultivation cycle from a single Kharif crop to cultivating Rabi crop too. The word spread; farmers from across the river approached Project Hirve, hoping to benefit from it. Together, we covered and cultivated more than 100 acres of land.

The project has had a positive impact on over 400 lives across 9 villages. In addition to extending cultivation cycles, increasing the income levels and reducing migration, access to water has also improved hygiene levels and reduced drudgery.

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K.C. Pant, who founded Rasta School in Khora Colony, with his little students.



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PICTURES BY DHRUBA DUTTA

WHAT A SMILE CAN DO

250 projects in 950 villages in 25 states

Kavita Charanji
New Delhi

WHEN Smile Foundation was launched in 2002, corporate social responsibility wasn't the big thing that it is now. The government didn't demand it of companies. Managements and promoters saw giving as charity — voluntary and scattered — and rarely, if ever, was the social involvement of a company seen as a driver of the country's development process.

The founders of Smile thought the equation could be different — more meaningful for society. They were young professionals in their thirties with management and accountancy degrees. A decade into economic reforms, they felt the corporate sector had a responsibility to deal with inequalities.

Smile wanted to imbue NGOs with rigour and sound managerial practices so that they could find it easier to access funds from the corporate sector for serious development work. On the other hand, by bonding with NGOs, companies would have a better understanding of social realities.

It has taken 15 years, but Smile has built a platform for doing good which few voluntary initiatives of its kind have managed to achieve. It supports more than 250 welfare projects in education, health, skill-building and women's empowerment in over 950 remote villages and urban slums in 25 states. It has even produced an internationally acclaimed film, *I am Kalam*, to inspire underprivileged youngsters to reach for the stars.

At a time when NGO leaders say funding for development projects is declining and the sector is facing a slump, Smile, headquartered in New Delhi, is making steady progress. Its decision to partner the corporate world much before the law mandating corporate social responsibility came into existence has paid off with 80 percent of its funding coming from companies.

"We turned to the corporate sector when no one was really looking at it as an

accelerator of social development. We felt companies could partner social initiatives because they had the money and we could provide the platform," explains Shantanu Mishra, one of the founders of Smile and its chief executive officer.

"As we saw it, a company needed to be competitive not just in business terms but also in its social orientation. Being inclusive was more than charity. It was a strategic investment in the future of the country and the image of the company," says Mishra.

Smile called it Social Venture Philanthropy by which it put seed money into dedicated grassroots organisations with great ideas who were unable to go it alone because of the lack of financial, professional and managerial resources.

"Being a young organisation, we were willing to learn and try," Mishra recalls.

Smile defined its role as that of a facilitator and catalyst. Over the years, in certain remote areas, it has also taken to directly implementing development projects. But it remains committed to bolstering change agents and moving on.

"We seek to empower NGOs in every possible way, including their capacity to raise funds so that they are not dependent on us," says Sanjeev Dham, chief operating officer at Smile.

Connecting NGOs and companies throws up many wonderful opportunities for effective development work. But it is also full of challenges. There is a clash of work cultures and attitudes. NGOs thrive on passion and idealism. Companies are result-driven and need quantifiable outcomes.

"It is a good thing for society if NGOs become more business-like and companies allow themselves to be more idealistic. But it is not easy to achieve. For instance, assessing impact in the social context is different to defining results in business terms. So, getting NGOs and companies to understand each other is fraught with problems though the intentions on both sides may be the same," explains Mishra.

Companies have strict governance and monitoring processes, they want

resources efficiently used and they expect results. Smile helps NGOs learn the latest management techniques, forge strategic partnerships, deliver efficiently and follow standards of transparency.

Smile sets itself apart in its approach to handling development projects. "We apply result-oriented business models, principles and practices to the social sector to ensure optimum use of resources and the highest social returns on investment," says Mishra.

Smile itself is an example of how a professionally run organisation has been set up from scratch. *Civil Society* first came across Smile a decade ago. It was in an airless basement at Safdarjung Enclave in south Delhi. Mishra was the go-to person and the other founders were as reclusive as they are today. But over these years, a buzzing organisation with defined systems has been built. The Delhi office now occupies three floors of a building in Green Park Extension and employs more than 150 people. In addition, there are offices in Mumbai and Bengaluru.

From the outset, in 2002, Smile's founders identified education as the torchbearer of change. But they soon realised that a concerted effort was needed. So, Mishra, a law graduate and alumnus of the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, gave up his corporate job to give Smile "thought, structure and soul".

Over the years Smile Foundation has partnered 250 global brands including Ericsson, FIS, Airbus, Deutsche Bank, Microsoft, PepsiCo and BAE Systems. Smile now has a sizeable footprint. It has a staff strength of 400 development professionals. The core team works with a supporting network of some 3,000 individuals who associate themselves with Smile on a project basis.

The programmes it implements range from education to healthcare to skill training for young people. Swabhiman is a programme to

empower women. Empowering the grassroots boosts the capacity of NGOs. There are other programmes as well.

"We have demonstrated our ability to scale up our programmes. That is our value proposition," says Dham.

But at the core of Smile's effort is the lifecycle approach. What this essentially means is that while education is the goal, healthcare, livelihoods and women's empowerment are all linked to it.

"While working on the ground, we realised that child education cannot be done in isolation, without ensuring the welfare of the whole family," explains Mishra. "Health is also a part of education. A child will not go to school if he is sick. If a child's parents are afflicted with health problems, he might drop out of school and start earning instead. Unless the mother is healthy and empowered, the child cannot be either. It is all interlinked."

"Our other programmes evolved as a logical progression to our education programme — be it livelihoods, health or women's empowerment. Today, children and education continue to remain at the centre of all we do, but through the lifecycle approach we also address the needs of the children's families and communities."

SCHOOL FOR ALL: Mission Education is Smile Foundation's flagship programme. Dedicated individuals and NGOs are helped to set up informal schools that offer bridge courses, remedial education, pre-school learning and vocational courses. To ensure quality education, teacher training, parent-teacher meetings and exposure visits are organised.

"Mission Education addresses the needs of out-of-school children and vulnerable children who might drop out," says Partha Pratim Rudra, director of the programme.

In Noida, Smile supports Sankalp Saksharti Samitiam, an informal school started by Meena Nijhawan, now 71, in 1993. Meena had time on her hands so she began teaching her domestic help, Padma. One day they noticed four street children wandering about in their neighbourhood. Meena invited them in, gave them a bath and a meal and advised them to study.

To their surprise, the children soon after turned up at her doorstep and asked to be taught. So Meena and Padma began teaching them. In no time word spread and children of rickshaw pullers, domestic helps and rag-pickers began to seek admission in Meena's impromptu school. Meena found herself running out of money to pay for meals, stationery and books. She also grappled with issues which children, who had led a rough life on the streets, faced. Smile extended a hand of support. Meena's little school now places children in mainstream schools and pays for their education. Her ex-students have become professionals.

In the tribal Kalahandi-Bolangir-Koraput region of Odisha, one of the poorest in India, Smile along with Jana Sewak Sangha, a local voluntary group, helps to improve government schools in Bolangir.

Smile's remedial education project has helped with recruiting teachers, healthcare, nutrition, libraries, computer labs, learning material and innovative toolkits for subjects like maths, science and English.

In eight years, the number of children in school has increased from around 100 to more than 1,100 in Smile's five Mission Education centres at Kudasinga, Kuturla, Shastri Nagar, Ichhapara and Tulsi Nagar. The number of dropouts has declined drastically and the academic performance of children has improved.

In Mumbai, Smile Foundation helped Amcha Ghar, a home for girls, scale up and become a full-fledged school using English as the medium of instruction. Amcha Ghar was started by two social workers, Susheela Singh and Anthony Dias. Sometime in 1995, they rescued a hapless girl who was being sexually exploited. But no institution would admit her because she wasn't an orphan. To their surprise,



Shantanu Mishra, CEO of Smile Foundation

Smile's decision to partner the corporate world has paid off with 80 percent of its funding coming from companies.



Smile's Swabhiman programme empowers women and creates change agents in the community

Singh and Dias discovered that there was in fact no place girls who were sexually exploited or emotionally abused could go to.

The helplessness of the girls moved the two social workers. On 14 April, 1996, in Uttan village in Bhayander they started a home called Amcha Ghar with three girls. Amcha Ghar now has 25 girls and around 700 children study there. Smile supported training of teachers, setting up of computer labs and libraries.

In Lucknow, Jupiter Academy's partnership with Smile enabled it to hire more teachers, admit more students and introduce vocational courses. The academy was started by Sandeep Bhatnagar, a fabricator who in the summer of 1998, took in two poor children hanging around outside his unit, and began teaching them. Soon the number of children, mostly between four and 12, rose to 75. Bhatnagar, who taught maths, got his wife to help out and hired three teachers. His academy now has 1,200 students and five 'branches'. Children can join pre-nursery and opt for skill training when they finish school. Jupiter's students even produce a toilet cleaner called Kick and market it.

"Smile has played a big role in our success," says K.C. Pant, founder of Rasta Girls School in Khora Colony in Ghaziabad, UP. "They give us hand-holding support. They check the academic progress of the children they sponsor and monitor us closely. We have a common objective. They have the expertise to raise resources and our strength is our work in the field."

The Rasta School, abuzz with mostly Muslim girls, has become a landmark in Khora Colony, a poor neighbourhood of congested lanes. Pant, who founded the school in 2007, says 600 girls now study there.

It all began as a sort of challenge, he says. Vinod Khanna, a retired IFS officer and a consultant with Tech Mahindra, jokingly asked Pant if he could start a school for Muslim girls. Pant, who had worked 22 years for Deepalaya, said he just couldn't refuse.

Pant had to use all his persuasive skills to get parents to send their girls to school. "Here I was, a Hindu Pandit from Uttarakhand trying to teach Muslim girls," he recalls. He and his field staff trudged to local *masjids*, *madrassas* and the neighbourhood. Finally, the community acquiesced and Pant began an informal pre-school and remedial classes for 250 girls. About 60 girls were helped to pass the National Institute of Open Schooling exam.

Rasta Girls School has now been recognised by the Uttar Pradesh State Education Board. The girls can appear for the CBSE exams too as private candidates. Meanwhile, Pant has opened two more Rasta schools.

Altogether Rasta provides education to 900 girls. The school has earned enormous goodwill within the community. The parents find the fees of ₹250 per month affordable.

