



STORIES OF IMPACT

EXPLORING THE WORLD OF GRASSROOTS EXPERIENCES

Volume 1 2022
ISSN Applied for
For private circulation only



**REFUGEES
OVERCOME
ADVERSITY ONE
STITCH AT A
TIME**

TIGER WIDOWS

Women fighting society, myths
and superstition

ABUSED & ABANDONED

Surviving the nightmare,
following a dream

URBAN DREAMS

The childhood fueling it.

"SEE" YOU TOMORROW

Embracing disability to
go places

THE RATIONALE OF THE MAGAZINE

For more than 30 years now participants of SPJIMR have gone to various places in India and overseas to work with communities and grass-roots organizations. They have in the process listened and learnt from the work these organizations are engaged in. The initiative is anchored in the belief that civil society is a learning mechanism and a knowledge system in its own right. In this we see the communities as a pedagogic device that provide experience and learning. The participants in

this journey of living, being and solution-ing also leave a part of themselves in these communities. They also bring back stories to us which lives on largely as part of DoCC folklore much beyond the structures of curriculum and evaluations.

The stories in this magazine are an attempt to capture fragments of encounters and perspectives of the varieties of stakeholders that make this journey. Welcome both to the journey and the pleasures of storytelling which is a prelude to social analysis.



FIELDWORK AS JOURNEY TO TRANSFORMATIVE 'SELF'

Each article is an invitation to engage, listen and respond to the stories of our stakeholders.

Fieldwork is a many layered experience. The people one interacts with, the location, the experiences of the people that one engages with leave an indelible impression on the fieldworker. Experiences of suffering, survival and victimisation uncover stories of grit, resilience and hope.

My first encounters as a young researcher in Odisha, after the cyclone in 1999 and in the Kutch after the earthquake in 2001 were naïve but moving. I went with the intention of spending a week in Odisha, but ambushed by complexity of the event, stayed on for several months. I found myself in similar situation again, after the earthquake in Gujrat.

Tragedy unravels lies, where the outpouring of grief becomes a ritual mourning slowly changing to a story of survival and hoping for a change. This is the framework of a fieldwork explorer. My experiences not just in India but also in China,

Japan, US have been testimonies to this. Sometimes this explorer is catapulted into the field because of the compelling urgency of the issue and in other cases it is mediated by actors already working in those locations.

This inaugural issue of IMPACT has a range of stories from the field. These are stories of the experiences of our DoCC participants with different subjects in the field and the indelible mark it left on them. The reflections of our alumni about the impact of rural internship on their minds and how it helped them redefine their purpose also find a place in this magazine. There are stories of our partner organisations who work on the ground and also share how SPJIMR participants made a difference.

A large number of stories in this issue speak about the resilience of the women and children. Whether it is "tiger widows" battling against myths and social structures or a

Munni surviving physical abuse and daring to dream; women occupy centre stage. Experience the exhilaration of Sangeeta and a Kamni as respondents discovering the world of literacy at the age of 25 on the other hand we have encounters with women forced to live a life of menopause as early as 25. There are anecdotes of orphaned yet cheerful children as they run and study for a better future. The cover story from Urmul of refugee women is a case study on rebuilding lives one stitch at a time-literally and metaphorically.

Each story asks you, the reader, to pause and reflect, learn and be inspired and think on how we could make a difference. ●

