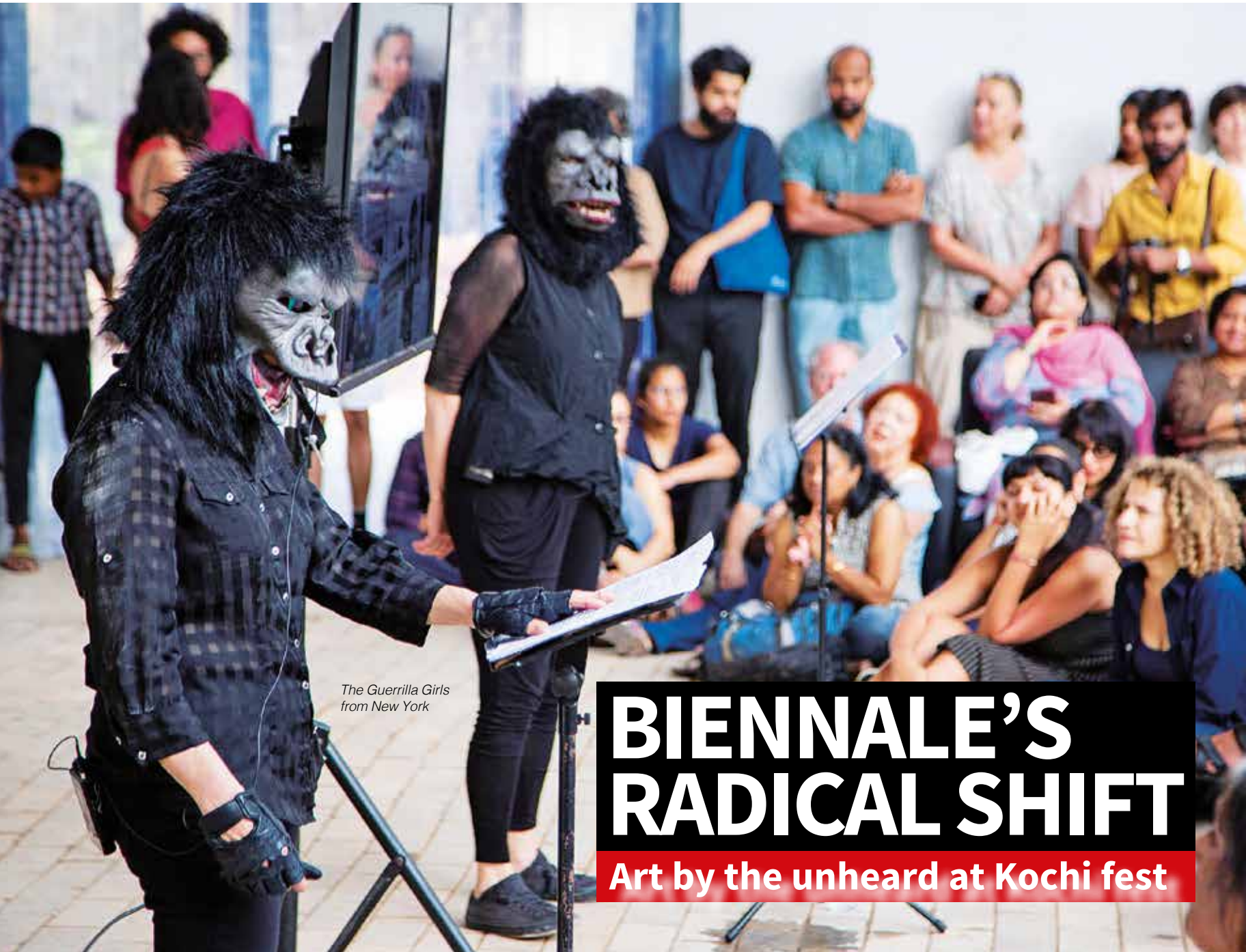


Civil Society



The Guerrilla Girls from New York

BIENNALE'S RADICAL SHIFT

Art by the unheard at Kochi fest

GOA'S HERITAGE MAP

Pages 8-9.....

ARUNA ROY ON MGNREGA

Pages 10-11.....

TREE CLIMBING CLASSES

Page 12.....

INTERVIEW

'TECH MUST HAVE A HUMAN INTERFACE'

KIRAN KARNIK ON THE NEED FOR GOING BOTTOM UP

Pages 6-8

MF FUNDING FOR NGOS?

Pages 22-23.....

NEEM FACTORY ON TRUCK

Pages 24-25.....

SUNDER NURSERY REVIVED

Pages 29-30.....

Our Sustainable Initiatives in 2018



Akshaya Patra

Provides mid-day meals to children of low income households, discouraging truancy

35 Government Schools

5000 Meals daily



Healthy India Happy India

Health camps conducted for to spread awareness about health and hygiene for underprivileged school children at government schools

28,000 students in **144**

Government schools

Kitchen garden training to more than **1000** students

1,700 spectacles distributed for free



Conservation & Sustainability

In partnership with SEBC (Society for Environment and Biodiversity Conservation), Himalaya has helped to reinforce the livelihood of local communities by preserving the flora in the Western Ghats, a UNESCO World heritage site

Tree Planting Program with over **700,000** trees planted till date



Kisaan Mitra

Focuses on the economic empowerment and financial security of small and marginalized farmers

Organized training programs for farmers

Eliminate dependencies on middlemen



Muskaan

A Himalaya Lip Care Initiative, provides free corrective surgeries for cleft lip and palate in underprivileged children

500+ Corrective Surgeries

INR 2 from the sale of each Himalaya Lip Care product goes towards Muskaan



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IN THE LIGHT

SAMITA RATHOR



LETTERS



Northeast lens

Thanks for your story, 'Cinema's Rockstars.' It was a comprehensive account of films being made by directors from the northeast. Our region does not get much coverage in the mainstream media. Interest in cinema from here was due to Rima Das' film, *Village Rockstars*, which was selected as India's entry for the Oscar awards.

John Sangma

Good story, well-written and highlights how directors here are building a new language of cinema, one which is realistic, rustic and impactful.

Sushil

Village stops builders

With reference to your story, 'Goa village digs in, grows paddy to stop builders,' I was very happy when Fr George told me that the people of St Estevan were going to return to

farming. I want many more to join them. I am also a farmer. Keep it up. God is with us.

Cynthia Aguiar

This is an example of great work for humanity. Goa has been blessed by Fr George's initiative. Congratulations to the team who thought of an innovative way to protect the earth.

Jacintha

Great effort by the citizens of St Estevan. Hats off to their struggle.

Radha Malik

Congratulations to this group of villagers for their inspiration and

enterprise. I hope more villages take the cue and save their land thanks to this example.

Hyacinth Pinto

Kudos to everybody who made this project a success. Hopefully, Chorao and other islands and villages will follow suit. We can make Goa a lush, green beauty, as it once used to be, and not a concrete jungle.

Joseph Fernandes

Happy to know about St Estevan's success story and I am willing to put in a day's labour in paddy farming for free.

Nelson Pacheco

Congratulations to all those who helped St Estevan take up farming. This is true democracy. Please include an address where donations can be sent. I cannot contribute much but I'm sure a lot of small donations can add up to a considerable sum and help the project.

S. Rodrigues

Very inspiring. My heart swells with joy to see the enthusiasm, unity and dedication of this island village. An excellent example for others to follow. Keep it up and keep it going.

Richard Almeida

Teff debut

Shree Padre's story, 'Teff' is here and *injera* may be on its way to India, was interesting and comprehensive. I am keen to try the flour and, later, I would like to grow teff on a small patch of land.

Padmini Raghavan

Stories like this one make *Civil Society* highly readable and different from other magazines. Please continue to provide readers with this kind of reading matter.

Narendra Apte

Donkey soap

On Kavita Charanji's story, 'Donkey love: Soap from milk, is a beautiful idea', the animal produces very little milk and so I agree it is cruel to deny milk to its calves.

Rajendra Hegde

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COVER STORY

THE FESTIVAL AT KOCHI

The Biennale held in Kochi has pushed the boundaries for such events, encouraging experimentation, radical offerings and seeking out the less-known.

18

Mapping heritage homes in Goa 8-9

Apni Basti Mela is good fun 14-15

Pipli gets trendy with its craft 16

Do manifestos matter? 26

An unsecular education 27

Why soft power counts 28

Magnificent Jatayu on a hill 31

The girl from a ghetto 33

Ayurveda: For a sore throat 34

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Civil Society
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Biennale and more

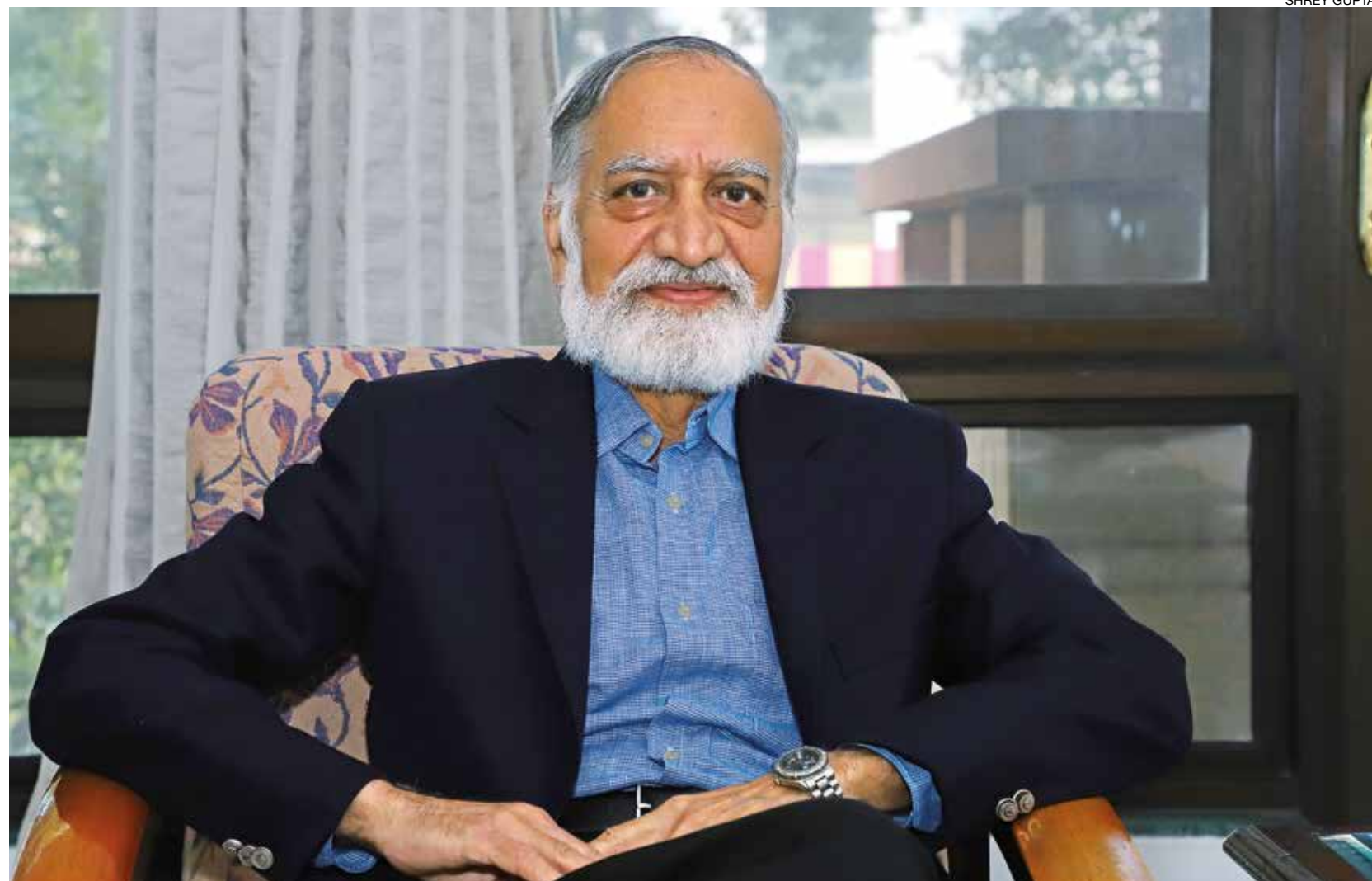
FREE-falling spaces enrich a democracy. The Biennale held in Kochi, which is featured as our cover story this month, is one such space. We should value it because we unfortunately live in times when the opportunities for discussion and self-expression have been drying up. You could say that for the world as a whole and definitely for India. We should first of all blame ourselves for not being assertive enough in protecting our freedoms. But it is also true that over time structures have come up in which governments and corporations have acquired the power to decide what we should see and read and say. The result is a predictability that makes our lives sterile. So entrenched are they that it is difficult to shake them and claim back space. The decline is now noticeable. Campuses, for instance, are bereft of their old energy. The media seems to have lost its relevance and purpose. The voluntary sector is treated with suspicion instead of being celebrated for the creative force that it can be. Just when we should be pushing our boundaries as a nation, we seem compelled to conform. The rare occasions that we break free, such as the Biennale, are those that we should cherish because they are reminders of the diverse kinds of nourishment we need for going forward.

Speaking to us for the lead interview of this issue, the gentle and insightful Kiran Karnik makes several important observations on the appropriate use of powerful technologies to promote development. Significantly, he bemoans the lack of discussion and debate in the country. There is a need for platforms on which differing views and perceptions can be shared. In the face of multiple disparities, a bottom-up approach is actually indispensable. But the reverse has been happening, especially with technology, which is hurriedly seen as a silver bullet. On the other side, there are those who have an entrenched suspicion of technology and find a design and a conspiracy in everything. They also do a lasting disservice to the country. A case in point has been Aadhaar, which needed to have been implemented with sensitivity and awareness of realities on the ground. Activists and social scientists had several important concerns and suggestions which were overlooked. Was it because of their unwillingness to engage or the arrogance of a few who believe technology is the answer to all problems? Both, undoubtedly, but what is truly worrisome is that we seem to have lost the stamina for consensus building. It is in this that we must see a breakdown. The Supreme Court finally decided on Aadhaar, but a courtroom is no real substitute for the give and take and pooling of ideas that should take place in society.

The rural employment guarantee scheme has its well-known supporters and opponents. But much beyond the differing views there is the stark reality of rural distress. We spoke to Aruna Roy on what has been ailing the scheme on the ground. There is little doubt that governments haven't been implementing the scheme with the serious intent that it deserves.

Finally, non-profits have been increasingly finding it difficult to raise funds for their causes. There are many reasons for this, but the lack of funds is certainly not one of them. So how best to connect donors and NGOs? The Quantum Mutual Fund has come up with a Systematic Giving Plan (SGP) for its investors. Will it work? We try to figure it out in our business section.

Shree Padre



SHREY GUPTA

Kiran Karnik: 'The constraint in reaching broadband to villages is organisational and managerial capability'

'Tech must go bottom up and take people into account'

Kiran Karnik on Aadhaar and going cashless

Civil Society News
New Delhi

DIGITAL technology has brought major changes in India and there are more coming. It has speeded up the way people connect and transact. It has made the interface with authority more transparent. Medical advice can be given over long distances. So, too, can education be acquired.

But in a country with stark social and economic disparities, can technology alone be the answer to the lack of governance and inclusion? Or is it inevitable that some people will just get left behind? In Aadhaar's implementation it has been seen that even a one percent failure rate has put millions of people at risk of losing their rights and many have. There have been deaths from something as basic as ration cards not being disbursed.

So what should be done to be more equitable in

delivering benefits from sophisticated transformations? How can technology be shaped to meet the needs of those who have a lot of catching up to do?

Kiran Karnik, who has been closely involved with technological changes in India over the years, has interesting answers. He has served in government programmes in space and atomic energy and he has also been part of the IT sector. His book, *Evolution: Decoding India's disruptive tech story*, has been recently released. On a crisp January morning, *Civil Society* caught up with Karnik in his simple and attractive apartment in Gurugram.

The Modi government has made strenuous efforts to use digital technology for better governance. Has it made enough headway?

The national so-called 'e-governance' programme started more than 10 years ago. It wasn't moving very fast. There was some effort to try and see what

services could be digitised. This government has given it additional impetus because the prime minister is personally very much involved and desirous of pushing the whole idea of technology, particularly digital technology. It has done very well in some areas in trying to see where technology can be used well to interface. In some other areas — take a thing that is so critical like the optical fibre reaching 50,000 gram panchayats — the progress has been slower than one would have liked. There has been acceleration but it has reached half that number and even that not properly. Taking broadband to rural India can transform lives in a big way — livelihoods, education, health, everything — but the kind of drive one would have expected and hoped for has been missing.

Isn't it strange because that's the pipe that would make all the difference? Is there any explanation? I think the problem comes in looking at technology

and not looking at the organisational forms with enough depth. The constraint we've seen time and again is organisational and managerial capability. Technology is there today and there's nothing new to be invented. There's nothing new to be done. It's really how you put it into place and execute. So it's all about management and organisation.

So it's a combination of good management and being in mission mode?

Absolutely. That's the whole secret of what you might say is our success in technology areas.

It is what was there in our space programme.

You can say it was in space. In my book I also give the example of atomic energy. You see it in a completely different way in information technology (IT), which is private sector-driven. The government has played a bigger role in the IT sector than people give it credit for in terms of policy and facilitation, but the private sector has driven it. In all three areas you see this combination, which you rightly said, of good management and being in mission mode.