SKILL TRAINING, JOBS: Skill training for youth was a logical step for Smile from Mission Education. Once children finish school, where would they get jobs? Smile began its Twin e-learning (STeP) programme in 2007 when the retail and information technology sectors were on an upswing. Beginning with two experimental centres in Delhi with NGOs, Smile now supports 88 centres. So far 32,000 young people have been trained and 20,000 have been placed.



Smile's mobile hospitals go to urban slums and remote rural areas

"Young people from underserved backgrounds need to be able to communicate in English and learn etiquette and body language. They need to understand the importance of time management and develop decision-making skills," says Bipasha Patnaik, manager of Smile's livelihood programme.

The Aarohan skilling centre was set up by Smile three years ago in Malviya Nagar with funds from Ericsson. Around 600 young people between 18 and 25 have passed through the centre. Jobs have been found for 300 of them and the others have found some form of self-employment. These young people have passed Class 10 or Class 12 and are taught computers, English, basic management and retail management, personality development and soft skills. The course is for four months. Students pay Rs 100 a month which covers the centre's overheads and works as an incentive for them to attend classes.

Ravi Paswan, 18, works at a Chinese restaurant. He comes from a little village in Nepal. Paswan passed Class 10 some years ago but couldn't study further. He hopes to find a better job after training. "I heard about the centre from someone and decided to join. I have picked up a little English and learnt a lot," he says.

Ashish Kumar, a diffident youngster, makes notes as he sits in on a computer theory session. Kumar completed Class 12 from a village in Azamgarh district of UP and came to Delhi to join computer classes on the advice of his maternal uncle. His father is a farmer. "I have been here one month and I like my classes. I am prepared to do a job, any job," he says.

Young people seeking skills invariably struggle with English. But they have a dedicated English teacher in the soft-spoken Sunita Dhar, who has been closely associated with Aarohan since 2005. "I am teaching English as Hinglish so that they can understand the language better. I never pass negative remarks. Instead, I become a child with them," she says.

K. Sarva Lakshmi teaches retail management, explaining organisational structures, job opportunities, the global retail scenario and sales skills. "We take photographs when young people join and after they complete the course. It is heartening to see the difference in them at the end of four months," says Lakshmi.

Over time the centre has built a reputation for itself. Smile has placed young people with Big Bazaar, HDFC Bank, Max Life Insurance, Vodafone, Bharti Airtel, KFC, Café Coffee Day, Westside and Amazon. These are jobs for which salaries vary between ₹7,000 and ₹15,000 a month.

Aarohan was thoroughly vetted before Smile took the NGO on board as a STeP partner. The NGO is well known for its work in education. "I was interviewed to determine whether we would be able to set up a centre. I said I could try because this was a new thing for us. Until then we were not placing children, only equipping them with digital literacy. After that Smile gave us this project. This is another feather in our cap and we are running it very well," says Rani Patel, founder-president of Aarohan.

The project is entirely sponsored by Smile which pays for salaries, computers, rent, learning material and so on.

MOBILE HOSPITALS: Smile on Wheels takes healthcare to the doorstep of underserved slums and remote villages. These vans are equipped and staffed

to make them equivalent to mobile hospitals. Apart from doctors, there are nurses and technicians and health workers who serve as mobilisers.

A mobile hospital begins by dealing with specific ailments. But it has a much larger role in connecting with the community so that Smile can identify and address issues relating to the overall well-being of the people. Medical assistance and advice are just the beginning of deeper and sustained engagement. Better awareness about maternal and neonatal health leads in turn to greater empowerment for women.

"Every quarter we analyse the disease pattern of a particular place and, based on our findings, we weave in health awareness activities," says Satnam Singh, national manager of Smile's health programme. "The government has useful communication material on health and we use it."

The mobile hospital at Chajjarsi visits the locality once a fortnight and attracts 90 to 120 patients every time. Project coordinator

Hitesh Kumar Chowdhury says, "Earlier we needed to announce our presence but now people eagerly wait for us."

Dr Ajit Kulkarni's mobile hospital covers seven out of 27 urban slums in Kalyan municipality in Thane district of Maharashtra, including Pisawali, Katemiyali, Amrahi and Prabhudhanagar in Maharashtra. On an average, he sees 150 patients every time.

"The mobile hospital has complete medical facilities. There is satisfaction in seeing happy faces when my patients wait for me and I know that I have their blessings," he says.

An MBBS from Shivaji University in Kolhapur, Dr Kulkarni had a flourishing private practice for 35 years. His most recent assignment was as medical officer with the Maharashtra government's Integrated Counselling Testing Centre (ICTC) van that traversed many miles in Thane district to detect, counsel and refer HIV patients for further tests.

Six years ago, he received a call from Smile Foundation to join Smile on Wheels and he took up the offer without hesitation.

Dr Kulkarni travels with a complete team — a nurse, pharmacist, pathologist, a community mobiliser and a project coordinator. The van has 95 medicines, including antibiotics, analgesics, tonics, calcium tablets and skin ointments. There are facilities like an oxygen cylinder, nebuliser and ECG machine. The pathologist can run the entire gamut of tests.

The focus is on antenatal and postnatal care. Pregnant women are registered and given multivitamins, iron, folic acid, calcium tablets and protein powder. For their deliveries women are referred to the nearest government hospital.

There is growth monitoring of babies and multivitamin drops are dispensed. The women are also given advice on breastfeeding.

Adolescent anaemic girls are given iron tablets for three to six months and advised haemoglobin tests every month. Kulkarni also prescribes medicines and advises on menstrual complaints and reproductive tract infections. "We focus on cases of malnutrition, worm infestations, growth problems, rickets and TB in children," he says.

Networking with government hospitals is very important so that they take special care of Smile's patients, says Kulkarni. If necessary, he visits the primary health centre or municipal hospital himself.

Preventive aspects of healthcare are emphasised. In August, due to heavy waterlogging in Mumbai after the rains, there were over 70 cases of leptospirosis, a severe bacterial infection that can cause multi-organ failure and even death. To prevent the spread of the disease in Kalyan, Kulkarni distributed capsules of Doxycycline.

Dr Anurag Sobhari's mobile hospital goes to 10 locations in Gurgaon. He says that health awareness to prevent seasonal diseases is very important in slums and rural areas. "We also educate people on washing hands, sanitation and related issues. Street plays are organised by professional theatre groups and community meetings held regularly."

EMPOWERING WOMEN: As Smile Foundation began working in slums and villages it came across incidents of domestic violence against women. To counter this, Smile launched Swabhiman, which means self-respect. Over the years, the programme has expanded to include health, education, life skills, rights and male sensitisation.

The programme identifies adolescent girls and women with good communication skills who can mobilise their community. They are trained as change agents and they keep educating the community after Smile pulls out. Girls from poor homes who do well in school are given a scholarship, helped with career counselling and linked to vocational institutes. They become key change agents.

Outside the Smile resource centre at Shashi Garden, a resettlement colony in East Delhi, seven young women with babies listen attentively as Nisha Sharma, a

community health educator, explains the benefits of breastfeeding. She then informs the women of the next date for immunisation of babies at the local dispensary.

Group discussions are also held on topics ranging from menstrual hygiene to the importance of education, reproductive and child health and so on.

Swabhiman's male health volunteers initiate meetings with men as well. Men can sometimes be seen at Labour Chowk discussing family planning, TB awareness, seasonal diseases and immunisation. "It's very important for the women that we work with men," says Pooja Rani, assistant manager of the Swabhiman project.

Swabhiman change agents also work with *anganwadi* workers. Says Usha Rani, a cheerful *anganwadi* worker, "Many women are illiterate. They don't know where or how to register for antenatal and postnatal care. We connect them to clinics and dispensaries. We also issue them cards that track immunisation and vaccination details."

In the two years that Smile has been working in Shashi Garden, home deliveries are down to 1.1 percent, immunisation coverage is 100 percent, the education of girls has been boosted and so has male support. "We will soon be pulling out of the community. We have created awareness and we have change agents to carry forward our work," says Seema Kumar, general manager of Mission Education and Swabhiman.

Swabhiman has a mobile health unit project which is a smaller version of the Smile on Wheels mobile hospital with a doctor, pharmacist and health workers.

One such unit is stationed in a narrow alley in Chattarpur Pahari in Delhi. Dr Neelu Shrivastav, who heads it, has been working with Smile since 2006. She visits Ashok Nagar, Dhaura Kuan, Chattarpur Pahari and Shashi Garden with her unit. Apart from her voluntary work with Smile, she and her husband have a flourishing private clinic. "I find great satisfaction in this work. The people who come to my unit really need good medicines and consultation," she says. ■



Partha Pratim Rudra



Seema Kumar



Sanjeev Dham



Satnam Singh

Desi cows get a brand name Kerala farmers launch Vechur products

Shree Padre
Kasaragod

HOW do you save *desi* or indigenous cows from extinction? Just make it profitable to rear them. It is really that simple.

For years *desi* cows have been losing out to crossbred varieties because they produce less milk. Farmers simply do not see them as a worthwhile investment. As a result, the number of these cows has been dwindling.

Well-intentioned efforts since the 1980s to conserve the *desi* cow invariably hit a roadblock when it came to the question of profitability. A farmer needed to get a decent income from his cow and with the *desi* breed that wasn't happening.

Now, 50 farmers in five districts of Kerala have come together to set up the Vechur Parirakshana Samithi, which is a non-profit but with a hardnosed business strategy. They have chosen Vechur as the brand name of their products. Vechur is a *desi* breed.

The way they see it, there is clear opportunity in promoting *desi* cow products for their health benefits. The fact that there are fewer *desi* cows only makes them exclusive and desirable. On offer under the Vechur label are milk, ghee, curd and organic agriculture inputs like *jeevamrutham* and *panchagavya*.

Most of the farmers are from Kottayam and together they have some 200 cows. But though they have one brand they operate independently. Production of milk and dung is not pooled. The farmers sell their products independently but ensure that the standards of the Vechur label are adhered to.

Pradeep Kottoor, a farmer from Ernakulam district, has four Vechur cows. "People who are physically weak and those who have allergies approach us, asking for *desi* milk. Many people drink it to improve their health in general. The reality is that demand is much higher than production," he says.

The Samithi was started by Pradeep,



Native Vechur cows are becoming popular in Kottayam



Branded Vechur milk

Sebastian, Ajay and a veterinary doctor. The man on whose shoulders rests the responsibility of promoting *desi* cows and their products is the 50-year-old Dr N. Jayadevan, a government vet working as assistant director in the state's animal husbandry department at Kanakkary, 20 km from Kottayam.