Dr. Chandrika Parmar
Faculty in Charge, SPJIMR,
Mumbai, India



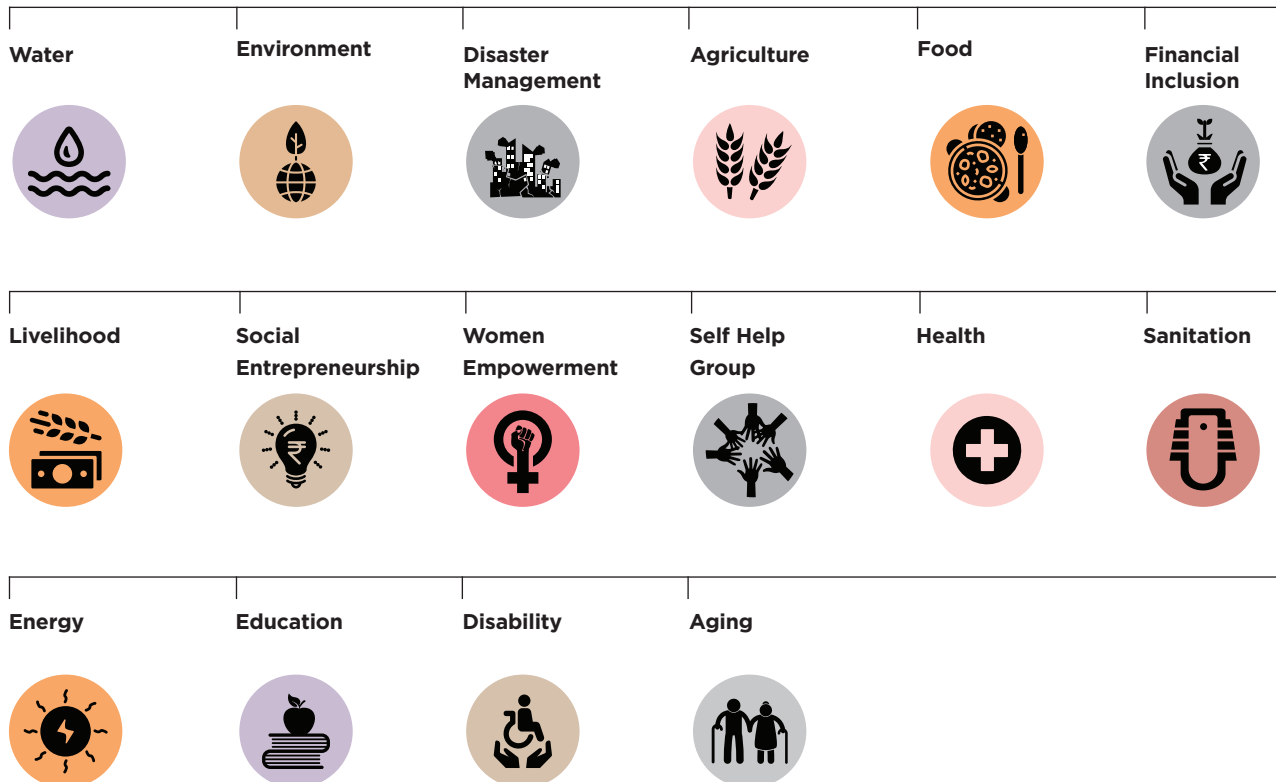
Clockwise from left: PGDM student during field visit with famer's family in Balotra, Rajasthan; Child of a beneficiary tiger widow in Harinagar, Bangladesh; Beneficiaries_Raah Foundation, Dongarpada, Palghar, Maharashtra

DoCC- WHAT WE DO

Development of Corporate Citizenship (DoCC) is a non-classroom learning (NCL) initiative. It aims to create sensitivity to and a sensibility about issues of equality and justice. DoCC is anchored in the belief that civil society is a learning mechanism. In this we see NGOs as a pedagogic device that provide experience and

learning. As part of this, the students go out into various parts of India and interact with pioneers at grassroots level. Here they engage with issues that impact community lives while at the same time visiting exemplary work centres.

DoCC hosts a variety of events and individuals that contribute to building a sustainability and socially sensitive mind-set. ●





SHAPING LEADERS WHO CAN DRIVE INNOVATIONS THAT BENEFIT BOTH BUSINESS AND SOCIETY.

Reflect and learn and be inspired by the inspiring stories of our participants and the communities that host them.

Wisdom is forged in the crucible of experience. Experience helps leaders translate their knowledge into wise decisions and action. The right experiences help leaders empathise, reflect, integrate, innovate, and understand the implications of their decisions and actions. But what about aspiring leaders who have not yet had the opportunities to acquire such experiences?

At SPJIMR, we expose our participants to a unique portfolio of immersive experiences that accelerate their leadership development. The portfolio is carefully curated, with each program focusing on a different operating context and objective. Our full-time program participants:

- Engage in poverty alleviation interventions in the slums of Mumbai through the Abhyudaya program
- Contribute to rural development projects throughout India and South Asia via the

Development of Corporate Citizenship (DoCC) program

- Discover themselves through the Personal Growth Lab and the Science of Spirituality practicum
- Learn how to work in teams to achieve results without direct authority through the Assessment of Managerial and Administrative Potential (ADMAPP) program.

- Develop confidence that they can operate in a global context by spending a customized mini-term at leading US and European schools through the Global Fast Track program.

- Develop a “maker-innovator” mindset by immersing themselves in a laboratory based design thinking and innovation journey and creating solutions to real-world problems

Collectively, these immersive experiences expose participants to understand, act, and reflect in unfamiliar situations. Such constructive dissonance shapes grounded and confident leaders who can drive innovations that benefit both business and society. SPJIMR was the first

management school in India to introduce such ‘non classroom learning’ experiences in its pedagogy more than twenty years ago, and constant innovation has kept us at the forefront. Our immersive experiences also carry significant academic credit, underscoring their importance in helping our participants grow as individuals and leaders.

The DoCC program, now in its 30th year, occupies a special place in this portfolio of immersive experiences. Yes, our participants grow, but just as importantly they leave a piece of themselves in the communities they serve as they creating lasting positive impact.