In IT, through NASSCOM, we set ourselves the target of \$50 billion by 2008. So there was a goal, there was a congruence of people and there was an intense sense of competition amongst the players. But the superordinate goal was to reach that \$50 billion. Everything needed to support that goal had to be done across companies. In human resources and infrastructure, such as better connectivity, they came together. In other areas they competed. The private sector works so well when you are in mission mode. Here (in e-governance) it's not been there to the same extent.

And tragically so because you do have current successes like solar.

Yes, you're right, it is much, much more successful.

So, in the absence of digital literacy at the grassroots and a robust telecom structure, should we have moved slowly and more consciously to deliver schemes meant for the poor?

It's a very good question. It troubles me because I'm not a technology enthusiast. I think technology can do it, but you have to use it appropriately.

You've said in your book, we need the 'renaissance' approach.

Absolutely. I think that you just need to look at a combination of things. It's not just all about technology. Having said that, I think that technology has great potential and the digital literacy part is not really a constraint. You can see this in the way people use the cell phone. It's not just a cell phone. You use it for all kinds of things. Not just in urban areas, but I've seen this even in rural areas. They know how to access websites, they know how to download music and movies, they know how to get the cricket score — all through icons without someone telling them. They know how to make a WhatsApp call. None of it has been done by 'educating' them and creating so-called digital literacy.

But for more complex things like financial transactions, we have to ask ourselves whether we have the wherewithal to use just technology. I think that's been the mistake with things like Aadhaar. It's not just the issues around privacy and data

protection. It's all about making it the only route when in a country like India you know that you have people being excluded for one reason or the other. I think that has been the problem. It has not been thought through sufficiently in a proper end-to-end manner.

Many technology enthusiasts, among them my friends and colleagues, have pushed hard, saying "this is the magic solution". There's no magic in this. In most problems in India we have to take a much wider approach and understand the issues that are there from the grassroots upwards. And that's been missing.

If I can digress for a bit here, a couple of things. When we did, not that it was great, but when we did good things in the space programme it was always based on beginning with an understanding of what the people you are trying to reach need. That's why we built a whole team of social scientists to understand first what people want and then see how technology could be used to deliver it.

Here we've gone the other way around. You have a technology and say, "Hey this is great, let's just deliver this." You're not trying to understand what

'For complex things like financial transactions, we have to ask ourselves whether we have the wherewithal to use just technology. I think that's been the mistake with things like Aadhaar. It has not been thought through.'

the issues are. Things like biometrics for people who do hard, manual work — their fingerprints get erased. Then you have a problem matching them. You have a 99 percent match. It sounds great but when you realise 99 percent is one left out of a hundred and you see how many are left out in one million and then how many out of a billion and you see 10 million. And you realise that 10 million won't get rations, their pensions or whatever. Then you realise the magnitude of the problem. If you start bottom up to look at the problem, then you begin to see. Very often, technology solves these very problems. It's not always that you throw away technology. But you need to first understand the problem and see how you can use this tool or this toolkit, then you have to deal with it. Rather than starting with this toolkit and saying, "I've got a hammer and whether a screw or a nail, I'm just going to hammer it in."

The Aadhaar card being a case, where activists are pointing out starvation deaths in Jharkhand, they have also been suggesting alternative methods like a smart card and a local data base. What can be done to get techies to work with activists to understand these issues? We may get very great inventions as a result of such collaboration.

I think this is a very critical issue and again something that is sadly neglected. We need to build common platforms where those who understand the people — activists who work at the grassroots — work with technologists. That has been missing. There has been no dialogue and unfortunately both seem to have taken opposite views where they don't

even talk the same language. The technologists are in a world of their own, thinking that technology can solve all the problems in the world. And then there are some, not all but many I would say, activists who feel that technology is the tool of the oppressor.

I think this is going back to when I first started my career when I was working in rural areas, 50 years ago. I used to have this problem. We would try to deal with those at the grassroots level and always found that most of them were just convinced that technology was a tool of the oppressor and stayed away from it. That's wrong. I think you have to see how to use it.

But the dialogue on how the two can come together is very critical. As with many areas, particularly in the past few years, dialogue between differing opinions in this country has got lost somewhere. We need to build that again. This is something that civil society organisations need to take the initiative in. Of course the government has a big responsibility to do this, probably bigger. But I think the whole civil society world also should relook at how they can establish a dialogue.

Isn't this interesting, considering the background to a lot of technology in our country. We're the originators of satellite TV and the purpose for it was educational. Public health being an example. We have a long history of this, so why is there memory loss? You've worked in the private and public sectors, perhaps you have some insights.

It is unfortunate and I don't have a clear answer as to why this sort of memory loss has happened. I've had the good fortune of working with the government and in the private sector and being very active, not just now but in the past with civil society organisations and I think it's very easy to build dialogue and straddle and cross-fertilise among the three. It's a huge advantage. We should be taking examples of success from the private sector and transferring them to civil society, to government and vice-versa. The government has done some very good things and there are examples across the country.

The dialogue seems to have broken down, possibly because we don't have enough platforms and one of my hopes has been that somebody, I don't know who, will create more platforms where there are possibilities of dialogue happening among these three.

Great opportunities are lost in the process...

Absolutely! For a country like ours, this is critical. We need to understand basic issues and solve them. One of the ways, not the only way, but one of the ways of solving them is to use the powerful new technologies that are now available. Our country

Continued on page 8

'Technology must go bottom up and take people into account'

Continued from page 7

has the good fortune to have the capability (to employ these technologies).

In your book one of the important things you've talked about is the cashless economy and what technology has done for banking and financial transfers. But in a country like ours, you must have thought how far we can go cashless, right? We have a large informal sector. Can the cashless economy bring the informal sector into the formal sector? Is there a meeting point here?

That's the great big hope. Of course, going completely cashless is not going to happen. It's not just us because of our state of development. Look at Germany. The amount of cash they use is phenomenal.

Or look at Japan.

Even Japan. Cash is not bad. You gave the example of bringing the informal sector in. It's something that I've mentioned in my book as an example, and that's the dream that some of us have about how going cashless can be usefully used. If the small vendors accept payments through a digital platform then they'll have a history of transactions that will be useful in getting loans. You have these people who lend to them at an interest rate of 2 percent a day! Giving them a loan at 18-20 percent would make them so much better off.

I think going completely cashless is a dream, it is a mirage, but it is not so difficult for them to reduce their cash and go digital. I think getting them into the formal economy in some way would be a great help for them in terms of getting loans, in terms of getting recognised, as being credit-worthy, both to suppliers and to buyers. It's something worth looking at, but again we have to do it with an understanding of the basic issues.

There's no substitute for the human interface.

I don't think there's a substitute. Complete mechanisation or automation is probably not feasible and not desirable.

How do we implement large-scale efforts to spread digital literacy to teachers and panchayat representatives?

I do think such efforts need to be done on scale. I'll give you one example from 50 years ago and the initial days of satellite broadcasting. We trained a huge number of teachers in teaching science. We had 2,500 teachers and we brought 50 of them to places where we had satellite broadcast. In 10 days we trained a massive number.

You need a similar effort. Start training at the district level and then move on to state level particularly for teachers and panchayat functionaries. Panchayats handle a fair amount of money and accounting. For them to be able to get this on a digital platform will be efficient, useful, quicker, and, more importantly, accountable. It'll be visible. ■

Mapping heritage homes in Goa

Derek Almeida
Panaji

GOA is practically littered with mesmerising houses and government buildings that hark back to 450 years of colonial rule. So great was the dominance of western architecture in shaping urban and, to some extent, rural landscape that local architecture was completely overwhelmed. But thanks to the efforts of the Goa Heritage Action Group (GHAG), about 60 houses, known as Raj-Angonn or courtyard houses, with basic plans based on indigenous ideologies that pre-date the arrival of the Portuguese have been listed.

Research conducted by GHAG focused on understanding the arrival of the courtyard in Goan architecture, documentation of these houses and creating awareness of the culture and heritage associated with them.

Elaborating on the survey of these houses, Raya Shankhwalker, honorary secretary of GHAG, said: "There has been so much prominence of Indo-Portuguese architecture that in many ways we have lost track of vernacular heritage. The courtyard houses of Goa are a unique form of climate

adaptive architecture. Our intention is to create a visiting circuit because locked up in these houses is a wealth of art and artifacts which have been relegated to the fringes for far too long."

Many of these houses may have been built during the Portuguese time while some of them may have a history that predates the arrival of the Portuguese. However, the basic plans could be centuries old even though the embellishments do have certain western influence.

"The key reasons for surveying and documenting these houses is that it is a part of Goa's heritage and we were keen to show how Goa has an indigenous architectural style that predates the Portuguese," said Shankhwalker.

According to a study paper by Arpitha Shreedhara for GHAG, the houses surveyed are between 150



A typical Goan courtyard home



Raya Shankhwalker, honorary secretary of the Goa Heritage Action Group

and 450 years old and a few of them have gun holes in their external walls. "In many houses, the attics are literally filled with old documents, furniture, weapons used during the wars, paintings and photographs depicting important historical events, etc."

The survey of the Raj-Angonn houses is one of the many efforts of GHAG to bring about awareness of heritage and the compelling need to protect it. Formed in 2000, at a time when it was difficult to get the required nine persons to form an NGO, the group has grown, and more importantly it has succeeded in creating awareness about the need to protect heritage.

In 2005 the group published a book, *Walking in and around Panjim*, which listed heritage structures in the capital city. "One of the reasons for doing this

PICTURES BY SAGUN GAWADE



Window into the past: some courtyard houses predate the arrival of the Portuguese

was because the state government had not framed comprehensive regulations and one of the precursors for framing these regulations was listing of heritage structures across Goa."

This massive exercise by GHAG was undertaken with its own resources to prove that it could be replicated in other cities, towns and villages. Unfortunately, the state government did not take cognisance of the list, nor use it to initiate listings in other parts of Goa.

The book became popular and three years ago the group decided to revisit the book with a more comprehensive listing with interactive walking maps. The new book, *Mapped Heritage of Panjim*, contains a list of 907 structures in the city alone. Lamented Shankhwalker, "In the last decade or so, around 125 heritage buildings have been demolished."

Although the state government is yet to frame heritage regulations, there are indications that it is

in the process of formulating a heritage policy and has initiated the process of listing heritage structures. However, it is surprising that GHAG, which is a key stakeholder, has not been asked to participate in the process, which according to Shankhwalker is "shrouded in mystery".

The group, which was the brainchild of Heta Pandit, began with an effort to create awareness through art and heritage festivals and the Fontainhas Art Festival, held in the Latin quarter of Panaji, became quite famous because it created an interface between artists, house owners and citizens.

When the international film festival of India came to Goa for the first time, there were plans to demolish the Goa Medical College main building which is a heritage structure. Intervention by GHAG stopped this and instead it was upgraded and, but for the theatre, the complex where the festival is held comprises heritage buildings.

At some time in the past, the Panjim corporation toyed with the idea of creating an amusement park in the main garden. The plan never saw the light of day thanks to the efforts of GHAG.

Explaining the *raison d'être* of the group, Shankhwalker said, "What sets us apart is that we never believed in conventional activism. We believed in soft activism which meant engaging with the government, creating awareness through art festivals and filing public interest litigation when necessary. And the success rate of this position has been very high."

The key to heritage preservation is first understanding the main benefits. "Conservation of heirlooms or our history is the key responsibility of a civilised society. It is important to conserve what was built by previous generations and transmit it to future generations," says Shankhwalker, adding, "today in Europe the core historic centres of cities are much sought after by tourists and this cannot be recreated."

Through the Fontainhas Art Festival, GHAG tried to push forward the idea of creating a development model for the heritage areas with people at the centre. "We need to enhance life in these areas so that people stop closing their houses and leaving or selling them to builders, because people are the soul of the place," he explained. Through this festival, the group generated more awareness and more hotels and restaurants opened in the area.

Recently, GHAG embarked on another research project on Kaavi art which adorns several places of worship and houses in Goa. It is a unique art form in which lime plaster on walls is etched and a red earth-based pigment is used to create art. Documentation is completed and publication of a book is expected to follow.

The past 18 years have not been smooth for the group. After the flurry of activity which marked the first seven years of its existence, it went into hibernation. "I personally had to take a break to drive personal growth which had taken a back seat," said Shankhwalker. Since then, the organisation had been shrinking and rebuilding started two years ago. But the original force which drove GHAG is still alive and ticking and the research projects on Kaavi art and Raj-Angonn houses is proof that it has not lost its soul. ■

Samita's World

by SAMITA RATHOR



'MGNREGA is being sidelined by the govt'

Civil Society News
New Delhi

WHEN farmers make no money, the rural economy comes to a standstill. Incomes shrink. Wages of agricultural labour have declined in the past two years and activists working at the grassroots say there is acute rural distress. The Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) was supposed to be a fallback in troubled times such as these by providing 100 days of work and timely payment.

However, just when it is most needed, MGNREGA is beset with problems. It is inadequately funded, payments to workers are inordinately delayed and social audits, to check corruption, aren't being done.

MGNREGA is the world's largest job guarantee programme. Since the time it was launched under the Congress, it has created rural roads, irrigation, water-harvesting structures and more. If implemented vigorously now it could buttress the flailing rural economy. The new state government in Rajasthan has taken some steps soon after coming to power. But nationally MGNREGA tends to suffer.

We spoke to Aruna Roy, one of the architects of MGNREGA, about how the programme is faring and what could be done about rural distress.

Since you work closely with rural communities, how severe is rural distress?

Rural distress has been a continuing phenomenon faced by a vast majority of the rural poor including farmers, agricultural workers, artisans and others dependent on the rural economy. Successive years of drought and economic upheavals such as demonetisation, poor monetary returns on agricultural produce and skewed terms of lending by formal financial institutions have exacerbated this distress and made people far more vulnerable in the last two years. Rural distress is significantly severe and needs a well-thought-out, sustainable and comprehensive plan of action.

Is MGNREGA living up to its promise? Or is the employment guarantee programme in the doldrums?

MGNREGA was conceived as a measure to address rural distress, systemically, and it remains the most tested method to tackle it. We shouldn't forget that despite the fall in employment figures, MGNREGA has played an important role in protecting the lives, livelihoods and wages of rural workers. It has provided vital support to vulnerable communities, including those facing distress due to natural disasters and calamities.

Unfortunately, MGNREGA is being deliberately sidelined by the Union government and many state governments, depriving people access to important, legally-supported structures. The remedy lies in immediate intervention so that there can be a renewed commitment to MGNREGA, as is now happening in Rajasthan.

According to the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER), one out of every



SHREY GUPTA

Aruna Roy: 'MGNREGA has served as a lifeline for the rural poor'

'We shouldn't forget that despite the fall in employment figures, MGNREGA has played an important role in protecting the lives, livelihoods and wages of rural workers.'

three rural households has worked in the employment guarantee programme. MGNREGA has served as a lifeline for the poor. In 2017-18, close to eight crore people worked under MGNREGA.

The facts speak for themselves. In 2017-18, the average number of days worked per household was 46 days. This, despite lack of political commitment and the programme functioning at half its 100-day 'guarantee'.

According to an NCAER report, at least 25 percent of the decline in poverty since 2004-05 for participating households can be attributed to MGNREGA. After stagnating for at least three decades, the growth in real rural wages, especially agricultural wages, picked up in 2007-08 after MGNREGA's inception. The average growth rate of rural revenue jumped from 2.7 percent per year in 1999-2004 to 9.7 percent in 2006-2011.

Women's participation in the workforce has

increased substantially due to MGNREGA, and enabled their access to formal financial institutions and the economy. Around 40 percent of total households employed under MGNREGA every year are SC/ST households. Eighty-two percent belong to the low (bottom 30 percent with a monthly income upto ₹657) and middle income group (middle 40 percent with a monthly income between ₹657 and ₹1,057).

Another major violation of the basic rights of workers comes from the delay in payment of wages. The Act mandates that workers have to be paid within 15 days of completion of work.

Studies indicate that while a quarter of rural households participate in the programme, nearly 60 percent of them would like to work more days but are unable to find work. Of the households that did not participate, 19 percent would have liked to participate but could not find work. This widespread direct rationing affects about 29 percent of all rural

households but is particularly pervasive in certain regions (NCAER -2015).

The year 2017-18 has also seen an alarming number of starvation deaths which can be linked to devastating rural distress. Although MGNREGA could have become an important source of economic security for these households, we find that in nearly all 74 starvation cases, despite having job cards, work was not provided to these individuals and households in the last two years.

Are there sufficient funds for implementation of MGNREGA? How should it be funded so that it doesn't falter?

Being a demand-driven programme, MGNREGA cannot be bound by budgetary constraints and restraining the flow of funds, as per demand, is a violation of the law. The Government of India (GoI) has, however, made it supply-driven — violating the core principles of the Act.

The irony is that every year the finance minister announces that the allocation for the programme is the 'highest ever'. However, the inflation-adjusted allocation for 2017-18 is lower than even 2010-11. In the last five years, one-fifth of the allocated budget was spent on clearing pending payments.

This has led to a vicious cycle with crores of workers denied wages for work done. This is unethical and unconstitutional. Even World Bank economists, one-time critics of the programme, recommended that at least 1.7 percent of the GDP be allocated for the programme to run robustly! Allocation dramatically declined from 0.58 percent in 2010-11 to 0.26 percent, despite increased GDP for the period. Telescoping shortfalls in providing funds pushes the financial crisis to the latter half of the year, when demand for MGNREGA employment peaks.