Though the label is Vechur, not all the 200 cows that these farmers have are Vechur cows. There are three more *desi* varieties being reared by the farmers — the Kasaragod Dwarf, Vilwadri and Cheruvally.

The Kasaragod Dwarf is the most popular currently. Each farmer has around five to six cows of this breed. However, Vechur is the only cow whose *desi* qualities have been recognised and notified by the Indian Council of Agriculture Research (ICAR) and the National Bureau of Animal Genetic Resources (NBAGR). Farmers say that the quality of milk and related products of other *desi* cows is the same as of the Vechur.

Sebastian has been rearing four

Vechur cows for a decade. He owns one hectare on which he grows mainly coconut, nutmeg and banana. He has taken another 15 acres on lease for cultivation. "Actually, what attracted me to the *desi* cows was cost. It is much cheaper to use fertiliser made from the dung of *desi* cows like *jeevamrutham*. I use only this and no chemical fertilizers for my crops. I also began to realise that *desi* cow milk is very good for health," he explains. He earns a net income of ₹3,000 per month by selling *desi* cow products.

It was mainly due to propagation of 'zero budget farming' by well-known campaigner Subhash Palekar that interest in *desi* cows began to pick up in the past five years in Kerala. Palekar, who comes from the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra, wrote books and trained farmers in natural farming recommending *jeevamrutham* and *panchagavyam* made from the urine and dung of *desi* cows.

Inspired by Palekar's methods, farmers from south Kerala made a beeline to Kasaragod in north Kerala to buy Kasaragod Dwarf cows. According to Dr Jayadevan's rough estimates, "Kottayam district and its surrounding area have around half the Kasaragod Dwarf cows of Kasaragod."

Awareness about the difference in quality between milk produced by crossbred cows, called A1 milk,

and that from *desi* cows, called A2 milk, is also spreading. Campaigners for *desi* breeds like Dr Jayadevan have been conducting workshops in different parts of the state. A book, *Devil in the Milk*, by Keith Woodward, a professor from New Zealand, has also contributed to raising the status of *desi* cows.

"Many of us are impressed by the use of *jeevamrutham* in farming. Demand for this nutrient preparation is rising. Families with only five or 10 cents of land can't keep a cow. They need to go out and buy *jeevamrutham*. We started selling these soil nutrients in a small way to farmers in the neighbourhood," says Dr Jayadevan.

The marketing of *desi* cow products started three years ago. As more and more people began making *desi* cow products, questions were raised about quality and standards. "In order to keep quality uniform and build trust, we thought branding was necessary for our products," adds Sebastian.

Native cows produce very little milk. Both the Vechur and Kasaragod Dwarf cows, even with very good rearing, yield just about three to 3.5 litres per day. This is not enough to meet the cost of their maintenance. Those who started rearing *desi* cows soon realised that, without any means to augment their income, they would not be able to afford to keep the cows for long.

"To encourage farmers to conserve *desi* cows, it is important to develop a market for *desi* cow products. The farmer then has an income and an incentive," points out Dr Jayadevan.

Although the farmers got their Vechur trademark and logo approved in September, they have been working on their idea for the past two years. Dr Jayadevan has been conducting classes in rearing *desi* cows and in making different milk and dung products.

The Vechur Parirakshana Samithi doesn't have an office. Interested buyers go to the homes of the Samithi members and buy cow products. For *jeevamrutham*, they need to inform the member in advance. All products are reasonably priced. Milk is sold at ₹120 per litre. *Jeevamrutham* costs ₹15 per litre and ghee, which has high demand, is priced at ₹2,500 per kg.

"Milk of Indian breed cattle is rich in beta A2 protein," explains Dr Jayadevan. "This has beneficial properties. It guards us against lifestyle diseases and degenerative illnesses like Type 2 diabetes, hypertension, Alzheimer's and so on. It has lactose that doesn't cause a problem for the lactose intolerant. The fat globule size of A2 is comparable to human milk. This makes it easily digestible. The milk is especially good for children and convalescents."

Adds Dr Jayadevan, "*Desi* milk can act as an ideal vehicle for neurotrophic medicines because its constituents can pass the blood-brain barrier. Take, for example, Brahmi leaves that are used to enhance memory. On its own the herb might not reach the brain. But Brahmi Ghrutam (ghee made with Brahmi leaves and *desi* ghee) can easily reach the brain. A2 milk is rich in phospholipids, the basic constituent of the human brain. It has ample cerebroside too. This plays a positive role in brain development, improving memory and cognitive thinking."

Around 50 years ago, people in Kerala took to crossbreeding of cows with great enthusiasm. The state, infected by this fervour, passed the Kerala



Members of the Vechur Parirakshana Samithi

Livestock Development Act, 1961, that made castration compulsory for local breeds. Private ownership of bulls that weren't certified as castrated by the authorities wasn't permitted. This sounded the death knell for native cow varieties. The Act still exists but is not insisted upon and is likely to be scrapped eventually.

In 1988 the Kerala Agriculture University initiated a programme to conserve the Vechur cow.

'Actually, what attracted me to *desi* cows was cost. It is much cheaper to use fertiliser made from the dung of *desi* cows.'

Later, a trust was formed to breed this cow and make it popular. Today, Kerala has around 2,000 Vechur cows.

Slowly, the state government also realised its mistakes. Now, the same Kerala Livestock Development Board which was enthusiastically promoting crossbred cows is offering an incentive of ₹10,000 for buying a Vechur cow. Frozen semen of the Vechur breed is widely available in all 1,000 government veterinary clinics spread over the state.

"Our organisation faces many challenges. We are still at the infant stage," says Dr Jayadevan. "Our Samithi members are spread over five districts. Coordinating them is not easy. In fact, it requires a full-time person. I am able to spare very little time as I have a profession to look after. Potential customers don't know about us. Currently, information about the Samithi is spreading by word of mouth. Supplying products to faraway places is another problem we face."

Yet, say members of the Samithi, they are able to meet 75 percent of the demand for *desi* cow products. Of course, enlightening a new customer about the benefits of native cow products requires considerable time and energy.

"There is huge demand for *jeevamrutham*," says

Sebastian. "The reason is that within one-and-a-half months of using it the farmer can see the difference it makes to his field." Dr Jayadevan keeps conducting half-day workshops on native cow rearing and making products like *jeevamrutham*. Last year, he did a workshop at the famous CMS College, Kottayam. Within a few months, students started making these products and selling them at exhibitions.

"Native cows have an inbuilt capacity to withstand climatic changes. They have considerable resistance to tropical contagious diseases. In the 10 years I have been working on this issue, I have come across very few cases of mastitis, and foot and mouth disease among *desi* cows," says Dr Jayadevan.

The importance of the Vechur brand is that for the first time a sustainable model to rear *desi* cows has been showcased. It has created demand for agricultural inputs like *jeevamrutham*. More and more people now understand the differences between A1 and A2 milk. Therefore, the Kottayam model of branding has good chances of spreading to other areas of the state.

Because of many practical limitations, increasing A2 milk production is easier said than done. The traditional dairy industry will keep supplying A1 milk to consumers for a long time without much challenge. According to Dr Jayadevan, many Kerala dairies are rearing a few Gir cows. They add Gir cow milk to their crossbred cows' milk to improve its quality. "By 2030, Kerala's cattlesheds will have a considerable number of big *desi* cows like Gir, Sahiwal, Thaparkar and so on. With the help of these, the state will reach a level where 25 percent of the milk it produces will be A2," he says.

The Kerala government has already decided to bring 100 Gir cows from Gujarat to Kerala for experimental rearing. "This is a welcome move, but these cows shouldn't overshadow our own smaller breeds that are affordable and convenient for the common man," says Dr Jayadevan. It costs ₹250 per day to maintain a bull of a local breed. Dr Jayadevan suggests the government provide a direct cash incentive to farmers as they are contributing in a big way to conserving local livestock biodiversity. ■

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Edwin Pinto, designer-shoemaker, at his work station

Janota's trendy shoes

Derek Almeida
Panaji

EDWIN Pinto is perhaps Goa's only designer-shoemaker to keep his business running for 20 years without publishing a single advertisement. For him word-of-mouth works better.

And why would he need advertising? With an outlet located off Goa's busiest traffic route from Mapusa to Panaji, it is almost impossible to miss 'Janota' which in Konkani means stylish, chic, or as Edwin puts it, "it almost means chic, but it's not really there".

It is at this design studio-cum-shop that Edwin dreams up designs, works with a variety of leather and produces shoes to suit every occasion and foot. Working with two very senior shoemakers, he produces about 30 pairs of shoes and slip-ons a month, while his son, Aaron, specialises in sling-bags and jackets.

The design process starts with a 'last' or wooden form which is procured from Mumbai. The 'last' is wrapped with paper on which the design is drawn. Once finalised, it is handed to the shoemakers who transfer it to leather and sole.

Over the years, Edwin has lost track of the number of shoes he has designed and sold and, despite the challenges



like lack of trained shoemakers, he forges on.

The shoes manufactured at Janota start at ₹2,000 a pair and could go up to ₹9,000. Custom-made shoes, which involve measuring the foot and modifying the 'last', cost more.

Edwin started out as an entrepreneur at the early age of 18. That was when he told his father he wanted to become a tailor. "My dad was a doctor, so when I told him I wanted to become a tailor, the whole family freaked out," says Edwin. After completing a course in Mumbai he entered the garment business where he designed and stitched men's wear and then went on to bridal gowns and everything else in between.

Edwin's first break in the shoe business came when he designed a pair of shoes for himself. "I designed it like a tailor," he explained. "It was made of fabric with a rubber sole. Then I bumped into Francisco Martins who was readying his dance troupe for the 1982 Asiad. He saw my shoes and placed an order of 600 pairs for all his dancers, all made of fabric. We completed that



order in three weeks."

But shoemaking continued as a hobby until Edwin met world-famous fashion designer, Wendell Rodricks at the inauguration of Savio Jon's boutique in Siolim, North Goa. "He asked me to design shoes for his store in Panaji and I presented a silk collection," recalls Edwin. The promotion by Rodricks brought him publicity at a national level and from then on Edwin gradually moved into the business of designing and making shoes.

"At one point of time I had eight shoemakers working for me," says Edwin. Today he works with just two — Murari Satardekar, who is 90 years old, and Devedas Arlekar, aged 70. They are the last shoemakers in a state that has shunned this trade on account of its association with a lower caste.

Edwin regularly attended the Saturday Night Bazaar, which was started by the late Ingo Grill at Arpora in North Goa. "Ingo was very supportive of my craft," said Edwin. "He gave me the best location in the bazaar and charged me one-fourth the rent."