I invite you to read the inspiring stories of our participants and the communities that host them. ●

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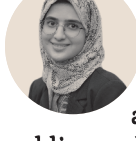
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Volume 1 2022

ISSN 12345678

For private circulation only

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IMPACT is published by **Chandrika Parmar** on behalf of Development of Corporate Citizenship, SPJIMR



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Photographs: Prithvi Raj Kota

LESSONS FROM 4-YEAR-OLD ORPHANS

**Discovering the true meaning of happiness
in 5 weeks at an orphanage.**

It was a bare room with one metal bed when there were two of us. It was our temporary residence for the next fortnight. Our discussion was silenced by a group of six children, all under 10 years old, when they carried, placed, and arranged a heavy metal bed in the room. I was outraged and in shock. Why were children made to do such heavy work?

This turning point in my life

Akhila playing Holi

happened in April 2019. What started as a course requirement became a surreal, life-altering experience. It touched me to the core, forced me to think, change my perspectives, and learn from the most memorable teachers I have ever met.

It was the first day of the fortnight I was supposed to stay at Swamy Vivekananda Orphanage Home run by Sai Seva Trust in Warangal, Telangana. In shock, I spent a lot of my initial time there just observing things and

discovering an alternate reality. Life is different in an orphanage. Everyone worked. I saw girls sweeping and cleaning while other children fed the cows or dusted furniture. The place was buzzing with activity, but it was all done by children. With limited funds and never-ending needs, there was no luxury or comfort. The basic needs of almost 110 kids, all between 3 and 15 years of age, were taken care of, but there was no one to pick up after them, to indulge them, or to provide all the little extras that I



Children standing in queue during lunch time

What stunned me was the fact that the trust runs on money provided by the trustees themselves.

had always taken for granted. I was shocked and shaken.

At their age, just going to school and doing my homework was a herculean task for me. I wasn't interested in anything, and I hadn't even known 1 percent of the things these children were doing on their own. Although young, they were completely self-reliant and undemanding. I distinctly remember my parents indulging me and my whims when I was of the same age. My perspectives changed on their own without me even realizing it. My worries about

getting good grades and getting a great job suddenly seemed trivial. I realized just how lucky I am, having lived a life of privilege from the time I was born.

From that moment, I stopped complaining about things not happening my way.

I volunteered to serve the children their meals one day and was deeply moved by that experience. The discipline in the dining hall was unbelievable. What was truly amazing was that this was not being enforced, because the children, even as young as 3 years old, had

NGO: SAI SEVA TRUST, WARANGAL, TELENGANA

Inception: 2002

Focus: Provide basic necessities such as food, clothing, shelter, and health care to orphans. Educate children to help

them realize their full potential and grow into independent, morally strong adults.

Impact:

- Some of the students

recently got scholarships in various sectors, such as academics, sports, art, etc.



Prithvi and his batchmate Nikhil with the kids during the internship

internalized it. No one guided or scolded them. Each one of them brought a plate from their rooms, washed their plates, stood in a line, got their food, and then sat in straight rows. No one, not even the 4-year-olds, ate till everyone was comfortably seated. I was frozen when I saw the children collectively pray and thank God for their food. It was incredible watching children, little more than toddlers, follow this discipline. It was both heart-warming and heart-wrenching to watch the older kids, barely into their teens, help the younger, tiny ones fill their plates. This was beyond anything I had ever experienced. A child who should have been in a nursery or playschool was standing in a queue to be served food, eating on her own, returning for refills if she wanted to eat more, and then washing her plate. I couldn't believe it then, and I still find it hard to wrap my brain around it even now.

More was in store. I was supposed to think of ways to help

in improving the efficacy and day-to-day operations of the Sai Seva Trust orphanage, amongst other things, when I was once again blown off my feet. I discovered that the trust was started by 12 like-minded friends, all ex-govt. employees, who decided to put into action their ideas and beliefs that they had shared during their breaks or at social gatherings.

One of the founding members, who was also the chairman, gave his land for the orphanage and building the school. Another trustee chose to stay in the orphanage after his wife's demise rather than live in comfort with his son so that he could oversee the day-to-day running of the orphanage and ensure standards were met. What stunned me further was the fact that the trust runs on money provided by the trustees themselves. Monthly contributions and donations to meet any shortfall in funds all come from the existing trustees.

While there is a small recurring contribution from a US-based NGO, the trust almost always runs at a deficit.

The funding pattern awed and shocked at the same time. All I could think was, 'How can people be so selfless in this age of corruption and greed?' I had often heard that one does not need money or possessions to be happy, but I saw it being practised for the first time. I joined the children during their free time and, with unshed tears and a lump in my throat, watched them play with broken marbles and rocks and treat them as prized possessions. I remembered how, as a child, I always demanded and got new toys, but was never satisfied and always asked for more. 105 orphans and 12 trustees have taught me that the true meaning of happiness is being content with what you have and cherishing every little thing that comes your way. ●

By
Prithvi Raj Kota

Harvesting
rainwater drop
by drop in the
isolated desert
communities of
Rajasthan.