As of January 2, about 99 percent of allocated funds have been exhausted (including payment dues) with no funds in the pipeline.

How should MGNREGA wages be released so that it is timely and reaches people?

The government must ensure payment of wages to workers within 15 days of them completing their work. When the financial flow is blocked by the GoI, state governments are compelled to instruct functionaries not to register demand. The situation has dire consequences during drought, as in 2015-16.

The statutory unemployment allowance, which has to be paid in 15 days for denying demand, never gets paid. Legal entitlement and accountability must lie with the central and state governments to ensure flow. MGNREGA has driven the creation of crores of bank accounts for rural workers, particularly women. The government must ensure that technological limitations and bottlenecks do not deny workers their legally due wages.

The Act mandates payment within 15 days on completion of work. The state governments are to process muster rolls for payment in 10 days. The GoI ought to transfer the money to the workers' bank accounts within two days of receiving

electronic pay orders from the state government.

Delay by the government is calculated for the payment of delay compensation. The central government's delay is unfortunately not taken into account. Once the payment order is released by state governments, the payment is considered to be completed and any delay thereafter is not reported at all.

According to a study in 2016-17 and 2017-18, the delay by the GoI in releasing funds was 56 days on an average for 10 states in India. Conveniently, the 'delay compensation' by the central government is left uncalculated! The study found that in contrast to tall claims of 'on time' payments by the GoI and state governments, only 21 percent and 32 percent of wage payments were made within the stipulated 15-day period in 2016-17 and 2017-18, respectively.

A year-on-year decline in wages for agricultural labour is reported. What is the minimum wage you would like the states to implement?

The legality of delinking MGNREGA wages from minimum wages has been questioned by multiple committees set up by the Ministry of Rural

'Wages for MGNREGA must be immediately linked to the state's statutory minimum wage and indexed to inflation.'

Development, the Central Employment Guarantee Council and the Karnataka High Court. It also stands in violation of the Supreme Court's judgments.

Wages in MGNREGA still await reconciliation with the Minimum Wages Act. Nor has the GoI implemented the recommendation to index MGNREGA wage rate to the Consumer Price Index. This has led to the stagnation of MGNREGA wages in real terms with little increase in nominal wages.

The MGNREGA wages in Assam, Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttarakhand have either not increased at all, or increased by just ₹1 for 2017-18. The Jharkhand government questioned this in a strong letter to the GoI. Wages for MGNREGA must be immediately linked to the statutory state minimum wage and indexed to inflation.

There are complaints of corruption and harassment. How are social audits working?

Apart from Rajasthan and Haryana, all other states have set up independent Social Audit Units, reflective of lack of political will and fear of accountability. They are not uniform in performance. Some states do well and others conduct them only in name. However, what is required is more pressure from people to make this particular accountability system function.

Social audits have been formally recognised by the CAG. Auditing standards have been developed to ensure that participatory, objective, evidence-based information is collected, so that social audit

findings lead to sanctioned outcomes. Social audits have also been ordered by the Supreme Court not only for MGNREGA, but also for the National Food Security Act, Juvenile Justice Act and the Building and Other Construction Workers Act. When implemented, social audits in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Jharkhand, Meghalaya, and Sikkim, have fought corruption and put accountability systems in place. They have empowered citizens' participation, and facilitated questioning of local governments about corruption, performance and fall in standards.

You are based in Rajasthan. What are your expectations from the new Congress government?

The newly elected government must implement the promises made in their election manifesto. They have already made some efforts in painting transparency boards and accepting our demands. On January 5, they started a Rozgaar Diwas on two Thursdays and a 'Kaam Maango Abhiyan' (demand work agitation).

This special campaign is from January 5-20. Officials have been instructed to issue receipts to facilitate unemployment allowance. They have also been asked to help workers complete the 100 days of work that they are entitled to. After 90 days workers will be entitled to automatic inclusion for labour cards. MGNREGA has again begun to get momentum in the villages in Rajasthan.

However, if they do not create an independent and effective social audit unit, they will fail the expectations of ethical governance gravely. It is a matter on which the government's performance will be critically evaluated.

In which areas would your organisation, the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS), be keen to work with the new government?

The MKSS has always engaged with governments, as all rights have to be ultimately put in place through political will and bureaucratic compliance. We will continue to engage with the government at the panchayat, block, district, and state level. For example, some MKSS workers will help with training and organising camps for work enrolment. There are unionising processes in place to ensure that 10 entitlements are implemented. Advocacy and struggle, exercising our democratic right to peaceful protest and agitation, are tools that are intermittently necessary to make power accountable.

The state government has increased pension to ₹750. But how should pensions be delivered to the elderly?

As members of the Pension Parishad, we strongly and firmly believe that the elderly, single women and the disabled have a right to access pensions that are equivalent to half the statutory minimum wage of the state, indexed to inflation.

These pensions benefit some of the most vulnerable and marginalised communities of the country who face innumerable limitations like distance, mobility, age and autonomy to access pensions. Pensions must be paid to them in their own gram panchayat and ward. To prevent inherent corruption in the implementation of such cash transfers, dispersal of wages in a public place in the village in front of claimants and witnesses is the best way to prevent misappropriation. ■

PICTURES BY SHREE PADRE



Training begins: The number of young people eager to learn has come as a surprise

Tree climbing classes

Shree Padre
Puttur

FOR 15 years Prashanth, a 37-year-old villager living near Thirthahally in Karnataka, slaved at a granite quarry and a petrol station, although he was an educated man who had completed a pre-university course. The little he earned disappeared into paying for food and other basic expenses. The net result was that he was always in debt.

Then he enrolled for a five-day skill training course in areca nut harvesting in Thirthahally. Areca nut trees have no branches and grow upright to about 50 feet. Climbing such trees, harvesting their nuts and spraying pesticides requires skill, boldness and physical ability.

Prashanth now earns not less than ₹1,500 a day as an areca nut harvester. In the next two months he will earn ₹75,000, a sum that will take care of all his expenses and leave him debt-free. An excited Prashanth hasn't taken a single day off from work though the job is strenuous. "I want to pay off my loans as quickly as possible," he says.

Like Prashanth, 21-year-old Suresh who lives in Perdala village in Kasaragod district of Kerala, learnt areca nut harvesting in another training course at Vittal and also earns ₹1,500 per day.

Karnataka is the highest producer of areca nuts in India with 800,000 acres under cultivation. The state requires at least 60,000 skilled harvesting workers. A thousand acres of an areca nut garden require about 70 workers for harvesting and spraying. Wages are between ₹1,000 to 1,500 per day.

Since the profession is dangerous and physically taxing, it never used to attract young people. So, there is a shortage of areca nut workers who can climb these tall trees and carry out agricultural operations. The current batch of workers is middle-

aged or even older.

The Coconut Board is the pioneer of tree climbing training. Confronted with a shortage of coconut tree climbers, it trained 53,851 youths and women in this skill. The trainees are called 'Friends of Coconut Trees' (FOCT). The Coconut Board's persistent training of coconut climbers has solved the problem to a good extent.

The areca nut harvesting season is from November to April. Skilled workers do both harvesting and spraying by climbing the trees. During the monsoon, spraying is required to prevent a fungicide disease called mahali. Once the disease strikes, there is no curative treatment. Generally, three rounds of spraying are needed between May and August.

Any delay could result in a financial disaster for the farmer. This year, for example, trees couldn't be sprayed because of continuous rain. Informed farmers estimate the losses due to mahali at ₹1,000 crore.

This prompted a group of farmers, who call themselves the Elite Group, in Thirthahally to launch a skill training programme in areca nut climbing. Surprisingly, they got a good response and trained 33 youngsters in a five-day workshop in October 2017.

Their initiative inspired Campco, a giant marketing cooperative based in Mangaluru, to offer

a similar training programme at the Central Plantation Crop Research Institute (CPCRI) in Vittal. They got 90 applications for 30 seats. The University of Agriculture and Horticultural Sciences (UAHS), Shivamogga, collaborated with Campco.

The turnout of young people eager to be trained surprised the organisers. Says S.R. Satishchandra, president of Campco, "We didn't expect so many youngsters to attend the workshop. But they proved us wrong." Adds K. Shankaranarayana Bhat, vice-president of Campco, "Out of 30 trainees 18 have already started work and are harvesting areca nut as best as newcomers can."

Climbing an areca nut tree is risky. If the climber releases his hands from the tree or if the loop placed around his ankles snaps, the climber can fall to his death or seriously hurt his back.

For the first time, the Vittal training programme included safety measures. Dr K.C. Shashidhar, head of the agriculture engineering department in UAHS, has studied the kind of safety measures required and come up with a suitable system.

"The gadgets we use for training and for regular work are different. Regular workers need to spend ₹4,500 in the beginning to buy the gadget and protect themselves during work. It will last for three to four years," he says.

News of both workshops spread through the media and by word of mouth. Dr Manohar Rao, president, Elite Group, says, "A few of our trainees are requesting us to conduct another training session. Some of their relatives are working in hotels in the city. They aren't happy. The trainees have volunteered to bring such people for our training."

Kooloor Sathyannarayana Rao, treasurer, Elite Group, adds, "Youngsters who migrate to cities for jobs are facing a crisis. They don't earn enough to support their families. If there is a good job opportunity in their villages, they will be keen to return."

"The Campco workshop has given us the confidence to scale it up," says Dr M.K. Naik, vice chancellor, UAHS, Shivamogga, "I appreciate the effort with which they have given top priority to workers' safety. We are now considering including this in the two-year agriculture diploma course we are already conducting at two centres."

Dr M.J. Chandregowda, director, Appropriate Technology Application Research Institute (ATARI), Bengaluru, who is in charge of all the Krishi Vijnan Kendras (KVKs) in the three southern states, is quite impressed. "We will take the responsibility of introducing this skill development technology these teams have pioneered to other areca nut areas," he said.



Safety measures have been put in place



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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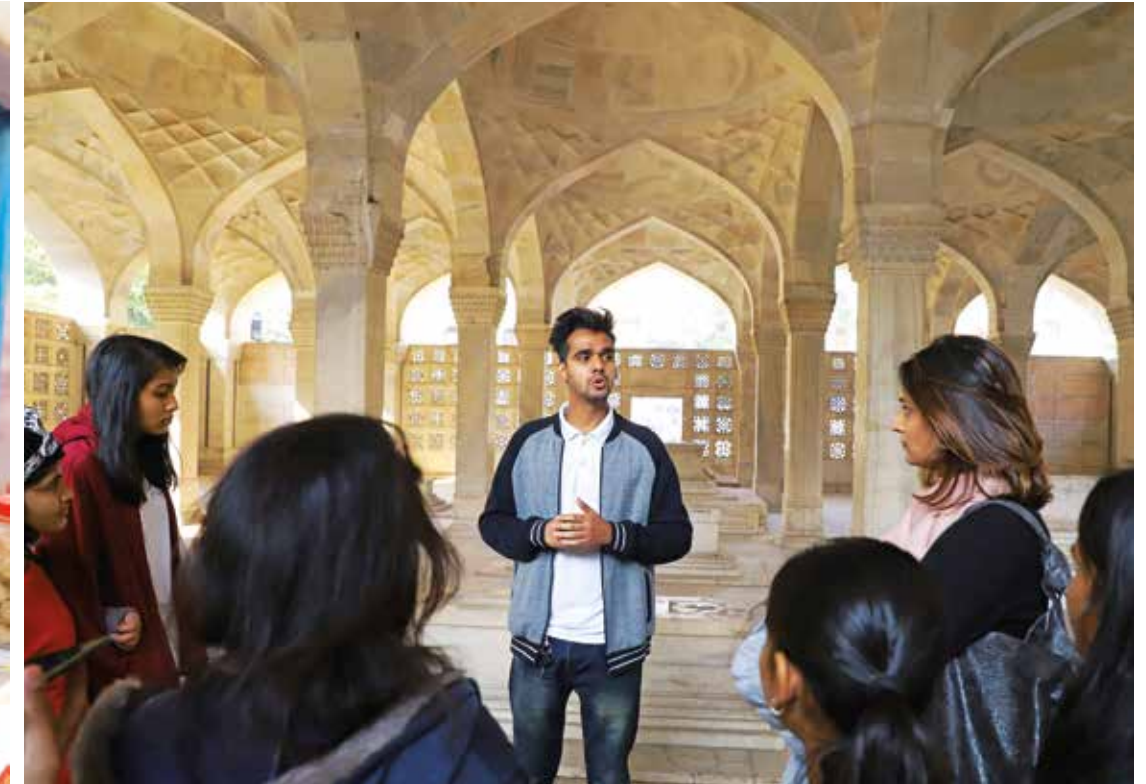
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A juggler performs before an enthralled audience



Zaika-e-Nizamuddin is now into catering



Faizan outlines the history of the Chausath Khamba

Apni Basti Mela is good fun, food and living heritage

Rwit Ghosh
New Delhi

STEPPED in history, the Hazrat Nizamuddin Basti is one of Delhi's oldest settlements. Every year, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) organises a vibrant Apni Basti Mela here so that residents feel proud of their locality's heritage.

Ensnared within the *basti's* maze of bylanes is the famed *dargah* of the Sufi saint, Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya, visited by millions of pilgrims each year. Here lie three legendary poets from the past — Amir Khusro, Mirza Ghalib and Rahim Khan-i-Khanan. Nizamuddin is dotted with historical monuments.

In 2008, the AKTC, which was restoring the grandeur of Humayun's tomb, took up the task of reviving the social, economic and cultural life of the communities that live near this historic site.

"The idea behind the *mela* is to celebrate life in the *basti* and encourage people who would not normally enter this locality to come and mingle with its residents. We also wanted to encourage the people of the *basti* to mix with the outside world," says Jyotsna Lall, director, programmes, at AKTC.

The venue of the *mela*, held in December, had flags, stalls selling merchandise made by residents of the *basti*, food stalls, games for children and exhibition stalls. There were carousels with images of the transformation the *basti* has undergone since AKTC started work here. Children swarmed all over and pointed out familiar areas.

"Many of them don't know what the Nizamuddin *basti* used to look like because they weren't born then. They don't remember the parks being dump yards, or not having community toilets," says Lall.

This year, AKTC felicitated members of their team who had done exemplary community work.



Children enact a play recounting the legend of Nizamuddin Auliya and the creation of the step-well at the *basti*

Among them was Shahida, an elder who had gone door-to-door to convince people to use public toilets while work on a trunk sewage line was taking place. If it hadn't been for her, AKTC might have found it tough to instal a proper sewage system.

The *mela* has had other outcomes. Two micro businesses run by women, Zaika-e-Nizamuddin and Insha-e-Noor, have found their feet due to the response they received at the *mela*.

Zaika-e-Nizamuddin started as a Self-Help Group (SHG) of women in 2010 to tackle malnourishment in the *basti*. The women made low-cost nourishing snacks for children.

Children can't spend more than ₹5 on snacks,"

says Swati Batra, women's livelihood coordinator at AKTC. The women realised this wasn't a viable business. They also noted that food was always bought from outside to be served at meetings.

"All the women make excellent *biryani* and kebabs at home. We realised we could market their food as authentic Nizamuddin cuisine," says Batra. AKTC helped standardise their recipes so that the women could work as a coordinated group.

In 2015, the Zaika-e-Nizamuddin group set up a stall at the Apni Basti Mela for the first time. They served only kebabs and *parathas*. These sold so well that the women and AKTC decided to start a catering wing. Now they do home delivery of kebabs

and *biryanis* to a growing list of clients and organise pop-up restaurants.

Zaika-e-Nizamuddin's forte is their fresh food. Ingredients are bought when orders are received. The food is prepared and delivered immediately.

The little business has made a world of difference to the women. "I used to stay at home and stitch. Zaika-e-Nizamuddin has given me an identity and recognition. People know me as a person who cooks local delicacies," says Noor Jahan, group coordinator of Zaika.

"When we first started we made just ₹400 to ₹700 each per month. Now we make between ₹5,000 to ₹8,000 from Zaika. Initially we were afraid of meeting people. Over time we have gained a lot of confidence in ourselves and our brand."

The other enterprise, Insha-e-Noor, has also seen rapid growth. When AKTC first started working in Nizamuddin Basti, it realised the importance of making a non-controversial entry into a community which wasn't receptive to the idea of letting women work.

The Insha Craft Centre was set up in 2008. In two years it trained 200 women in machine embroidery and tailoring. In 2011, the training centre became a production centre. The women participated in their first exhibition with a small inventory of products. A second centre called Noor trained women in *sanji*, a traditional paper-cutting craft. The women would make wall art and lamps with Mughal artwork, using *sanji*. In 2015, the Insha Craft Centre and Noor were merged to form Insha-e-Noor.

Insha-e-Noor now teaches five craft forms; *sanji*, crochet, *aari* embroidery, tailoring, and binding and packaging. Any woman can walk in, choose a craft she is interested in and learn from the master craftsmen at the centre. They can then make products for the centre and earn an income every month.

For most of the women, Insha-e-Noor is their secondary source of income. They mostly have jobs as housemaids and cleaners. The women make products when they are free. They just have to ensure they deliver on time.

"The main objective of Insha-e-Noor is to provide sustained, dignified and enhanced income to the women who work with us," says Batra. "We've seen women literally fighting with their families to come work here."