Edwin never thought of marketing or advertising because all he wanted to do was to create and work with his hands. That could be Janota's strength or weakness, depending on whether one looks at it as a creative process or from the standpoint of marketing. When asked if the decision to stay small was a conscious one, Edwin replies in the affirmative. "I always had work for myself and the shoemakers. The demand was always there, so the question of growing never arose," he explained. Sometimes, small is big.

Surprisingly, most of his clients are not from Goa, but from Mumbai, Delhi and Bengaluru. A lot of foreign tourists pop in now and then to buy his shoes. The business has a website, but online sales are not a strong point.

While Edwin continues to work with fabric, cattle leather and hemp, he prefers sheepskin leather because it is soft and comes in a variety of colours. This leather, sourced from Chennai, has a huge market in Goa, thanks to it being a tourist destination on the world map.

The availability of sheep leather has also spawned a cottage industry for jackets. "These are designed and manufactured by Kashmiris, Biharis and Tamilians," said Edwin who is desperately looking for shoemakers.

"I tried bringing shoemakers from outside the state, but they are not quality conscious," he lamented. "Saterdekar, who started making shoes at the age of 13 and Arlekar trained under Portuguese master shoemakers and will not compromise on quality."

To overcome this problem, Edwin has put up a proposal to the jail authorities to start a course for convicts. The idea is to give convicts a trade that can be of use to them when they are discharged.

But there are times when he seriously considers moving to a region where shoemakers are easily available. Should that happen, it would be a sad departure for Goa's only shoemaker. ■

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PICTURES BY DEREK ALMEIDA

INSIGHTS

OPINION | ANALYSIS | RESEARCH | IDEAS

Education needs radical reform



BACK TO SCHOOL
DILEEP RANJEKAR

A T a recent interaction with a large group of colleagues in a regional meeting, one relatively junior member who visits schools daily as part of his training schedule was very disturbed with his experiences in a school. He did not like the way teachers were treated by senior functionaries when they visited the school. The functionaries did not empathise with several situations that the teachers faced in the school — such as the degree of difficulty multigrade teaching creates for the teacher or the artificial pressure of completing the syllabus that gets created without consideration as to whether the children are actually learning or whether there is an appropriate teacher-pupil ratio.

He said that while the mid-day meal programme is an important one for children, it is not the only purpose of the school. But the education administration places a disproportionate emphasis on the programme. While there is constant scrutiny of the mid-day meal programme, there isn't equal focus on learning outcomes. The administration was very prompt in taking punitive action if something went wrong with the mid-day meal. However, there wasn't such rigorous evaluation of teaching-learning or continuous comprehensive evaluation processes.

Another colleague interacts with senior educational functionaries vested with the responsibility of education across the state. She often finds that the perception and priorities of many education functionaries are radically different from what happens in the schools. She asked whether it is possible for the Azim Premji Foundation to engage with institutions (such as the Lal Bahadur Shastri Academy) to develop the right social and education perspective among these functionaries.

Many feel that the critical reason why our current

education system is failing to achieve its stated goals is that the functionaries who are required to administer our large education system are not qualified and competent since they have not been prepared to deal with the complex challenges.

One of the most striking features that I observed in Finland about five years ago was a thoroughly shared understanding among the academic and administrative departments that were responsible for education in the country. We spent a lot of time with the university that helped the State in developing the agenda, the curriculum board, the textbook preparation board, the teachers and principals of the schools and also the school

- The academic and administrative structures are well-coordinated and know each other's work and priority in detail through a continuous dialogue.
- Almost all personnel engaged in education are professionally qualified and trained to contribute to education.
- Given the rigour of teacher education, only those who pass the quality muster can become teachers. It is not easy to become a teacher in Finland.
- Teachers have status in society that is equal to that of any other profession.
- Education is very well-resourced (financially and intellectually) and is among the highest priorities on the State agenda.



The education sector needs a national perspective

administration department. There was a striking similarity in the way they spoke. Their overarching concern was: "How do we help our schools in achieving the education objectives?" The university is deeply engaged in researching the processes in schools and also building capacity among the teacher preparation institutions. It studies and formulates strategies for dealing with issues such as pre-school education, strategies for children with learning disabilities, and so on. The curriculum board is not only engaged with writing the philosophy of education but also with how it can be translated in the classroom through pedagogic processes. The administration has a clear map of how it will manage the schedules of school timings, appointment of teachers and addressing the infrastructure issues and is constantly tracking their own performance in helping the schools.

Some of the core principles they follow in organising and managing education are:

- The political role in appointment of teachers, approving teacher education institutions or transfers and so on is non-existent.
- The broader vision and agenda is more continuous than programmatic. There are no programmes of 'flavour of the year' nature.
- Section X of the National Policy of Education, 1986, laid down several principles for managing education in India. Unfortunately, successive governments failed to implement the spirit and letter of the policy.
- Illustratively, the policy required us to set up central, state and even district advisory boards of education to play a pivotal role in education at various levels. Our Central Advisory Board for Education — which is regarded as

the highest decision-making body in education — has met 64 times since 1920 when it was first established. The policy required us to establish an 'Indian Education Services' to bring a national perspective on education issues. Among other things it would have ensured developing a cadre of people who understand the perspective of education including the philosophy-sociology and psychology in education. It would have ensured a long-term perspective rather than launching several short-term programmes that have lacked continuum at central and state levels.

Today we have several central and state institutions such as UGC, NCERT, NCTE, AICTE, IMC and NUEPA, operating almost independently of one another with no common bridge binding their work. Even within the Ministry of Human Resource Development, several sections tend to view their work in a unidimensional manner.

Continued on page 26

EIAs are slipshod



**FINE
PRINT**

KANCHI KOHLI

Poor environment impact assessment (EIA) reports are an old story now. The environment ministry acknowledged this a long time ago. So citizens continue to labour, pointing out flaws in project after project. In 2007, while setting the mood for an accreditation process for EIA consultants, the ministry had put out the Quality Council of India (QCI) and National Accreditation Board for Education and Training's (NABET) proposed scheme and endorsed the claim that EIAs mostly do not measure up to the required quality.

At that time the accreditation process was a voluntary exercise. Consultants were encouraged to register and their sectoral expertise was listed along with an endorsement from NABET that this was a credible institution for impact assessment. All along, the criteria for these endorsements, the affiliations of the expert committee and the opaque process were in doubt. Several submissions were also made to NABET not to accredit consultants with poor track records.

None of that really influenced the process and early last year, this voluntary exercise became mandatory. At first there were directions by way of Office Memorandums. Today there is an amendment to the EIA notification. On 3 March 2016, a new clause 13 was added. This emphasised that accredited environmental consultants shall be allowed to prepare EIA reports and environment management plans for the sectors they are certified to do so by the NABET process.

There is no choice now. You need to be a consultant with a stamp from NABET or recognised separately by the ministry to be able to prepare an EIA report. Institutions like NEERI, which are already government-affiliated, have not agreed to go through the NABET process.

THE ILOG CASE: In the July 2017 issue of *Civil Society*, this column mentioned the ILOG case — of

Continued from page 25

If we don't change the way we manage our education system — the largest in the world — we will continue to have the current infirmities. Mere application of ointment will not help. We need radical structural changes that have the potential to address the following pivotal issues:

People working in the education department must have deeper knowledge and abilities that include a social and educational perspective on the role of the teacher, and belief in the abilities of the children.

The various education advisory bodies at central, state and district level must be truly empowered bodies to make decisions and not merely act as

a 4.5 MTPA Captive Jetty being constructed by I Log Ports Pvt Ltd in Maharashtra.

The Konkan Vinashkari Prakash Virodhi Samiti had put together a detailed critique of the EIA report prepared by Bhagavathi Ana Labs Private Ltd (BALPL) highlighting the many different ways it was plagiarised, false and incomplete. The public hearing based on this EIA report, to be held in March 2017, was indefinitely postponed but not on the grounds that the assessment was flawed. In fact, the legal process allows for the entire project to be rejected on grounds of false and misleading data. Despite pleas to the environment ministry, action of this nature has not been taken. BALPL is accredited by NABET.

For members of the Samiti, who came together to oppose this destructive project on the Konkan coast of Maharashtra, such plagiarism was a serious issue. A false EIA report is not just a matter of fact or theft; it has serious implications for human lives and the ecology that will be impacted by the construction of industrial and infrastructure projects. Satyajit Chavan, one of the members of the Samiti, filed a complaint with NABET highlighting all the plagiarised and inadequate portions of the EIA report, asking for the accreditation of BALPL to be cancelled. This was on 6 April 2017.

NABET's officials sought a response from the EIA consultant, who assured them in a letter dated 7 April that they had taken note of the problems and such mistakes would not be repeated. On 15 May, NABET let off BALPL with a warning that the consultant "must ensure that such lapses do not recur in future and take all care to ensure that such complaints should not reach QCI-NABET".

This response, when received by Chavan on 15 May, was simply unacceptable. The QCI-NABET process had not opened itself up to public review either at the time of the accreditation or in instances where concerned citizens would want to raise complaints as well as appeals. There is little on the NABET website that facilitates it. It was only after a reading of the third version document laying out the accreditation scheme that an appeal was filed on 12 June 2017, using Section 9.3 relating to "Suspension/Cancellation/Debarment of Accreditation".

rubber stamps.

We must establish several high-quality Schools of Education (at least one per state, to begin with) that develop truly competent education professionals. These institutions must be fully and permanently resourced by the government.

Teacher education needs to be fundamentally reformed to prepare teachers who are fully competent to engage with the children to achieve the broader aims of education rather than merely dealing with content of various subjects in a rote manner. They must be prepared for every useful aspect of education.

Administrators or politicians who do not have an

A decision has now been arrived at, one that lets off BALPL with a strict warning. In a letter dated 27 September 2017, addressed to the consultant, NABET says that the latter "has adopted a very unethical approach" and such instances have been recorded against BALPL in the past too. Of course, they are to take all of Chavan's points on board while revising the report, and warned that any "further recurrence of such act...will attract strict action including suspension".

A September 2017 decision by NABET on the complaint against the EIA states: "In view of the above, it appeared that such practices are repeatedly adopted by BALPL. Committee felt that strict action should be taken against BALPL. This is a clear case of plagiarism. This practice is not at all acceptable and attracts strict action."

Yet the consultant has been let off with a warning and direction that all the comments of the complainant are taken on board before revising the EIA for ILOG. This is despite the fact that it has been proved that "such practices are repeatedly adopted by BALPL".

