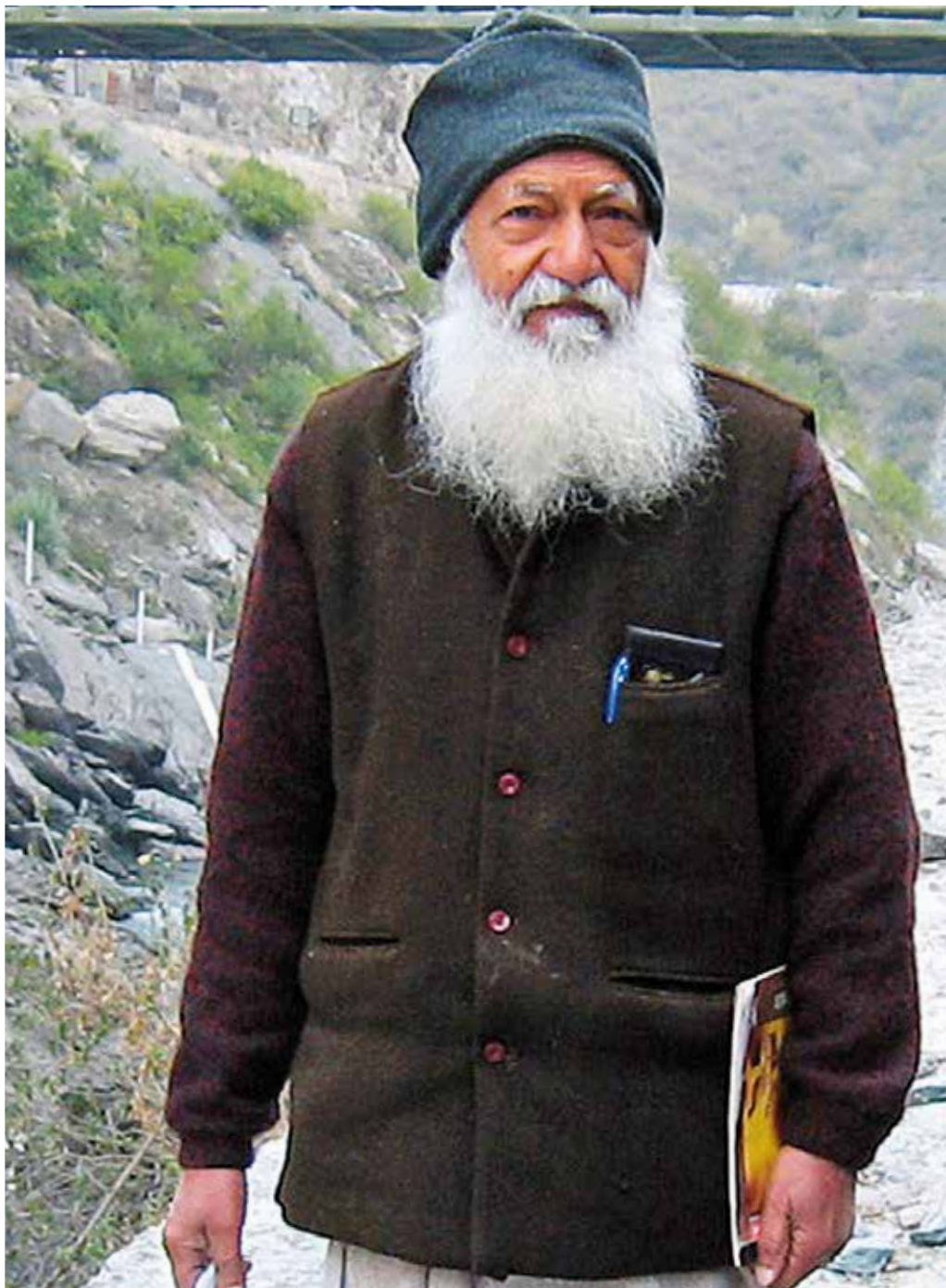


# Civil Society



## DYING FOR THE GANGA

The incredible story of Prof. G. D. Agarwal 1932-2018

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# CONSERVING BIODIVERSITY



Seedball



Seedballs ready to be broadcasted



Swietenia mahagoni Seed

## Phase one - Pune, Maharashtra

Creating awareness about the importance of biodiversity

More than 300 college students participated in the two-day activity of seed ball preparation and broadcast

Himalaya and SEBC identified the best plant species, viz. Oroxylum indicum, Swietenia mahagoni, Peepal, Cassia fistula and Albizia as per environment-friendliness and sustainability

Approximately 30,000 seed balls were successfully broadcasted by the student around Pabe ghat, Khanapur and Sinhagad fort area in Pune, Maharashtra

The seeds will germinate with the onset of monsoon in the region and justify our initiative to contribute to the environment



ADITYA BIRLA GROUP  
FICCI-ADITYA BIRLA  
CSR Centre For Excellence

## FICCI-ADITYA BIRLA CSR Centre For Excellence

“I dream of an India free from poverty. An India where every child is educated, where every man and woman enjoys a sense of self-worth through gainful employment. An India which sets a fine example to the world on how social and economic goals can go hand in hand for the benefit of humanity.”

-Aditya Vikram Birla (1943 - 1995)  
Renowned Indian Industrialist and Former Chairman, Aditya Birla Group

FICCI ADITYA BIRLA CSR CENTRE FOR EXCELLENCE is a joint initiative of Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI) and the Aditya Birla Group chaired by Padma Bhushan Smt. Rajashree Birla. The Centre aims to provide strategic direction to the development of socially inclusive and holistic CSR practices by providing a platform to various stakeholders so that they can share their experiences, learn, exchange ideas and support partnerships that add value to business.

### KEY INITIATIVES

- FICCI CSR Awards instituted in 1999 is India's first CSR Awards that aims to identify and recognize the efforts of companies in integrating and internalizing Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) into their core business operations.
- Capacity Building initiatives for CSR stakeholders for impactful implementation of CSR programs
- Sectoral Workshops and policy advocacy related to best practices for CSR stakeholders to promote shared learning on one platform.

### FOCUS AREAS

Networking and Advocacy

01

02

Information Dissemination

Research & Publications

03

04

Acknowledging and Awarding the best practices in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

The Centre for Excellence engages with a diverse range of stakeholders :

Corporate leaders of Large, Medium and Small Enterprises

CSR Heads and CSR Professionals

NGOs, Social Enterprises, Foundations, Academia

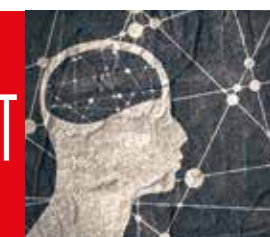
Regional, National and Global Experts

Central Government, State Government, Public Sector Companies, Bilateral and Multilateral agencies

Chambers of Commerce & Business Associations



## ANNOUNCEMENT



## National Conference: 'Speak Up' - National Mental Health Movement

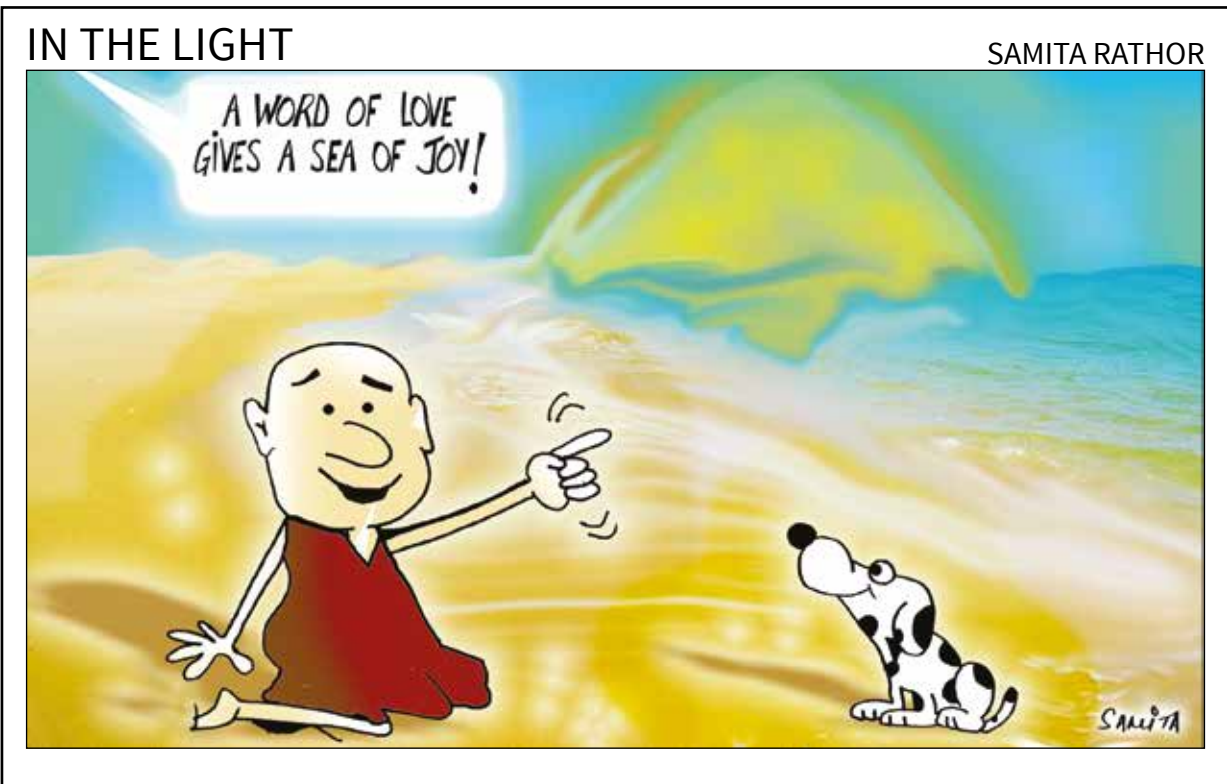
Date: October 30, 2018 | Venue: FICCI, Federation House, New Delhi

Mental health is a major concern worldwide and India is not far behind in sharing this. If we evaluate developments in the field of mental health, the pace appears to be slow. The neglect of mental health is evident from a World Health Organization report which estimated that 50 million Indians suffered from depression. With an aim to bring together all stakeholders of mental health (service providers: medical and non-medical professionals, Government bodies, national associations, corporates, media, influencers, academicians) and discuss serious concerns around Mental Health in India, FICCI Aditya Birla CSR Centre for Excellence in partnership with Mpower is organising an annual leadership forum 'Speak Up' - National Mental Health Movement on October 30, 2018 at FICCI, Federation House, New Delhi. The flagship event would witness public addresses, panel discussions, Q&A and exhibits set-ups at the venue by influencers and sponsors, supporting the cause. The platform is to encourage stakeholders to 'SpeakUp' about the ground level realities at various levels and steps taken to fight the stigma attached to Mental Health in India. To know more, email your interest to [csrce@ficci.com](mailto:csrce@ficci.com)

To know more, log on to: [www.csrce.org](http://www.csrce.org)

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LETTERS



Anniversary issue

Civil Society magazine was the earliest and perhaps the first of this genre of journalism which covers change-makers and their stories in the civil society space. You have survived and flourished! Congratulations for having reached this milestone.

Madhukar Shukla

I thoroughly enjoy reading Civil Society since I find the articles extremely relevant. One never gets to read such stories in conventional print media. It is very refreshing to read about the successes born out of small experiments and initiatives around the country.

The anniversary issue carried a story about a primary health centre in Barmer. I hope that various stakeholders read that story and

realise the power and potential that one single person carries. It is very easy to be overwhelmed by the enormity of challenges that we face as a country. Your magazine inspires one to go on!

Amit Khanna

Not many realise that with the kind of polity, education and institutions we have, making democracy work on the ground and for the people requires a vibrant media. Our democracy works for the privileged and 'development' delivers to them. Civil society has a big role to play in strengthening democracy. And any act that strengthens it is to be valued. You are doing it remarkably well, that too in a visible space. This is highly commendable.

Keerti Shah

Congratulations on sustaining Civil Society for 15 years! This is no small achievement and I note that your standards remain high which is even more significant. All my very best to Civil Society.

Ravi Venkatesan

Congratulations for your 15th anniversary and may there be many more! It's quite amazing how Civil Society has persevered and not given up like the initiators of so many great ideas who couldn't sustain them.

Civil Society's initiative reminds me of my father's sense of commitment to Writers Workshop which, by the way, celebrates its 60th anniversary this year!

Ananda Lal

Hall of Fame

Thanks for the write-up, 'Mind Doctor on call,' in your annual issue. Mental health is a very important and neglected issue in rural areas. So it is good to see the efforts of Dr Mohite and Dr Kaul. Both the government and NGOs need to frame a plan to provide such services.

Ashok Chacko

Apropos your story, 'Scientist on a mission', Dr P. Rajendran deserves accolades for turning two agricultural stations that were almost defunct into prosperous and vibrant modules. His dedication and team work created new agricultural communities.

Hussain Syed Anis

Dr Rajendran is an outstanding scientist, manager and, above all, a gentleman. He transformed agricultural research stations into farmer-friendly places. We are proud of him and his contributions.

Dr K.B. Peter

I would like to thank Dr Rajendran for creating Poopoli, one of the most popular flower shows in India.

Nandakumar

I think Dr C.R. Elsy's work is really outstanding. She is truly a GI hunter who is getting farmers their rights over their intellectual property. Her work is an example for other government scientists working in IPR departments.

Bandana Goel

Apropos your article, 'The Womb Crusaders' on the contribution of Dr

Prakash Vinjamuri and Dr S.V. Kameswari to the health of women in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh.

Apart from campaigning on the need to protect the womb, they are also creating awareness on education and food. The multi-tasking both doctors have undertaken in health, education and food through novel concepts such as Open House, Spreadlight and Food for All also deserve mention. Thank you for having recognised their immense philanthropic work.

Dr A. Raghu Kumar

Dr Prakash Vinjamuri and Dr S.V. Kameswari must get a chance to speak to medical students across the country and to the faculty so that many more doctors feel inspired.

Baju P.

Your article, 'PHC saviour' was very accurate. Dr Jogesh is energetic and persistent. He found the primary health centre in Gida in terrible shape and turned it around so well that it is comparable to any private health centre. He eliminated the difference between a private health service centre and a government one.

Rajendra Prasad

Education system

Dileep Ranjekar in his article, 'In school, a silver lining to dark clouds' has raised several pertinent issues. He mentions past developments, expresses concern and makes concrete suggestions. I strongly agree that we must change our education system. Otherwise we will not be able to create the kind of nation that is reflected in our Constitution.

Gururaj Rao

Telangana schools

Praveen Kumar's write-up, 'When the government becomes a caring super parent,' was extraordinary. He is a great father to near one million Swaeroes. We are proud of him.

Narasimha

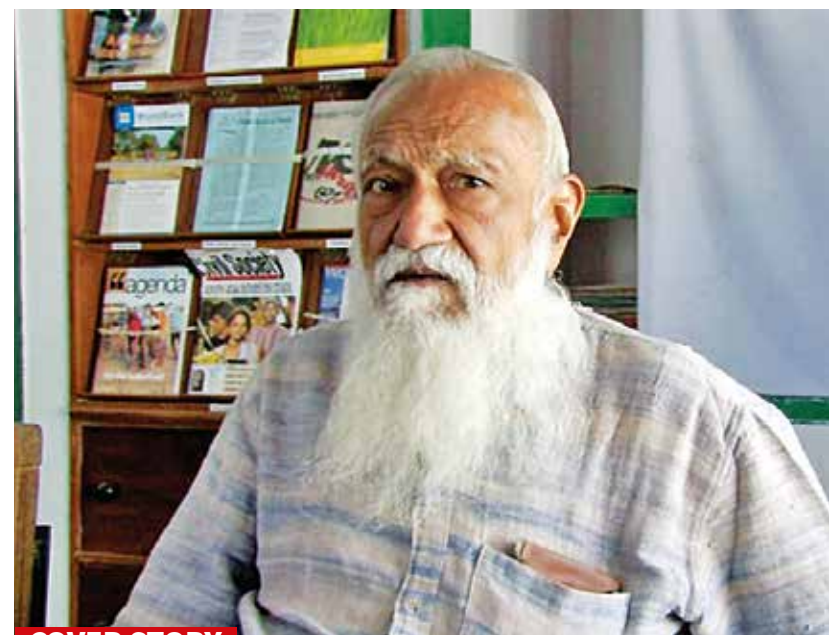
Praveen Kumar's services are far greater than any teacher's. The smile on the faces of the children says it all.

Sudarshan Rao

Praveen Kumar's commitment towards the marginal sections of our society is unimaginable. If he continues for another 10 years Swaeroes will make their mark across the world.