Like Zaika-e-Nizamuddin, Insha-e-Noor has helped the women become more confident. "I never used to step out of my home," says Shahi, "Now look at me. I work at a kiosk in Humayun's tomb. I have gained a lot of confidence."

AKTC is keen to ensure that both enterprises become financially viable entities. They have started phasing themselves out. Insha-e-Noor is being registered as a producer-company. All its members will become shareholders. A 12-member board is being trained by AKTC to handle management and training.

"Our ultimate objective is to make sure that Zaika-e-Nizamuddin and Insha-e-Noor function as independent enterprises that are financially viable," says Batra.

Another offshoot are heritage walks into the Nizamuddin *basti* by local youngsters trained as guides. For many of them, the walk is akin to retracing their way home.

Some, like Faizan, have grown up watching AKTC revitalise the area. Pointing to the *mela* grounds, Faizan says 10 years ago it used to be frequented by drug addicts and peddlers. He is part of Sair-e-Nizamuddin, an SHG that conducts the heritage walks.

"I've worked as a guide for the last four years, partly because of my interest in history and partly



Jyotsna Lall is director, programmes, at AKTC

because my elder brother thought I would be a good fit," says Faizan, "I'm finishing my master's in history and this is a part-time job. I've always enjoyed showing people around and telling them the history of a place." Like Faizan, there are many young people sporting white T-shirts who act as guides.

The Chausath Khamba, in the midst of this bustling *basti*, has been beautifully restored by AKTC. During *mela* days, the place becomes a cultural hotspot staging plays and music shows for residents.

As the sky darkens, the Chausath Khamba begins to glow and the people of the *basti* trickle in. The stage is a replica of their locality. The story being enacted is their story, a legendary one dating back 700 years to when the *basti* was founded.

At that time Sultan Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq, the ruler of Delhi, was building his capital, Tughlakabad. One day he came across a worker who was sleeping. The emperor asked why. The worker confessed that he and his co-workers had been working at night to build a *baoli* (step-well) inside the *basti*. Furious, the emperor banned supply of oil to the *basti*. But the Sufi saint, Nizamuddin Auliya, stepped in and miraculously the lamps lit up with water.

The play is greeted with a burst of appreciative applause. The audience, after all, feels truly proud of its historical locality. ■

Pipli gets trendy with its craft

Rakhi Ghosh
Bhubaneswar

CLOURFUL chariots are the first thing that people notice during Odisha's annual chariot procession of the gods, Jagannath, Balabhadra and Devi Subhadra. Decorating the chariots for the procession has been the responsibility of Darji or tailoring servitors for generations.

Applique items such as *chhati* or umbrella, *tarasa*, a heart-shaped wooden piece covered by applique and supported by a long wooden pole, and *chandua*, an umbrella shaped canopy are also used to dress up the chariots during the processions.

The craftsmen involved in making and trading of applique work, one of Odisha's top handicrafts, are settled in Pipli, about 20 km from Bhubaneswar. The craft that once began among a small group of people to serve and decorate the gods and chariots during festivals, has evolved into a well-known handicraft and a livelihood for thousands of people.

But due to various reasons, the applique artisans are moving to other trades or migrating to cities to work as construction workers to eke out a living. "If things do not improve soon, there is every possibility that only a handful of craftsmen will be left for doing applique work," says Benuddhar Mahapatra, president of the Odisha Applique Society.

MANY DESIGNS: Pipli, the village of applique craftsmen, derives its name from Pirs, the Muslim saint who lived in the region. The king of Odisha established the village to accommodate the craftsmen who made applique craft for the annual Jagannath Rath Yatra procession.

Both Hindus and Muslims of the village are involved in the making and trading of applique craft. The craft that originated as a temple art now finds its space in a wide range of decorative and ceremonial products. Almost all the villagers depend on the craft for their livelihood, the tourism industry working in their favour.

"It's not that all are involved in making or trading of applique products. There are people who run hotels and other businesses that cater to tourists who visit Puri and Konark," said Mahapatra. "Tourists cannot resist buying colourful applique craft displayed in our shops."

The craftsmen of Pipli produce numerous designs ranging from Jagannath and Ganesha, the favourite gods, to animals, birds, flowers, leaves, and geometric designs. Catering to modern needs, they produce wedding canopies, umbrellas, bags, wall hangings, lampshades and household furnishings that are popular with locals and tourists.

"Although traditional applique work has its

charms, customers seek innovative products. Patchwork applique, that is mostly done in hand stitch or hem embroidery, is the current favourite among shoppers," says shopkeeper Tajudin. While traditional applique lampshades are still in demand, sale of purses, cushion covers, letter pads, wall hangings and other decorative items has increased. "The modern applique work is finer, creative and has created its own space with customers," said Tajudin.

WOMEN ARTISANS: Women mostly do the applique work. Almost all the women of every household engage in this craft. It is the source of their livelihood. Women are involved in stitching,



An umbrella with applique. Artisans are innovating with new products to cater to consumers

but men take care of the designing, cutting and selection of colours, besides the sale of products.

"Whatever applique work you see is done by women artisans, but the pay is very meagre," says Tina Chhatoi, an artisan. "There are no fixed working hours. Sometimes we work for more than 10 hours."

But it does help the women add to the family income. "After passing Class 10, there was no job opportunity. Like me, many young women joined applique craft workshops," says Kamini Parida, an applique worker. The monthly income of ₹5,000 helps her support her family.

However, according to a workshop owner, the number of women artisans has reduced. Though the craft is dependent on women artisans, with the government's new skill-building training, many young girls have quit handicrafts and joined apparel factories in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.

RAW MATERIAL SHORTAGE: Artisans would buy cloth from state-owned Orissa Textiles Mills (OTM) 15 years ago. But after closure of the mill they have to depend on private mills or manufacturing units of other states. "After the closure of OTM, we buy cloth from Surat and thread and other accessories from Kolkata," says Jabar Khan, owner of one of the oldest applique product shops at Pipli.

But the real problem, according to traders, is that

they do not get the right quality cloth. "For applique work we use low-cost material, and so we cannot get good quality cloth," said Jabar Khan. "Because we are buying raw material from Surat the input cost and hence the cost of the product increases and customers find it expensive compared to other gift items."

The State Handlooms, Textiles and Handicrafts Department has opened a raw material bank for applique artisans and small traders at Pipli. But most of them say that there is not much variety of colours at the raw material bank. "In applique work we use nearly 10 different colours of cloth, threads and other accessories but most of the time the bank stores cloth of only two or three colours," said Rasanand Maharana, a workshop owner.

THE CHALLENGES: The recent Goods & Services Tax (GST) on handicraft items is another challenge for retail shop owners. "In 2016 we sold a large number of lampshades to traders of other states. In 2017 sales dropped to 50 percent because of implementation of GST," said Jahid Khan, a trader. "With 5 percent GST on cloth and 12 percent on steel wire you can imagine its impact on the price of finished items."

Tourists from Bhubaneswar used to pass through Pipli on their way to Puri and Konark. A bypass road, constructed in 2015, for the convenience of tourists and devotees going to Puri and Konark during Nabakalebara of Lord Jagannath, has been a major

shortcoming for the handicraft trade.

"Now hardly any tourist comes to this applique village. The government should make arrangements to bring tourists to this place," said Jabar Khan. "In other states, governments do a lot to promote local handicrafts, but here authorities are indifferent to our issues," said Mahapatra.

The villagers briefed central ministers Dharmendra Pradhan and Suresh Prabhu of their plight, when the ministers visited Pipli. They have staged road blocks, put forth written complaints to authorities concerned and also to the chief minister, but haven't got any response.

The craftsmen plan to introduce applique work in sarees and dress materials, as applique handicraft is always in demand.

"The skill training given by the government should be given for local handicrafts too, otherwise there will be a dearth of artisans in handicraft industries," said Maharana.

Recently, an interactive session was held between artisans and traders of applique work and designers of the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) in Bhubaneswar.

"They were overwhelmed, seeing our creativity, and we are hopeful this interaction will help boost our business and take applique craft to new heights," said Mahapatra. ■

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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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Gond artists Durgabai and Subhash Vyam's wall-based installation

Biennale's radical shift

Kochi fest presents stunning art by the unheard

Saibal Chatterjee
Kochi

AN immersive sound art installation by 43-year-old Mumbai-based artist Shilpa Gupta titled "For, In Your Tongue I Cannot Hide" is dedicated to poets imprisoned, and even executed, for their writings in different countries and centuries. Lines penned by 100 such literary renegades are transmitted through speakers strung from the ceiling in a room. Under the microphones are metal stands that hold printouts of the poems of such rebels as Daren Tatour, Liu Xia, Habib Jalib, Amanuel Asrat, Irina Ratushinskaya, Hadraawi and Mikayil Mushfig, to name only a few. Gupta's purpose is obvious: bring back to life those sought to be silenced by totalitarian regimes.

Ninety-four artists from 30 nations are exhibiting their works in public spaces and heritage sites across Fort Kochi and Mattancherry in Kerala as part of the fourth edition of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale (KMB).

This sprawling 108-day art fiesta is unlike any of the previous three Biennale editions. A few of its principal goals are: Giving voice to the voiceless, documenting resistance against tyranny, lending depth and new meaning to an evolving gender discourse in the #MeToo era, seeking out unsung artists from the shadows and a better deal for women in the art world.

Conceived and curated by eminent 60-year-old artist Anita Dube, the first

woman at the helm of the show, the event has seen a radical shift in emphasis. With its curatorial vision hinging on "Possibilities for a Non-Alienated Life", India's largest festival of its kind has brought voices barely heard and traditions rarely accommodated in the contemporary art world closer to the mainstream.

The Kochi-Muziris Biennale opened on December 12 and will continue till March 29.

Works by artists from the Arab world, the African continent and under-represented corners of India stand alongside installations by globally celebrated veterans such as Sue Williamson, William Kentridge, Bracha Ettinger, Martha Rosler and Julie Gough, besides a host of Indian luminaries.

More than half the participating artists in KMB 2018 are women. That apart, Dalits, tribals, transgenders, people of colour, and artists from conflict zones, among others, occupy prime slots in the ongoing Biennale to embody Dube's "desire for liberation and comradeship where the possibilities for a non-alienated life could spill into a politics of friendship".

By drawing many artists who exist outside the rarefied realms of galleries, museums and auctions into KMB's fold, the curator has sought to create a space "where pleasure and pedagogy could sit together and share a drink, and where we could dance and sing and celebrate a dream together".

Artists from Kenya, Cameroon, Lebanon, Palestine, Pakistan and Bangladesh are here with works marked by singular styles. "Decentralised collaboration" is



Durgabai and Subhash Vyam



A splash of graffiti on a wall



Aryakrishnan's interactive and live archive in memory of slain transgender activist Maria



Anita Dube, curator of the 2018-2019 Kochi-Muziris Biennale

the leitmotif of this Biennale.

The festival has taken into its sweep a wide range of challenges facing the world today and is, therefore, focused on works of artists and photographers who address conflict, assaults on individual freedom, and the many manifestations of social injustice.

This is true of the entire expanse of the Biennale. Besides the exhibitions at 10 different venues, there is an array of ancillary programmes — talks, seminars, workshops, film screenings (the Artists' Cinema segment is a favourite for many) and a medley of musical soirees.

"I've conceived this like a musical score which is created by an array of instruments. But music relies on effects; art exhibitions hinge on ideas, images, fragments.... This Biennale brings together varied materialities, styles, traditions and media," explained Dube before a walkthrough organised a day ahead of the Biennale opening.

The latest edition of the KMB is indeed like a complex 94-piece orchestra producing a diverse range of stimuli, an euphony of the finest timbre. The works on show are cautionary, but they also project the tenacity of the artist in the face of the growing threats to a world in the grip of rightwing politics.

"It is historic," says Dube, "that this Biennale is taking place at this point of history in my home country." Her allusion is, of course, to the distortions being injected into our notion of nationhood, leading to a souring of the dreams that once gave a newly independent country a positive impetus.

SUBALTERN IMPRINT: The "follies of history" parade across 63-year-old South African artist William Kentridge's dirge, *More Sweetly Play the Dance*, an eight-screen, 12-minute video installation spanning from the floor to the ceiling. The work, supported by a 10-track audio system, depicts a dancing column of animated drawings and videos of dancers enacting various forms of an elaborate *danse macabre*. It shows a procession of sickly figures supported by intravenous drips, priests marching with funeral flowers and people dragging sacks and dead bodies, led by a brass band, with world maps, text from Kentridge's notebooks

and Chinese characters constituting the backdrop. The installation alludes to real events without being specific by riding into a dark metaphorical abyss of death, disease and destruction.

Another South African artist, 78-year-old Sue Williamson, travels centuries back in time in her installation, "One Hundred and Nineteen Deeds of Sale", to focus on a horrific part of Kochi's history. She throws light on the young men and women from Kochi who were enslaved by Dutch colonisers and shipped to Cape Town to work on projects to build the New World. On a clothesline in the sea-facing backyard of Aspinwall, she has hung 119 pieces of cotton cloth with names of the slaves written on them — a memorial to the forgotten victims of history.

One of the more exciting parts of the biennial art event are the provocative posters put up by the Guerrilla Girls, a feminist collective founded in New York in the mid-1980s to fight sexism and racism in the art world. These women hide behind gorilla masks and assume the names of dead female artists. The two Guerrilla Girls who attended at KMB 2018 called themselves Frida (Kahlo) and Kathe (Kollwitz). Their posters, plastered on the walls inside and outside the compound of Aspinwall House, drew attention to all that is wrong with museums and galleries as a result of the dominance of powerful and wealthy white men.

One Guerrilla Girls poster at the entrance to Aspinwall read: "Don't let museums reduce art to the small number of artists who have won a popularity contest among big-time dealers, curators and collectors. If museums don't show art as diverse as the cultures they claim to represent, tell them they're not showing the history of art, they are just preserving the history of wealth and power." How perfectly well that sums up what Dube is trying to achieve with this Biennale — a sharp break from established practice by opening out the festival space to artists on the fringes!

If not as dramatic as the in-your-face defiance of the Guerrilla Girls, the Sister Library that Darjeeling's Mumbai-based art activist, Aqai Thami, has brought to Fort Kochi is equally telling. It is a travelling library that has an evolving catalogue of books by women writers, an effort aimed at countering the gender

imbalance in the availability of reading material in mainstream spaces. Thami's personal collection forms the core of Sister Library, but readers keep adding to it by contributing books and periodicals by and about women.

REBEL AND RESIST: A large mural put up by Prabhakar Pachpute, an artist from the industrial town of Chandrapur in Maharashtra, conveys the plight of villagers resisting the profit-driven plans of mining corporations. It calls for action to save farmers from multinational companies and oppressive governments.

The work, *Resilient Bodies in the Era of Resistance*, consists of large plywood cutouts on which 32-year-old Pachpute has used charcoal and acrylic colour to paint the continuing struggle of his village to keep powerful foes at bay. He belongs to a family that works in coal mines.

Paris-based French-Guyanese artist, healer and yoga teacher Tabita Rezaire has come up with a work, "Sorry for Real Sorrow", which seems to capture the history of violence against and exploitation of African and other indigenous lands, bodies and knowledge bases. Her work, a series of lightboxes with holographic apologies issued on behalf of the Western world, points to the replacement of one form of colonial power relations with another.

"We are heading towards internet colonisation," says the 30-year-old artist. During her research for this work, Rezaire stumbled upon the fact that today's undersea fibre cables have been laid along the old shipping routes that the imperialists used.

At the other end of the Biennale spectrum is the husband-wife duo of Gond artists, Subhash and Durgabai Vyam, who have mounted plywood artworks on the walls of a room in Aspinwall. These pieces of art are inspired by the central Indian tribe's traditional stories. The couple also conducted a well-attended workshop designed to introduce local children to the intricacies of Gond art.

We live in dark times and nowhere is that revealed more starkly than in the dimly-lit coir godown of Aspinwall House, one of the main venues of the Biennale. One of the artists exhibiting here is Bengaluru-born B.V. Suresh, 58. He captures the state of the nation in a work that uses cane sticks to strike out against the rising tide of hate-mongering, mob violence and suppression of dissent. Battery-powered cane sticks constantly crash against the floor while an "angry Hanuman" video plays on loop and broomsticks rotate incessantly.

Suresh's work, titled "Canes of Wrath", also features a peacock that has lost its colours — a metaphor for the undermining of India's pluralism — and burnt bread loaves (a reference to the razing of Best Bakery during the Gujarat riots of 2002). "The peacock, India's national bird, is so colourful. But here it is an albino," says Suresh, who now teaches in the University of Hyderabad and is also part of KMB's Students Biennale as an educator. "This is to show that our country is losing its varied hues as our diversity comes under constant attack."

"We want to open up as many possibilities as we can," says Dube. "Monoculture is killing us. So I've mixed up the little traditions with the larger ones. I'm trying to break the hierarchy." Towards that end, she has included a series of images by photographer Vicky Roy, who grew up on a railway platform and in a shelter home; the works of Bapi Das, a former auto-rickshaw driver in Kolkata who does intricate embroidery on cloth; and a complex installation by Vinu V.V., a Dalit artist from Kerala who is acutely aware of social injustice and is influenced by the artisanal and ritualistic practices of his community.