THE MINISTRY'S POSITION: Back in 2011, the ministry had clarified its position on action against faulty EIA reports. The circular dated 5 October 2011 clearly stated that if at any stage it is observed or brought to the notice of the ministry that the contents of the EIA report have been copied from other EIA reports, "such projects shall be summarily rejected". In cases where environment clearance is granted, that shall be revoked.

In ILOG's case, the EIA report is copied, amongst other places, from studies of the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), and its director has put this on record. An act that should lead the ministry to liberally interpret this instruction as principled action against plagiarism, and not nitpick on whether the copied text is from another EIA or a reputed study.

Instead, we have a situation today where both the project proponent and the consultant enjoy a continued lease of life. ■

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education perspective or long-term interest in education must not be allowed to make decisions in education.

While the community must play a significant role in education and supporting schools, we should not entertain romantic notions of leaving education to communities irrespective of their competence to understand education.

Since this is also the time when the new National Education Policy is being thought through, it is important to critically examine how many important resolutions in the 1986 Education Policy have gone un-implemented. ■

Dileep Ranjekar is CEO of the Azim Premji Foundation

No logic behind dam mania



**WATER
WATCH**

HIMANSHU THAKKAR

VIKAS Gando Thayo Chhe" which means 'development has gone mad' is a super hit song these days in Gujarat. In the just concluded *garba* festival, this song was hugely popular throughout Gujarat. The song became popular even before Prime Minister Narendra Modi celebrated his birthday on 7 September by declaring completion of an incomplete Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP), heaping totally unnecessary, unjustified and unjust displacement on 40,000 families in the Narmada valley and killing the largest westward-flowing river of India. So much for the river rejuvenation claims his government has been making since May 2014. As if to complete the process, another dam has been started on the Narmada, a few kilometres downstream of the Sardar Sarovar Dam at Garudeshwar, without any Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).

Downstream of the Sardar Sarovar Dam, 150 km of the Narmada river has been killed since no fresh water is flowing downstream in the non-monsoon months and this year even in the monsoon months. That stretch of river and the people on its banks are suffering salinity ingress, pollution, lack of freshwater, groundwater salinity, impact on fisheries and even on agriculture. Now, in the name of stopping that salinity ingress, the Prime Minister is to lay the foundation stone for yet another dam on the Narmada, the Bhadbhut Dam, to cost another Rs 4,000 crore. No wonder, the dam is hugely and publicly being opposed by the people of Gujarat, including over 10,000 fisherfolk families. Possibly it was this madness the people of Gujarat were celebrating this Navratri!

Days before the SSP function, in removing Uma Bharti as Union Water Resources Minister in early September and replacing her with Nitin Gadkari, the PM showed another sign of the dam fundamentalism of his government. The media almost unanimously declared Bharti a failure in the Water Resources Ministry. Her almost regular, weekly statements that the Ken-Betwa work would start soon could not be realised, nor was the Ganga in any better state than

what she had inherited as minister.

Can we expect our rivers to be in any better shape or the state of our water resources to improve under the new minister? In his home state, Maharashtra, when a ₹70,000-crore irrigation scam was exposed, the media had raised many questions about Gadkari writing to the UPA government, asking for release of money for contractors involved in corruption-ridden projects. It was interesting that after taking over the portfolio, Gadkari's first stop was Maharashtra, to offer the chief minister ₹55,000 crore for the same corruption-ridden irrigation projects in three years, claiming to increase the area irrigated in the state from the current 18.8 percent to 40 percent in two years — very unconvincing, to put it charitably.

Even as surface transport minister, his advocacy



People whose homes are being submerged by the Sardar Sarovar Dam Project

The Bhadbhut Dam, which will cost another ₹4,000 crore, is hugely and publicly being opposed by the people of Gujarat including over 10,000 fisherfolk families.

of using rivers for inland waterways did not consider the impact of the project on rivers or biodiversity or the livelihoods of millions dependent on rivers or many other aspects of river rejuvenation, the government's declared priority. India's rivers and water resources will need to wait a lot longer before they see *achhe din*, it seems.

While swami Sri Ravi Shankar, claiming to work for improvement of rivers, is still battling a case in the National Green Tribunal for destroying the Yamuna floodplain, we have a new one that asks people to send missed calls to improve the state of our rivers. Rally for Rivers, unfortunately, does not even start with a sound understanding of what is a river, what threats the rivers are facing and what condition they are in. Its 700-plus page draft policy recommendation submitted to the government

seems to be written by people who do not understand either India's water resources challenges or our rivers. But their leader, Jaggi Vasudev, seems to have the support of the government in power. He has no problems with dams or interlinking of rivers! He has been asking state governments for land along the rivers for establishing pilots of tree plantation. Seeing all this, Rajendra Singh of the Tarun Bharat Sangh, who earlier supported the rally, has turned into a critic.

But the Union government continues to push interlinking of rivers in general and the Ken-Betwa Project in particular. The Niti Aayog has also set up a committee to push big hydro in Northeast India, despite continued evidence that big hydro is no longer viable.

India is a power-surplus nation, and is likely to remain so for decades to come. With the cost of power from solar and wind-based projects coming down to ₹3 per unit or below, and when there are no takers of power beyond that price on power exchanges, with half the power on sale finding no takers, where is the question of the viability of large hydro? The cost of power from large hydro is more than Rs 6 at the most conservative level, and comes with all the attendant social and environmental impacts, risks, a long gestation period and cost and time over-runs.

But in the face of fundamentalism, logic does not work. So the 5040 MW Pancheshwar Project on the Kali river on the Indo-Nepal border is also being pushed — in a highly earthquake-prone, landslide-prone, flash flood-prone area, involving a dam much bigger than Tehri. It will cost over ₹50,000 crore, with Non Performing Asset writ large all over it. The EIA of the project by WAPCOS is as usual a shoddy piece of work, and public hearings involved massive violations in the presence of armed police. Our prime

minister is going to Nepal in the second week of October, to lay the foundation stone of yet another dam — Arun 3 this time.

But we have better, non-dam options. The just concluded monsoon was far from normal for most of the country, even though the meteorological department declared it normal. The dam the prime minister declared complete on his birthday could not even be filled. The monsoon again told us loud and clear: groundwater is the water lifeline of India and the only way to sustain it is to harvest rainwater where it falls. This can also actually help kickstart growth and pacify angry farmers all over India, among many other benefits. If only we were smart enough to see that. And smart enough to get a government that understands these realities. ■

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How to fix railways



**HERE
& NOW**

SUBIR ROY

SHORTLY after the Utkal Express derailment took place owing to established operational procedures not being followed, killing 23 people, a former senior railway official who was closely connected with finance, speaking to me off the record, blurted out, “They (the railwaymen) seem to be interested only in making money.”

I put it down to his getting a bit emotionally carried away on seeing the beloved organisation he had served for a lifetime come to such a sorry pass. But soon thereafter a similar sentiment was expressed by none other than the current railway minister, Piyush Goyal. Reviewing the estimates for two elevated rail corridor projects in Mumbai, he is supposed to have interjected, “how can the cost of every km of elevated track be more than what it would be for a bullet train?” and added, “I feel suffocated with the level of corruption in the room.”

Corruption is not the only issue. When allegations of delay and negligence were levelled against Suresh Prabhu, railway minister until very recently, over a new foot overbridge not being readied in time to relieve the rush (the Elphinstone stampede, killing 22 people, would not have occurred had the new bridge been there), a spokesman for Prabhu gave the entire sequence of events for the new bridge.

In late 2015 an MP wrote to Prabhu asking for a new foot overbridge to be built. He was able to reply only by February 2016, that is, over two months later, as the expenditure for a project of its size had to be sanctioned by Parliament. In his reply Prabhu said that the project was “under active consideration” though these were “challenging times” for the railways because of the “global slowdown”. The sanction came immediately thereafter. When the accident occurred, the project had been sanctioned and the tenders were due to be opened in just over a month’s time, early November.

Prabhu’s contribution, the spokesman said, was that compared to it taking three years for the tenders to be opened after a project was sanctioned, in this case it was set to be done in a bit under two years. This was because of the initiative Prabhu had taken to shift online the tendering

process for works contracts so as to have greater transparency and speed.

To complete the picture, so to speak, this is what the leader of one of the railwaymen’s unions has to say in connection with the recent accidents. Repair and maintenance work was not being carried out on time, causing the railways to operate under unsafe conditions. The necessary equipment, particularly imported machine parts, and trained staff have to be available on time. Outsourcing of maintenance work, eventually carried out by staff not properly trained, was also an issue. However, unfortunately, with rising traffic and increase in number of trains, blocks for maintenance and repair work were not available on time.

What is the solution he proposed? Withdraw the 30,000-odd staff, some of them trackmen, who were engaged in doing household work at senior officials’



The stampede in Mumbai which killed 22 people

The national carrier is riven with corruption and hamstrung by outdated procedures. Hence, they have been cutting corners.

residences, and deploy them in regular operations. In fact, the new chairman of the railway board has already issued orders for withdrawing gangmen “unofficially” deputed at officials’ residence for household work. The staff shortage, which led to lack of maintenance, was also due to a pause in recruitment in the last two years.

While the union leader dwelt on these issues, his main argument was that you cannot blame railway employees for the recent accidents and you cannot sack them without conducting an inquiry, as has been done for 13 employees after the Khatauli accident in August.

I have deliberately dwelt at some length on real words from real people who know the scene to paint a picture of the current state of affairs in the railways. It will be clear that the national carrier is

riven with corruption and hamstrung by outdated procedure. Hence, they have been cutting corners and ignoring their own safety rules, at enormous cost of letting fatal accidents happen. Overall, there is a great lack of ownership on the part of those who run the organisation.

These trends do not emerge in a day but with hindsight it is clear that merging the railway budget with the overall Union budget has contributed to the lack of commitment. The railways were earlier set apart from other public sector organisations with considerable parliamentary time and space (the rail budget documents) being given to it. Now, it is just another somewhat faceless departmental organisation.

For a government that lays great store by going digital, the discontinuation of the rail budget papers has reduced transparency. A lot of information which was earlier readily available in the explanatory memorandum that came along with the rail budget papers has now to be ferreted out of the general budget information.

While steps have already been taken to make funds available for overdue maintenance work, most prominently replacement of old tracks (these giving up has led to a string of derailments), and this is likely to be speeded up, a lot more needs to be done.