John Sudhakar

Letters should be sent to response@civilsocietyonline.com



COVER STORY

DYING TO SAVE THE GANGA

Prof. G.D. Agarwal, known as Swami Sanand, died while fasting to save the Ganga. It was his fourth fast to seek removal of dams on the upper reaches of the river. We recount his incredible life.

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The Ganga tragedy

EFFORTS to improve the water quality of the Ganga go back decades and have used up lots of public money. Yet, the river is dirtier than ever and more threatened today than before by misguided dam projects, pollution, waterway initiatives and encroachments. The future of our rivers does not depend on how much we spend on them, but the space we provide them to fulfil their natural role. The rivers we interfere with either shrivel up and die or reassert themselves with catastrophic consequences as we have seen with the Ganga in Uttarakhand and with other rivers elsewhere in the country.

In the 1980s when Dr Niloy Chaudhuri gave shape to the Ganga Action Plan it was clear that such a cumbersome initiative couldn't possibly work. Dr Chaudhuri realised this, but he was Chairman of the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) and Indira Gandhi wanted an action plan to clean the river. He provided it in the way Indian scientists are known to succumb to authority. Prof. G.D. Agarwal was the member-secretary of the CPCB at that time. He left the CPCB because his science and environmentalism were action-oriented and involved people and went much beyond serving governments.

Though known for his academic brilliance and rigour, Prof. Agarwal stayed close to the ground. He left a deep impression on his students, many of whom went on to play creative and influential roles in India's environmental movement. In the past few years he undertook four fasts to save the Ganga with the simple message that for a river to survive it must first flow freely and cannot be encumbered with dams in its upper reaches as has been repeatedly planned for the Ganga by successive governments. He also wanted people in authority to understand that the Ganga is no ordinary river — it is India's lifeline and deeply intertwined with cultural and religious traditions. His efforts did yield some results with the UPA cancelling some dams. But there has been no national vision for the Ganga as an invaluable natural resource. Prof. Agarwal's death in itself is a terrible loss, but it is yet another shameful episode in an even bigger and unending tragedy of governments and politicians in general refusing to address issues on which our collective well-being truly depends.

Prof. Agarwal brought activism to science and science to activism. He turned to religion and spirituality as well.

We have covered Prof. Agarwal in the past and in our cover story you will find a picture of him taken during one of his earlier fasts. The picture starkly conveys his loneliness — the loneliness of a long-distance runner. He wasn't short of admirers in academia, among activists and in government too. But he failed to have the national impact he should have had.

We also have in this issue an interview with V. Umashankar, an IAS officer who showed rare leadership in bringing better civic systems to Gurugram — this is of course before he got mysteriously shunted out! And from the south, we take a look at KCR's record as he opts for an early election. A report on jobs tells us where employment is headed.

# ‘We must deal with Gurugram as a single city’

## V. Umashankar on how the GMDA is reworking management systems for improving civic services

Civil Society News  
Gurugram

**B**ARELY a year after it was created, the Gurugram Metropolitan Development Authority (GMDA) found its Chief Executive Officer, V. Umashankar, transferred.

An upright and insightful IAS officer with an IIT degree, Umashankar had set up the GMDA from scratch and had just got down to the serious business of ending Gurugram's chaotic growth and fragmented civic management.

He had also been talking tough with developers and weighing in on behalf of residents. He favoured the cancelling of licences and forfeiting of deposits of companies like the Ansals which hadn't provided promised infrastructure and owed the government money.

Umashankar led a complex initiative in urban renewal for which he seemed naturally suited with his meticulous style and capacity for lateral thinking. Right from the time of the public hearings for the setting up of the GMDA, people who interfaced with him invariably came away impressed.

In an interview with *Civil Society* conducted shortly before the transfer order came, Umashankar spoke of what had been achieved by the GMDA in the brief time since its inception. A process to reverse many years of neglect had been put in place.

**You were commissioner of the Municipal Corporation of Gurugram (MCG) and the CEO of the GMDA. What are the issues the city is facing?**

A lot of good things have happened in Gurugram and the not-so-good things have surfaced in the past few years. The post-Independence story of Gurugram begins with Maruti which brought a new level of development here. Gurugram's second leap was due to the IT revolution. It leveraged the city's proximity to the airport and led to private spaces coming up. Property was developed which gave the city a certain infrastructure and ambience that the IT industry was looking for.

But we went a little too far with that kind of development. The real estate market in India thrives on liquidity. So if normal liquidity is withdrawn, the real estate market collapses and that especially impacts a city like Gurugram which is totally based on the private sector development model.

We went through an extensive consultative process when the GMDA was to be created. We put together people's reactions and the opinion of experts on the kind of problems we have here. In December 2016 we made a presentation to the cabinet on the structure of the GMDA. We

identified certain issues and slotted them under different heads. I think the first problem which is the most serious and usually gets missed is the problem of what is Gurugram.

**Why do you say that?**

During the consultative process we felt we were not talking about one city but five different cities. You had the HUDA sectors which have been here probably the longest apart from the villages. They had a set of problems entirely different from the private coloniser areas like DLF or Sushant Lok. And if you started talking to people in the new Gurugram areas — that started developing post-2008 — they had completely different problems. They were fighting for basic infrastructure. The villages and the old city, which had become part of the larger agglomeration, had a different range of problems.

We felt we couldn't go ahead unless we started unifying the city. That has been a work in progress. Last year we completed takeover of all HUDA sectors by the municipal corporation. HUDA is no longer responsible for internal development except for two sectors — Sector 29 which is purely commercial and Sector 53 where plots are yet to be given out.

The next step was to start taking over the colonisers' areas. Here we hit a legal problem. You could say we had to fight our way through the colonisers' maze. Thankfully, that process has reached its culmination and the first two coloniser areas, Sushant Lok and Palam Vihar, have been taken over by the MCG.

In a larger philosophical sense our endeavour was to get everybody to start speaking about the same city. Then you can get different agencies to come together and resolve issues.

Secondly, you had two layers of development. HUDA would do everything in its own areas from sanitation to major roads and so would the MCG in its areas. There has to be a certain level of apportionment of functional jurisdiction. All internal development in sectors now gets done by the MCG including roads and all external development from the main roads is done by the GMDA.

Front-end water supply is carried out by the MCG. We ensure water reaches sector limits. So there is a clear demarcation of what I call the wholesale part and the retail part of development and services.

Solid waste has to be dealt with by a single agency. Any interfaces create a problem. The MCG takes care of solid waste and waste management in general. That process was also concluded fairly



V. Umashankar: 'Now there are just two agencies responsible — the MCG for front-end work and the GMDA for back-end work'

painlessly. All this involves a lot of transfers. Roads get transferred from one agency to the next, water supply too, and so on. We have managed to achieve this without causing any inconvenience to citizens. Water supply was transferred without citizens even feeling the change.

Third is the multiplicity of agencies responsible for services. Now there are just two agencies responsible — the MCG which does the front-end work and the GMDA which takes care of the back-end. This process is yet to percolate entirely. HUDA sectors have felt the change. Private coloniser areas too will see the difference once the MCG starts making its presence felt.

**There are many complaints about infrastructure.**

If you ask me personally the infrastructure in the city isn't too bad. There have been jurisdiction issues which have created some infrastructure problems in certain areas. The infrastructure issues in the new sectors are terrible. This is a city that is still growing.

The problem is the model of urbanisation we followed. It has been entirely through colonisation licences. Assume that you issue a licence in 2006. The developer comes back a year later in 2007 with his layout plans, water estimates and the

**‘Do we have adequate canal-based river water to supply to citizens? The answer is yes. We need to get our distribution networks ready. We also have to ensure water leakages get reduced and we use recycled water...’**

infrastructure he requires. You begin the land acquisition process for roads. That takes five to eight years with litigation thrown in. Only by 2013 will you have some land for roads and there will still be pockets under litigation. You then frame development estimates and start development which takes another two to three years.

Meanwhile the coloniser, who is in a hurry, completes his construction work in four years and starts selling his properties. People begin occupying these places. But no commensurate infrastructure will come in by 2012. There will be a five-year lag. People will complain that they don't have water, sewage connections or roads.

Noida first built the infrastructure. They sell plots and don't hand over licences. But, in that case, you must have the liquidity to do so much land

acquisition. I believe the Noida model's day and age are over. It was premised on the assumption that you can acquire land when you want and at the cheapest cost. Both these assumptions are not valid anymore.

Government acquisition of land is expensive and time-consuming. Any development authority based on this model will run into financial trouble.

People will start shifting to the Gurugram model. But we have to ensure that roads and infrastructure come up as properties start getting occupied. So either we crunch the time of acquisition or we tell the developer that four years is a moratorium. A tie-up between the two then happens. This is a policy issue.

The other two major problems of the city are traffic and drainage.

**Not water?**

No, I don't think so. There is this scare over water. Nationally, almost 80 percent of water is used for agricultural purposes. Six percent is for domestic consumption and three percent is used by industry. Even with the growth in population by 2030, domestic consumption will go up to nine percent. It is agriculture that is going to face the brunt of the water crisis.

When cities are small they look at their proximate sources of water supply, whether tanks or tube wells. When cities grow, local sources cannot support their population. Water will need to be taken from a perennial source like a river, or a large lake. For us it is the Yamuna.

The problem about water availability in the Yamuna is far more important than the groundwater problem in Gurugram if we are looking at drinking water. It is glaciers in the Himalayas that will affect water supply here. And then no amount of groundwater availability can feed the population of Delhi-Gurugram.

Do we have adequate canal-based river water to supply to citizens? The answer is yes. The problem is we need to get our distribution networks ready. We also have to ensure that water leakages get reduced and that we use recycled water for our non-potable requirements.

The new sectors are currently dependent on water tankers and groundwater. We will be in a position to reach piped water to almost all these areas between December 2018 and March 2019.

We found that from the water treatment plant to Sector 51, which is the last boosting station, we are losing 30 percent of the water supply. We have not yet counted leakages at the distribution level. So that will take us close to 50 percent. We have started conducting water audits and we are pushing ourselves to plug water leakages.

By about March 2019, the Sewage Treatment Plants (STPs) will treat water almost close to potable levels of about 10 BOD (five is potable). We are now constructing underground tanks and we have laid distribution lines for recycled waste water. We are creating hydrants which can be used to irrigate parks. Laying a distribution system inside sectors will be very expensive.

**How much water will be recycled?**

About 30 percent. Most developer areas in the new sectors are coming up with inbuilt STPs. In our tariff system, which we have just got approved, we are giving a 50 percent rebate on sewerage charges if you use recycled wastewater yourself on the condition that developers instal an electronic online monitoring system which will deliver the signals of operation to our control room. People won't be going there to inspect. We will know from the online system whether their STPs are working or not. Group housing societies could instal STPs too. If somebody shows the inclination the rebate automatically becomes available.

I think we have already made a dent. The textile industry is picking up recycled water from us. We are charging them only ₹3 per kilo litre. The other water would have cost them ₹10 per kilo litre.

**You said drainage is an issue. Every monsoon the city drowns. What are the steps being taken?**

*Continued on page 8*

## ‘We must deal with Gurugram as a single city’

Continued from page 7

Drainage is a major problem and it is going to take us a while to resolve it. The city is at the foot of the Aravalis. This place has always had run-off. The British constructed the Jharsa *bandh*, the Chakkarpur *bandh* and the Badshahpur *bandh*. The Jharsa *bandh* stops the flow of water into the old city area. At that time the rest of Gurugram was just farmland with huge capacity to absorb water.

As more and more areas got concretised the land's ability to absorb run-off has reduced substantially, so we are actually seeing a lot of streets becoming rainwater drains. There is an 80-metre elevation difference between Sector 57 and the outfall point of the city. That's huge. So the water tends to flow naturally here.

There is a certain flow point. Rain from the hills reaches Hero Honda Chowk in four hours, plus or minus 15 minutes. It is a massive amount of water. On August 28 we had the highest rainfall in 10 years of 130 mm in just four hours. The Badshahpur drain near the chowk was taking 800 cusecs of water. The drinking water requirement for Gurugram is 200 cusecs per day. As much water as Gurugram requires for one whole day passed into the Najafgarh drain and into the Yamuna. This is only going to worsen as more areas get concretised. The water is going to find its way into the Badshahpur drain. So we need strategies to tackle this.

### And the problem of intense traffic jams?

You can look at higher-level solutions like flyovers and underpasses and lower-level solutions like alternative forms of mobility. We started a bus service a month ago on one route with 25 buses on a 22-km loop. It's doing fairly well. We have a ridership of around 8,000. We had estimated around 11,000. We were shocked and revised the fare. The information is that there is a rise in ridership. Gurugram did not have an organised bus service in the past. The level of service is far better than Delhi. It's been well received and it will be expanded to 11 routes by February 2019. We decided to start on one route, give the promised frequency and earn a good reputation.

### You also have immense traffic around Cyber Hub (an IT centre) and Udyog Vihar (an industrial area). It seems like unmanageable chaos.

It's the problem of the entry point and centred around the Delhi-Haryana border. That's where a significant number of these offices are concentrated. These are commuters from Delhi who are not going to shift to buses easily. The proportion of people going to Delhi from Gurugram is less, about 65:35. Both NHAI and GMDA are carrying out projects to decongest the area by creating multiple access points. NH-8 has become a funnel where traffic from all over Delhi and Noida converges. You have to remove the funnel by creating other access points. That is our strategy. ■

# Is KCR invincible after first term?

T.S. Sudhir  
Hyderabad

IN Addagutta locality of Secunderabad, Chandrakala is happy that for the past four months she does not have to stand in a queue with buckets at the community hand pump to fill water. A tap connection in her home has ensured a life of dignity for this 54-year-old homemaker.

“It wasn't just the physical effort of lining up and carrying water pots back home or the ugly fights. It was somehow demeaning that such a basic necessity was not available to us at home. Now, with the tap connection, we feel we are not on the street,” explains Chandrakala.

One reason the movement for the separate state of Telangana took off was a sense of alienation and of being treated as second-class citizens in undivided Andhra Pradesh governed by leaders from Andhra and Rayalaseema regions. It is this feeling of self-respect that K. Chandrasekhar Rao, or KCR as he is popularly known, has tried to address with the kind of welfare schemes he has designed as Telangana's first chief minister since June 2014.

“No woman in Telangana should be seen waiting for a water tanker on the street,” KCR had said while announcing the project and promising to complete it before 2019.

A tap connection for every household is part of Mission Bhagiratha, a ₹40,000-crore project that aims to provide 100 litres per capita per day of potable water to every household in Telangana. The water is being tapped from the Krishna and Godavari rivers, the two major water sources that flow through Telangana.

When KCR decided to dissolve the Telangana assembly eight months ahead of the scheduled elections in April 2019, the belief was that he had done so based on astrological advice. But a closer look at the manner in which he has gone about preparing the ground for a second term reveals an approach reminiscent of J. Jayalalithaa.

In 2016, Tamil Nadu showed its appreciation of Jayalalithaa's welfare measures like the Amma canteens providing subsidised food and the Amma kits for newborns and young mothers by giving her a second successive term. Her welfare measures helped create a narrative of a caring government. KCR's style of governance has taken a leaf out of the AIADMK book and designed populist sops tailor-made for each section of society. By going to the people now, KCR subtly wants to convey that he has finished the job ahead of time.

“I can say 99.8 percent of the promises we made in our manifesto in 2014 have been fulfilled. In addition, we have also implemented measures like Rythu Bandhu that were not part of our manifesto,” he declared proudly.

**FARMER'S FRIEND:** More than halfway through

his term, KCR realised that if there is one statistic that puts Telangana to shame, it is its position among the top three states when it comes to farmer suicides along with Maharashtra and Karnataka. Since Telangana was formed, close to 3,500 farmers have killed themselves, according to activists and opposition leaders. KCR sought to reach out to this politically important sector through his Rythu Bandhu (Farmer's Friend) programme.

Under the scheme, the government gives ₹8,000 per acre as input subsidy (₹4,000 for the kharif crop and ₹4,000 for the rabi crop). In the first financial year, ₹12,000 crore was earmarked for the scheme. In the first instalment that was handed out in April 2018, nearly 5.8 million farmers received cheques. KCR's argument is that this will ensure the farmer is not at the moneylender's mercy for sowing the crop.

But the programme has had its share of controversy. The problem is that it does not cover 1.5 million tenant farmers in Telangana, who are the people actually tilling the fields. The cheques are given to the landlords who are farmers only in name and live in cities, having rented out their fields. It is, in that sense, a double bonanza for them. In addition to the rent, they get a subsidy from the government which they do not pass on to the tenant farmer.

“Of the ₹17,000 crore of agricultural credit that is given by public sector banks, 25 percent goes to people settled in Hyderabad who own agricultural land in the districts. This ₹8,000 too goes to the same landowners instead of the cultivators. Ideally, this scheme should be an incentive for those who do farming. Instead, it has become an incentive to own land,” points out G.V. Ramanjaneyulu, an agriculture scientist.