Vinu's installation at KMB 2018 centres on sculptures made from the wood of a tree that bears poisonous fruit. Hundreds of figurines are nailed to tree trunks, a gender-reversed rendition of a practice in which possessed women drive nails into the walls of a temple in order to be cured of their affliction. Enhancing the impact of the work is Vinu's use of poetry and other literary inputs to underline



B.V. Suresh and a peacock from his installation, 'Canes of Wrath'

Suresh's work features a peacock that has lost its colours — a metaphor for the undermining of India's pluralism.

a narrative in which the dispossessed and the ostracised are the protagonists.

Bapi Das, 39, stopped driving an auto-rickshaw in 2017. But he now works as a gardener in a Hindu burial ground to make ends meet. He devotes all the time he has after his duty hours, which span from 6 am to 2 pm, to his difficult art. "Some of my pieces take up to four hours to finish. One of the larger works took me four years," he says. "It puts severe strain on the eyes, so I have to keep taking breaks."

The self-taught Das rues the fact that despite his growing visibility, he still isn't taken seriously by the art world, barring a few well-known artists who mentor and patronise him. The Purulia-born Vicky Roy, 31, is formally trained in photography, and has found acceptance easier to come by. "I did a four-year course and also spent six months in New York City honing my skills," he says.

ARTISTS FOR KERALA: Memories of the floods that ravaged Kerala last year are still fresh. Not only have several artists come up with exhibits as reminders of the devastation, the Kochi Biennale Foundation (KBF) has taken several



Tabita Rezaire performing



Veer Munshi's, 'Relics from a Lost Paradise.'

initiatives to contribute to the relief efforts. For one, all the raw materials used at the Biennale will be repurposed to build houses for victims of the floods.

At least a dozen homes of 600 square feet each will be built with the remains of the Pavilion in Cabral Yard. The Pavilion has been envisioned by Dube as the festival's central hub for open dialogue and performances. "The exhibition mode is no longer enough," she says. "We also need a space for conversations." The Pavilion is a platform for film shows, lectures and pop-up programmes. "Anybody can enter the space and say I want to share something," says Dube.

Also part of the Biennale's plans, an art auction — Art Rises for Kerala (ARK) — was held on January 18 in conjunction with Mumbai-based auction house SaffronArt. It was preceded by a preview exhibition held at Bastion Bungalow, a heritage property by the sea, from January 5 to 17. Artists featured in the auction included Anish Kapoor, A. Ramachandran, Gulam Mohammed Sheikh, Dayanita Singh, Anju and Atul Dodiya, Madhvi and Manu Parekh, Shilpa Gupta and Mithu Sen, besides Amrita Sher-Gil.

Bose Krishnamachari, artist and KBF president, attributed the success of the

auction, the first of its kind in Kerala, to the strong bonds the Biennale has developed with the larger community of artists. "Artists have shown great solidarity with our core values. We are overwhelmed by the support we've got from the art community in this time of need," he said. The proceeds from the auction will go into the Chief Minister's Distress Relief Fund.

Individual exhibiting artists, too, have recorded their sense of alarm at the damage wreaked by the natural calamity that hit Kerala in August and also extended their support to the flood-affected. Bangladeshi artist Marzia Farhana has put up a multimedia installation, "Ecocide and the Rise of Free Fall", which captures the trail of destruction. For this work that denotes lives and homes turned upside down, Farhana used material collected from flood-ravaged parts of Kerala.

Members of Kerala's Oorali music and art collective, which is officially participating in KMB 2018, will travel in their bus along the state's coastline, staging 10 shows for fishermen at different locations. The bus itself is converted into a stage at every stop. This initiative is in recognition of the key role fishermen played in the rescue and relief operations. Formed in 2010, Oorali has performed around India and the world. "Every performance is an opportunity for Oorali to remind each other, all of us, that we are a commune of humans, beyond whatever we imagine," says the commune's mission statement.

Temsuyanger Longkumer, a London-based artist from Nagaland, has three works in the Biennale, one of which is Kerala-centric and represents hope in the face of adversity. His *Catch a Rainbow II*, at Pepper House, not far from Aspinwall, creates a rainbow that is visible night and day. This work, says Longkumer, is also a reaction to the recent Supreme Court ruling against the IPC's Section 377 that criminalised homosexuality.

Kochi-based artist Aryakrishnan, 37, who worked here as a young curator on the first two editions of the Students' Biennale, is participating this year with *Sweet Maria*, his tribute to his friend and transgender activist who was killed in 2012. His project for the Biennale is an archive that recounts the work of the late activist. "It is tough to slot Maria in just one form of art," says Aryakrishnan, an Ambedkar University alumnus who now lives and works in Delhi. "So this work is a monument that uses different forms of engagement to recreate Maria's aesthetics and politics."

SRINAGAR SPECIAL: The personal and the political merge seamlessly in the works of the Kashmiri artists who are here with the Srinagar Biennale, one of the infra-projects at KMB 2018. This segment, curated by Veer Munshi, features 14 Hindu and Muslim artists from the Valley trying to explore the many dimensions of the conflict that began in the late 1980s.

Put up at the TKM Warehouse in Mattancherry, the central element in the project is a structure that resembles a Sufi *dargah* with a number of coffins, some open, some closed, with *papier-mache* bones and skulls. Munshi's work, titled "Relics from the Lost Paradise", draws from elements of Kashmiri architecture reinforced by secular values. "A Sufi shrine is considered a place of worship open to all," says the 63-year-old Delhi-based artist.

As part of the project, the collective did a 12-hour performance featuring Saqib Bhat and Hina Aarif. The two artists frisked people visiting the exhibition area to indicate how constant surveillance has become the norm in Kashmir. The duo confiscated personal belongings, restricted people's entry and asked for identity proof without speaking or providing any justification. "Many felt offended," says Bhat. Adds Aarif: "Others were confused. They did not know why we were frisking them."

A state of mind is transported from one part of India to another more than 3,500 km away. Art knows no boundaries. ■

Hooking mutual funds to NGOs

Investors can pledge money to causes

Civil Society News
New Delhi

NON-profits mostly have to strive hard to raise funds for their causes. It distracts them from the good work they are doing. But what if those with a proven track record could be assured of funds from individuals investing in mutual funds and, at the same time, eager to do their bit by society? Given the sums that mutual funds attract, the potential is huge for putting money into non-profits and through them promoting better development and inclusion.

The Quantum Mutual Fund has started what it calls a Systematic Giving Plan (SGP) for its investors. It collaborates with HelpYourNGO Foundation to provide the names of non-profits in different sectors into which investors can opt to put their money.

Both Quantum and HelpYourNGO have in common Ajit Dayal, 58, who moves money around but has a social heart. Dayal is lean, doesn't drink and is passionate about transforming India. Many years ago, when *Civil Society* first met him, he talked about cheerfully flying economy and donating the difference in fare with business class, which his clients were ready to pay for.

Dayal is a man of new ideas and he has kept coming back to *Civil Society* with them. Quantum's SGP is the latest and has the potential of being a game changer. Dayal is all excited about it.

Meanwhile, it is Winnie Dholakia, 29, at HelpYourNGO who has been doing a lot of heavy lifting while identifying and verifying non-profits with the team there. *Civil Society* spoke to her for the details.

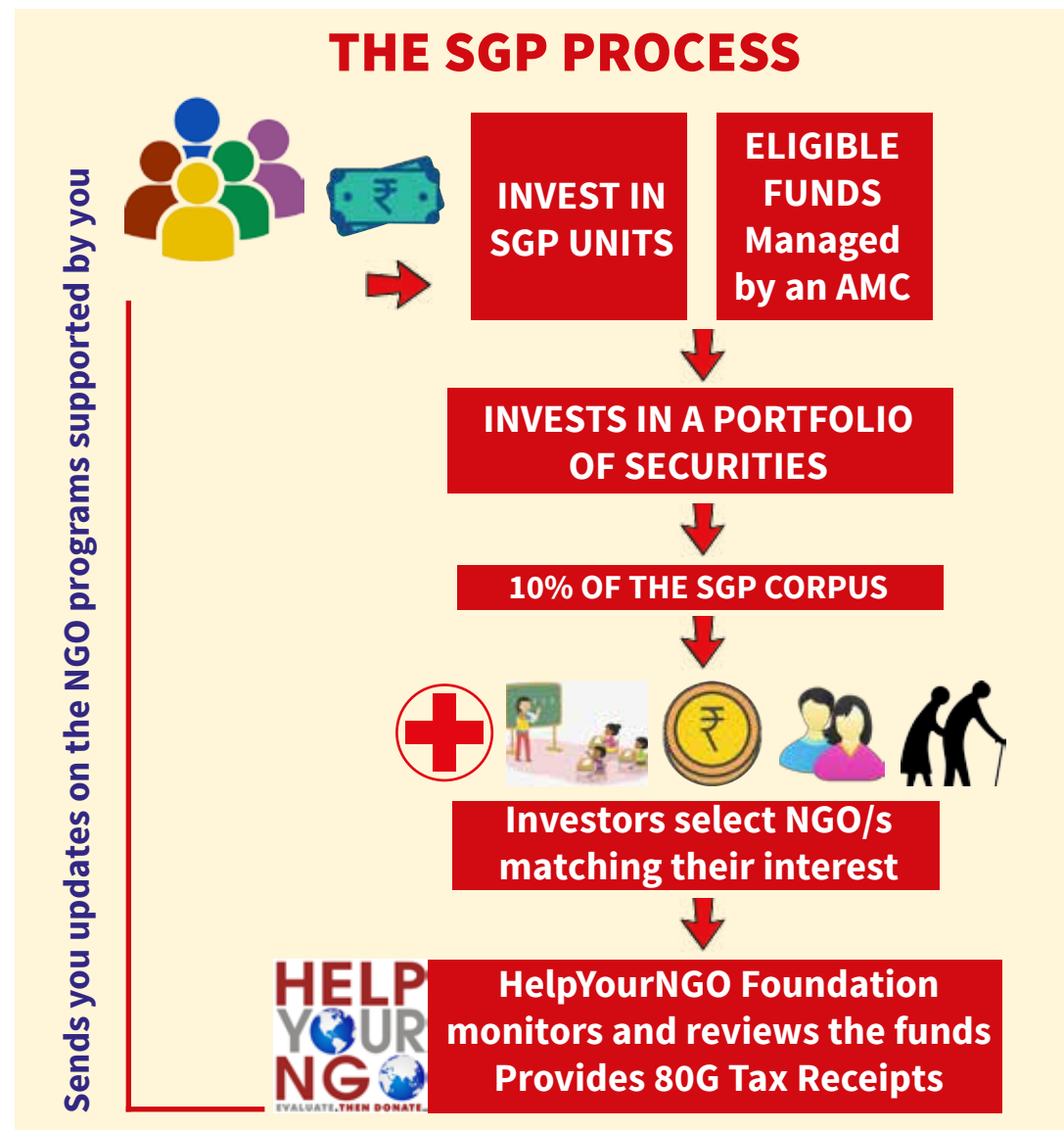
How does the Systematic Giving Plan (SGP) work?

The SGP created by HelpYourNGO enables investors to contribute 10 percent of their investment with a mutual fund towards a charitable cause and give it to NGOs vetted by HelpYourNGO.

This is the first initiative of its kind in the world. The idea was born out of our founders' passion for sensible, long-term investing and a desire to create a steady stream of inflows for NGOs so that they can focus on the work they do rather than on fundraising — which they might not be good at.

The money invested in SGP units is invested in the stock markets. The value of the corpus will rise or fall with the markets. Every year, the investor may choose to donate 10 percent of the SGP corpus value.

There is flexibility. Investors in SGP units can change the NGO they wish to support. Furthermore, if the investor needs the money due to some



An infographic explaining how the Systematic Giving Plan (SGP) functions

changed circumstance, he or she can redeem the SGP units and sweep the residual money back.

Though the money is earmarked for NGOs, it belongs to the investors till they finally decide to click the button and transfer it.

How much money have you raised through SGP and what do you think is the potential?

The Quantum Mutual Fund (QMF) is the first mutual fund house to adopt and offer the SGP option to its investors. It is termed the 'SMILE' facility. Funds invested and pledged under SMILE are currently over ₹1 crore. It is important to note that one pay-out cycle was seamlessly completed in September 2018. The operational backend worked efficiently and 80G tax receipts were shared with

the investors/donors in time. Now that we have the assurance that the full cycle works impeccably, we shall focus on increasing visibility for the SGP.

For QMF, we have chosen the annual pay-out date as September 30. This would allow the NGOs sufficient time to plan the utilisation of the SGP funds disbursed within each financial year.

QMF plans to achieve a SMILE corpus of ₹10 crore in 12 months, ₹100 crore over the next three years, and ₹500 crore in five years! The power of small (or large!) pooled donations via the SMILE units has the potential to systematically give ₹50 crore every year to NGOs.

We are hoping the mutual fund industry, which had assets under management of ₹25.20 lakh crore as of August 31, 2018, adopts HelpYourNGO's

Systematic Giving Plan, thereby helping to create a significant and predictable source of funds for NGOs.

For India to be a stable society where opportunities are created for millions to further their lives it is imperative that we support the many good NGOs who help the less fortunate of our country with opportunities to flourish.

You say you have identified 650-plus NGOs. That is a pretty large number.

We are hoping to build a database with thousands of NGOs over time. But there are 3.3 million registered non-profits in India and, assuming even a small number is currently operational, we have a long way to go.

HelpYourNGO was set up in 2000 with the objective of promoting transparency in the social sector and helping donors make donation decisions in an enlightened, strategic and impactful manner. HelpYourNGO is the only organisation in India that standardises detailed financial and programme information of over 650 NGOs across 489 zip codes and 13 sectors.

How did you get to them?

When we started operations in early 2013, we approached NGOs for listing with us, based on desktop research and our own knowledge of non-profits. During this process, our endeavour was to list NGOs covering various sectors. While communicating with NGOs, we recognised that they incurred a visible cost in compiling financial and programme data. So, HelpYourNGO paid Rs1,000 to each registered NGO to offset this cost.

This was discontinued eventually after we started getting an overwhelming response from the NGOs. They saw potential benefit in listing on our platform in terms of increased visibility and presentation of their work. Also, the NGOs appreciated that the registration process with HelpYourNGO was completely free with no annual renewal charges.

How do you keep track of them?

We register NGOs having a three-year track record. They are required to submit documents like 12A (mandatory), 80G, FCRA, registration certificate, trust deed/memorandum of association/article of association, PAN, etc., and also their audit and annual reports.

Once the registration is complete, the NGO is only required to submit audit and annual/activity reports. Our team updates the NGO's financial and programme information on our website based on these reports. While doing so, we double-check the information already displayed on the website like board members/trustees, auditor, address, donor contact, website, FCRA status, donor tax benefit, etc. During the course of the year, if there is any change in their organisation's profile showcased on our website, mostly the NGOs connect with us for an update.

Are they all small NGOs? Your mission is to give the small NGOs visibility.

Since we are trying to build a database of non-profits pan-India, we register all NGOs on our platform — small, mid-sized and large. Currently, only five percent of our NGOs have an income of over ₹15 crore, 33 percent fall in the ₹1 crore to 15

crore category and the balance 62 percent have an income of less than ₹1 crore.

We display standardised information for every NGO (which facilitates easy comparison between NGOs across sectors and within the same sector) with 'Donate' buttons so donors can read information and donate directly to an NGO of their choice. The idea is to offer the small and mid-sized NGOs the same visibility and presence on the internet as the large ones.

Our interaction with NGOs since 2013 has made us realise the challenges the smaller, un-branded NGOs face in fundraising. Larger, established NGOs hire teams (and pay external marketing agents an exorbitant 30-35 percent to collect donations!) while the smaller NGOs struggle. They have poor web presence, no payment gateway, lack of knowledge about online fundraising and no resources to establish an online presence.

As per Bain India HNWI survey 2015, 68 percent of individuals donate based on relationships or media presence. We recognise that in the public eye, the larger/better-branded NGOs would gain more



Winnie Dholakia

'We aim at raising funds for any credible NGO but make an effort to recommend those small and mid-sized NGOs which run efficient programmes but don't know how to leverage a donor's contribution.'

visibility and more donations, but we are here to neutralise that.

We aim at raising funds for any credible NGO but make an effort to recommend and identify small and mid-sized NGOs which run efficient programmes but don't know how to leverage a donor's charitable contribution. These NGOs meet our standards of transparency and credibility, but are less known than the popular NGOs.

We publish the HelpYourNGO Yearbook annually which showcases information of credible NGOs. Via the Yearbook we offer the same visibility and space to the relatively smaller or less-known NGOs running excellent programmes.

Via our offline Donor Advisory Services, we recommend NGOs whose programmes, financial reporting and organisational values make them stand out.

Could you name a few you have identified and how they have benefitted?

Select NGOs of our database of 650-plus are moved to the 'Recommended' category to highlight that they are credible. The identified NGOs for Quantum Mutual Fund's (QMF) Systematic Giving Plan (SGP) option for their investors termed the 'SMILE' facility are all from our 'Recommended' category. Some of them are CanSupport, Make-A-Wish Foundation, Vidya Poshak, Parinaam and the Sree Guruvayurappan Bhajan Samaj Trust.

University endowments and foundations in the US invest their corpus for long-term capital appreciation. For example, Harvard University's endowment has built a corpus of over \$37 billion by raising money from their alumni and investing it sensibly. This saves the president's time from worrying about raising money and allows him to focus on enhancing the reputation of Harvard.

The potential benefit to the identified NGOs could be just like Harvard's.