The railways need to be given a high profile and a distinct identity and the best way to do this is to corporatise it. (This has nothing to do with privatisation as the government can continue to hold even 100 per cent of the shares.) Along with this it needs a dynamic leader who can lead from the front like many a charismatic CEO in the corporate sector. Additionally, corporatisation will lead to commercial accounting systems under company law being followed which will enable the organisation’s financial performance to be properly benchmarked and also make for greater transparency.

The task before a new CEO will cause him to look both back and forward. Well established and laid down operational procedures will have to be meticulously followed. As the former official quoted above said, “If they just go through the innumerable reports of the Commission of Railway Safety on past accidents and their recommendations, that will give a massive to-do list to work on.”

Plus, the railways must move faster in adopting new technology available round the world — not just gimmicky focus on bullet trains but stuff that makes operations safer. And critically, there has to be a plan to go digital and adopt information technology as extensively as possible.

If all this is done, along with a corporate focus on marketing and being in new and better paying business to regain market share, the country will have a railways that is intrinsically profitable (reimbursing transparently calculated losses incurred in discharging social service obligations is another matter) and that it can be proud of. ■

LIVING

BOOKS | ECO-TOURISM | FILM | THEATRE | AYURVEDA

Stories of strife and salvation

Films on contemporary themes at TIFF

Saibal Chatterjee
Toronto

HOLLYWOOD star Angelina Jolie had two films in the 2017 Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) — one as director, the other as executive producer. Both the titles stemmed from her active involvement with humanitarian work around the world. The first tells the story of a girl who survived the “killing fields” of Cambodia in the 1970s; the second, an animation film set in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan, journeys into the world of a pre-teen girl seeking freedom and happiness amid seismic changes.

First They Killed My Father, a Netflix production co-written and directed by Jolie, brings to the screen bestselling author and human rights activist Loung Ung’s memoir of the chilling Khmer Rouge years (1975-79) that began when she was five years old. The film depicts with skill and empathy the horrors of political violence and its brutal impact on innocent lives.

The Breadwinner, executive produced by Jolie, is Irish animation director Nora Twomey’s adaptation of Deborah Ellis’ award-winning novel. It revolves around an 11-year-old Afghan girl who disguises herself as a boy to earn a living for her mother and sister when her teacher-father is sent to jail by the Taliban. She draws strength from the love of her family and the regenerative power of storytelling.

Many an important film in the TIFF programme this year dealt with the repercussions of war, personal struggles for freedom and redemption, and tales of young rebels fighting to find their voices. “I believe that when we tell stories, we can heal,” says Vancouver-based Afghan-Canadian filmmaker Tarique Qayumi.

Qayumi’s second fiction feature, *Black Kite*, premiered in TIFF’s Special Presentations section. It represents an effort to use memory and imagination as a means to come to grips with Afghanistan’s tumultuous contemporary history. The film uses live action, documentary footage and animated passages to capture the tectonic political shifts that the war-ravaged nation has witnessed over the decades. It homes in on a kite-maker’s son who, in the company of his young daughter, clandestinely clings to his passion despite a Taliban ban on kite-flying.

“The film tells the story of a boy whose dreams are dominated by kites even as history stands in his way,” says Qayumi, who migrated to Canada from Kabul as an eight-year-old in the early 1980s. “Children of the post-Taliban period do not have a sense of history. This film is for them. I hope they embrace it,” says the director who also manned the



'Ava' is about a girl in Tehran at odds with her orthodox parents and school authorities

camera in order to facilitate a guerrilla-style shoot aimed at evading unwanted Taliban attention and dodging suicide bombers.

After studying in the UCLA School of Theatre, Film and Television, Qayumi and his actress-wife Tajana Prka (also the producer of *Black Kite*) spent four years in Kabul working on docu-dramas for a progressive TV channel. “When the stint ended, we felt that we could not leave Afghanistan unless we told a story of our own. I had this idea in mind for some time. I wrote the screenplay in three weeks,” says Qayumi.

Qayumi’s wasn’t, of course, the only film in the Toronto programme by a director in exile exploring the current political and social realities of the land

Many an important film in TIFF this year dealt with the repercussions of war, and personal struggles for freedom and redemption.

of his or her birth. Several other titles in the TIFF 2017 selection tackled the themes of political instability, displacement and rebellion against cultural and social conservatism.

Notable among these were Tehran-born Quebecois filmmaker Sadaf Foroughi’s *Ava*; second generation Pakistani-origin Norwegian director Iram Haq’s *What Will People Say*; and Zambian-British Rungano Nyoni’s *I Am Not a Witch*.

Foroughi, director of *Ava*, a fictional tale of a Tehran girl at odds with her orthodox parents and school authorities, was 20 years old when she left Iran for France, where she studied art and film and acquired a PhD in the philosophy of cinema. Maker of a string of acclaimed short films, she has lived in Montreal since 2009. “*Ava* is the story of my growing up years,” she says.

Getting her first feature film to the screen was no mean task for Foroughi. “I spent years looking for a producer. Nothing materialised, so I decided to produce the film myself,” says the 41-year-old director. Things are now beginning to look up: she has not only found an international distributor for *Ava*, she already has a producer on board for her next film.

The eponymous heroine of *Ava* is a creatively inclined girl who is prevented from meeting her

Continued on page 30

best friend, playing the violin and dating. Her overprotective mother objects to her relationship with a boy and goes to the extent of taking Ava to a doctor for a pregnancy test — which is tantamount to an outrageous invasion of her privacy. Ava's sympathetic father is powerless in the face of social expectations. The growing restrictions on the girl trigger acts of life-altering rebellion.



'First They Killed My Father' goes back to the chilling Khmer Rouge years



'The Breadwinner' is about an Afghan girl who disguises herself as a boy

Welsh filmmaker Rungano Nyoni goes from the strictly personal to the much larger canvas of societal and cultural practices in *I Am Not a Witch*.

The female protagonist of Iram Haq's deeply affecting *What Will People Say*, which has drawn inspiration from the director's own life, finds herself in a similar situation in the Pakistani immigrant community in Norway. The film is the story of Nisha (played by 18-year-old Maria Mozhdah, a Pakistan-born girl raised in Norway) who runs afoul of her father (Indian actor Adil Hussain) when she is caught with her boyfriend in her bedroom.

Her father takes Nisha to Pakistan against her wishes and leaves her there with relatives to cut her off from the Western ways that he hates. "When I was 14 years old, I was kidnapped by my parents and forced to live for one-and-a-half years in Pakistan," says the Norway-born Haq. "I have waited until I felt ready as a filmmaker and as a

person to be able to tell this story in a wise and sensible way."

The 41-year-old director debuted in 2013 with *I Am Yours*, about a Pakistani single mother in Norway struggling with her relationships with men and her equations with a traditionalist mother, which also premiered at TIFF and was the Nordic nation's official nomination for the Oscars. "The heroine of *I Am Yours* is the woman that Nisha eventually became," says Haq.

"I very often find inspiration from myself," Haq told a media conference addressed by the 12 filmmakers who were competing for the Toronto Platform Prize at TIFF this year. "I like to deal with feelings of shame and what it triggers in us — loneliness, identity crises, and the feeling of being rejected and unloved."

Lusaka-born Welsh filmmaker Rungano Nyoni goes from the strictly personal to the much larger canvas of societal and cultural practices in *I Am Not a Witch*, a film that garnered accolades earlier this year after its world premiere in the Cannes Directors' Fortnight. Screened in TIFF's Discovery, a section dedicated to upcoming filmmakers, the film is about a nine-year-old girl who is accused of being a witch and banished to a desert camp. She faces the prospect of either continuing to live this life or fleeing and risking being turned into a goat.

Nyoni, who was raised in Cardiff, researched for the film by spending a month in a witch camp in Ghana. She mixes straight-laced satire with broad surrealist touches to expose a reality of Zambia that borders on the bizarre. *I Am Not a Witch* is a debut film, but the self-assurance with which Nyoni has crafted it belies the director's lack of experience.

The literal and the metaphoric flow into — and out — of each other in Nyoni's treatment of the subject. She adopts a neutral stance on the theme of witchcraft but comes out without ambiguity against the plight of women and children who are branded and then horribly mistreated. *I Am Not a Witch* probes the injustice and violence that women are subjected to in tradition-bound Africa while investing the story with a universal resonance.

"The film sprang from several stories that I had heard about women in Lusaka," Nyoni told the audience in a post-screening Q&A in Cannes in May. "I condensed all these anecdotes into one as they collectively epitomised what goes on in the witch camps." Isn't that true of all stories that heal and redeem, no matter where in the world they come from? ■



Bird's eye view from a rock at Horsley Hills

Historic hill station gets a facelift

Susheela Nair
Chittoor (AP)

THE eight-kilometre drive from the parched plains of Madanapalli in Chittoor district past wooded slopes and hair-pin bends to Horsley Hills was spectacular. Perched at an altitude of 1,265 metres, the fascinating hill station of Horsley Hills is an ideal weekend getaway tucked away in the Nallamalai range near Madanapalli. It was the summer retreat of W.D. Horsley, the erstwhile Collector of Cuddapah. If you are travelling in summer, you will be greeted by the exuberant hues of blooming *gulmohar* and *jacaranda* along the winding road. In the hills and their environs can sometimes be seen forest denizens like wild boar, monkeys, jungle fowl and snakes. One is also likely to encounter the Chenchu tribes who live here with their famous Pungannur cows who eat little fodder but yield a lot of milk.

After settling into our room at the Governor's Bungalow, we enjoyed the unhurried pace of life. Despite the verdant foliage around and the temptation to trek, we opted not to venture out. The magical stillness of the evening was broken by the raucous cries of birds as they returned to roost. Some common langurs were prancing from one tree to another, indulging in playful pranks. We found trees of all sizes and heights, sheltering a myriad of birds. An old eucalyptus, said to be more than 150

years old, and endearingly called Kalyani, was apparently planted by Horsley and is the star attraction of the place. The lush forests around these hills have plenty of activities to keep you engaged. If the outdoors fascinates you, there is birdwatching, trekking and camping under a starry sky on offer.

HISTORY AND LEGEND: The place abounds in legends. According to one popular story, a religious woman called Mallama lived in isolation on a hill in the Nallamalai range of Andhra Pradesh. She was protected and looked after by an elephant (*yenugu* in Telugu). Subsequently, the place came to be known locally as 'Yenugu Mallamma Konda' (hill). A temple stands in her honour atop the hill.