But KCR did not budge. He made it clear that tenant farmers would not be part of the largesse.

“Most tenant agreements are oral in nature. The government is not a party to the decision to lease land. If we get into it, it will only lead to legal complications. Besides, tenants and terms and conditions can change every year, every crop season, so how can the government keep track?” says C. Parthasarathi, agriculture secretary of Telangana.

To defend its list of farmer beneficiaries, the government's argument is that 39 percent of those who received cheques have land holdings of three acres and less and that does not make them rich farmers.

“We can criticise the implementation of the scheme but it is tough to call the Rythu Bandhu itself wrong,” says N. Ramchander Rao, MLC of the BJP in Telangana. “It is a fact that farmers are in distress, borrowing liberally from private moneylenders at exorbitant rates of interest. This measure is at least small relief.”

What puts KCR in a slightly comfortable position electorally is his intelligent blend of politics and governance. When Jayalalithaa started



P. ANIL KUMAR

**KCR has intelligently targeted his social welfare sops so that they translate into votes. It is a careful blend of politics and governance.**

the Amma canteens, the late Cho Ramaswamy had told this writer, “She is not looking at a vote in every *idli*.” But KCR with his targeted approach can actually afford to do so.

**SUBSIDY FOR SHEPHERDS:** For instance, to specifically target the shepherd community, 8.4 million sheep were distributed at a cost ₹5,000 crore. Each of the 400,000 beneficiaries had to bear one-fourth of the cost (₹1,250) while the government paid the remaining 75 percent (₹93,750). In the last couple of years, these sheep have given birth to an additional 2.5 million sheep. What made such a government scheme stand out was the attention paid to detail.

“We asked the district administrations to grow Style Hemata grass in forest lands and horticulture lands for fodder for sheep. We brought in veterinary doctors and mobile health vans and ensured each lorry carried only four units of sheep to avoid health problems,” said T. Srinivas Yadav, animal husbandry minister.

**TWO-BEDROOM FLATS:** One of the promises made by KCR's Telangana Rashtra Samiti (TRS) government was it would construct two-bedroom flats of 560 sq feet for the poor. To build 2.74 lakh houses, the government earmarked ₹17,660 crore. But in four years the government has been able to complete less than 12,000 houses even though construction is on to construct 1.5 million houses. KCR's hope was that the dream of stepping into their own houses in the next few months would net him the votes of beneficiaries and their families.

“Construction of the flat allotted to our family has begun. Hopefully it will be completed by end of 2019,” says Gattaiah, a daily wage worker whose slum dwelling was cleared by the authorities in late 2017. He and many others were handed occupation certificates. It is this constituency, that cuts across caste and religion lines and is based on a *roti, kapda, makaan* template that KCR hopes will work for him this December 7.

**SHAADI MUBARAK:** The government also targeted specific schemes for communities. Kalyana Lakshmi and Shaadi Mubarak help families with funds for their daughters' marriage. Initially meant for Muslim and Dalit families, the scheme was also an effort to curb the sale and trafficking of young girls by getting them married to old Arab Sheikhs from the Gulf. Started in 2014, the scheme gave ₹51,000 to each family but was increased to ₹1 lakh and then extended to Backward Castes and upper caste BPL families as well. Over 400,000 families have availed of this help so far.

“The Shaadi Mubarak scheme has helped so many Muslim families in the Old City area of Hyderabad. It shows that our government has its heart in the right place and is able to design schemes that help the most needy,” says Mahmood Ali, deputy chief minister of Telangana.

**REVIVING LAKES:** But KCR has also shown the sagacity to look ahead. His Mission Kakatiya proposes to rejuvenate over 46,000 lakes and tanks in Telangana in order to provide micro irrigation facilities to farmers. Nearly 5,000 of these water

bodies are chain-linked lakes, with an ayacut of close to 2.5 million acres. So far, work is going on at 27,000 lakes that have been identified under the scheme. In fact, all 46,000 lakes in the state have been geo-tagged to ensure they don't get encroached on by corrupt government machinery.

“In my childhood, I used to swim in this pond. But since the silt was never removed it became unusable. In the past three years, so many of our water bodies have been desilted in our villages. They were filled with fresh rainwater which can now be used for irrigation, bathing and other needs. Earlier they were either encroached on or garbage was dumped in them,” says Mritunjay, a farmer in Medak district.

The opposition is imploring the people of Telangana not to fall for what it says are cosmetic works done in some districts. It alleges huge corruption in irrigation works.

“The KCR government implemented irrigation related projects wherever he and his family members received commissions,” claims Uttam Kumar Reddy, Telangana Congress chief. “When Telangana was formed, the state debt was ₹69,000 crore. Today it stands at ₹2 lakh crore.”

But it is not just the rural vote that KCR has on his radar. The TRS was very weak in Hyderabad. The Andhra population settled here was seen as inimical to the movement for a separate state during the agitation. In 2014, the TRS won just two seats from the Greater Hyderabad area but by the time the municipal polls were held in 2016, the TRS gained strength, winning 99 of the 150 wards in the corporation.

For the urban English-speaking population KCR offers the feel-good factor. Telangana has pitched itself as an investor-friendly state with its I-pass policy that makes it mandatory for every industrialist to get all government clearances within 15 days, or else it is deemed as given.

The state ranked first jointly last year in the Ease of Doing Business rankings and came second by a whisker this year, proof that attracting investment and creating employment is the government's constant focus. The fact that Ikea, the Swedish furniture company, chose to set up its first shop in Hyderabad, endorses the city's image as an investor-friendly destination.

For its youthful workforce, Telangana is focusing on the Cost and Quality of Doing Business. This was after feedback revealed that when IT majors like Infosys, Wipro and TCS recruited young people from Telangana, they had to be retrained for the next seven months to mould them for their requirements. This meant that those employees did not generate any revenue for that period as they could not be deployed on any ongoing projects.

“We found out from these big recruiters the kind of software and applications the new recruits would work on when they joined and introduced that in the fourth year syllabus. As a result, the seven months' retraining programme has been reduced to just 15 days of orientation, bringing down the cost factor significantly for these companies,” says Jayesh Ranjan, Industries Secretary of Telangana.

Telangana is now in election mode. KCR and his team are trying to ensure that the beneficiaries of his government's schemes turn up in the polling booths to express gratitude by voting for the TRS' ambassador car symbol. ■



Joseph Das carries Sarita in his arms while Guria playfully pinches her cheek



The clean and functional men's ward

PICTURES BY PRASANTA BISWAS

# A HOME FOR THE DESTITUTE

## Ashabari provides a healing touch

Subir Roy  
Kolkata

SARITA is around three, sweet-looking and healthy. But she was not so when she and her mother, Guria, first came in. She was so emaciated she could hardly walk, her legs bent as if she had polio. Guria is a Muslim from Pilkhana, a large slum in Howrah across the Ganga from Kolkata. A Hindu man from Moradabad in UP had taken her along and there they lived as man and wife.

Then one day the man told her, let's go live where I work and there you can cook. He put mother and child in the ladies compartment of a train to take them to his workplace and that was the last they saw of him. When Guria got down at Howrah station she had nowhere to go as she did not know her home address or the way to it. Mother and child somehow survived on the city streets until another woman, a former inmate of Ashabari who used to come for free medicines, brought the two there.

Guria giggles like a girl well below her age and is mentally challenged, though with time and treatment has grown better. Seeing the mother's condition, Joseph Das and his wife have moved the little girl out of the general women's ward to their own home and there she lives like a granddaughter of the couple. Sarita is clearly very attached to Das and does not seem to have enough of cuddling, perhaps out of an ingrained sense of insecurity.

Manju D'Souza's story is far different from Guria's. We catch a glimpse of her sitting at a

window in the women's ward of Ashabari, a dignified greying woman with glasses. It seems she and her son didn't know where to go after her husband died and ended up with the Missionaries of Charity founded by Mother Teresa. But as the Missionaries won't accept a person with money (she has a bit), Manju and her son are in Das' care at Ashabari. As we move on Das tells us that both mother and son are mentally challenged.

Both Guria, who giggles, and Manju, who keeps staring stonily, look mentally challenged. Anup Mahato in the men's ward is totally different. He looks and is a hundred percent normal, speaks clear English, and has been at Ashabari for over a decade. He is of great help to Das as he drives well and stands by to drive the home's ambulance when the regular driver is absent. He says he was in the army and his son lives in the US. There seems absolutely nothing wrong with him but for the fact that he is an alcoholic, confides Das, quickly running through whatever money he comes by.

Joseph Das, 67, is the founder and spirit behind Ashabari, Calcutta Home of Hope. He started it nearly two decades ago, in 2000 on Gandhi Jayanti (October 2), to take care of dying destitutes. Over time it has been found that those who are lucky enough to recover from an acute physical condition are often left mentally challenged, needing clinical attention. Thus, Ashabari now also looks after the mentally challenged. There is also an active effort to locate the families of those who have recovered in both mind and body, so that they can be reunited

with their families.

**WITH MOTHER TERESA:** Das, a Malayali, first served for 12 years as a member of the Missionaries of Charity Brothers (also founded by Mother Teresa), setting up homes for destitutes all over the country. He worked very closely with Mother in a senior position (he looked after the transport operations of the Missionaries) until he left the organisation shortly before Mother passed away in 1998 and set up Ashabari in 1999. He is married to Lilly Joseph, a nurse by profession, who is Das's partner in Ashabari. They have an 18-year-old daughter now pursuing her undergraduate studies.

Ashabari is registered as an NGO and runs on philanthropy. The number of inmates at its centre on the outskirts of Kolkata in Amtala, South 24-Parganas district, varies. When we first spoke to Das he said, "Till yesterday there were 120 inmates, but two passed away today and so there are now 118. Actual capacity is around 60-90 but most often there are around 120. Earlier I picked up destitutes from Howrah and Sealdah stations and also Kolkata's streets. Now I do not go around looking for inmates but take them in when I find them. Most of the present inmates are from around 10 km." Destitutes are sometimes handed over by the police, in critical condition. Then the caring touch is applied, curative or palliative.

Interestingly, Ashabari began as an outdoor medical clinic before offering a home for the truly left behind. When the home was being constructed,

Das recalls, "I found the local people needed a lot of medical care and so passed on to them some unused medicines given by friends. Word spread and soon a weekly clinic, serving around 500 at its peak, got going." Though public healthcare delivery in the area has improved, the clinic still serves around 100 a week.

**LOCAL DOCTORS:** "Initially I was doing the job of a doctor with the paramedical training I had received. Then I was joined by a local doctor, Dilip Kumar Golder, and I became his compounder. Then other local doctors came forward to help. Initially they worked for free." Dr Golder, 58, is unassuming, focuses on general medicine, and is without any specialisation. He admits he is a bit into *samaj seva* and recalls that it was his father who hand-held him into it, saying that this was a must for a doctor.

After all these years he still visits the weekly clinic at Ashabari. Basic medical care includes dressing

and treating festering maggot-infested wounds that many come with. Those needing in-patient care are admitted into his 25-bed nursing home. The psychiatrist working with him also attends the Saturday clinic. Dr Golder marvels at the transformation that routinely takes place at Ashabari. "When they come in, some of the inmates can hardly speak. Then many recover, are able to say where they come from and go back home."

Ashabari has always run on donations hence financial ups and downs have been a part of its existence. But for the first 14 years there was no serious problem as there was regular help from a Spanish organisation, Calcutta Ondoan, run by a volunteer couple who worked with Mother Teresa. But this cooperation came to an end around four years ago, in 2014, when the Spanish donors wanted the operation to expand and run with better facilities but Das wanted to run things on a scale which he himself could handle.

**RUN ON DONATIONS:** Ashabari continues to run on donations from friends in India and abroad. Plus children from two schools periodically help with provisions — Sushila Birla Girls School Kolkata's posh Minto Park area and K E Carmel School in the same area run by the Carmelite fathers of Kerala. Ashabari employs 15 people and spends around ₹3 lakh to ₹3.5 lakh a year and "at any given time we have resources for a couple of months ahead. I strongly believe I am doing God's work and he will take care of our needs."

Every month Ashabari purchases medicines worth ₹50,000 for free distribution. Significantly, more than half, ₹30,000, goes in purchasing psychiatric medicines. "We manage because I personally run things," says Das.

We do most of our talking seated in a large room with a bank of medicine cabinets along one wall, packing cases with medicines on the floor, a sewing machine against another wall and a good part of the room taken up by a long table with several chairs around it. There is also a cupboard in one corner with what looks like the control for a sound and public address system. The room serves as reception, office and weekly clinic. "Every evening I hold a prayer meeting here which is carried by the public address system," says Das.

To get to Ashabari you have to turn off the

Baruipur-Amtala highway down a narrow lane and then go into another narrower lane that can barely take a car. The complex has three buildings, a two-storied one with the men's wards, another one with the women's ward and a third one where Das and family and, of course, Sarita live.

**MEN'S WARD:** The men's ward on the first floor has a locked iron grill gate. It is opened to let us in. Das says these inmates are mentally challenged and may go astray if the door is kept open. Along an entire side is a long narrow table and bench on which are seated dozens of inmates with anticipation written on their faces. "They know it is meal time and they are waiting for lunch," says Das. The gate to the women's ward is not locked and there we meet Mrs Das, who is 60, matronly and jolly.

When I enter the men's ward my unaccustomed senses detect an odour. I look around and find everything clean and the men bathed and in clean, simple attire. I realise the odour comes from bodies that don't use talcum powder — a powerful body odour sans the use of personal care products. The whole place is utterly functional, signalling a lower middle class lifestyle, running on enough to meet necessities without a paisa to waste on non-essentials.

It looks a bit run-down, no wonder because financial support has been unpredictable for four years now. But then fresh construction is going on in two buildings. Ashabari is able to save on costs because some of the older inmates who are recovered help look after the newer ones who need personal care.

Financial trouble is not the only hurdle Ashabari has faced. At one time there were as many as 3,000 women, members of bank-linked self-help groups (SHGs), helped by dedicated Ashabari staff, pursuing a range of income earning activities. But it was discovered that the staff were selling chit fund products to the women. When asked to stop, they went on strike. Das then shut down this programme, though some of the women are still with SHGs on their own.

Since Das is pushing 70 I ask him about succession planning. Mrs Das is able to run the place well on her own even when he is away for a longish period like a month. As for the longer-term future, Das comes up with a reply classically his, "God knows." He means it, quite literally. ■

### Samita's World

by SAMITA RATHOR



# Longer hours, lower wages, less security, fewer women

Civil Society News  
New Delhi

JOB creation was on the agenda of the BJP government when it came to power four years ago. As India readies for the next electoral battle, jobs have become a topic of intense debate among economists. Some say jobs have increased, others say jobs have decreased, depending on their political affiliation.

A more nuanced view is presented by the Azim Premji University's (APU) Centre for Sustainable Employment. It recently released a report, "The State of Working India 2018", which attempts to answer basic questions of India's job market: who is looking for work, where is the work, how good is the work and who does the work.

The objective of the report is to "develop a road map to create just and sustainable employment for all," writes Anurag Behar, Vice Chancellor of APU.

The report's lead author is Amit Basole, School of Liberal Studies, APU, and it has contributions by noted academics. A lot of charts, maps, graphs and other data from official sources and field surveys have been demystified to present a cogent picture of the quantity of employment and unemployment, the sectors and industries that are creating jobs, the states that are performing better, the quality of jobs, and the effect of caste and gender disparities.