You speak of high-impact non-profits. How do you define them?

A high-impact non-profit is one whose efforts have been proven to cause sustainable, positive change in the community.

For Bengaluru-based SMILE NGO Sree Guruvayurappan Bhajan Samaj Trust's (SGBS Trust) Unnati programme, the placement record of their students and starting salaries indicate the sustainability and impact of the programme. Many of their students break out of the cycle of poverty they were raised in, often earning a salary equal to

that of their parents. The training, exposure and value system offered to them thanks to Unnati means that many of them do not need to depend on charity further. Students then become role models for the next generation of young people. For us, that is an indication of Unnati's impact as an organisation.

Mumbai-based NGO Apne Aap Women's Collective is working with sex workers and one of their key objectives is to break the intergenerational cycle of prostitution. They implement various programmes for empowerment of sex workers and their daughters and toddlers. The impact can be gauged from the fact that none of the daughters of the sex workers has entered prostitution and in fact, they have become independent and successful due to the NGO's interventions. Some have even helped their mothers quit prostitution and supported their siblings' education expenses.

Light of Life Trust's Education programme, Anando, focuses on successful completion of secondary education of children from rural India and their holistic development. The impact of their interventions has been that over 80 percent of the students who have appeared for SSC so far are pursuing a higher education. Many of the employed beneficiaries earn a monthly income which is much larger than the total family income. Finally, there has been a marked increase in the average age (20.5 from the earlier 17 years) at which girls get married. ■

Natural pesticide is made at the farmer's doorstep

On a truck, a neem factory!

Shree Padre
Ishwaramangala

THREE months ago, Nagaraju G.H. started an unusual venture, probably the first of its kind in India. He set up a mobile neem crushing factory mounted on two trucks, and he now travels to the doorsteps of farmers to supply neem seed powder to them.

Nagaraju provides a much needed service. There is high demand for neem oil and neem cake due to the rising popularity of organic farming. Both products are used as natural pest repellents. Along with spiralling demand over the past two decades, prices have risen sharply. The end result is considerable adulteration of neem products. For farmers, getting pure neem products has become very difficult.

Going house to house, Nagaraju shows farmers a video on how his neem powder is made so that they are completely reassured.

"I sold about 1,000 tonnes of neem seed powder last year. Next season, I hope to double my sales," he says. He plans to visit coffee estates in Chikmagalur and Hassan next month.

To get Nagaraju to come with his unit, the farmer has to place a minimum order of 10 tonnes. He then arrives on a pre-fixed date with two trucks. The first truck, a small one, is loaded with a crushing machine. The second, larger, 'support' truck has 10 tonnes of raw neem seeds. The unit has a staff of five consisting of a driver, two operators, one manager and two labourers.

The 45 hp pulveriser on the truck is a high-speed one. It crushes three tonnes of neem seeds in an hour. The 'support' truck is parked near the crushing unit. Two labourers continuously feed the pulveriser from bags of seeds on the support truck. The farmer has to provide five additional labourers to carry out the operation fast.

The seeds are crushed into coarse powder. These are filled into gunny bags, weighed and stitched. Each bag contains 50 kg of neem seed powder and is sold for ₹1,100 and 1 kg of neem powder costs ₹22.

In markets here neem cake, used both as manure and as a pest repellent, is available in two forms — as pellets and as a powder. "Neem pellets are produced in big expellers. While crushing the seeds, the oil comes out from one side and the pellets from the other. So neem pellets will smell of neem but not the oil which has insect repellent capacity. Several farmers, unaware of this, buy neem pellets but don't get the desired result," explains Nagaraju.

Nagaraju's main clients are coffee planters and



Nagaraju's mobile neem crushing factory

Nagaraju provides a much needed service. There is high demand for neem oil and neem cake due to the rising popularity of organic farming. Both are used as natural pest repellents.

areca nut farmers. Coffee estate owners usually buy large quantities of neem powder in March and April to feed their plants before the monsoon. The second season they buy neem powder is post-monsoon, in September and October. Areca nut farmers, on the other hand, buy neem powder throughout the year.

Nagaraju isn't new to the neem seed business. He has a permanent neem crushing unit in Hiriyur taluk of Chitradurga district, functioning for decades.

Why did he decide to set up a mobile unit? Fifteen years ago, he says, when he was telling farmers about the purity of his neem products, a planter in Chikmagalur quipped, "What's so special about you? All the manure business guys adulterate. Why should I believe that you are any different?"

Nagaraju felt insulted. He decided to rig together a mobile unit that could be taken to farmers to show them how he produces neem products. But implementing his idea proved tough. Finally, he brainstormed with a friend and came up with the unit.

Initially, the pulveriser used to be a separate stationary unit that was dismantled and transported. But it wouldn't start smoothly. Most pulverisers, widely available, are small and produce little. Nagaraju required a pulveriser with high output. So he developed an inexpensive customised one and bought two second-hand 10-tonner trucks. Nagaraju's total capital for his venture, which he started last November, worked out to ₹25 lakh.

SEEDS AND SALES: India has a copious number of neem trees in the southern and northern states. Seeds fall from the trees from June to September. Collection of neem seeds provides an income to thousands of poor labourer families.

Generally, these labourers sweep the ground and collect the seeds. So raw seeds have neem leaves, bits of twigs and tiny pebbles mixed in them. Small shops in the neem belt in Karnataka buy these seeds from labourers for about ₹8 to ₹10 per kg or even less. The pooled seeds are then bought by big traders who stock them to sell during the off-season when they get a higher price.

Nagaraju gets neem seeds from Kushtagi, the biggest market for neem seeds in Karnataka and Koppal. Both his raw material area and his customers are a 12-hour journey from his hometown in Hiriyur taluk.

During the peak season, every day, 50 to 100 lorries loaded with seeds arrive at Kushtagi. "There are big traders who stock 10,000 to 20,000 tonnes of these seeds from Kushtagi for a few months and then sell later," he says. But during the off-season, he has to buy neem seeds from distant states like Andhra Pradesh, Odisha and Gujarat.

Nagaraju first sold neem products from his mobile factory during a day-long agriculture extension programme on the premises of a farmer, Vishwanath Rao, in Sullia. A few farmers bought 10 tonnes of neem seed powder from him.

Noting this, K.V. Sharma, a farmer from Ishwaramangala near Sullia, asked Nagaraju to visit his farm. He introduced Nagaraju to fellow farmers. In two or three days, Nagaraju sold 20 tonnes of

PICTURES BY SHREE PADRE



Workers filling gunny bags with freshly crushed neem powder

Nagaraju says he can get even better quality neem seeds with negligible stones and twigs from Odisha and Gujarat during certain times of the year but the seeds are costlier and he would need to hike his prices to make a profit.

neem powder. Sharma endorses the quality of Nagaraju's neem powder. "Recently, I procured branded neem seed powder from a government research station. But Nagaraju's product is far superior," he says.

Nagaraju has so far sold 60 tonnes of neem powder from his mobile factory in three or four places and received positive feedback. "A few customers want to see our raw seeds. We show it to them. But the entire process is carried out right in front of their eyes, so they are completely satisfied," he says.

He says he can get even better quality seeds with negligible stones and twigs from Odisha and Gujarat during certain times of the year but the

seeds are costlier and he would need to hike his prices to make a profit.

Since the peak period, when coffee estates buy neem powder and pellets, is fast approaching, Nagaraju plans an intensive promotion drive to book orders. "I have 1,000 regular customers who buy anything from half a tonne to 20 tonnes. Even if I get an order of one tonne from each of my regular customers, I can easily achieve my regular sales target of 1,000 tonnes per year," he explains.

He is now thinking of fixing the pulveriser on a bigger truck with a few alterations. If successful, he will need just one truck for his mobile neem factory. ■

Phone: Nagaraju G.H. - 94481 69775

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READ US. WE READ YOU.

Do manifestos matter?



**DELHI
DARBAR**

SANJAYA BARU

A committee set up by the Central Election Commission of India has come out with a curious, if amusing, ruling. It has said that the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) should be amended to ensure that political parties release their manifesto “at least 72 hours before voting ends in the first phase of polls”. In other words, at least two days before voting is due. Given that campaigning, with its speeches, begins at least a month before voting, if not more, and that many political parties have started printing voluminous manifestos, it is worth asking if 48 hours is adequate time for a voter to read a manifesto and make up her mind as to who she will vote for.

But all this fuss assumes manifestos play a role in determining electoral outcomes. Sure, some key elements of a manifesto would. Major promises like farm loan waivers and temple construction would sway voters one way or another. These promises are repeatedly made in campaign speeches and their appearance in a manifesto lends weight to the promise. But, if a manifesto is about a few key promises, why produce a 50-page document? Some political parties have done that in the past.

Indeed, manifesto writers take themselves seriously. Political parties name a senior party leader as chairman of the manifesto committee to ensure that it is properly written and says all the necessary things. Given the time and effort that go into manifesto writing, any effort to make sure that it is read is a good thing. So kudos to the Election Commission for its ruling. It will at least be welcomed by those charged with the responsibility of writing a manifesto.

What has been the experience with election manifestos in the past? In assembly elections manifestos rarely matter, except with the Left Front parties. At the national level the major political parties — the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Congress — take manifestos seriously. Party members of repute and experience write these manifestos and the party president and head of government read the document carefully to make sure that no wild promises are being made.

In recent years, it was not a pre-election manifesto but a post-election ‘common minimum programme’ that really gained prominence in the actual running of a government. This was the famous National



Common Minimum Programme (NCMP) of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) and the Left Front, drafted after the poll results to the 14th Lok Sabha (2004-09) were out. The NCMP was drafted initially by Bibek Debroy, now a member of the NITI Aayog in the Narendra Modi government and at that time an economist working closely with Dr Manmohan Singh, and finalised by Jairam Ramesh and Sitaram Yechury.

As prime minister, Manmohan Singh took the NCMP commitments very seriously. He created a unit in the PM’s office under a senior official that classified the NCMP into a hundred-odd specific commitments. For each commitment made, the relevant implementing ministry/agency was identified. The prime minister would chair a monthly review of the implementation of each promise made. The Left Front would demand a report from time to time to satisfy itself that the government was serious about the NCMP. Even after the Left Front withdrew support to the Manmohan Singh government, the PMO continued to monitor the implementation of the NCMP.

Interestingly, when the Left Front claimed that the India-US civil nuclear energy agreement was not a part of the NCMP and charged the PM with pursuing an agenda of his own, the NCMP was fished out to identify appropriate phraseology in the sections on foreign and economic policies that supported the view that the nuclear deal was very much a part of the NCMP.

Something similar happened with Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee when he chose to authorise the conduct of nuclear weapons tests and then declared India a nuclear weapons power. This was not an electoral commitment, claimed the BJP’s critics.

The PMO promptly pulled out a stray sentence in the party’s election manifesto to argue that a commitment to go nuclear had in fact been made in the manifesto.

One reason why manifestos may play a lesser role at the assembly level and why even at the centre their relevance may have gone down is the fact that parliamentary elections have become presidential in the era of 24x7 television. Personalities seem to matter as much as policies. If a party gets the right mix between leadership personality and party manifesto, it can hope to score better — like K. Chandrashekar Rao and K.T. Rama Rao did in Telangana.

The reason the Election Commission had to come out with its observation on manifestos is because of the comically last-minute publication of manifestos during the recent assembly polls. Despite such cynicism, the fact is that major political parties are increasingly realising that the voter does judge a government by its ability to deliver on the promises made at the time of the elections. The Kamal Nath government in Bhopal had plans to set up a manifesto implementation committee, on the lines of the UPA’s NCMP, at least partly because it had come to the view that by April-May 2019 the government’s performance will be judged against promises made and that this will influence voter behaviour in the Lok Sabha elections.

It is also a fact that Prime Minister Modi’s standing has suffered from the fact that he is seen to have promised more and delivered less. Dr Singh’s motto used to be the opposite — promise less and deliver more. In the end, that approach delivers better electoral results. ■

Sanjaya Baru is a writer based in New Delhi

An unsecular education



**BACK TO
SCHOOL**

DILEEP RANJEKAR

FOR about 18 years of my working life I lived in an upscale Mumbai neighbourhood and my children grew up during this period. It was very convenient for us when they both secured admission in a so-called premium private school that was barely 300 metres from our house. They studied in that school from nursery to Class 10. While my wife took complete charge of all affairs related to my children, my role was more clerical — filling in all kinds of forms that were required to be submitted to the school from time to time.

During the school admission process, among the plethora of queries we had to respond to, was a question seeking information about our religion. I found it odd and unnecessary. I wrote ‘Not applicable’ in the column. My wife was apprehensive that writing ‘Not applicable’ would adversely impact our children’s admission into a school that we wanted very much as it was convenient for us. I explained to her that (a) nobody reads each and every column (b) in case they do read it, they won’t bother (c) I would love it if they read it and asked us. I would then get a wonderful opportunity to explain why I put down ‘Not applicable’.

As I predicted, the school never asked about it. But the matter did not end at the time of admission. Every year, we had to fill in an updated form at the beginning of the academic year and I would write the same thing. My wife, as a very caring and concerned mother, was worried about the impact this might have on our children. As they grew older, I explained to them the reasons for my response. I said it was not necessary to know the religion of a child unless there was some decision/benefit linked to such information. The children quickly grasped the point. Right from the time they began understanding the world around them, they had not seen any overt religious practices at home. While my daughter was in passive agreement with my point, my son began questioning the relevance of religion very aggressively from the age of six. By the time he became an adult, he had concluded that many conflicts around the world are centred around the fanatical religious beliefs of ethnic groups.

During my childhood, way back in the early 1960s, both in my neighbourhood and in my school the one message that we received was about how India had been attacked several times by Muslim

invaders and how we must always be worried about their intentions, and so on. Our Class 4 social science book, titled *History of Great People*, glorified several greats such as Bal Gangadhar Tilak, the Rani of Jhansi, Subhas Chandra Bose, Vallabhbhai Patel, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Veer Savarkar, Maharshi Karve, Jyotiba Phule and the like. The most prominent stories were of Chhatrapati Shivaji, Prithviraj Chauhan and Maharana Rana Pratap — with detailed descriptions of how they fought to protect the Hindu Rashtra. This, coupled with huge dosages of the mythological stories from the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, had a great impact on my young mind. Lord Vishnu was my greatest hero and in my peer group, we preferred Mukesh, Kishore Kumar and Manna Dey over Mohammad Rafi, just based on the singers’ religions. We hated Naushad and loved Shankar Jaikishan, based on mere religious considerations. Beyond this religious divide there was also a message about caste — I still remember

was the case with my children. As I grew older, I began regarding Mohammad Rafi as an all-time great singer of Bollywood and Naushad became among the top three favourite music composers of my choice. The more I thought about life rationally, the more I became an agnostic.

So the question is, how did we rise beyond our neighbourhood ‘sanskar’? How did we ignore the loud messages from our parents, our textbooks and teachers (though it was less from the teachers)? How is it that by 23 years of age, I had become an agnostic?

To begin with, I can attribute it to my parents. While my mother was a God-fearing traditional person, she was not fanatical about imposing her beliefs on her children. My father, while he believed in God, was a rationalist. He disliked all the rituals my mother would perform and was pretty vocal about it. Secondly, while our textbooks were oriented in a certain way, my school (which had over 2,200 children) did not show any visible signs of recognising or promoting religion in school affairs. Some of our teachers were very pragmatic and never encouraged any visible discrimination based on religion or caste in school. Above all, the kind of education we went through, made us independent and free thinkers. Our rational instincts overtook everything else since we could not find any differences among people based on their religion or caste.

One of the important roles of education is to promote Constitutional values such as democracy, equity, secularism and socialism. Most teachers, education functionaries and members of society don’t have a good understanding of what the word ‘secular’ means. It simply means that the State has no religion. That no decision by the State will be made on the basis of religious considerations. At the same time, the same Constitution recognises the ‘right to practise one’s own faith’ as a fundamental right. Extensive education on this aspect ought to be an integral part of our teacher preparation, our teaching-learning practice and our demonstration of practices in the education system. Only then can we aspire

to develop children with a truly ‘secular approach’ in life.

There are several collateral benefits of being secular. A secular person would respect the rights and views of others. Such a person would be truly inclusive, with pluralistic values, and would consider religion a private matter that does not create conflict with others or be a nuisance for others. Such a person would have a rational mind and possess a scientific temper to independently think through the implications of one’s own actions as well as those of others. Above all, such a person would not undermine the positive aspects of our culture and heritage! ■

Dileep Ranjekar is CEO of the Azim Premji Foundation



My closest friend in class during my schooldays was Mohammad Daruwala. The more I thought about life rationally, the more I became an agnostic.

the reaction of my friend’s mother when I allowed our barber to take some water from a bucket I was carrying on my cycle.

And yet, my closest friend in class during my schooldays was Mohammad Daruwala. The house where we invariably stopped to drink water after our evening’s play was that of a family that was said to belong to the lowest caste among Hindus (often referred to as ‘untouchables’). Despite the pure vegetarian culture that prevailed at home, I used to enjoy the egg pakodas that my classmate, Sunil, would bring in his lunch box.

During my college days, almost all my friends came from diverse communities and strata of society and not just from one kind. And the same

Why soft power counts



**HERE
& NOW**

AMIT DASGUPTA

PRESIDENT Donald Trump recently made headlines, yet again. This time he criticised 'friend and ally' India on something that sounded insignificant and yet struck at the core of how foreign policy is being reinvented. Other than by the Americans.