Horsley heard this legend and decided to take a trip there to escape the heat, dust and spicy food of Andhra Pradesh. During one of his meanderings into the hill ranges of Chittoor district, he chanced upon these pristine tracts. Enthralled by their astounding natural beauty and cool environs, he constructed a cottage and spent his summers there. He laid the foundation of a hill retreat which came to bear his name. But, at that time, there was no access to this place by road. The beautiful house that Horsley stayed in still stands. In 1870, he constructed two quaint houses. Subsequently, various other bungalows were added.

These bungalows degenerated into despair and neglect. But the glory of Horsley Hills was revived by the Governor of Andhra Pradesh, Chandulal Madhavlal Trivedi, soon after the state was formed in 1953. A road was laid in 1958 and the hilltop villa was the residence of the Governor during his summer sojourns for many years. Since then Horsley Hills has taken its place on India's tourism map.

Horsley Hills flaunts a botanical garden with rare plants and a Deer Rehabilitation Centre. The forest department has developed the area into an attractive tourist park called 'Environment Park'. And the children's park with a mini zoo has rhesus monkeys and crocodiles. The densely wooded slopes developed by the forest department abound in



Red-coloured quartz rocks on the way to Talakona Falls

birds. Hoopoes are the star attraction. The Environment Park is well-maintained, and the birds and animals are well cared for in cages.

From Valley View Point, just behind the Governor's Bungalow, one can have panoramic views of the valleys, and a patchwork of paddy fields and hamlets in the neighbouring areas. If you are in an adventurous mood, climb up the rocky escarpments to view spectacular sunsets. The magnificent boulders are an ideal place to practise rappelling and rock climbing. Another prominent tourist spot is Gali Bandalu (Windy Rock), a rocky slope that derives its name from the gusty winds that blow nearly all day.

TREK AND PRAY: On our return journey from Horsley Hills, we took a detour to Talakona Falls, 57 km from Tirupati and nine from Nerabalu. En route, we saw a forest department signboard indicating the presence of a 300-year-old, five-kilometre-long killer weed that had spread its tentacles and killed all the plants in that radius. A short trek from here led to small waterfalls surrounded by red quartz rocks, an ideal place for rock climbing and rappelling. There was nothing to disturb our quietude in this serene

locale except the trickle of water. Talakona is famous for the temple of Sri Siddheswara Swamy and the picturesque waterfalls in the midst of thick forests. The Talakona Waterfalls which cascade 300 feet is a four-kilometre trek from the temple. However, there was not much water during our visit and we saw numerous silvery streaks descending the cliff face into the ravines below.

Around 40 km from Horsley Hills is Gurramp Konda, another interesting spot adjoining Horsley. Atop the hill is a fortress, said to have been under the occupation of Raza Ali, nephew of Tipu Sultan. Stone plaques at the fort suggest that the 'Tiger of Mysore' stayed here from 1779. In 1791, British troops attacked the fort and took possession of it but later Tipu drove them out and handed the fortress back to his nephew. ■

FACT FILE

Nearest airport: Bengaluru (151 km), Tirupati (140 km).
Nearest railhead: Madanapalli Road (27 km).
By road: Bengaluru (151 km).
Best Season: September to January.
Where to stay: AP Tourism's Haritha Hill Resort.

RANDOM SHELF HELP

A quick selection from the many books that turn up for review

The forest matters

By Anjana Basu

SUMANA Roy's love affair with trees is an extended musing with a difference. She delves into the roots of her childhood and the tree feeling that grew with her. This book is her tribute to trees. She synergises history, mythology, botany, philosophy and the arts to tell the story of trees and their altruistic, healing, contemplative nature.

Starting with how she began to draw a tree and then went on to discover that Nandalal Bose felt the tree form was essential to art — so much so that he advocated using an upside down tree to outline a mountain and its valleys.

Roy's feeling is that trees are largely discriminated against in favour of flowers — women, for example, she says, are usually compared to flowers in Bengali literature and given floral names. Of course, as her explorations unfold she extends her research to the flowers in Tagore's garden and his stories.

Greek mythology is full of dryads and hamadryads, the sylph-like spirits of the trees and women chased by gods turning into trees, though the Greeks were unabashed pantheists. To this Roy

adds a sexual undercurrent, pointing out that trees have their own kind of sexuality and that in many folk tales, children are born from figs.

Roy's researches cover Bengali literature, the *Upanishads* and Buddhist texts, not to mention the films of Aparna Sen and Satyajit Ray. Sen's *Sati* is based on the myth of tree marriages to avert evil, though the mute girl who is married to a banyan tree has no such luck in her life.

Perhaps Roy's life in bustling Siliguri with trees behind and a chance to have gardens resulted in this love affair. From Siliguri she went to explore Jagadish Bose's house in Darjeeling where he formulated his concept that plants have emotions and can feel pain, recording their responses to his stimuli on painstakingly calibrated gadgets.

But then, trees have been part of existence as far back as time with the Tree of Good and Evil in the Bible and the Koran, and Yggdrasil of the Norse myths possibly because a living, growing thing which unites heaven and earth has always attracted the imagination of philosophers, not to mention poets and painters. Which is why the Tree of Life motif recurs in art among the Gonds, in Kalamakari and in many more instances too numerous to count.



How I Became A Tree
Sumana Roy
Aleph
Rs 599



School Worlds; Anuradha Sharma
Rs 795; SAGE

The book is a study of Pratyantar, a private, charitable, co-ed school in a Delhi neighbourhood. The school, meant for underprivileged children, runs alongside the main school where richer parents send their children.

The charitable school isn't a poor cousin. It is an English-medium school with good infrastructure and offers computer education and extra-curricular activities. A hot mid-day meal is served. The school has around 260 students and teaching upto Class 8.

Anuradha Sharma, the author, looks into the inner workings of this school. How do teachers perceive their students who come from surrounding slums? How do children respond to their school? Sharma deserves a lot of credit for her detailed research. She seems to have blended into the school and won the confidence of children and teachers. Classrooms, playground, the staff room, the dining room, nothing escapes her keen eye. Sharma notes the relationship between teachers and their students, discipline, processes, and the difficulty in teaching a subject like English to first-generation learners.

The school has an air of benevolence, unlike, say, a government school. This has its own impact on the children. They resist being bracketed as inferior recipients of charity. They don't see themselves as 'disadvantaged'. Their parents inspire them. They see their home in the slum as a positive space and their idea of family isn't the nuclear family in their textbooks but an extended family back in the village with perhaps 31 members.

The teachers see the children as poor, in need of discipline and learning support. The school is an additional noble parent, they believe. The gender divide intrudes almost unconsciously into class. The book is worth reading for those interested in education for underprivileged children. ■



The Baba Ramdev Phenomenon; From moksha to market; Kaushik Deka; Rs 295; Rupa

The amazing rise of Patanjali Ayurved has much to do with its rather striking founder, Baba Ramdev. Kaushik Deka, a journalist with *India Today*, tells an engaging story of Baba Ramdev and how he and Acharya Balkrishna Suvedi, an Indian of Nepali origin, founded a company that has been described as "the most disruptive force in India's FMCG market".

Baba Ramdev and Balkrishna both come from humble families. Ramdev's father was a marginal farmer and Balkrishna's a security guard. Ramdev suffered a paralytic attack when he was very young and recovered through yoga and sheer grit. He left school, obsessed with studying Indian philosophy and tradition, to study in a gurukul where he met Balkrishna.

Ramdev became a brand much before he and Balkrishna dived into manufacturing. His yoga classes and free advice on health and inexpensive herbal medicines made him a household name by word of mouth. The duo's first success was in making a genuine version of Chywanprash, a health supplement which they sold cheap.

The ingredients which made Patanjali Ayurved a huge success come across clearly in Deka's book. Unlike other gurus, Ramdev doesn't deliver religious discourses. He sticks to promoting yoga, herbal cures, *swadeshi* and nationalism. Secularism is better for business.

Till date, he says his businesses aren't meant to make money for himself but to do something useful for people, to make India economically independent and free the country of multinational companies about whom his comments are rather tart. Nationalism has effectively sold ghee, toothpaste, hair oil and shampoo, Patanjali's bestsellers.

Patanjali also constantly innovates new products. It is probably the only manufacturing company growing and giving jobs to youth and an income to farmers. The company is conquering rural markets and is a brand local consumers identify with strongly.

Deka's book is comprehensive and rather admiring. There are issues he has glossed over. But Baba Ramdev's story is an interesting one though the book is shoddily edited. ■

Mohenjo Daro art has trees with women sitting on them. And, possibly, if one went through all the different sources, the book would become greater than the Treelogy Roy refers to it as.

At one level this could be taken as a new perspective on the threatened environment — trees are part of life and hold our spirits within them. At another level the book shows Roy's patience as she pieces together the evidence she has collected to support her arguments regarding the importance of trees in the various aspects of life.

One could almost call it Jacobean, recalling Sir Francis Bacon's essay "Of Gardens" which tellingly began, "God Almighty first planted a Garden." Roy has spent time alone in *vanvas* in a forest bungalow, contemplating her bonds with trees, which too attract violence of a kind.

One thing is certain; her tree-filled groves are places of silence — which is why she is drawn to them. Trees convey their messages without words. The bustle of animals and birds belongs to Hinduism which gives animal life greater value, Roy suggests, than plants.

According to the *Mahabharata*, the tigers are there to protect the forests and the forests there to protect the animals. One cannot exist without the other. ■

Many shades of corruption

Archana Ranjan
New Delhi

CORRUPTION has been the subtext of life in India. In the last 10 years it has dominated the headlines like never before, resulting in a protest movement and the birth of a new political party. Scams wracked the last UPA government, besmirching reputations and even resulting in jail terms for politicians and their cronies. Yet not much has been done since to prevent grand corruption.

N. Ram's tidy and timely book provides the reader with a nuanced understanding of the nature of this beast. The author traces corruption in India down the years to contemporary times and suggests what could be done.

The book has been neatly organised into three parts. The first deals with the story of corruption in India, taking us through the days of the East India Company, to the early days of independent India and official attempts to contain and understand corruption — such as through the Santhanam Committee, and the seminal work of Gunnar Myrdal, *Asian Drama: An Inquiry into the Poverty of Nations*.

The author quotes legal luminary Upendra Baxi, anthropologist Akhil Gupta and the comparatively recent study by Sukhtankar and Vaishnav. The many types and forms of corruption, the problem areas in the law on corruption and the implementation of these laws have also been studied. It was interesting to learn, for example, that of all G-20 countries, India has the smallest number of government employees in relation to the country's population. It is no wonder then that cases are pending in courts of law for want of judges and policing is poor since the shortage in the police force is 'alarming', and there is a massive failure of enforcement.