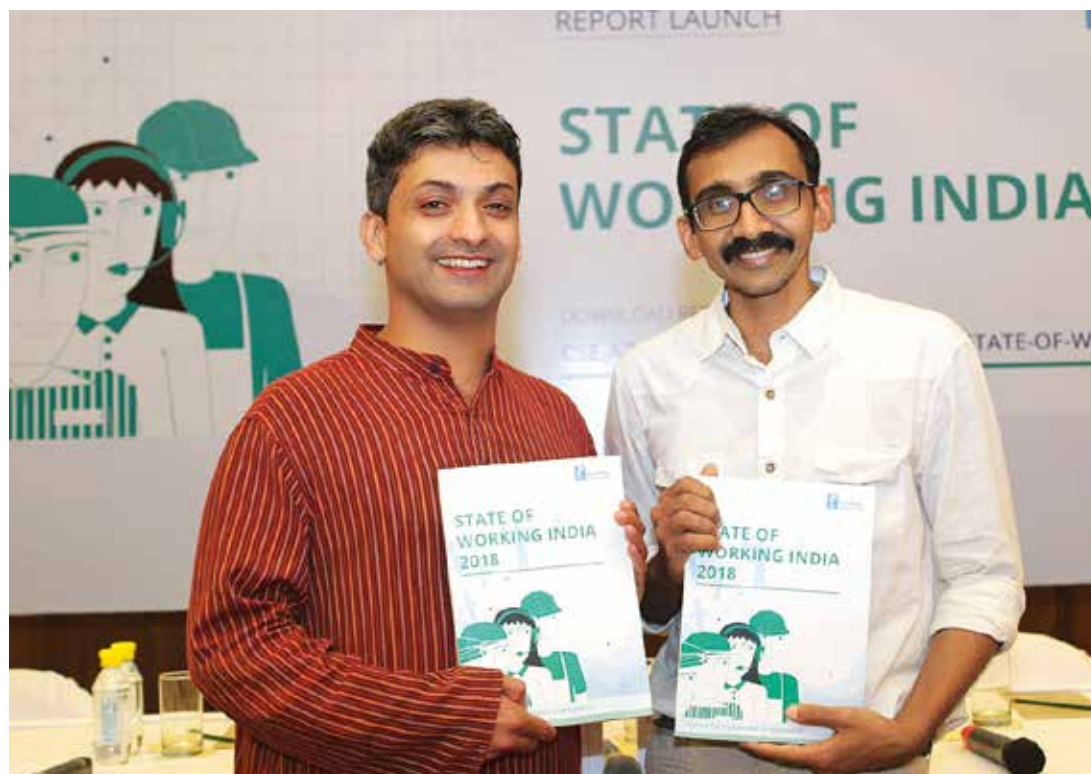
Here are some highlights of the report:

A rise in GDP doesn't create jobs. It used to be said that India's problem was underemployment and low wages. The new feature of its economy is a high rate of open unemployment which is now over 5 percent. For the youth and the better educated, it is as much as 16 percent.

Unemployment is visible across India, with the exception of Karnataka, Chhattisgarh and Gujarat. But the most unemployment is experienced by young, male graduates in northern states. This perhaps explains the agitations for reservation in government jobs. The problem isn't of merely providing jobs but of creating decent, better-paying jobs.

Wages are rising very slowly. Eighty-two percent of male and 92 percent of female workers earn less than ₹10,000 per month. The minimum salary recommended by the Seventh Pay Commission and demanded by labour activists and unions is ₹18,000 per month. But even in the organised manufacturing sector 90 percent of the industries pay below ₹18,000. The situation is worse in the unorganised sector.

One survey from West Bengal found women did multiple jobs — tailoring, mid-day meals, brick kiln work, daily labour — to earn anything between ₹2,700 and ₹6,800.



Arjun Jayadev and Amit Basole with their report

**In the organised manufacturing sector 90 percent of the industries pay below ₹18,000. In the unorganised sector it is worse.**

The organised manufacturing sector no longer yields the number of jobs it used to, regardless of investment. The outliers are knitwear, plastics and footwear which provided jobs and some increase in wages.

**CONTRACTS, LONG HOURS:** Jobs in the organised manufacturing sector are, on the whole, not 'decent, remunerative or stable'. As much as 30 percent of workers, mostly in capital-intensive industries, are contract workers or, worse still, trainee and apprentice workers, who are paid even less.

Workers are slogging long hours for less money. Labour productivity increased by six times in the past 30 years but wages increased by only 1.5 times. Even managers and supervisors are being paid less. "The labour share of income in organised manufacturing has collapsed to around 10 percent," states the report. Such a scenario increases inequality.

The gap between the organised sector and the unorganised sector is shrinking. In fact, wages in some segments of the unorganised sector rose more than in the organised sector.

According to field surveys and anecdotal evidence, firms choose to grow by setting up a series of small factories instead of a large one, to duck labour laws. The reason is that laws are based on factory size and not firm size. There could be under-reporting of workers too. In 2011, an estimated 54 million workers were in manufacturing as per

household surveys. But firms surveyed reported only 47 million workers.

**SERVICE SECTORS:** Employment in service sectors, including IT and retail, increased from 11.5 percent in 2011 to 15 percent in 2015. But more than 50 percent of service sector employment still consists of petty trade, domestic services and other types of small-scale and informal employment. Also to be noted is the structural shift taking place in the IT sector with artificial intelligence, robotics and block chain gaining ground.

Sixteen percent of service sector workers are women and 60 percent of them are domestic workers. The number of women in higher paid jobs as senior officers, legislators, managers shows a declining trend. Women constitute 22 percent of workers in manufacturing, mostly in textiles and garments, tobacco, education, health and domestic workers and they earn on average 65 percent of what men earn. But this gap is narrowing in the organised manufacturing sector and is less among well-educated and regular female workers.

While women's participation in the workforce is low, there are variations across states. Only 20 women are in paid employment for every 100 men in UP. But in Tamil Nadu it is 50 and in the northeast as high as 70. According to some field studies, women don't join the labour force not because of social constraints but due to lack of opportunity.

**GOVT SCHEMES:** It is the government that is creating the maximum jobs for women through MGNREGA, and by employing women as ASHA workers and *anganwadi* workers. The women are paid stipends. What has been created is a vast rural workforce of underpaid workers with basic skills. Women are also moving up from being primary school teachers to becoming secondary school teachers.

Public policy is reducing caste disparities. Most Scheduled Castes (SCs) are employed in the leather industry (46 percent). They make up 18.5 percent of

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# Matri Sudha fights malnutrition with Poshan Champions

PICTURES BY SHREY GUPTA

Kavita Charanji  
New Delhi

**B**ARKHA'S husband, Pintu, earns ₹7,000 a month as a salesman in a company. "I don't spend much on food, but we don't go hungry," she says. Her two older children, Tanisha and Lucky, look healthy as they run around their cramped house in Prem Nagar in Lal Kuan village on the Mehrauli-Badarpur road in New Delhi. But the youngest, five-year-old Ayush, is emaciated and pale.

Ayush is lucky to have survived at all. He was born at home and weighed just 1.5 kg. He wasn't breastfed. A victim of domestic violence, Barkha fractured her leg during her third pregnancy and could not register herself with the ASHA or anganwadi worker. Neither did they reach out to her.

It was Arvind Singh and his team from Matri Sudha, based in Lal Kuan's Nardan Basti, who spotted Ayush. They were on one of their routine growth monitoring visits and turned up at Barkha's doorstep. The team was appalled to find that Ayush weighed merely 5.65 kg instead of around 8.3 kg which is the standard weight for a child his age. Ayush couldn't even sit up. The child fell in the Severe Acute Malnourished category. Half the children in Delhi's slums are underweight, according to a study by CRY (Child Relief and You) in 2015.

In July the city was shocked when three children, who were eight, four and two years old, died of prolonged starvation in Mandawali slum in East Delhi. The family didn't have a ration card. Neither were the children enrolled in the *anganwadi* centre which would have entitled them to one meal and alerted the *anganwadi* and ASHA worker to their impoverished condition.

The most marginalised families and their children need to be identified and helped by an alert team along with the *anganwadi* workers, ASHAs and the community. This is exactly what Matri Sudha and its Poshan (Nutrition) Champions are doing with



Arvind Singh with Matri Sudha's Poshan Champions

great impact.

The team saw to it that the baby was registered with the local *anganwadi* centre, linked to the immunisation process and to a community health worker. The obdurate father had to be threatened with police action unless he took the child for screening to the local primary healthcare centre (PHC). The father finally relented. Ayush was

referred to Kalawati Saran Children's Hospital. The Matri Sudha team accompanied Barkha and Ayush. The child was diagnosed with rickets caused by severe Vitamin D deficiency. He would never walk without surgery, warned the doctors. Fortunately, with medicines, nutrition counselling and Barkha's loving care, Ayush can stand now though he barely speaks. He undergoes speech therapy at Kalawati

Saran Hospital and will in time be ready for school. Barkha is now one of Matri Sudha's 11 Poshan Champions in Lal Kuan. The team includes eight community members, one ASHA worker and two *anganwadi* workers.

"Malnutrition is not just related to poverty but to the family's environment. We felt there should be a group of resource persons within the community



A cooked meal at the *anganwadi*

who could implement our objective of improving the nutritional status of children below six years, adolescent girls, and pregnant and lactating mothers. We wanted to create local leadership around the issue," says Arvind Singh, head of Matri Sudha.

Poshan Champions like Kavita Chauhan, Seema, Shamima Begum and Kavita Kumar are today important change agents in Lal Kuan. *Anganwadi* worker Kavita Chauhan commutes all the way from her home in Greater Noida to the *anganwadi* centre at Nardan Basti in Lal Kuan which has become a landmark for the community.

Chauhan says proudly, "It is because of my constant follow-up with the authorities that mid-day meals have improved." In one corner of the *anganwadi* centre is a weighing scale on which children are weighed monthly though the norm at most centres is to weigh children every three months. If Chauhan notices that a child is severely

malnourished, she weighs the child three times a month. "Along with the Matri Sudha team and ASHA worker, I never fail to visit the homes of pregnant and lactating mothers to explain the importance of good nutrition, antenatal check-ups, vaccination and immunisation. We also hold regular meetings with women on subjects like breastfeeding at the *anganwadi* centre," she says.

Community members have become more receptive to regular growth monitoring of their children and are involved in maternal and child health issues, according to Chauhan. Also, the women themselves call meetings.

Poshan Champion Kavita Kumar, who is 25, holds up her healthy two-and-a-half years old baby boy, Vansh. She is a role model for the community. Motivated by the Matri Sudha team, Kumar, a victim of domestic violence, never skipped a single

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## Longer hours, lower wages, less security

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all workers. But, due to reservation, both SCs and Scheduled Tribes (STs) are better represented in public administration. They also earn less than upper castes (56 percent) on the whole, but the gap narrows with better education.

The report also found that the crafts sector is a big employer and central to the rural non-farm economy. India has over 500 officially listed arts and crafts. The sector can provide millions of jobs that are eco-friendly and enhance existing skills. But, the government has to treat crafts as an industry and not as some kind of conservation exercise.

Workers leaving agriculture are mainly moving to construction. But only 10 percent of the construction sector is formalised. Another sector

which is providing employment is the security sector which now employs seven million people.

The rise of the construction sector is also due to public policy (in this case MGNREGA). Almost 5.8 million women workers were added to the rural construction sector over 2004-11, out of whom more than 50 percent were in public construction work.

Other interesting information is that the pattern of migration is changing with people from Bihar and UP migrating to Kerala and Tamil Nadu instead of Delhi and Maharashtra.

Other surprises are that Punjab, perceived as an agricultural state, has fewer people in farming than any other state in north and central India. In manufacturing, West Bengal, with its large unorganised manufacturing sector, is on a par with Gujarat and Tamil Nadu. Kerala, Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, and Goa are leaders in service sector employment. Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, and Bihar as well as

several smaller northeastern states still report agriculture as their primary occupation.

The report recommends:

- A National Employment Policy to create quality jobs for the people.
- An expansion of MGNREGA.
- Encouraging larger manufacturing industries to come up through wage subsidies and incentives for skilling workers.
- Examining state-level policies which are working.
- Public investment in agriculture especially in modernising markets.
- A Universal Basic Services (UBS) programme that invests in education, health, housing, and public transport and safety to create jobs, human capital, and public goods.
- Job creation can be fruitfully tied to investments in green energy and climate adaptation. ■

The study can be downloaded from the Azim Premji University's Centre for Sustainable Employment's website.

## 24<sup>th</sup> NATIONAL MEDIA AWARD PROGRAMME 2019

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Arvind Singh with children at an anganwadi

antenatal and post-natal check-up at the PHC. Her son was always immunised on time.

Shamima Begum has also earned recognition as a Poshan Champion and as an ideal mother-in-law. "I have four daughters-in-law whom I looked after very well when they conceived. My seven grandchildren are healthy as I explained the importance of breastfeeding to their mothers. Now I always check if new nutritional supplements or vaccinations are necessary. I share my knowledge at community meetings," says Shamima. Matri Sudha plans to draw in more fathers to the discussions.

Large Poshan Sabhas are also organised by Matri Sudha. "These *sabhas* help us create awareness and enable sensitisation. We share positive stories by people themselves. The *sabhas* also connect people on the issue of malnutrition," says Singh. Recently, Matri Sudha organised Poshan Sabhas in Nardan Basti and V.P. Singh Camp. The Poshan Sabhas were led by enthusiastic youth and adolescents. One youth member provided statistics and talked about the dire consequences of malnutrition. Another

**It took time to win over parents but today they are keen that their children go to the *anganwadi* get their meals and their growth monitored.**

narrated the story of two malnourished adolescents.

It hasn't been easy for Matri Sudha to catch the attention of the community. When they began, misconceptions abounded about growth monitoring of children. Parents felt that weighing children regularly would hamper their growth. The *anganwadi* centres remained deserted. The Matri Sudha team was going door to door and monitoring the growth of every child in Lal Kuan.



Barkha with her three children

The organisation then decided to strengthen the *anganwadi* centres through community mobilisation and capacity building of *anganwadi* workers so that they were well equipped to work amidst the community. Matri Sudha showed the *anganwadi* workers how to carry out growth monitoring and map progress. They also prepared their own growth charts to complement growth monitoring charts based on WHO standards. They held regular community meetings at the *anganwadi* centres. It was a zero cost exercise, says Singh.

The outcome has been encouraging. Today the community is keen that their children go to the *anganwadi* centre, get their meals and their growth monitored. An increasing number of children who were severely underweight have improved. The recent Poshan Sabhas witnessed larger turnouts.

Matri Sudha launched a Freedom from Malnutrition Campaign on Independence Day. "Though we have got freedom from colonial rule, children need to be freed from malnutrition," says Singh. The campaign aims to make Delhi free of malnutrition.

The group has key demands — a state plan of action on malnutrition with a dedicated budget, better quality and more nutritious food for children in government schools and *anganwadi* centres and a State Food Commission to monitor implementation of the Food Security Act. ■

# Organic boosts tribal incomes from cotton

Usha Rai  
Barwani (MP)

**I**N 2015, after growing Bt cotton for 15 years, around 7,000 Bhil, Bhilala, Korku and Gond tribal farmers of the Nimar region of Madhya Pradesh switched to organic farming. Every year they find their cotton yields improving along with their income.

When the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP) stepped into Niwali block of Barwani district in Nimar region with its development package in 2006, cotton farming had become risky with extensive use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides. Farmers were not earning enough from their harvests, debt was increasing and the health of the farmers and their families was deteriorating.

The Aga Khan Foundation partnered AKRSP in 2015 to promote non-Bt cotton and use of organic fertilisers like *amrit pani*, bio pest repellants and compost manure.

Kesarimal, 45, of Chatli village, who switched to organic farming on his four acres, recalls that 10 years ago he fell ill after spraying his cotton crop with chemical fertilisers. Other farmers and their families too suffered breathing problems. Mukesh, from the adjoining Kusumiya village, says asthma and TB cases increased. He contracted chikungunya and his hands itched. The fields too suffered. The soil turned so hard that it could not be tilled by bulls.

It has taken Kesarimal's fields three years to completely convert to organic farming, enabling him to get premier rates for organic cotton. Though every year after detoxification yields improve, it is only in the third year that the full benefits of organic farming are reaped, says Iqbal Baig, the AKRSP representative. This year Kesarimal has got 15 percent more money for his organic cotton crop and he says proudly, "It is the best cotton in the market."

**REGISTERING FARMERS:** Some 1,500 farmers of 39 villages of Niwali block have been registered under three Internal Control Systems, each with 500 farmers, and can be digitally tracked by the government's Agricultural & Processed Food Export Development Authority (APEDA). All do organic farming of cotton and other crops and, as registered members of APEDA, are entitled to organic farming rates.

There are about 20 organic cotton dealers in the Nimar region. Farmers keep their cotton at home and buyers visit their homes and test the cotton to verify its organic nature. In their enthusiasm to get a better price, farmers who have not been properly counselled could spray water on the cotton to make it heavier. However, buyers are sharp and the farmer could end up a loser. In the Nimar region cotton is

grown in the kharif season (July to October) and the cotton is picked three times. The quality of the first picking is the best, says Kesarimal.

Farmers from non-organic farming areas have been visiting Kesarimal to understand the conversion so that they can replicate it in their fields. He explains how intercropping of cotton with marigold, *moong*, *tur* and *bhindi* attracts insects, leaving the main crop, cotton, pest-free. Since the leaves of the cotton plant curl up, looking distinctly



Women make the soyabean tonic



The cotton goes through a quality check

unhealthy if mosquitoes sit on them, plastic with gum is used as a sticky trap.

The cultivation of organic cotton is going hand-in-hand with the making of homemade fertilisers and insecticides and women play an important role in preparing the biocides.