In Trump's view, Indian assistance for building a "library" in Afghanistan was a colossal waste of resources, both time and money. What he had hoped for was direct Indian military involvement in the actual fight against terrorism.

It is worth recalling that over decades, in several countries, the instruments of foreign policy have undergone a radical transformation, including in some instances, the replacement of traditional diplomacy, as we have known it.

In general terms, foreign policy is defined as the pursuance of one's strategic national interests through negotiation, winning friends, and avoiding, as far as possible, conflict or war. Following the Westphalian model, diplomacy emerged as the principal instrument through which this was achieved.

It was and continues to be a strong and successful model where professional diplomats are used to championing or pushing the national agenda.

However, there are historical examples where this instrument has been tweaked to achieve a similar objective more effectively. Governments have, for instance, hand-picked emissaries and able negotiators, outside the formal diplomatic corps, to defuse crises. Or even used a different instrument to reach the same audience and achieve its stated objectives. Often, this had huge security and other ramifications.

Robert Kennedy's secret negotiations with Anatoly Dobrynin, for instance, to end the Cuban missile crisis in 1962 peacefully, is well documented. The negotiations successfully defused a crisis that had all the makings of triggering World War III. On 17 different occasions, Mahatma Gandhi effectively opted for fasting as an instrument of civil disobedience and *satyagraha* rather than open confrontation — another powerful example where he either quelled rioting mobs or brought combative negotiators to the discussion table.

Such instances, nevertheless, remained within the overall rubric of traditional diplomacy with successful alternative and tweaked approaches.

A shift occurred when the focus on the interlocutor underwent a dramatic change. Traditional diplomacy

was essentially an engagement between governments and their stated interlocutors. The public was largely kept out. But when the public or the 'common man' became the target of diplomacy, the game underwent a massive and transformative overhaul. India's "library" in Afghanistan is one such example and a powerful one at that.

As indeed is the relatively little-known 800-year-old Indian hospice in Jerusalem, which was started by an Indian *sufi*, Baba Farid, who went there from Punjab, a decade or so after Saladin forced the Crusaders out of the holy city. For the thousands of Indian and other Muslims, who have sought and continue to seek shelter for the night during their pilgrimage to Mecca, this is a strong symbol of India in Jerusalem. No traditional diplomacy could ever match the impact this hospice has had on the common people. New Delhi recognises this and has, consequently, supported its upkeep financially. For



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with US President Donald Trump

Trump, this would be a waste of useful resources.

The synagogues of Kolkata, for instance, have been tended to by Muslim families over decades. For over half a century, a Muslim family has been carving headstones for one of India's oldest cemeteries for the dwindling Bene Israel Jewish community in Mumbai. Such instances break the myth and perception that Muslims and Jews, as both a religion and a community, are incompatible. Telling such stories has now become a foreign policy instrument.

Over three decades ago, Joseph S. Nye spoke of 'soft power' as an alternative to 'hard' or military power. The latter, in his view, tended to achieve objectives through military operations and coercion, which would never truly have long-term acceptance. Soft power, on the other hand, "would get others to do what they would otherwise have not." In other words, hard power was meant to threaten and coerce governments, whereas soft power aimed at winning friends and influencing people outside of government. Over time, this became an additional and effective addition to the instruments of foreign policy, as governments across the globe reached out to people in addition to governments.

Several other developments took place during this time. Communications dramatically improved and this impacted the media and its reportage. Its multiplier effect was felt across geographies that went beyond democracies. The Arab Spring, for instance, was people-driven and against what were perceived as oppressive regimes. It started in Tunisia and rapidly spread to Libya, Egypt, Yemen, Syria and Bahrain. Government forces understandably cracked down on protesters but, as history demonstrated, governments fell and regimes changed, ushering in greater consultations with people and a more democratic form of governance.

Governments, across the globe, have increasingly come to recognise civil society as an integral instrument of foreign policy. In some instances, the voice of civil society is used to push the government's agenda. This is widely evident in multilateral and plurilateral negotiations, such as on WTO or climate change, where civil society participation is used to buttress the government's position and, indeed, opposition to certain measures advocated by developed countries.

On the external front, India has understood the importance of civil society and embraced soft power as an integral component of its overall foreign policy. The "library" in Afghanistan needs to be seen in this context, as, indeed, should the Indira Gandhi Children's Hospital in Kabul, which has tended to hundreds of children maimed by the ongoing conflict or the Jaipur Foot, which has provided hope and a future to thousands who lost a lower limb, or both, through terror attacks in Afghanistan.

Trump and US presidents before him fail to realise that the military alone cannot secure the future of Afghanistan. Consequently, Americans are not trusted in Afghanistan nor, indeed, are they likely to be. They are not seen as peacemakers but as an arrogant and occupying force. Indians, however, are seen as trusted friends and allies. Long after the Americans have left and been forgotten as, indeed, the Russians were before them, India will continue to be an integral part of the Afghan worldview and future because New Delhi has been mindful of impacting common Afghans.

We often forget that foreign policy is in a state of continuous evolution and needs necessarily to be so, if it is to be in sync, contemporary and relevant. New instruments need to be constantly added and old instruments recalibrated to enhance efficacy and outreach. The co-opting of civil society was an inevitable part of this process. The day we stop building schools or libraries or hospitals, we will have vastly limited what foreign policy can deliver in terms of people-to-people relations. That would be a sad day, indeed. Fortunately, Indian diplomacy recognises this. ■

Amit Dasgupta is a former Indian diplomat and the India head of the University of New South Wales, Sydney. The views expressed are his own.

LIVING

BOOKS | ECO-TOURISM | FILM | THEATRE | AYURVEDA

Delhi's heritage park 90 acres with forest, lake, wildlife

PICTURES BY SHREY GUPTA



Sunder Burj as seen from the entrance of Sunder Nursery

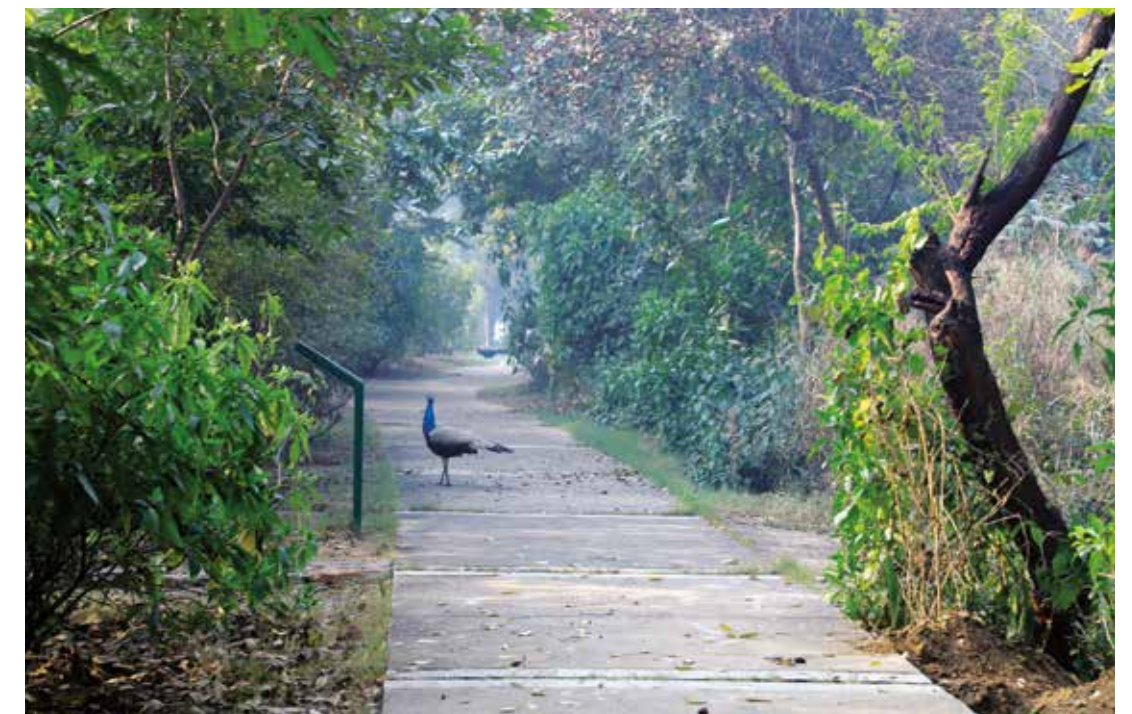
Rwit Ghosh
New Delhi

NEW Delhi now has a vast green space in the middle of the city with resplendent trees, a sparkling lake, 15 historical monuments, a nursery, an arboretum and wildlife. This expanse of 90 acres is part of the Humayun's Tomb complex. Known as Sunder Nursery, the park was built by the Mughals in the 16th century and its original name was Azim Bagh.

After zealous revival efforts led by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC), Sunder Nursery, now a heritage park, was opened for people to visit a year ago. A few finishing touches are being added.

When you walk into the park, the first monument you will see is the Sunder Burj. Stroll inside and note the intricate carvings of different *ayahs* (verses) from the Quran adorning its walls. Beautiful motifs line the monument and go all the way up to the inside of the dome. The intricacy of this art work is a reminder that Sunder Burj is no ordinary place. Though its tombs have long disappeared, the

Continued on page 30



A peacock struts across a pathway in the biodiversity zone of the park



The park has lakes and channels of water



The interiors of the Lakkarwala Burj

Mughal gardens always have flowing water. Inspired by this feature, behind the Sunder Burj there is a central axis through which water flows. Fountains intersperse this channel.

structure still stands, anonymously, since nobody knows who it was built for.

Mughal gardens always have flowing water. Inspired by this feature, behind the Sunder Burj there is a central axis through which water flows. Fountains in the shape of the lotus intersperse this clear channel of water. On either side there are places to rest, carved out of a single block of red sandstone with tiny motifs on the sides. Flower beds, tenderly maintained, flank the central axis.

Follow this channel of water and you will arrive at an artificially created lake that tinkles quietly. To your left is the Lakkarwala Burj, another UNESCO site. There is a miswak tree here, now completely hollow, that was brought back from the brink of death by the AKTC. They watered it, cared for it and

kept it in isolation. Surrounded by smaller plants, the tree is now an impressive example of revival and heritage. All around the artificial lake are pavilions for people to come and sit and perhaps reflect.

The path to Lakkarwala Burj is flanked by a bed of roses with 30 species on display. It is a sight to behold. Lakkarwala Burj, like Sunder Burj, has intricate art work inside. The difference is that it has an additional room attached to it which, many believe, was the home of the caretaker of the tomb, whose room is easily distinguishable by the lack of ornamentation. But, just like the Sunder Burj, no one knows for whom this monument was built and what its real name was. It was locally called Lakkarwala Burj and the name stuck.

Pause here and see if you can spot the owl who



The miswak tree that was revived

has become a permanent resident of the Lakkarwala Burj. The owl can usually be found sleeping in its nest on the western face of the monument or roosting on a tree to the west. Peacocks live in the tall underbrush here and appear from time to time. There are flowering trees here that serve as home for butterflies and migratory birds.

Delhi has four types of ecosystems and all four have been integrated into the park. You can find land that is *dabur* (marshy), *kohi* (hilly), *khadar* (riverine) and *bangar* (alluvial). These habitats attract insects and birds and are an educational tool that teachers can use to help their students learn about biodiversity and nature.

The eco areas make up a significant portion of the park. They have been left relatively untouched save for a single path that winds its way through the undergrowth and is ideal for reflection or quiet observation of nature or maybe just a nap in the sun on a winter afternoon. Often, a peacock might cross your path and stare at you languidly before retreating into the underbrush until he thinks it's time for a flourish of feathers.

What is particularly striking is the absence of litter of any kind in the park. Staff working here go to great lengths to ensure that Sunder Nursery is spick and span. There is an abundance of trash cans all around to ensure that waste disposal is never a glaring problem.

East of Sunderwala Mehal, a nobleman's tomb, there is an amphitheatre perfect for theatre, music or an artistes' gathering. It can easily seat 300 people and there's more space on the lawns behind. The amphitheatre is asking to be used. It is looking for groups to perform in it.

Plans have been drawn up for play areas for children to keep them occupied while their parents walk around. A restaurant is also in the works, to extend the park experience into the evening. Park authorities have ensured that there is ample space for people to picnic.

Entrance to Sunder Nursery is ₹35 for Indians and ₹100 for foreigners. An annual pass costs ₹3,000, perfect for enjoying a park as impressive as Sunder Nursery. ■

Magnificent Jatayu on a hill

It is the world's biggest bird sculpture

Susheela Nair
Thiruvananthapuram

SPREAD over 65 acres across four hills, the Jatayu Earth's Centre hosts the world's largest bird sculpture at an awesome height of 1,000 feet from the bottom of the hill. The bird is none other than the heroic Jatayu, glorified in the *Ramayana* for valiantly trying to save Sita.

The view from atop the hill where the sculpture stands is stunning. As our cable car ascended, we saw an outcrop of primordial rock soaring high above the surrounding sylvan setting. We rose above green valleys, paddy fields, farmland and a sparkling water body encircled by looming rocks.

The sprawling sculpture of Jatayu is 200 feet long, 150 feet wide and 70 feet high. It looks as if the bird is embracing the rock. The sculpture has 15,000 sq ft of utility space beneath, including a multi-dimensional mini-theatre, which will be opened to the public later this year.

A Rs 100-crore eco-tourism project, the Jatayu Earth's Centre has been designed through a BOT (build-operate-transfer) agreement between the government of Kerala and Guruchandrika Builders & Property, a company co-owned by Rajiv Anchal, sculptor, filmmaker and CEO of the project. Built on land leased for 30 years, the Centre, at Chadayamangalam village, is a unique blend of artistry, mythology, technology, culture, adventure, leisure and wellness.

THE STORY OF JATAYU: The hill has mythical markings and a temple fenced outside the tourist area. Legend has it that it was on a rocky peak near Chadayamangalam village that the mythical Jatayu fell while trying to save Sita from the clutches of Ravana. After a fierce fight in the air, his wings were chopped off with Chandrahassa, the sword of Ravana. Jatayu fell over this rock and waited, braving extreme weather and surviving on water he extracted from the hard rock. This pond, which is said to have never dried, is seen near the sculpture along with the footprint of Rama which got imprinted on the rock while he released the soul of Jatayu from the ailing body.

The myth of Jatayu is so intrinsically linked with the village that people say it used to be earlier called Jatayumangalam and over a period of time evolved into present-day Chadayamangalam. The peak came to be called Jatayupara (Jatayu Peak).

The sculpture is the main revenue driver here. It is one of four components which collectively form the Jatayu Earth's Centre. The second major component is an adventure park which has been built on the side of the peak. It offers a variety of activities designed around natural rock formations. You can climb up an 82-foot rock-face, rappel down a 45-foot cliff and cross a tricky Burma bridge. Also on offer are commando nets, a vertical ladder, ziplining, chimney climbing, and trekking up a hill. The Jatayu

Adventure Centre offers all this and more.

The third component is a wellness centre. Tourists interested in Siddha can opt for this traditional line of treatment in caves, part of this ecosystem. The fourth hill, known as Kitchen Rock Hill, has natural caves which are equipped with modern amenities to provide medical rejuvenation. These rocks naturally evolved into vertical column structures. The crevices in between are large enough to provide easy

Society formulated by its promoters, even before the project becomes fully functional. Professionals and experts have been roped in to draw up a responsible tourism model that will uplift the adjacent community by promoting organic farming in and around Jatayu Earth's Centre.

Group farming, skill training, organic farming and an Incubation Centre are some of the society's ongoing projects. Tourists will be able to buy fresh

SUSHEELA NAIR



The sprawling sculpture of Jatayu is 200 feet long, 150 feet wide and 70 feet high

passage between them. Enclosures are built around this organic formation inconspicuously so that the naturalness of the rock is never lost while modern comforts are provided.

Tourists can take a stroll down the Centre's herbal garden and feel one with nature. Those choosing this hill for rejuvenation will get a four-day package for sightseeing across Kerala in a helicopter. These facilities, on the third and fourth hills, will commence only after completion of the second phase of the project which is scheduled in 2019. Night camping and trekking through a private forest culminating in a moonlit dinner on top of a rock forms the fourth component of the rock-themed park.

"There was a time when man and wildlife lived in harmony and Jatayu is a symbol of that time. The aim is to protect the rock and preserve nature around it," says Anchal. "Nothing dominates the rock as all the construction, including the sculpture, is designed and textured to meld into the landscape. Most of the area was barren when the project kicked off. Trees were planted well ahead and today the fallen Jatayu lies in a green haven."

The Social Committee of the Jatayu Earth's Centre is evident in the Eco-Guards Nature Protection

products directly from local farms. Heritage walks, farm tourism and harvest festivals are a few of the envisaged programmes under this project. The project advocates responsible tourism and will involve families from around the area to produce organic vegetables.

Native plants, which once adorned these rocky hills, have been brought back to life by replanting and careful nurturing. Conservation of rainwater is managed by a massive collection tank aesthetically built below a hilltop where fish and other aquatic life are conserved. The society aims at successful conservation of the total biodiversity on this 65-acre land and its adjoining community. Plans are afoot to tap unconventional energy sources by utilising solar and wind power for the energy requirement of the project area. ■

FACT FILE

Getting there: Jatayu Earth's Centre is 50 km from Thiruvananthapuram International Airport and 36 km from Kollam railway station. Entry fee is ₹400.