Section II of the book deals with the history, definitions and theory of corruption. Here again the author has painstakingly culled information from gems on the subject, from Nicholas B. Dirks' *The Scandal of the Empire* to the trial of Robert Clive and the early days of our republic, reminding us of the Jeep scandal (1948-55) and the Mundhra scandal (1957-58).

It is again interesting to note that in both these cases the ministers resigned, taking full responsibility for the actions of their subordinates even though it was no one's case that these ministers had personally benefitted. This itself is worthy of remaining in public memory, because today corrupt ministers, even when caught with their hands in the till, have sought to brazen it out, and if they had no option but to resign, they left only after cynically installing a trusted friend or relative to hold the fort.

The comparison with the standard of corruption maintained in other countries, as brought out by Transparency International's



A group of young people protesting against corruption during the Anna Hazare-led movement in Delhi

Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (CPI) is inherently flawed, says Ram, as it overlooks the role played by the private sector in corruption.

Corruption Perception Index (CPI), is referred to. Ram points out that the CPI is inherently flawed as it overlooks the role played by the private sector in corruption. It does have a Bribe Payers Index, but the 'supply side' of international bribery — the touts, the so-called commission agents and the like — has not been given as much

importance as it demands. In most countries, laws dealing with these middlemen have loopholes dictated primarily by realpolitik.

A whole chapter is dedicated to the conceptualisation and defining of corruption. It is mentioned that although India ratified the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) way back in 2005, it has yet to put in place the necessary legislation and institutional arrangements, and that, as has rightly been pointed out, shows how the

intent of successive governments and how political economic factors allow corruption to thrive.

The Marxist take on political corruption has also been comprehensively covered. There is hardly anything concerning the topic of corruption which has not been touched with an even hand.

Section III discusses two case studies — one, the Bofors case, where *The Hindu*, Ram's newspaper, spearheaded the investigation, and the other Tamil Nadu's 'scientific' system of

political corruption. Reference to the Vyapam scam, being an example of another system of political corruption, has been made. Both are studied in detail and, even for those who have followed the newspaper reports diligently through the years, the study is comprehensive and thorough.

A sobering quote from journalist Aman Sethi is important to remember how Vyapam represents 'a vast societal swindle', where not only all the limbs of the State are involved, but the victims themselves must share the blame as should the vernacular press which didn't raise the red flag soon enough. The Tamil Nadu system is discussed in detail, where there are specified rates, facilitation, collusion and extraction, depending on the sector. One interesting observation is that in Tamil Nadu, in spite of endemic corruption, the mid-day meal and MGNREGA programmes have still managed to remain the best in the country!

Wrapping up the discussion on the what, when and how of corruption, the book quantifies eight things that need to be done to combat it. The suggestions are, like the rest of the book, comprehensive, sensible and eminently readable. The topic of the book should have been differently worded to suggest that there is no reason why scams cannot be contained. That would have provided a ray of hope in an otherwise bleak scenario. ■



**AYURVEDA
ADVISORY**
Dr SRIKANTH

Lighten dark circles

I am 28 and looking forward to getting married next month. I have lost weight and undergone keratin therapy to smoothen my hair. However, my face is marred by dark circles under my eyes. I have tried some home remedies and commercial cosmetic creams, but they have not been effective. Please advise.

Gayatri Vishwanath

Under-eye dark circles can affect both men and women. The skin around the eyelids is the thinnest skin on the body. A deficiency of nutrients or the lack of a balanced diet can contribute to discolouration of the area under the eyes. Lack of sleep or excessive fatigue can also result in paleness of the skin which again allows the blood underneath to become more visible and make the skin appear darker.

Dark circles can also result from allergies, excessive sun exposure, fluid retention and aging, which thins the skin under the eyes. The role of heredity can also not be ruled out. Stress and hormonal changes can contribute to dark circles. Iron and Vitamin B deficiency too can lead to dark circles. In such cases, a few dietary and lifestyle changes along with the application of a gentle under-eye cream should reduce the dark circles.

Dark circles are likely to become more noticeable and become permanent with advancing age. As we get older, skin loses collagen and gets thinner and more translucent. As the skin ages, its water retaining property is compromised.

ADVISE: Drinking adequate quantity of water, getting enough sleep, exercising regularly (which helps improve blood circulation), avoiding excessive exposure to the sun, using a good sun protection cream when outdoors and applying an under-eye cream before going to bed can all help address this problem.

Drink lots of water, eat more fresh fruit and sleep well.

HOME REMEDIES: Soothe your eyes with cotton wool dipped in rose water. Place the cotton pads on your eyes for 10-15 minutes and lie still to ease away tension. Later, wash with cold water. Repeat every night for about a month for best results.

Mix one tablespoon of crushed de-skinned almonds with enough whole, fresh milk to make a nice paste. Apply to the under-eye area and leave on for 10 minutes, then rinse with cool water.

Apply a few drops of sweet almond oil on the dark circles and massage gently into the skin. Leave the oil on overnight. Wash off the oil with a gentle face wash the next morning. You can repeat this every night until the dark circles are gone.

Dipping cotton pads in fresh, chilled cucumber juice and placing them over your eyes for 15 minutes daily for about 15 days will be helpful.

Apply fresh aloe vera gel under the eyes and massage for a few seconds. Leave it on for 10-15 minutes. Clean with a moist cotton pad.

Make a mixture of fresh paste of sandalwood, turmeric (of equal quantity) and milk cream and apply as a thin coat over the dark circles. Allow it to dry and wash off with cold water. Do this once daily for about a fortnight for visible results.

APPLICATIONS: Kumkumadi taila (from Kottakkal Arya Vaidya Sala or Vaidyaratnama Oushadhasala) – apply a few drops on the dark circles and massage gently into the skin at bedtime. Leave it overnight and wash off with a gentle face wash the next morning. For stubborn dark circles, you may have to repeat this procedure for about a month.

For those who dislike applying oil because of its stickiness, you may try: Himalaya's Under Eye Cream or Youth Eternity Under Eye Cream – gently massage the cream into the delicate area beneath the eyes after thorough cleansing. Use twice daily.

Kumkumadi lepam (Imis Pharmaceuticals) – apply a small quantity to the affected area twice daily, after washing and drying the skin.

Recurrence of dark circles might be because of stress, depression and a hectic lifestyle. No amount of home remedies will work if the mind isn't calm. Regular practice of yoga and meditation are found to be effective in decreasing dark circles, as they are helpful in calming the mind.

However, if the condition persists despite following the above measures, it is important to consult a dermatologist to rule out any other underlying cause that might be major. ■

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.

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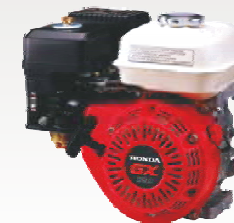


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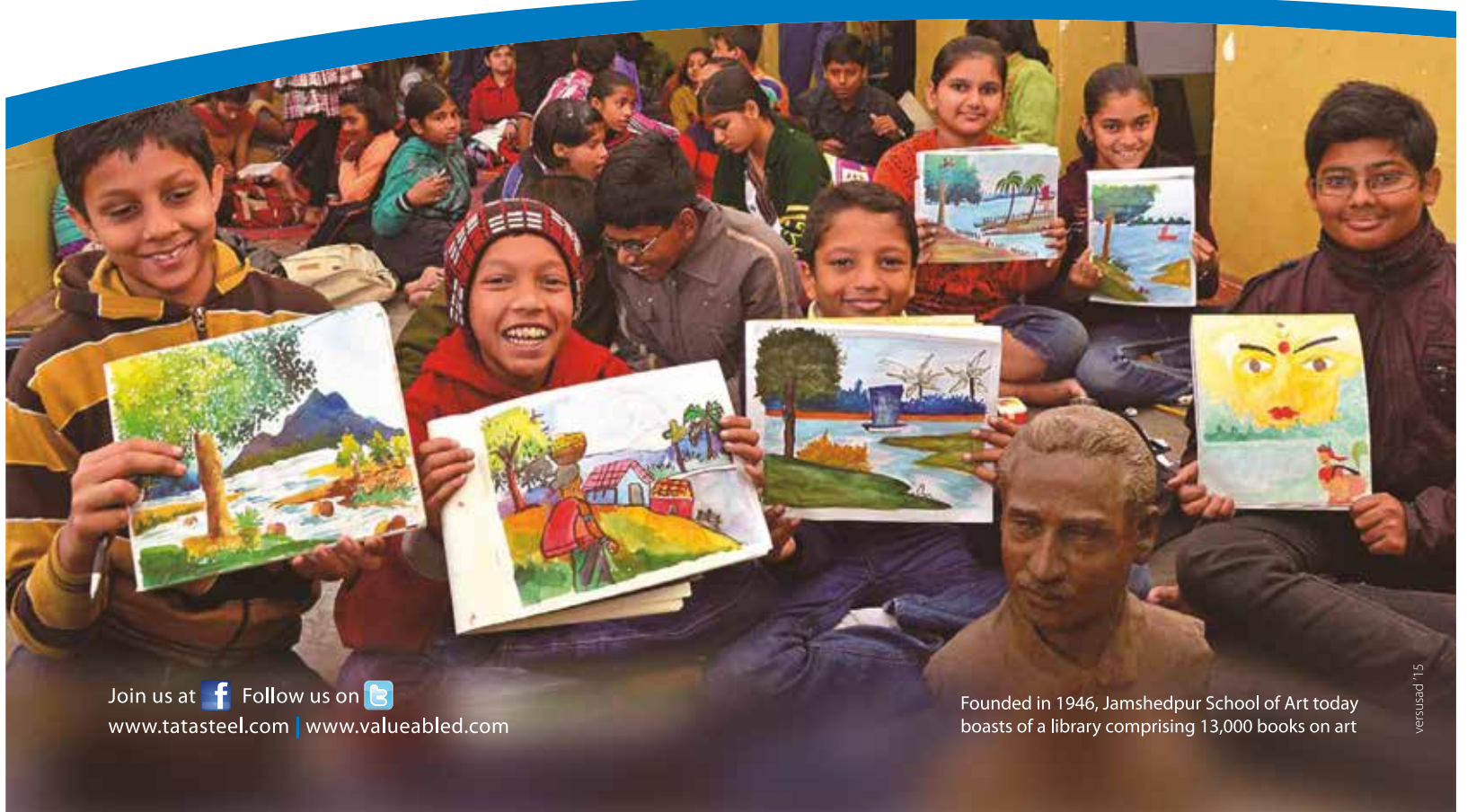


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