**HOMEGROWN FERTILISERS:** Among the popular homegrown fertilisers is soyabean tonic. It is a concoction of jaggery, ground drumstick leaves, mahua, and two litres of cow urine. Properly stirred, it is kept for eight to 10 days till it's ready for sprinkling on the crops with spray pumps. There is also a five-leaf manure made by grinding leaves of

pumpkin, drumstick, neem, dhatura and akaab and mixing the paste into 10 litres cow's urine and 10 kg of fresh cow dung.

Kept in big drums for 60 days, the mixture is stirred repeatedly till it becomes manure. It also acts as an insecticide for all crops. Kesarimal says proudly that he and his wife have all the ingredients for making leaf manure on their four acres. Compost is also made over three months, using leaf litter from the fields and cow urine in layers.

At Kusumiya village, in addition to the soyabean tonic and the five-leaf manure, a blend of onion, garlic and chillies makes a potent pest control tonic. Bhupinder, 25, one of the younger farmers, who looks after 6.5 acres, says with pride that he keeps three cows and two buffaloes for milk, butter and cow's urine. Since a litre of cow's urine costs anything from ₹20 to ₹40 in the market in the organic cotton growing areas of Barwani, farmers collect it from their cows.

In addition to cow's urine, cow horns are being used to restore soil vitality. The use of cow horn manure or fermented cow dung is the first step farmers take when they switch to organic farming. The cow horns are filled with the dung of a well-fed lactating cow to ensure there is calcium in the dung and then buried in winter, the open end facing downwards, in a pit 16 to 18 inches deep. It is covered with soil that has been enriched with good quality compost. Arjun of AKRSP, who works closely with farmers, says in the winter months the soil has growth energies which are absorbed into the dung through the horn. The preparation is ready in four months when it turns into humus and is stored in glass containers.

The making of cow dung manure is one of the many things taught at the farm field schools found in many villages of Niwali block, attended by women and men. With colourful information posters, vibrant discussions are held here on organic farming, preparing of various bio pesticides and prevailing market prices. With the new range of locally brewed pesticides, only harmful insects are destroyed and there has been a return of earthworms — vital for soil rejuvenation — says Bhupinder. AKRSP representatives make it a point to attend the meeting held on a fixed day every month.

**A WIN-WIN:** With homegrown biocides there is a saving of ₹10,000 to ₹15,000 on fertilisers and pesticides on five acres, says Mukesh. Cotton yields are increasing. As against 15 quintals earlier, last year he got 17 quintals and the price of organic cotton is higher. "It's a win-win situation and our soil too has improved," he says. Gyan Singh, who grows organic wheat, says it sells at ₹2,500 a quintal as against ₹1,800 for normal wheat. With improved soil fertility almost all farmers have started growing organic vegetables and maize.

Efforts are now on for branding the organic cotton of the farmers of Niwali block who have formed the Satya Sanathan Kisan Samooh. Farmers' Interest Groups have grown and have linkages with the Farmers' Producers Company at Niwali which ensures a good price for crops. Of the four women entrepreneurs of Niwali, two are board directors of the company. ■

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# A wealth of rare seeds for farmers

Shree Padre  
Thrissur

ON September 28 an interested group of farmers was escorted to an unusual field at the National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources (NBPGR) in Thrissur. There they saw an amazing 600 accessions of okra or *bhindi* growing in the field with some being rare ones. The farmers were told they could ask for any variety they wanted. Once the seeds were ready they could come and collect them for free.

Earlier, the NBPGR wasn't opening its doors to farmers and allowing them to select seeds from its vast and rare collection. Thanks to a change in policy, farmers can now acquire rare seeds that aren't available in the open market.

Dr John Joseph, principal scientist of NBPGR in Thrissur, took the initiative to bring about this important change in policy. "Our contention is that it is better to take farmers into confidence for the objective of biodiversity conservation," he explains. "If we don't do that, many of our old and promising varieties of vegetables and other crops will disappear in today's market-based rat-race."

His recommendation was accepted by NBPGR's top leadership. Thanks to this change in policy, NBPGR in Thrissur has been convening an 'okra field day' for the past three years. For the first two years, it wasn't a well-known event. This year, it was posted on social media and attracted more attention.

Six hundred accessions of okra? Actually, the Thrissur regional centre of the NBPGR has double that number — 1,400 accessions of okra painstakingly collected not only from all over India, but from all over the world. The germplasm of these seeds are kept at the Akola NBPGR regional centre as reserve.

**SAMPLE PACKETS:** Once farmers have made their choice, the pods are dried, the seeds are collected and small sample packets handed over to them based on availability and selection. But before that, the institute mandatorily keeps some seeds for conservation.

The NBPGR has 10 regional centres, each in India's different agro-ecological zones, with its headquarters at Delhi. It has a vast and diverse collection of vegetable, medicinal and other crops and their wild relatives. Seeds of every crop are stored in cold rooms in two locations, with one serving as a fallback. Another set of all these seeds are stored for a long time in low temperature at the NBPGR's New Delhi headquarters.

To retain the viability of seeds, they have to be sown in soil at least once in two decades. But to ensure that their viability is not lost at any cost, this process is undertaken once in 12 years. Out of all



Farmers amid the okra plants in NBPGR in Thrissur

PICTURES BY NBPGR



Dr John Joseph

the seeds thus produced, NBPGR compulsorily acquires a huge quantity to re-store them and also sends them to its New Delhi headquarters. If there are any seeds left, they can be distributed.

But the practice, till recently, was to give excess seeds only to government agencies like universities and particular farms, if they requested them. The NBPGR's policy didn't permit it to make these seeds available to farmers.

**CHOSEN VARIETIES:** Among vegetable crops, farmers tend to retain only commercially successful varieties. This emphasis on a few chosen varieties eventually reduces local biodiversity. This is one major reason biodiversity is slowly being lost in all cultivated crops. Several good varieties begin to become extinct.

Take, for example, okra. Pusa sawani, a dark green and short variety, released by ICAR in 1969, has overtaken all other varieties in the country. Today, when you travel to cities, whether in north India or south India, you will see a profusion of this variety in markets.

Interested farmers need to send an intimation of their participation and register themselves. After a briefing, they are taken to the fields. Eight plants of each accession are generally grown. The names of every accession are printed on a nearby board. Farmers go round, select the accessions they want and submit the indent in writing.

Once their seeds are ready, NBPGR informs them by phone, mail or WhatsApp. The NBPGR has a WhatsApp group of progressive farmers who are interested in newer and promising varieties. Farmers who had requested seeds have to come and collect the seed packets from the centre themselves.

No money is charged. But farmers must agree to two conditions. One, they won't pass on these seeds to any foreign national. Second, they will not give these seeds to nurseries with commercial interests in mind. But farmers can use these seeds for commercial crop production.

Farmers select according to the appearance of the crop. But it's a unique opportunity for them to grow new varieties and evaluate each according to quantity of yield, taste, susceptibility to or resistance to diseases like yellow mosaic.

"A variety that has no ridge is considered very tasty and is much sought after now. Even in the market, it is said to command a higher price. Mappas curry made with this *bhindi* in coconut milk, they say, is really outstanding," says Dr Joseph.

**RICE, MILLETS:** This centre organised a similar field day for rice and little millets last year. But the response to millets was lukewarm. This year the NBPGR plans to do another one on little millets. It is uncertain whether other centres are also inviting farmers to take a look at their seed varieties and select what they like.

In the pipeline is a 'yard-long bean' or vegetable cowpea field day for farmers. Called *payar* in Malayalam and *alasande* in Kannada, this bean variety is even more popular than *bhindi*. The NBPGR has a collection of more than 100 yard-long beans which it has collected by travelling all over the country.

All these yard-long beans are longer than 20 inches. One particular collection is 75 to 80 inches long. "We have evaluated about 20 collections that are superior to released varieties like 'Arka Mangala' and 'Geethika,'" says Dr Joseph.

"We have very good relations with farmers. Some of them are regular visitors. If they come to Thrissur, they don't return without visiting our centre," says Dr Joseph. Some farmers offer the NBPGR their own rare varieties of planting materials too. A vegetable cowpea thus provided by Abdul Khader, a retired policeman from Palakkad, is quite promising and has been named Velamthavalam.

The NBPGR in Thrissur has an impressive collection. It has 160 collections of amaranthus, 65 of salad cucumber, 23 of ash gourd, 85 of pumpkin, 265 of bitter gourd, 65 of snake gourd and eight of ivy gourd.

"If we are certain that the farmers who approach us won't misuse our seeds, we do provide them small quantities of rare varieties, subject to availability," Dr Joseph adds. ■

Contact: Phone -- NBPGR Thrissur, (0487) 237 0499, 94478 89787  
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## Harvesting water. Harnessing futures.

In a perfect world, children lead happy, carefree childhoods. They spend their days learning in school, while their free time is spent at play with friends. However, for the children of Nuh in Haryana, this is but a distant dream. The culprit - a severe shortage of potable water.

While most of us cannot even begin to imagine how crippling this can be; the residents of Nuh suffer the consequences every day. Over-salinated water and a lack of safe and assured water supply has created a trail of chronic issues that impact the health and well being of school children. This lack of potable water has affected the attendance rate at schools, with children going back home to refill their water bottles. More often than not, they never make it back to school.

DCB Bank stepped in to support an innovative plan using rooftop rainwater harvesting and bio-sand filters in three schools, which resulted in a number of positive changes. Access to drinking water has led to a decrease in absenteeism from schools. Mid-day meals are also cooked using this water, ensuring the children are healthier and happier.

With the capacity to harvest 3,00,000 litres of potable water a year, Nuh now looks to a hopeful future. One where children are free to learn and lead a normal, happy and healthy childhood.

### DCB Bank Rooftop Rainwater Harvesting Project:

- Set up at 3 schools in Nuh, Haryana
- Four 25,000 litre tanks harvest 3,00,000 litres of rainwater a year
- Innovative, electricity-free bio-sand filter eliminates contaminants
- Nuh's children now have access to clean potable water, daily
- Over 1,000 futures positively impacted



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# ENGINEER, GREEN GURU, SANYASI

## The incredible story of Prof. G. D. Agarwal

Dunu Roy  
New Delhi

WE were on the bus from Shahdol to Varanasi. Suddenly, “Roko, roko!” my companion urged the driver. He leapt out of the bus, and disappeared. A few moments later he returned, beaming, clutching a leaf plate of hot *jalebis*! This was the quintessential Guru Das Agrawal, who knew every delicacy (and cinema hall) on any route he covered, and this one he had travelled many times in the early 1960s when he was a young engineer building the Rihand dam, one of the pioneering ‘temples’ of Nehruvian India near Renukoot.

GD joined IIT Kanpur after building the dam. He then went somewhat unwillingly, after the director of the institute told him it would be a violation of the technical collaboration agreement signed by the IIT with the US, to the University of California at Berkeley to complete his PhD.

Once there, he revelled in the opportunity for learning that the university offered. But, apart from his academic pursuits, he also founded, along with some other remarkable expatriates, the Front for Rapid Economic Advancement of India (FREA India) as part of his continuing contribution to national rejuvenation.

This curiously named ‘Front’ was a product of the thinking in those early days that without economic progress India would not be freed of poverty, and that science and technology were the chosen instruments for that progress. In 1969, some of my fellow students at IIT Bombay set up FREA in India and hatched a conspiracy that lured me into joining. I was advised to go and meet GD who had returned to India and was again teaching at IIT Kanpur.

The opportunity to do some good offered itself when the new FREA in Bombay received a request for help from the publisher of a small Hindi weekly in Shahdol, complaining that people were



Prof. Agarwal as Swami Sanand

**He became a swami to see a clean Ganga...brought his vast scientific knowledge to bear on government as well as religious and social organisations to take some action, but he failed.**



Prof. Agarwal on a fast in Delhi in March 2009

suffering from the effluents released by the largest paper mill in Asia but the company refused to acknowledge that it was polluting the Sone river. This was well before there was any environmental legislation in India.

So I boarded the earliest train to Kanpur and met GD. He asked me what I thought could be done. All I could think of was to somehow measure the pollution levels. He proceeded to dismiss every one of my ideas, and then slowly rebuilt all of them into a coherent whole. I was to discover that this was a characteristic pedagogic style of his: listen patiently to what the learner has to say; demolish it ruthlessly so that the learner is left shattered; then provide a much more elegant structure to rethink (accompanied, of course, with generous helpings of *aloo puri* and *kheer malai*!).

Four wide-eyed students were recruited from IIT Kanpur and that summer they conducted in Shahdol what was probably the first community-based environmental impact study in India. Sudhindra Seshadri was one of those students and he recalled that GD later said to him, “The value of something is what it leads to”.

GD’s concern for his students was legendary. Once, when three of them found they could not complete their course work because they had to leave for the US, GD literally hauled them back from the railway station, took extra classes, and saw to it that they completed the course. It was probably the same kind of mentoring that led Anil Agarwal to set up the Centre for Science and Environment in 1980; and me, with a few other hare-brained fellow travellers, to move to Shahdol in 1973 to design an Environmental Plan. GD was a frequent visitor to Shahdol. He kept pointing out other ways of looking

at the problem.

We had acquired a second-hand Fargo pick-up truck and Arvind Gupta converted it into a diesel version. Much to his dismay GD rechristened it, first as no-Far-go and then as Nearstop, on the basis of its erratic performance; although he was happy to bounce along in it as it rattled all over the district.

Many arguments raged with him as we mined his encyclopaedic knowledge of chemistry, physics, biology and botany to understand the society we were living in; and GD was often arrayed on the other side. As Arvind later confessed, “I was too much in the ‘Left’ mode to understand and appreciate a gentle soul like GD”; but Sudhindra remembers GD saying, “I don’t agree with you guys, but I love you.”

It was this love for learning and teaching that remained at the core of his being. Atul Jain, one of his close students at IIT-K, once asked him why he did not get married. GD’s response was, “The day I stop teaching you can ask me to get married. I can’t do both.” That, of course, did not prevent him from vigorous match-making as he would ask, with a twinkle in his eye, “What do you think of A’s suitability for B?”

**GURU FOR ALL:** GD moved on from IIT-K to become the first Member-Secretary of the newly formed Central Pollution Control Board — he was, as Sanjeev Ghotge, yet another IIT-K product, reminded us, India’s first ‘technically qualified’ environmentalist. From that period, his teaching and

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# Dying to save the Ganga

## Govt had four months to act after fast began

Bharat Dogra  
New Delhi

THE guru of the Indian environmental movement breathed his last as his fast to save the Ganga entered the 111th day on October 11. It was one of many fasts that Prof. Guru Das Agarwal, who in his later years was known as Swami Sanand, undertook to convince governments to protect the river and preserve its flow.

From October 9 he began ingesting only water as he tried to get the Union government to see the merit of his demands and act decisively to save the Ganga. But when he saw that his demands were still not being conceded, he gave up even water. He was then forcibly removed to AIIMS in Rishikesh by the government. He breathed his last there.

A devout Hindu, Prof. Agarwal’s family had close affiliations with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) for generations. He supported the Bharatiya Janata Party.

He wrote several letters to the government, addressing Prime Minister Narendra Modi personally, with four demands. These were:

- A comprehensive Bill in Parliament, based on a draft prepared by the Ganga Mahasabha in 2012, for enactment of a law to effectively protect the Ganga.
- A stop to all hydroelectric projects under construction or proposed in the upper reaches of the Ganga and its major tributaries: that is, the Bhagirathi, Alaknanda, Mandakini, Dhaulagiri, Nandakini and Pinder.

- A ban on riverbed sand mining in the main stem of the Ganga, particularly in the Haridwar-Kumbh Mela area.

- Formation of the Ganga Bhakt Parishad, an autonomous body of 20 persons nominated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to manage and ensure the well-being of the river. This body would be the sole and final decision-making authority in all matters pertaining to the Ganga.

With time running out, after he gave up drinking water, Prof. Agarwal just sought a written assurance that legislation on protecting the Ganga would be presented in the winter session of Parliament and that all construction projects on the Ganga — dams in the upper reaches and dredging by the National Shipping Waterways in the lower reaches — would be suspended immediately.

Prof. Agarwal was a man of science. He realised the importance of a free-flowing (*aviral*) Ganga. He had studied all the facets of the Ganga. The Ganga was for him a symbol of India’s cultural heritage, the nation’s soul. “I have failed,” he said before he passed away.

**CHARISMATIC TEACHER:** Prof. Agarwal was a leading authority on environmental engineering. After his doctorate from the University of California, Berkeley, he taught at IIT Kanpur and other renowned engineering institutions at Roorkee and elsewhere. A learned and charismatic teacher, he inspired

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# FOR THE GANGA TO SURVIVE IT HAS TO BE FREE-FLOWING



The Ganga where it begins



A fast-flowing stretch in the upper reaches



A dam reduces the river to a trickle

## Engineer, green guru, sanyasi

Continued from page 21

learning began to extend into the realm of all those young people outside the university system who were trying to tackle the problems of the environment.