Enquiries: + 91 -9072-588-713
Visitors can also avail of heli-taxi services to other major tourist attractions in Kerala.

RANDOM SHELF HELP

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

Voices from the campus

EDUCATION at the Crossroads is about a range of issues that bedevil higher education and school education in India. Edited by Apoorvanand and Omia Goyal, the book consists of 19 essays with a well-written foreword by Karan Singh.

The good news is that in the past two decades higher education has grown exponentially in India. We now have the largest system of higher education in the world. More children, especially girls, are going to college. In fact, 46 percent of students enrolled in colleges are girls. The percentage of SC/ST students has also risen, though Muslims continue to lag behind.

The flip side is that much of this growth is led by private, profit-driven entities who offer education of poor quality, says this book. According to the All India Survey of Higher Education (AISHE) report, 75 percent of India's colleges are now private, including 233 out of 723 universities. The government's own colleges and universities — historic and still prestigious — have been left to languish. Most are in a state of collapse with teachers hired on a contract basis.

The essays, written by professors, researchers, people working for NGOs and school educators, raise specific issues of contemporary concern.

There is demand for autonomy in higher education. Udaya Kumar in "The University and its Outside" talks about the troubled relationship between academia and the State. In recent years the State has intruded into universities to impose its own objectives. It wants to expand education through technology, convert universities into skills factories and impose a toxic philosophy of learning, all of which shouldn't be the objective of learning, writes Kumar. What teachers need is freedom, writes Sudhanshu Bhushan in "Challenges of Higher Education Policy". He appeals for empowering teachers through what he calls the capability approach.

Secondly, the increased commercialisation of education is worrying educators. Jyotsna Jha in "Education India Private Ltd", points out the many wily ways in which schools hike charges. There are 'differential fees' for special classes. Tech solutions or costly online courses are pushed onto parents. Jha is critical of the rise of utility courses, like engineering, with no links to the social sciences, and the demeaning of skill-based courses. Also, there is no measurement of quality in higher education, she points out.

Apoorvanand's piece on MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) questions the government's enthusiasm for online learning which, he writes, is driven by global education interests, the second largest market after healthcare. He claims that the fervour regarding such courses is ebbing. Most users are mid-career professionals who find such courses useful for up-skilling, and teachers. He underlines the importance of brick and mortar structures. Teaching thrives on engagement. Colleges create communities and are beehives of learning. MOOCs, he writes, are really just add-ons to learning and can't replace the university system.

In recent years, there has been lobbying for low-fee private schools. How much do parents really pay? Manabi Majumdar and Sangram Mukherjee calculate the expenses of sending a child to a low-fee private school and juxtapose this figure with the cost of sending a child to a government school.

They find that as much as 25 percent of the median monthly per capita expenditure of indigent parents goes on low-fee private schools at primary stage in rural India. In urban India the expense works out to 20 percent. Apart from fees, parents spend on stationery, books, uniforms, transport and private coaching. Expenses in government schools are much lower. Since most government schools in rural India are closer to home, parents spend less on transport. But, regardless of whether the child goes to a private or government school, parents spend on private tuition.

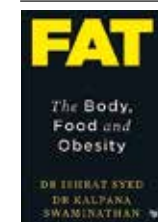
Not much has been written about how parents from artisanal, Dalit, nomadic

and labourer communities see the school system. Salai Selvan and V. Geetha in "Parenting at School" research this aspect in Tamil Nadu. Most parents go to work early morning, leaving their eldest daughter to look after her siblings. There are a few schools which adjust to these realities. One even permitted a seven-year-old girl to bring the children along and provided space for her to look after them. Another school, Vanavil, adjusted its curriculum and ambience to retain children. Two of their students now go to college and parents love the school.

"A Silent Revolution" by Mary John is about the pervasive sexual harassment that girls face on the campus. Colleges haven't come up with processes that would enable girls to transit from their protective homes into the wider world without limiting their freedom. Instead, college administrations respond by imposing fierce protectionism and policing. In recent years, campuses have erupted with demands for equality and safer campuses across colleges. There is the Pinjra Tod movement in Delhi University, Hyderabad for Feminism in Hyderabad University and the Hokkolorob movement in Jadavpur University.

Other pieces in this book reflect on why use of the vernacular languishes in higher education, on teaching poetry, and on the value of indigenous knowledge. Farah Farooqui writes an excellent essay, "School in a Ghetto". It's about her experience as the manager of a government-aided Muslim majority school in the Walled City of Delhi and the fears and aspirations of the children. ■

Obesity is no laughing matter



Fat: The Body, Food and Obesity
Dr Ishrat Syed
and Dr Kalpana Swaminathan
Speaking Tiger
₹399

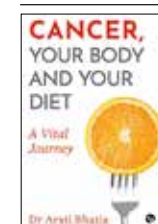
IF anyone were to tell you that reading about the processes of the human body is staggeringly boring, they've clearly never read *Fat: The Body, Food and Obesity* by Dr Ishrat Syed and Dr Kalpana Swaminathan. The book is humorously written and easy to read. Yet, make no mistake, it's a well-researched book.

With the number of obese people rising in India, it's time we took notice. While we like to exercise to look and feel good, we also, traditionally, consider it polite to urge our friends, relatives and guests to stuff themselves with food.

The book answers basic questions about obesity in India. Why have we become an obese nation? Why are our children becoming obese and how will this impact their health when they grow into adulthood? Is home food making us fat or is it 'outside' food? And what can we do about obesity?

The book is divided into three parts. The first, titled 'Mechanisms', explains basic body weight, the goodness of fat, its links with your brain, the perfect meal, the role of sugar and more. In the second part, 'Matériel & Methodologies', the authors track changing food habits, why we eat what we eat, the digestive process and how food impacts our organs and so on. The last section, 'Meliorations', helps the reader understand what can be done to combat obesity. One tip: eat eggs and avoid baked products. ■

You versus Cancer



Cancer, Your Body and Your Diet
Dr Arati Bhatia
Speaking Tiger
₹350

SURVIVING cancer is no joke, but being a professional in the medical field and coming back from the deadly disease lends a bit of irony to the situation. In *Cancer, Your Body and Your Diet*, Dr Arati Bhatia expertly breaks down the latest advances and research in cancer treatment. Using her clinical and personal experiences, she weaves through a wide variety of topics concerning cancer.

Throughout the book, the author narrates her own experiences of cancer – taking readers through every step on the painful path to recovery. From diagnosis and therapy to providing palliative care, with a focus on improving the quality of life for a cancer patient, Dr Bhatia applies her training garnered over 40 years of practising medicine.

In a refreshing change of pace, the author provides practical and informative advice when it comes to understanding the kinds of food that can prevent cancer, what to eat before chemotherapy, radiation and surgery, and what is to be eaten to recover from cancer. *Cancer, Your Body and Your Diet* proves to be an easily accessible and useful handbook when it comes to fighting cancer and ultimately leading a healthy and fulfilling lifestyle. ■

The girl from a ghetto



Muslim Women Speak: Of Dreams and Shackles
Ghazala Jamil
SAGE & Yoda Press
₹595

THE archetypal perception about Muslim women is that they are victims of Islam and of patriarchy. So they don't have any freedom to decide the trajectory of their lives. But is this really true? Ghazala Jamil, an Assistant Professor at the Centre for the Study of Law and Governance at Jawaharlal Nehru University, dissects this notion in her book, *Muslim Women Speak*.

In doing so she also reveals the fallacies and fault lines of India's mainstream feminist movement and why the Muslim women's movement must cut its own path.

The research study was commissioned by the Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolan (BMMA) which has emerged as a frontline organisation for Muslim women due to its successful campaign against triple talaq.

The idea initially was to collect data on the aspirations of Muslim girls along with their social, economic and education status and then, on the basis of these findings, advocate changes in policy and welfare measures.

Jamil, however, argued that narratives were more important than bald data. Instead of going door to door with a questionnaire, a more holistic image could be captured by encouraging the girls to speak of their lives and aspirations. So, workshops were organised where the girls could come, bond with one another and speak frankly in a friendly atmosphere.

Since 2008, Jamil and affiliates of the BMMA have listened to young Muslim women in 23 urban and semi-urban centres in 12 states. Their research sought answers to several questions. Was there any unifying factor among India's diverse Muslim community? How could women raise their voices and articulate themselves? What was the impact of communal violence on young women? The girls were also asked to describe their lives, their dreams and aspirations, the mother-daughter relationship and their expectations from marriage.

Since BMMA's partners were already working on the ground and were familiar with the girls' families, it made it possible for the girls to come to the workshops. Yet, they hesitated to speak. In Ahmedabad, some of the girls broke down and wept. The lady who brought them to the workshop said post the Gujarat riots the girls lived such isolated lives that they didn't meet other girls, didn't step out of the house and some didn't even know how to cross the road.

Jamil points out that Muslim girls and women suffer multiple types of oppression.

First of all there is what she calls structural violence by the State. Due to communalism, the community is forced to live in ghettos for safety. But the State does not provide basic civic services. Take Mumbra, a locality in Mumbai mostly



First of all there is structural violence by the State. Due to communalism, the community is forced to live in ghettos for safety. But the State does not provide basic civic services.

inhabited by the Muslim community. The electricity is irregular, drainage is horrible and waterlogging makes everyone miserable. In Ahmedabad there aren't any good schools where the community lives. The ones which exist are only upto Class 8. Fearing for their safety, parents won't let their girls travel to schools farther away. So the girls drop out and get

married. The number of dropouts appears to be substantial.

Yet the girls dream of working. They want to be teachers, doctors, lawyers, computer engineers. They have simple desires — a nice house, education, owning a scooter, joining *Indian Idol* and not having to cope with the conservatism of the community.

Mostly it is their mothers who try to support them. The girls too try to lend some dignity to their mothers' lives by helping them with housework. They tend to downgrade their aspirations over time, believing they aren't achievable. They also have role models like Sania Mirza, Sonia Gandhi or Kiran Bedi.

The girls face discrimination within their families from the men and domestic violence. They related stories of extreme cases of domestic violence by husbands and fathers. Puberty is the time when all kinds of restrictions begin being placed on the girls. They are told over and over again that girls' place is in the home. The ghetto, or locality, acts as a collective in restricting the girls, preventing them from getting an education and working.

Most of all it is communal violence directed against them and their men that deeply affects the psyche of girls. When they talked about the impact communal violence had on their lives, they often broke down. Because of communal violence, the girls and women are not able to question patriarchy. "The experience of communal violence binds the women closer to their men more strongly than the shared experience of patriarchy binds Hindu women and Muslim women," writes Jamil perceptively.

The tragedy, she says, is that while Muslim women try to protect and care for their men in the face of discrimination and violence, the men do not reciprocate. They refuse to address patriarchy, domestic violence or the issues of education and employment for women. This kind of attitude isn't confined to religious and political leaders but often extends to men in academics, even scholars and intellectuals, writes Jamil.

So Muslim girls face multiple barriers. They can't be placed on the same footing as ordinary middle-class girls. This is why, says Jamil, Muslim women have to take up their own issues and not rely on the feminist movement in India which appeals for a unitary sisterhood and expects you to leave your identity behind. Muslim women are proud of their identity. They also can't subscribe to a 'man versus women' kind of view, writes Jamil. The feminists see men as powerful. This is untrue. Not all men are powerful and Muslim men are marginalised too. "Liberalism cannot be asserted as the only true value governing women's rights and behaviour," writes Jamil. ■



**AYURVEDA
ADVISORY**
Dr SRIKANTH

For a sore throat

IN winter, a sore throat is a common complaint. Pain or discomfort occurs at the back of the throat. The pain can be severe and is usually worsened by swallowing. Many people with a sore throat find it difficult to eat or drink. A sore throat usually results from infection. The most common infections could be: Pharyngitis (an infection of the pharynx / throat). Tonsillitis (an infection of the tonsils). Very often both occur simultaneously. This condition is called tonsillopharyngitis.

Throat infections are most often caused by common cold viruses. A running nose and cough usually indicate a viral cause. In only 30 percent of patients is the cause bacterial. In such cases, the administration of anti-microbials may be required.

SYMPTOMS: A sore throat, which usually worsens when swallowing or speaking. A red throat and tonsils, often swollen. Swollen and tender lymph nodes in the neck. Occasionally, the individual may also evidence: Pain in the ears
High fever
White patches on the tonsils
Bad breath
Muffled voice
Occasionally, loss of appetite, headache as well as nausea, vomiting and abdominal pain.
Very young children, who are not able to describe a sore throat, often refuse to eat.

HOME REMEDIES: Gargle with warm salt water. Mix one teaspoon of table salt in a cup of

warm water. Gargle with the solution for about a minute. Spit the water out after gargling. Repeat the gargling as often as possible through the day for speedy recovery. Half a teaspoon of turmeric powder may be added with salt for faster recovery.

Prepare a decoction of ginger. Take one inch of raw ginger, peeled and crushed. Boil in one cup of water for eight to 10 minutes and strain. Add one teaspoon of honey to the warm decoction and a squeeze of lime. Use this for gargling three to four times a day.

Alternatively, you can use a methi (fenugreek) decoction. Add one tablespoon of fenugreek seeds to one cup of water. Simmer for 30 minutes. Strain and cool. Gargle with this decoction for at least 30 seconds and then spit it out. Repeat twice daily until you get relief.

Consuming a drink made by boiling eight to 10 tulsi (basil) leaves in a cup of water for about 10 minutes and adding about two gm of black pepper powder or one teaspoon of honey can provide quick relief. Drink this two to three times a day for about two to three days.

Add half or one teaspoon of cinnamon powder to a glass of hot water. Mix one to two teaspoons of honey. Drink slowly while still warm, two or three times a day for about a week.

Add half to one teaspoon of turmeric powder and a pinch of ground black pepper plus half to one teaspoon of red sugar candy powder to a glass of warm milk. Drink this twice daily for two to three days.

Take a quarter teaspoon of dry ginger powder and cinnamon powder and half a teaspoon of licorice (mulethi) powder. Steep this mixture in hot water for five to 10 minutes and drink at least three times a day.

Small pieces of Yashtimadhu root (mulethi / licorice) or dry ginger or cinnamon or clove can be used for chewing at periodical intervals to get symptomatic relief.

TREATMENT: Topical therapeutic agents are

available as lozenges and rinses. Patients are advised to consume enough fluids. Adequate rest helps early recovery. Avoid speaking loudly and don't eat hard or coarse food items.

MEDICATION: Ayurvedic lozenges — Koflet, Koflet-H, Koflet-SF lozenges (Himalaya); Zeal, Zeal plus lozenges (Vasu); Kanthil (Kushal); Srikara Amodini pills (BV Pandit); Sualin (Hamdard); Khadiradi vati (Zandu / Baidyanath); Lavangadi vati (Dabur / Patanjali). Three to four times a day will provide immediate relief.

Mouthwash / ready-to-gargle — HiOra, Oro-T (Himalaya) — 15 ml. Gargle for 30-45 seconds. Three to four times daily will relieve symptoms.

Triphala 50g, Yashti 25g and Tankana 5g. Mix thoroughly. Add one teaspoon of this mixture to one cup of warm water and gargle five to six times daily for one or two days.

Lukewarm plain sesame oil or Irimedadi taila (Kottakkal / Vaidyaratnam) for oil-rinsing. Swish two teaspoons of oil thoroughly in the mouth for two to three minutes and spit out when the oil becomes frothy. Do this process twice daily for two to three months during winter and the monsoon.

Internal / systemic medicines — Any of the following combinations can be taken for 15 days to a month or till all symptoms are relieved:

Septilin tablets / syrup (Himalaya). Children: 1 tablet / 1 tsp syrup — thrice daily; adults 2 tablets / 2 tsp syrup — thrice daily or Guduchi tablets (Himalaya) — 2 tablets thrice daily or Triphala guggulu / Nimbadi guggulu — 1 tablet thrice daily along with Sarivadi vati (Baidyanath) or Laxmi vilas ras (Dabur / Doothpapeshwar) — 1 tablet thrice daily for 15 to 21 days.

Consult your doctor if there is no symptomatic relief. Treatment with antibiotics may be necessary if the infection is stubborn or culture results indicate bacterial presence. ■

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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PRODUCTS

Golden spice

ARANYAM Natural Options specialises in turmeric, the super spice that the West has fallen in love with. Meenakshi Bhardwaj, co-founder of this enterprise, says their Lakadong turmeric is special because it is sourced from interior villages in the rainforests of Mawsynram in Meghalaya. Aranyam turmeric has a curcumin content of seven to 10 percent as compared to ordinary turmeric which has a curcumin content of only one to two percent. "We surpass even government parameters in all respects," she says. The turmeric is extracted from the plant's rhizome and pounded carefully by hand into powder.

You can also opt for one of Aranyam's turmeric mixes. For instance, for better absorption there is turmeric mixed with pepper, ginger, cardamom and cinnamon. It can be blended into buttermilk, lassi or milkshake. You can also make a warm latte or haldi *doodh*, ideal for keeping colds at bay during winter.

Bhardwaj is keen to export this special turmeric. She has received enquiries from the US and Europe. "The process of getting organic certification is tough, though," she says. "Also, we want to maintain our brand name and not just sell our turmeric. We have built it up with difficulty." Aranyam sources and sells pure forest honey as well. ■

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Email: aranyamnaturals@gmail.com



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