The Air Pollution Act was passed at this time and GD realised that Indian companies did not have the monitoring equipment required by the Act. When the big firms he called did not respond he roped in another ex-student, S.K. Gupta, to set up Envirotech to produce high-volume air samplers. When GD finally resigned in disgust from the Pollution Board, SK reminisces with a chuckle, "I roped him in right back and he managed Envirotech into a successful company."

It was in the same spirit that he came to guide me through World Wide Fund for Nature's first (and last) workshop in 1990 to develop low-cost pollution monitoring techniques that would be useful for communities. The week-long workshop attracted an array of scientists, community organisers, activists, and trade unionists, and he was hugely influential in taking environmental science to the grassroots.

Meanwhile he also began the move to Chitrakoot where he helped to set up a department of environment at the new Mahatma Gandhi Gramodaya Vishwavidyalaya, and also began preparing for retirement to a *vridhashram* there. But the Banwasi Sewa Ashram in Sonbadra sent me an appeal for help in monitoring pollution. I asked GD, and he happily jumped at the chance to return to the area where he had begun his career as an engineer. What he saw of the complex of thermal power plants that had come up around the Rihand dam he had built and its reservoir, and the ensuing massive degradation, appalled him. This sparked off yet another experiment with community-based impact assessment with the Ashram, although GD would keep prodding me, "Where is the people's movement?"

He would often put this question to Shubhabehn of the Ashram, and she remembers how at a public

meeting on environment, after all the heads from different villages had spoken, GD gave vent to his flaming temper at all talk and no action. He could be calmed down only after they gave him a written plan of action and took an oath that they would follow the plan and produce results by a given date. Shubha recounts, "Even his anger was for us a prod to think and learn. He tore apart our note and helped us build a more practical plan."

Ramkumar Vidyarthi, a child rights activist with Sahjeevan Samiti at that time, posted on Facebook a different pedagogical approach which GD adopted in Tarang village. The primary school teacher there was often drunk and no amount of persuasion would get him to kick the habit. When GD expressed a desire to visit the school on Teacher's Day everyone was in a quandary. Sure enough, the teacher came smelling of *mahua*, but GD offered him flowers and a copy of the *Gita* and then touched his feet before explaining to the children the importance of the day. According to Ramkumar, "there was great improvement in both the teacher as well as the villagers, who rebuilt the dilapidated school".

It was, I think, a combination of all these stints — at teaching, in the government, a consultancy firm, with activists, and community groups all over the country that gradually led him back to his roots in western Uttar Pradesh. As he said, "I have to live my life by my code so why should I have to listen to what others say?"

He became a *swami* to singlemindedly pursue his goal to see a clean Ganga once again. He brought his vast scientific knowledge to bear on the subject and tried to persuade the government as well as religious and social organisations to take some action, but he failed. He finally embarked on his final fast — unto death — on June 22 this year. In August, Ravi Chopra (another old FREA hand) and I drove down to Haridwar to see him and he was as matter-of-fact and lucid as ever. He gave us a clinical description of his symptoms and said, "I think my body will last for another six weeks. But don't worry about me. I am satisfied with what I have done and my going will only give you more strength to do what needs to be done." What could be more inspiring as guru *darshan*? ■

**He gave us a clinical description of his symptoms and said, 'I think my body will last for another six weeks. But don't worry about me.'**



Prof. Agarwal takes sanyas

## Dying to save the Ganga

Continued from page 21

students like Anil Agarwal, Ravi Chopra, and Dunu Roy, who went on to be well-known environmentalists. He encouraged one of them, S.K. Gupta, to set up Envirotech, India's first pollution control technology company. Prof. Agarwal was also the first member-secretary of the Central Board of Pollution Control.

In 2007, he travelled to Gangotri above which the Ganga originates, where it is called the Bhagirathi. He came to know that the government was building a series of dams. Prof. Agarwal realised that those dams would destroy this pristine stretch of the river and limit the flow of water downstream. The Ganga is one of India's most polluted rivers which gets filled with sewage, garbage and industrial effluents as it flows downstream. Without a constant flow of water, the river would go dry as it ran its course. Prof. Agarwal resolved to do whatever he could to protect and rejuvenate the river, sacred to millions.

His strategy was Gandhian. He went on hunger strikes, in 2008, in 2009 and in 2010. He first demanded that dam building be stopped between Gangotri and Maneri. His fast drew attention to the importance of having a free-flowing river. The government designated the Ganga as India's national river. His second fast in 2009 led to the formation of the National Ganga River Basin Authority to oversee all aspects of protecting and rejuvenating the river. His third fast in 2010 got the UPA to cancel three dams between Gangotri and Uttarkashi.

In 2012 the central government even issued a notification declaring a 100-km stretch of the Bhagirathi between Gaumukh and Uttarkashi an eco-sensitive zone, where hydro projects wouldn't be allowed. The move was welcomed by Prof. Agarwal. But development projects are now underway in this sensitive zone along the river.

In 2011, Prof. Agarwal joined an order of Hindu monastics in Uttarakhand and took the name, Swami Gyan Swaroop Sanand. He decided to devote himself wholly to saving the Ganga. The present phase of his struggle started on February 24 this year when he wrote a letter to the Prime Minister saying that he had high hopes from his government on Ganga protection but they had been belied. ■

## An Indian view of the world



**T**HE Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) funds a think-tank studying China called the Institute of Chinese Studies (ICS). Its board is chaired by former National Security Advisor Shiv Shankar Menon. Mr Menon is not only a former foreign secretary and a former ambassador to China but also has good command over the Chinese language. The director of the institute is another former ambassador to China, Ashok Kantha. The institute was supposed to be India's window to China. It is not clear what assessment the government has of the institute's contribution to an 'Indian' understanding of China but we are now informed that the government has decided to fund yet another think-tank, the Centre for Contemporary China Studies (CCCS), with a China focus.

The CCCS board will be chaired by the Minister of External Affairs and the National Security Advisor will be its vice-chairman.

According to a media report, the CCCS will draw on internal governmental resources from the ministries of external affairs, defence, commerce and industry, and various other governmental functionaries who have knowledge of China. While nothing more is currently known of the role and composition of the new centre, its setting up raises an interesting question about how much expertise is, in fact, available in India on contemporary China. The ICS has been working hard to create a pool of talent and mobilise adequate funds. Both have so far proven to be difficult exercises. Given the paucity of adequately trained Indian research talent, it remains to be seen how relevant the new CCCS will be in facilitating informed decision-making within the government on China-related matters.

The news report that mentioned the creation of the CCCS stated, interestingly, that the proposed centre would provide an 'Indian view' of China. Does this mean that the government believes that

the expertise on China available outside government does not constitute an 'Indian view'? At least one reason for such thinking may be that a lot of the research now being conducted by Indians even within Indian think-tanks is funded by foreign entities. Indian research institutions have been forced to approach foreign funding agencies because domestic funding, from both within the government and outside, is not adequately forthcoming. Even a government-funded think-tank like the ICS has been finding funding a problem.

Globally, there are two very different models of

economist anywhere in the world based on published data.

It is also worth asking what it is that the CCCS can do better than what the research staff at the National Security Council Secretariat already does. The NSCS has research staff drawn from both within government and outside who study other countries and who have access to classified information within the government. Fifteen years ago a committee under the chairmanship of the late K. Subrahmanyam, a strategic affairs guru, recommended adequate public funding for the creation of competent research talent in the study of India's neighbourhood, especially China. The fact remains that 15 years later little has been done in this direction.

The creation of the CCCS is an admission of the inadequacy of informed research on China but the problem is a more generalised one. Area studies, with language competence, remain inadequately funded in India. Indian researchers know little of the internal social, political and economic dynamics of India's neighbours. The knowledge of countries further afield is even less. When a major Indian company with substantial economic interests in a Latin American country wished to understand the implications of a regime change



creating research capacity when it comes to the study of another country. In the United States, research on China is funded both by the private sector and the government. Both privately-funded and government-funded institutions undertake classified as well as open-source research. This system is based on trust wherein the government funds classified research conducted by non-governmental entities. Such entities are trusted not to make public the findings of classified research. Interestingly, two prominent US think-tanks, Brookings and Carnegie, have recently been accused of accepting funds from China.

The alternative model of funding the study of another country is that of China where all think-tanks are government-funded and all research requires official clearance before its publication. It appears India is trying to experiment with a combination of the two. It remains to be seen how successful this new experiment will be. As an example of what the CCCS can do, the news report mentions the commissioning of a study on the impact on India of US trade sanctions on China. This is a study that can be done by any competent

in that country it turned to a European think-tank for advice. It ended up paying a substantial amount of money for that research. Closer home another Indian company with investments in a South Asian neighbour was taken completely by surprise by political developments there. The company had not bothered to do due diligence based on available research on the politics of that country.

With Indian companies going global, with India becoming more globally active and with so much uncertainty in the global political security environment, India needs vast numbers of talented nationals capable of providing high-quality research. Needless to add, their training and mentoring should be such that their thinking is 'Indian' enough for the government to regard such research as offering an 'Indian' perspective on the world. Indianness in thinking is not a monopoly of government officials. Indian citizens doing research in Indian-funded think-tanks outside government can also be a reliable source of research provided the government knows how to build a relationship of trust. The first step is to ensure funding. ■

Sanjaya Baru is a writer based in New Delhi



### 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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# Chasing the English dream



## BACK TO SCHOOL

DILEEP RANJEKAR

ON my way to Hyderabad airport, around 35-40 kilometres from Gulbarga, I spent time interacting with government school teachers at the Teacher Learning Centre of the Azim Premji Foundation run by a young post-graduate from Azim Premji University. The centre was barely three months old and was focussed on developing the English language abilities of teachers in surrounding government schools.

Around 25 teachers were present and I was pleasantly surprised to observe that all of them interacted with me only in English – by design. While their vocabulary was not very rich and they did make several mistakes in grammar and syntax, their confidence, fluency and determination to stick to English were pleasantly striking. And even more creditable was the fact that this change had happened in just three months. It gave us confidence in the belief that if we made a quality effort and persisted, we would be able to see change.

Till Class 11, I studied in the Marathi medium. English as a language of study was introduced to me only in Class 5. I was able to quickly master the mechanics of it and began scoring cent percent marks in English. I mastered the textbooks of the next standard during my summer vacation and was chosen by our English teacher as a role model for other students.

My father was greatly enamoured of the English language and would be in awe of anybody who could speak it fluently. One of his favourite activities was making me read *The Times of India* loudly while he shaved (a rather elaborate ceremony). I was then in Class 8. The only thing he would do was to correct me when my pronunciation was wrong. I had mastered the art of reading English loudly without understanding much of what I was reading. I continued to get very high marks in written examinations. Even in college, for the first two years when we had English as a subject, I used to score more than students educated in the English medium. However, my ability to speak English was never tested since the world around me spoke primarily in Marathi and, in some cases, Hindi.

I experienced my first Waterloo when I joined the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS). My roommate was from Tamil Nadu and did not know a word of Hindi. The process of speaking with him in English made me nervous since I was constantly translating words from Marathi to English. As we became friends, he started laughing at my use of

certain words – like calling postal stamps “tickets”, an electric bulb a “globe”, and so on. I did not take it seriously since I attributed this to lack of practice and the opportunity to speak in English.

However, my notion that my written English was great was shattered when my field work supervisor, Prof Kudchedkar (he was head of personnel management and industrial relations at TISS but was a professor of English earlier in his career), returned my field work journal with red markings all over. Practically every sentence had an error – either the preposition was wrong or the usage of verbs was erroneous. I noted each and every correction, realised my mistakes and by the end of the semester, was able to write reports with practically no errors. Over a period of time, I



LAKSHMAN ANAND

realised that I had to stop translating Marathi into English and think in English itself. In the long run, that solved the problem.

During the early years of the Azim Premji Foundation, around 19 years ago, we did a quick survey on the aspirations of parents regarding their children in districts close to Bengaluru. One of the three common desires was that their children should be able to speak English. The other two: knowing computers and getting a job in the IT sector.

The past 20 years have seen almost a 20 percentage point migration of children from government schools to private ones. And among the complex reasons for such migration (including the perception of the poor quality of education in government schools, poor infrastructure, time spent on task, accountability, status, and the like), the one most frequently cited by parents is that English is the medium of instruction in many private schools. At the same time, it is an open secret that in thousands of private schools, especially in semi-rural and rural areas, English is taught very poorly.

The Sub-Committee appointed by the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) to

recommend actions to improve the quality of education in government schools (thereby enhancing enrolment and attendance in these schools) made several suggestions. Two involved introducing early childhood education in government schools and introducing English as a medium of instruction for those children who opted for it. The logic was that most “early childhood schools” (often referred to as nursery and kindergarten schools) are private and once the child begins attending a private school, the parents are reluctant to move him from a private kindergarten school to a government school. Further, most surveys indicate that the positioning of English by private schools is a big attraction for parents whose sole aspiration is that their children should not fall behind in the national and international race.

As the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) in its position paper on the English language states: “English, in India, is today a symbol of people’s aspirations for quality in education and fuller participation in national and international life.” While this may be the reality, the million-dollar issue is how do we develop the capacity of the education system to promote good quality teaching of the English language!

At one end of the spectrum is the enormous ability of children to pick up multiple languages in very little time and, on the other, is the huge apprehension of teachers regarding developing their ability in the English language. In between are critical issues such as lack of an environment to speak English – both for teachers and students, absence of good English books for children, lack of good programmes to train teachers in English proficiency, poor-quality textbooks, teachers treating textbooks as the only tool to teach English and not using computers imaginatively to promote the language.

Teaching English to children – especially early in life – is not such a difficult issue, provided teachers, teacher-educators, bureaucrats and their political masters are serious about it. For displaying this political will and seriousness, we need large-scale commitment coupled with the necessary financial and human resources. There needs to be a systemic effort to train teachers in English language pedagogy, create a suitable environment around teachers and children, and ensure complete elimination of political drama linked with political games that fight language wars on the ground to serve narrow interests.

China, for instance, mandated that all citizens would learn reading, writing and speaking English in 10 years and more or less achieved it. Japan, in the 1990s, showed a lot of resistance to the English language but with the advent of the internet, altered its stance completely and announced incentives for English language learning. We, as a nation, need to take up this issue on a war footing. ■

Dileep Ranjekar is CEO of the Azim Premji Foundation

# Visiting Kobad in jail



## STATE & PEOPLE

GAUTAM VOHRA

KOBAD Ghandy is moving towards window number four with the help of a walking stick. When he sees us he smiles and I notice that one of his front teeth is missing.

The window is covered by two wire meshes. One on his side. The other on ours. The distance between him and us is further enhanced by an elongated cemented channel that goes across the length of all the windows.

We have to pick up phones to speak to Kobad. I am meeting him in prison again, almost a decade after I established contact with him at Tihar jail. There, too, a wire mesh divided us. But at Tihar I was alone with him in a room. At Hazaribagh jail, built in the 19th century by the British, we are standing outside, alongside the other prisoners, some four to a window, several shouting to get themselves heard.

Since then Kobad has been taken to several prisons across the country. He was relatively better treated in Andhra prisons as there he held the status of a political prisoner. In Hazaribagh, as elsewhere, he is a common criminal, an undertrial for almost a decade. The irony is that not a single charge under the UAPA (Unlawful Areas Protection Act) has been proved against him in all these years, except a minor charge or two of assuming a false identity.

I am hoping to hear that he is better off in Hazaribagh jail than he was at Tihar. His letters from Tihar were full of incidents of denial of basic rights, even harassment. So the four of us are perturbed to hear that conditions are much worse: he is routinely refused access to the outside world, his letters do not get posted, he is not allowed to use the phone, letters to him reach late if at all and the simplest of requests is ignored.

Meenal Madhukar, a healer, talks to Kobad about reflecting positive energy. For he has expressed only the negatives; if he thinks positively, exuding positive energy, the conditions around him will change. Kobad listens with a smile to these new ideas. He is keen to get answers from Harshit Dhingra who is coordinating his legal battles. Kobad is told that this trick of the State – as soon as he wins one case, the police whisk him away to be tried for another case in another state – has to be tackled. That is how they have been able to prolong the case.

The plan is to file a petition in the Supreme Court so that the State informs us about the cases and charges of terrorism that have been filed against him. If these are similar – as they have been under UAPA – they should be dismissed as the other courts did. Then Kobad will be spared the turmoil he has had to undergo so far. In fact, according to the “confessional statements” that Kobad is alleged

to have made, he is next due in Odisha and Chhattisgarh. At the age of 71, his health cannot take it.

Kobad asks his local lawyer, Rohit Thakur, if he has filed the case on medical grounds. For, unlike other prisons, the medical care in Hazaribagh jail is minimal. And Kobad is particularly concerned about his deteriorating prostate condition. Rohit informs him that he has not yet been able to get the report from the jail hospital doctor. He has also been unable to get access to the Superintendent who can address the problems being faced by Kobad.

As we bid farewell to Kobad, expressing our

superintendent gives his direct phone number to Rohit. Now access will not be an issue and hopefully Kobad’s immediate health problems can be attended to.

We have accomplished what we came for. But my stride no longer has the same spring as when we boarded the plane to Ranchi. I recall being amused by a sign at the Birsa Munda airport saying “Do not spit” and had wondered whom it was directed at. For those who could read it were not the likely offenders.

We book in at the Canary Inn and I am drawn to Hindu Hotel, serving Hindu meals. Next to it is a



**The irony is that not a single charge under UAPA has been proved against Kobad in all these years, except a minor charge or two of assuming a false identity.**

solidarity, I see a resigned look on his face. We are keen to meet the jail superintendent and send in our request. He is busy in another wing of the jail and does not respond. After lunch we go to his residence. We are summoned to his verandah where he reclines under the fan while swallows dash in and out. Before us is the vista of a large space dominated by a forest overlooking the lake. The trees have enormous girth, towering over the surroundings, probably planted by the Brits a century or two ago.

I cannot help admiring the style that the superintendent, Hamid Akhtar, resides in. Even officials in the IAS cadre could not manage such accommodation. My father, a member of the steel frame, the ICS, lived in comfort in Ferozepur district, the state headquarters, in Chandigarh and in Delhi. But the superintendent’s abode is something else.

The outcome of our meeting is that the

poster with Narendra Modi promising electricity to all villages. I had seen such posters of the PM in Ranchi. In Hazaribagh he is no less dominant. I try to get my companions to have a Hindu meal. I am curious, never having been offered one. But they are not persuaded. I miss out on a rare treat.

The next morning we are in a celebratory mood. Harshit and Meenal purchase *laddoos*, *barfi* and *gulab jamuns* to give to the jail and the jailors. After we have visited Kobad, and thereafter the superintendent, we visit Harshit’s relatives who treat us to more *mithai*. Harshit takes me to the window of a 14th floor apartment to show me his school where he played cricket. The city of Hazaribagh is laid out at our feet even as more *laddoos* are brought to us by the young cousin. While we are in these resplendent surroundings, Kobad is in his dingy room. In Hazaribagh jail. Caught in his dilemmas posed by the Indian State. ■

# Still early days for women



## GENDER REPORT

ANITA ANAND

SINCE the beginning of October, Indian print, TV and social media are full of stories of women speaking out about being sexually harassed, as part of the #MeToo movement. Prominent media and entertainment personalities have been named.

The #MeToo campaign goes back to 2006, before the predominance of social media, when African American activist Tarana Burke created the campaign as a grassroots movement to reach sexual assault survivors in underprivileged communities. In 2017, it triggered a global phenomenon when actress and producer Alyssa Milano accused Hollywood's prominent producer, Harvey Weinstein, of sexual assault.

Milano wrote, "If all the women who have been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote 'Me too' as a status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem."

Within days, millions of women – and some men – used Twitter, Facebook and Instagram to disclose the harassment and abuse they had faced. They included celebrities and public figures, as well as ordinary people who felt empowered to speak.

The movement became a conversation about men's behaviour towards women and the imbalance of power at the top. Facebook reported that within 24 hours, 4.7 million people around the world engaged in the #MeToo conversation, with over 12 million posts, comments, and reactions.

In India, in response to lobbying by women's organisations for years, in 2013, the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act was passed. The law was a first step. However, a survey conducted by the Indian Bar Association in 2017 of 6,047 respondents showed that 70 percent of women said they did not report sexual harassment by superiors, fearing repercussions.

According to National Crime Records Bureau data, there was a 51 percent rise in sexual harassment cases at places related to work – from 469 in 2014 to 714 in 2015. Between 2014 and 2015, cases of sexual harassment within office premises more than doubled – from 57 to 119. And this probably does not consider the large number of women who work in the informal sector in agriculture, construction and other daily wage sectors where they are sexually blackmailed, just to collect their wages. Or women in small towns and non-urban areas.

It's also financial blackmail, as women cannot afford to lose their jobs. Often, when women speak out, either to human resources departments in the workplace or to their families, they are told to put

up with the sexual harassment or leave their jobs.

According to the law, an internal complaints committee (ICC) is mandatory in every private or public organisation with 10 or more employees. However, the 2015 research study, "Fostering Safe Workplaces", by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) showed 36 percent of Indian companies and 25 percent of MNCs had not constituted their ICCs. About 50 percent of the more than 120 participating companies admitted that their ICC members were not legally trained. The law imposes a penalty of upto Rs 50,000

violence and unwanted attention. Neither men nor women are prepared for this.

The #MeToo movement is welcome and long overdue. But, the upsides and downsides will determine its future.

The upside is that the issue of sexual harassment is out in the open. Women are speaking out, freeing themselves from what they've held on to for years. Society is now forced to speak about the behaviour of men towards women, especially from men in power. Via social media, their concerns, often overlooked by print media, are out in public. There



**Behaviour codes for men and women in the workplace are unclear. It is assumed that men make the rules and women abide by them.**

on employers who do not implement the Act in the workplace or fail to even constitute an ICC.

As with all laws, implementation is the challenge. And further, general confusion about what is right and wrong.

Ankhi Das, public policy director, Facebook, tweeted, "You needn't have a #MeToo moment to support the women journalists who have narrated their victimisation. You needn't even be a woman. You just need to have a sensibility of what is right and what is wrong."

And how do we get this sensibility? Are we born with it, do we acquire it? If so, how?

In India, women from an early age are socialised to please men to get ahead in life, especially men in power. Nothing in their upbringing, however, prepares them for sexual assault from men they admire or look up to or men in power. The behaviour codes for men and women in the workplace are unclear. It is assumed that men make the rules and women abide by them. It is natural that there is sexual attraction and tension, but not

is solidarity among women, those who have been abused and those who have not. And, the movement has the potential to create healthier and more balanced workplaces.

The downside is the lack of organised follow-up protection and support for women making their stories public. Legally, it can take forever to settle cases. The toll of speaking out could be as much as not speaking out. Life will not be easy for women in terms of professional work and mental health, as we have witnessed in previous cases of women speaking out. There could be a backlash from men and organisations, a reluctance to hire women and further tension and confusion about workplace etiquette.

The movement can do well to consider a focus on education and consciousness raising among girls and boys, women and men regarding the norms in common spaces inhabited by them. This will be the future. ■

*Anita Anand is a development and communications specialist*



Shruti Shibulal: 'We have been sensitive to the environment'

## Tamara exudes colonial charm

It's an 1860 bungalow that is luxuriously green

Susheela Nair  
Bengaluru

THE imposing The Tamara Kodai is just a stone's throw from the din and bustle of Upper Lake View amidst the charming hills of Kodaikanal. Its grey stone walls with muted warm lighting, terracotta roof, ceiling-to-floor windows, and a fireplace surrounded by sofas, exude colonial charm. As we walked into the foyer, we sensed a silence, stillness and tranquility reminiscent of a monastery.

Situated 6,500 feet above sea level, the lovely old building has an absorbing history harking back to the days when it was originally called Baynes' Bungalow and owned by British District Judge Baynes. One of the first few houses to be built in the region, Baynes' Bungalow was sold to Father Louis Cyr in 1860. It was then renovated, reopened and rechristened La Providence. This stunning building was used as a monastic retreat for the priests of Nagapattinam in 1860.

"This is our second luxury property. We have been working on this project for a decade and tried to retain the original glory of the place. In keeping with the Tamara philosophy of 'Sustainable Good Life', we have rebuilt this retreat by being sensitive to the environment. We have used an efficient and sustainable design, respecting the importance of the building and its history. Our construction is focused on tree-friendly practices with minimal concrete cover, local flora and rainwater harvesting. Sewage and effluent treatment facilities guide waste-water back to bathrooms and landscaping," says Shruti Shibulal, CEO, The Tamara Leisure Experiences Pvt Ltd.

"We have also retained many old parts like arches of doors and windows, the pillars, windows, grills and frames. The wood used for furniture is plantation teakwood imported from Indonesia. We are also aware of our responsibilities to the local community. We promote local artisans by displaying their products in our shop, The Verandah, inside the resort. The colonial interiors, such as the

fireplace, have been retained to give our guests an authentic colonial feel," explained Shruti.

The 53 suites have wooden flooring and colonial interiors featuring a bedroom, living room, and, of course, a large balcony. I woke up to the sound of birdsong and the smell of fresh pine in this luxurious colonial bungalow. I enjoyed the morning mist while sipping a cup of coffee. And when you work up an appetite, you can pick from La Providence, an all-day dining restaurant. The area above the restaurant used to be a chapel. It has now been converted into a library-cum-recreational space. There is also Bistro 1845, a French-style vintage themed bistro and bar serving excellent European, Asian and Indian cuisine. Subsequently, the building was renovated and expanded with modern comforts such as indoor heating, two restaurants, a ballroom with a 200-person capacity, boardroom and conference facilities, and a Wellness Centre and Spa.

The resort also hosts Levinge Lounge, *Continued on page 30*

Continued from page 29

Kodaikanal's only temperature-controlled pool and a bar located at the highest vantage point on the property. It overlooks a heart-stopping view of the valley below, ideal for post-swim rest and relaxation. There are plans to introduce instruments so that guests can indulge in stargazing as it is the highest point in the area.

**RELAX AND BE BUSY**

My stay at this world-class heritage accommodation wasn't just about indulging in luxury experiences in the heart of the hills of Kodaikanal. I was also keen to explore its riveting past and soak in the serenity of nature at its best. There are various activities for guests like treks, a historic cemetery walk, visits to old churches, forest road cycling to 'unexplored Kodai', a pool table, darts, and board games. If you would like to venture out, you can explore the area with an easy trek, cycle through the forests nearby and walk to the Kodai lake in the heart of the town.

On our first day, we set off on a two-hour trek into the Pambar forest near the resort. It led us to the breathtaking Rhino Nose Viewpoint, where the village of Vellagavi is located, and culminated at Pambar Waterfalls, better known as Liril Falls. On the forest trail, we soaked in the serenity of nature and came across bunches of Neelakurinji flowers.

Syed, the resort's Unique Experiences Manager, a walking encyclopedia on the flora and fauna of the region, guided us along the forest trail. He regaled trekkers with nuggets on Kodai's history and the flora and fauna found in this part of the Western Ghats. He shared interesting snippets of information on a

myriad herbs and medicinal plants from eucalyptus, wild tobacco, which is said to cure lung ailments, orange creeper, the leaves and roots of which are used as anti-fungal and anti-bacterial medicine in traditional Ayurveda, to fruit-bearing trees such as juicy wild passion fruit, Jerusalem cherry (commonly known as *sundaikai* in Tamil), and many others. We also went on an excursion to the lesser known village of Poombarai. The 20-km ride to Berijam Lake, cruising past the Madigatta *shola* forest and a few viewpoints, was equally interesting. The trip culminated with a visit to Manavannoor, a stunning hamlet offering verdant meadows and lush rolling hills. The place also houses a sheep and rabbit farm.



View of Poombarai village below



A lovely waterbody



Enjoy an evening with the stars

We returned to the resort for some rest and relaxation, which was augmented by a reinvigorating session at The Elevation Spa. The spa area, which was the erstwhile resting quarters of the priests, has been converted into fully equipped massage rooms, and a room for a manicure and pedicure. Indulging in a 60-minute Swedish massage which focuses on relaxing the muscles with long swipes, was the ultimate way to wind off my pleasurable stay at The Tamara Kodai. ■

**FACT FILE**

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SUSHEELA NAIR

SUSHEELA NAIR

SUSHEELA NAIR

# Natarani is back after 3 years with old flair

**Priyanka Raja**  
Ahmedabad

ON September 24, after a three-year hiatus, the Natarani Amphitheatre reopened to a packed house with an in-house production, *Mother River*, ending Ahmedabad's cultural desolation.

Natarani is housed in the Darpana Academy of Arts founded in 1949 by Mrinalini Sarabhai, the famed danseuse, and her husband, Vikram Sarabhai, father of India's space programme. The academy was later moved to its own premises.

*Mother River* depicted the newly renovated space at its grandest. Performed by Mallika, Mrinalini Sarabhai's daughter, and her team of Darpana dancers and musicians, the theatrical production was riveting. Directed by Yadavan Chandran, Darpana's artistic and technical director, it was an audio-visual delight for the audience.

Mallika hopes that the revival of Darpana will make Ahmedabad a throbbing cultural hotspot and a mecca for architects to see India's first green public arts space.

The academy's curated programme includes the Sunday to Sunday Theatre Festival, Karana, the classical dance drama festival, Re Rooted, the contemporary dance festival, Cinema of Resistance and D Talks, a lecture series.

The Symphony Orchestra of India is collaborating with Natarani to bring Western classical music to Ahmedabad every month. On September 28, the orchestra, with 24 musicians and conductor Evgeny Bushkov, performed at Natarani for the first time.

In the old days, when the academy was started, students were used to the sight of brightly coloured saris drying on the river sands, and the sounds of *dhobis* mingled with those of the *tattakizhi* (a musical instrument). Little Banjara girls running behind donkeys inspired Cartier-Bresson to shoot a photo series that brought the lives of people along the river bank to the notice of the world.

But over the years, floods in the river eroded the academy's land and the Darpana library, designed by noted architect B.V. Doshi, threatened to fall into the river bed. In 1993, it was decided to build a retaining wall to keep the academy safe.

Mallika, who is joint director of the academy, realised that Ahmedabad lacked a properly equipped performance venue. She saw an opportunity to change that, and have a retaining wall, in one swoop. The solution was to use the erosion to carve out an amphitheatre that would become a retaining wall and a state-of-the-art venue.

In 1994, designed by architect Kirtee Shah, Natarani was born, named to celebrate Mrinalini, the *rani* (queen) of dance. Over the next 22 years, Natarani became the centre of the city's international arts scene, hosting over 1,500 curated performances from 40 countries, and providing free or subsidised facilities for budding artistes in the city. The broad river and its sands formed a magnificent backdrop.

But in 2004 the Sabarmati Riverfront Project

The Natarani Amphitheatre reopened with *Mother River*, an in-house performance

Mallika Sarabhai



The new gallery for art

brought all this to a grinding halt. The project took away part of the academy's land and half its stage to build a four-lane highway. A cacophony of noise caused by the rush of traffic disrupted its former serenity and the academy struggled to find its feet.

Heritage architects Nimish Patel and Parul Zaveri, known for their conservation work and for modernising traditional building technologies, were called in to figure out what could be done. They built an evocative wall in 2016 to prop up the amphitheatre after months of experimenting with form and material.

The magnificent serrated wall on the new Sabarmati riverfront road caught the eye of commuters. Some compared it with the original walls of the city, built by Emperor Ahmed Shah in 1411. Others thought it would be fun to climb. Soon the red brick and blue wall became a favourite selfie spot for people, and early mornings saw newlyweds, bikers and others crowding it. Some even climbed a few feet up to be photographed.

Besides being beautiful, the wall served its purpose of bringing down decibel levels from 75 to 45. Darpana activities could proceed in relative peace once again except that the venue itself sorely

needed a makeover. Cosmopolitan Amdavadis missed the arts scene that it once nurtured, and in the three years without it, the city had lost the one venue that continuously presented top-level national and international arts events. Something needed to be reimagined.

Mallika has always been deeply committed to sustainability. She has a solar powered home at her organic farm and is the only Reva driver in the city. In Darpana too she had introduced solar power and composting. In developing new facilities she wanted architects to go completely green while creating a space that would be technologically ahead of its time.

Architects Mausmi and Uday Andhare of the Centre for Environmental Planning and Technology (CEPT) were brought in with their firm, Indigo Architects. They had never designed a theatre, had no idea of the needs and demands of a venue like Natarani, where audiences sometimes assembled on the steps of the stage to watch performers.

But they had built homes and a museum using recycled material and passive cooling technologies. Yadavan Chandran and Mallika became the driving force to ensure that the building worked as a high-

tech performance space with diverse possibilities. Having designed many shows and lit them around the world, Chandran knew exactly what he wanted – the best for years to come, and better still. "We must build a space that can accommodate every technical demand of any performance," he said.

The space was small, reduced by the road and the wall. Something had to go. With deep regret, Darpana's first building, Doshi's library-cum-dance studio, was broken down. As the old Natarani too came down, it was decided to reuse the old bricks – bricks that had heard and seen decades of rehearsals and performances – to make new ones. Lime would be used rather than cement. A rainwater harvesting facility would be built underneath the sprung wooden stage, and water from there would be cooled and circulated beneath the seating, with a network of pipes, draining the heat from the building and creating micro climates that would be 10 degrees cooler than outside temperatures. A system was put in place to draw in atmospheric air, cool it and throw it continuously into the theatre through outlets at ground level, providing fresh cool air during events.

The new theatre was wide. To build a catwalk for the lights, without any pillars blocking audience views, was a challenge that structural engineer Mehul Shah had to face. And there were many more. The journey was bumpy, with frequent clashes between designers and practitioners, but common ground was found and work moved forward.

The rebuilding has also created a shaded plaza that will host events, book launches, play readings, craft demonstrations and discussions. Another exciting new venue is the Mrinalini Sarabhai Gallery, slated to be an interactive space. An exhibition to showcase Mrinalini's many-splendoured life is being developed. The exhibition, that will open later this year, will run for three months.

Darpana is all set to revive Ahmedabad's cultural ethos and be a template for architects aspiring to build green public spaces. ■



# Innovations that show the way

By Ratna Viswanathan

**T**HE Path Ahead is a collection of essays penned by people who are experts in the sectors they write about. It has contributions from Dhiraj Rajaram, Nachiket Mor, Ashish Dhawan, Nivruti Rai, Adi Godrej, Tushaar Shah and many more luminaries.

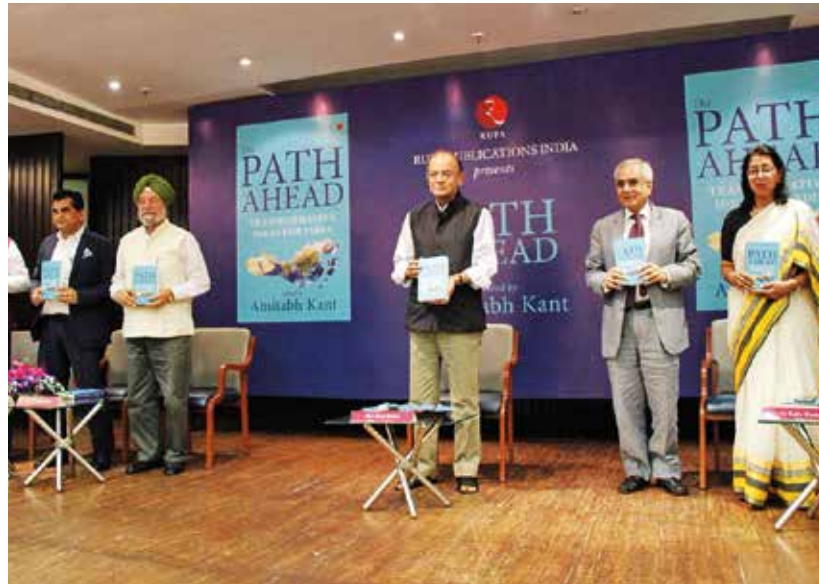
Numerous writings in the book focus on business models, the economy, infrastructure, innovation, research and design, digitalisation as distinct from digitisation, sustainable finance, financial inclusion and a host of areas of equal importance to the burgeoning nation that India is.

Amitabh Kant, CEO of NITI Aayog, has put together a carefully curated collection that focuses on the way forward and the need for catalysts for transforming what is good to great. In a fast-evolving transition powered by technology, inclusive economics, industrial innovation and a young demography, India is at a sweet spot and has to leverage its advantages here and now. Big data is the new oil and where better to put it to use than in a country with the finest brains to catalyse this for transformation?

This collection of essays is a timely publication, considering the change in thinking and ways of doing that we as a country are seeing on several levels. Enablers and disrupters are redesigning how things have worked traditionally. Blockchain technology and the Internet of Things are revolutionising strategy and implementation in traditional sectors where previously human touch was thought to be the only feasible option.

The thought leaders writing in this book are in the process of catalysing approaches to various sectors, whether it be health, education, banking, or delivery of services – both financial and non-

financial. The common thread that runs through all this is impact and outcome. Traditional financing and investing is being rethought and impact investing has grown into multitrillion-dollar figures. The key to growth is sustainability as charity can stretch only so far and no further. It is important for



Arun Jaitley releases the book



The Path Ahead: Transformative Ideas for India Edited: Amitabh Kant; Rupa Publications ₹595

today's entrepreneur to engage with the triple bottom line, overlooking which has substantial costs both for the planet and businesses.

The thought that has gone into putting this book together reflects the perspective Kant has gained through his own learnings as a bureaucrat and his understanding of governance and growth dynamics. There is an inherent recognition of the need to revitalise agriculture, alongside the progress made in industry, as the larger part of the population lives in rural India. There is also need to leverage on private sector funding and technology for public good and skill development is key to informed growth.

The whole emphasis is on innovative finance and impact investment with a purpose. Industry is looking to partner with civil society and not-for-profit entities in the quest to provide a better quality of life, sustain agriculture and unorganised sector

growth as these are the large employers. The United Nations' 2030 Agenda on the Sustainable Development Goals must be met by India and to this end blended finance, and sustainable bonds are sources that need to be further explored so that these goals can be delivered.

As Kant explains in his introduction to this very useful collection, there are several innovations underway that are slowly and surely transforming India. He cites the example of the Public Financial Management System (PFMS), the Pro-Active Governance and Timely Implementation (PRAGATI) programme, the United Payment Interface (UPI) and the Bharat Interface for Money (BHIM), to name a few schemes already underway. He states that blockchain and Artificial Intelligence (AI) solutions are great enablers that can find solutions to improve agriculture, health, water, sanitation, and ease of doing business.

The book makes for interesting reading as it focuses on varied aspects of technology, financial trends and incorporation of emerging trends to accelerate development. It is a good reference point for practitioners and those curious to understand the emerging growth blueprint.

The book touches upon different sectors of development – human capital, brand building, uplifting rural India, finance and income. The authors explain the demographics and then list the benefits and the drivers of the technique. The idea of utilising funds to transform the healthcare and education industries is the need of the hour. And that is the pivotal point of all the chapters.

Well-written and structured, this book is for entrepreneurs who are trying to make a name for themselves. Although the idea of entrepreneurship or business is a far cry for me, it is understandable how our country can develop through it. Instead of indulging in falsification and being armchair critics, it is high time citizens take a stand and become change-makers. ■

# Jugaad's great, but ...

By Subir Roy

**J**UGAAD has come to stand for a distinctive Indian way of finding solutions driven by the need to be frugal while relying on an inherent innovativeness. Such no-frills solutions have readily cut corners, disregarded aesthetics and been unconcerned about seeking excellence. With such a rough and ready approach, innovators of *jugaad* solutions have been least concerned about either establishing their own intellectual property rights or infringing on others.

It is therefore natural that *jugaad* solutions go only up to a point. The book, *Jugaad Yatra*, explores their limitations and flaws, and points the way forward. An example cited is that of Dharmveer Kamboji, whose rags to riches journey took him from being a low-caste farmer from Haryana pedalling a cycle rickshaw in Old Delhi to being the innovator of a multipurpose fruit processor. "I pick cheap things, things not useful to others to make that device.... Right from my first gadget I tried to use simple and easily available items which would be used in place of regular machines. These were *jugaads*, innovations," he says, and then outlines the path ahead by adding, "but with time I have been developing proper machinery, after thorough research and ideation."

Author Dean Nelson divides Indian *jugaad* innovators into two kinds. The first, from the grassroots, like Kamboji, are clubbed under "Swadeshi R&D". He, along with innovators like Arunachalam Muruganantham, the inventor of the low-cost sanitary pad-making machine, "highlight a caring selfless side of the country motivated by ideas of community and service". Professor Anil Gupta, formerly of IIM Ahmedabad, who through Honey Bee Network has tracked grassroots Indian innovation, finds an uplifting altruism behind each project, the innovators being more socially than financially motivated.

The other Indian innovators are clubbed under the label "Crorepatis: The *jugaad* guide to making billions" and feature prominent Indian businessmen like K. Modi, Gopichand Hinduja and Kunwer Sachdev of Su-Kam Power Systems fame. Modi defines the group by describing himself as a "*jugaad* person" who will find a solution by any means after professional managers have thrown up their hands. His own defining moment came when he bought a cigarette business without knowing the business at all and then eventually saved the day by finding a tax loophole which gave the business a breather of a few months, enabling it to remain afloat and survive.

Another *jugaad* solution narrated is one delivered by the Hinduja. A severe shortage of onions and potatoes took place in Iran, shooting prices skywards and becoming a political challenge for the Shah of Iran. The Hinduja realised that, coincidentally, there was a glut of both commodities in north India and a lot of irate farmers. The challenge was to transport the produce from north



A mini rice mill which enables small farmers to mill and brand their own paddy



Jugaad Yatra Dean Nelson Aleph ₹599

India to Iran. It had to go in trucks across Pakistan, which would not allow Indian drivers in. (What if there were spies?) Eventually, drivers were brought from countries like South Korea, the produce was transported, prices came back to normal in Iran and the Hinduja picked up the laurels.

Modi describes this group as consummate risk-takers. The only problem with stories highlighting such successes is that they tend to undermine the role of professional managers.

One businessman who will have nothing to do with *jugaad* solutions and will go by the book in running his businesses on the basis of research and careful planning is Anand Mahindra whose empire stretches across automobiles to information technology. To him, *jugaad* is a moral thread to India's development.

One problem with celebrating *jugaad* is not worrying about "excellence" and this is examined in a chapter titled "For most Indians 70 per cent is good enough". This is illustrated in detail by Aakash, touted as India's Pound 22 i-Pad which turned out a fiasco. The simple point is it worked but was not fully ready. This gave many Indian products "roughness and ugliness". Attention to detail, finesse and aesthetics is missing.

In a subsequent chapter titled "Bad *jugaad*" the author dwells in detail on the regulatory setbacks India's leading pharmaceutical exporters to developed markets have faced when their facilities have been found lacking in good manufacturing practices and truthful recording of data.

There is also a detailed examination of the poor account that India gave of itself by being unprepared

for the 2010 Commonwealth Games. This has been attributed by the former comptroller & auditor-general (CAG), Vinod Rai, to corruption and shoddiness which reflected the hold that *jugaad* had over the Indian mindset. It needs to be banished and replaced by a habit of excellence.

Nelson follows this up with three detailed bits of reporting. One is on the degradation of India's rivers, pegged on his visit to the Kumbh Mela in 2013. He quotes a leading Hindu *sadhu* as saying, "Water is dirty, Ganga is pure" to ask if the ability to see purity in filth made people believe the river did not need protection. The second is the kind of safety and driving conditions that he has observed while driving on an annual holiday from Delhi to Kullu in Himachal Pradesh. The third is on the state of India's cities, based on how Delhi is being ravaged by the cutting of corners by both senior civil servants in their Lutyens bungalows and lesser mortals constructing illegally.

Nelson has reported out of India for 10 years for two leading western newspapers and the book, which incorporates interviews with a galaxy of people who should know, is an example for aspiring journalists on how a book should be meticulously researched.

But there is a problem in starting to talk about *jugaad* and then spending the better part of the book depicting how Indian public life malfunctions mainly because of corruption and the focus of Indians on inner purity while caring little about being a good citizen. *Jugaad* is about an innovative tradition in a poor country where delivering something instead of nothing has been a driver. Lack of discipline on roads, or corruption among law enforcers and deliverers of private healthcare is another matter. ■

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Dr SRIKANTH

**Don't catch cold**

WITH winter round the corner we need to take extra care of our health to ensure that we keep well and keep illnesses at bay. During this season, there is an increase in the incidence of respiratory-related ailments. Bouts of cough, common cold and flu become relatively frequent. Even severe conditions like bronchitis, pneumonia and asthma increase considerably.

Viruses that cause cold, influenza and similar respiratory disorders are present in innumerable strains and hence elude a 'one-size-fits-all' treatment. They are usually highly contagious. High-risk groups include children and older people.

If it is not infection, then the cause of the common cold might be allergy! Allergic rhinitis is the most common of allergic diseases and may be caused by dust, mites, animal dander, pollen or any such allergen.

**Symptoms:** A common cold due to infection is usually accompanied by symptoms like general body ache, fatigue, stuffy nose, sneezing and sore throat.

A cold due to allergy is usually characterised by a running nose, sneezing, congestion and an itching sensation in the nose and eyes.

A common cold often treats itself with plenty of rest, balanced meals and fluids. However, it is to be noted that infection or allergy is usually due to reduced immunity. Preventive care therefore becomes very important. With the constant threat

of viruses or allergens, it is vital to ensure that our immune system works at an optimum level. A strong immune system ensures that the body can resist organisms/allergens that cause disease.

By adjusting one's diet according to the season and supplementing it with effective herbs that are natural immunity boosters, it is possible to strengthen our immunity and avoid falling ill.

**Prevention:** Suggestions to prevent the common cold include:

Maintaining good hygiene: Wash your hands with soap/hand sanitiser before and after meals, or after encountering unhygienic surfaces.

Boost your immunity by eating a balanced, nutritious diet. Easy to digest food is advised like warm soups and steamed or boiled vegetables with a little spice for taste. One should avoid all foods that are difficult to digest such as milk, curd and oily, spicy, and heavy food. Avoid refrigerated food and consume only hot food.

For those who are prone to episodes of the common cold, regular intake of immunity enhancing herbs like amalaki (Indian gooseberry), tulsi (basil), guduchi (giloy) and haridra (turmeric) are helpful in preventing cold and other respiratory ailments due to seasonal changes. These herbs are now available as standardised tablets made by many reputed companies. Regular consumption of green tea is also usually recommended as an immunity enhancer.

**Remedies:** Essential oils can act as great home remedies for common cold. Eucalyptus oil can help relieve nasal blockage, and other cold-related issues. It is well-known for its antiseptic and antibacterial properties. A few drops of eucalyptus oil on a handkerchief or pillow cover, works wonders for a blocked nose. The other less popular but effective essential oils include nutmeg oil, camphor oil and peppermint oil.

However, it is easier to opt for a readily available

cold balm with a combination of essential oils, like Himalaya Cold Balm or Zandu Balm. Apply the balm on the affected area (nose or chest) to get quick relief from a running or stuffy nose.

Yoga practitioners suggest learning 'jal neti' and practising it regularly to avoid recurrent complaints of common cold.

In my practice, I usually suggest instilling medicated nasal drops (4-5 drops of Anu taila or Shadbindu taila from any reputed Ayurvedic pharmacy or Bresol-NS from Himalaya) 2-3 times a day, for about 7-10 days or until the symptoms of nasal congestion subside. Inhalation of plain steam for about 2-3 minutes prior to instilling these nasal drops ensures better results.

**Medication:** Classic Ayurvedic medicines like Dasamoola Katutrayam Kashaya or Indukantam Kashaya (Kottakkal/Vaidyaratnam/AVP) — 2 teaspoons, mixed with 6 teaspoons of boiled and cooled water, twice daily on an empty stomach with 1 teaspoon of Agastya Rasayana (Kottakkal/Vaidyaratnam), twice daily, should be started at the onset of complaints of common cold and continued for about 30-45 days. This will ensure a symptom-free winter for those prone to common cold.

In stubborn or chronic cases, one may take either Septilin (Himalaya); Extrammune (Charak); Step (Vasu) — 2-0-2 tablets or capsules/2-0-2 teaspoons of syrup — for about 2-3 months during the critical season. This helps in preventing symptoms from becoming severe.

Geriforte tablets 2-0-2 or 2-0-2 tsp syrup (Himalaya) or 1-2 tsp of amrit kalash (Maharishi Ayurveda)/kesari kalp (Baidyanath) or chyavanaprasha from any reputed company — twice daily — can be continued as a daily preventive health tonic. ■

*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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THREE years ago, Sanchita Bajaj started a small home-based business called Gourmet Medleys. Bajaj had worked for 18 years in the education sector, selling educational material for a multinational. A friend, who ran a food stall, suggested she try her hand at the food business. Bajaj, a believer in natural and wholesome foods, began by making an array of baked wheat crisps with different vegetables like beetroot, spinach and carrot. She went on to experiment with a range of foods and now produces snacks which you can crunch on without worrying about calories or your health.

Her medley of products includes moong dal crackers in three flavours (cumin, oregano and chilli) and bajra and soya cookies. Another invention is a nut fudge made with flaxseed, dry fruits and jaggery.

No preservatives, colour or essence are added, says Bajaj. She sells her foods on online stores which specialise in natural products like Q-trove and placesoforigin.in. She also takes part in Dastkar's exhibitions and is a regular seller at consumer and lifestyle exhibitions. ■

**Contact:** Sanchita Bajaj: 9810116589; Email: gourmet.medleys@gmail.com



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