THE BATTLEFIELD FO

Their ancestors fought with Alexander the Great, migrated, and settled in the Barmer region of present-day Rajasthan. Once known for their ferocity in battle, these isolated

OR DRINKING WATER

Photographs: Prithvi Raj, Kota



A typical house in the village

**“Pucca tanka when so close to the house, reduces the burden on women and young girls by providing access to clean water whenever required.”
Jasoda Devi**

desert communities are still embroiled in an ongoing battle—a battle for potable water.

Beniwalon Ki Dhani is an isolated desert village of barely 500 hardy souls in the Baytoo Tehsil of the Barmer district in Rajasthan. While it is barely 50 kms away from the sub-district headquarters of Baytoo and 100km away from Barmer, the district headquarters, it is more than some generations away from the conveniences of cities and towns. The tough terrain does no favours. Most of the villagers have been involved in menial labour for less than 6 months. The groundwater is saline and not fit for consumption. The villagers are dependent on rain for all their water. With no steady salary, very little government intervention, and unpredictable rainfall, the land breeds tough people.

The family of Jasoda Devi Mangilal is one such tough family. A housewife, her family consists of eight members. The family primarily depends on rain-fed agriculture in the Kharif season and usually grows Bajra, Jowar, and Moth beans. The family has cows, goats, and sheep to supplement their income. The male members work for daily wages for a few days

a month, and government welfare schemes, while in place, barely affect them. They have access to food, clothing, and electricity, but water and hygiene are scarce.

While the village is situated in a desolate desert zone, government intervention ensured the village has a well for potable water. This 250-foot deep village well, which unfortunately ran dry in the scorching summer, was the only source of water. With eight





The pakka tanka during construction



The pakka tanka post construction

members in the house, each knowing the value of water and consuming it frugally, the family still needed approximately 84 litres of water per day. The daughter-in-law of the house was responsible for keeping the house clean and fetching drinking water from the village well. While the authorities had installed hand pumps across the village, the water was not fit for consumption. They had no option but to use the village well

for drinking water, and fortunately for Jasoda Devi's family, it was just 0.5 km away. The daughter-in-law made 7 trips carrying 12 litres per trip to meet their daily requirement of 84 litres of water every day. She spent 840 hours and walked 2555 kms every year for water only.

The Jal Bhagirathi Foundation (JBF) stepped in to address this basic necessity. Volunteers and members of JBF explained the importance of clean drinking water and the advantages of water gathering in pucca tankas to the villagers. The pucca tanka is a unique participatory project for financing water infrastructure in villages. It takes into account the financial capability of the participants and is done on a cost-sharing basis by both the participant and JBF, where 70 percent of the expense is borne by JBF and the rest, 30 percent by the recipient. A development fund called Jal Kosh is set up in which communities raise 30 percent of the cost of the water harvesting systems. All contributions are raised in cash and formalised

by opening a bank account. The residents are helped and guided by JBF in the planning and development stage. These rainwater harvesting tankas are designed to avoid silting. These enclosed structures with external hand pumps restrict human contact with the stored water, ensuring minimal contamination of the stored water. The simplicity of indigenously designed tankas is that they require negligible upkeep and external intervention. This system is monitored and administered by Jal Sabha, which ensures impartial water distribution by ensuring adequate representation of men and women from all communities in the management of these pucca tankas. The Jal Sabha, besides empowering women and marginalised communities, also discourages untouchability and communalism, which are still prevalent in this region.

These pucca tankas, which cost approximately INR 80,000.00, not only harvest rainwater but also ensure a 24x7 supply of water to the residents. This water is used for drinking, cooking, and sanitation, while the water from kachcha tanka could then be used for cleaning, etc. Since Jasoda Devi Mangilal's family



Supervising the pakka tanka construction

and the village were familiar with the kachcha tanka, the emphasis was on clean and potable water. The pucca tanka also increased the sanitation and hygiene levels of the community and saved women and children hours of walking to collect water. Women were taught

soap making to make use of the time saved, which not only further improved hygiene and health levels but also became an extra source of income. ●

By
Ayushi Batra



Jasoda Devi wife of Mangilal drawing water from the handpump of the newl pakka tanka.

The Pucca Tanka is a one-of-a-kind participatory rainwater harvesting project in which JBF bears 70 percent of the costs and the recipient/s bear 30 percent.

NGO: JAL BHAGIRATHI FOUNDATION, JAIPUR, RAJASTHAN

Inception: Oct 2001

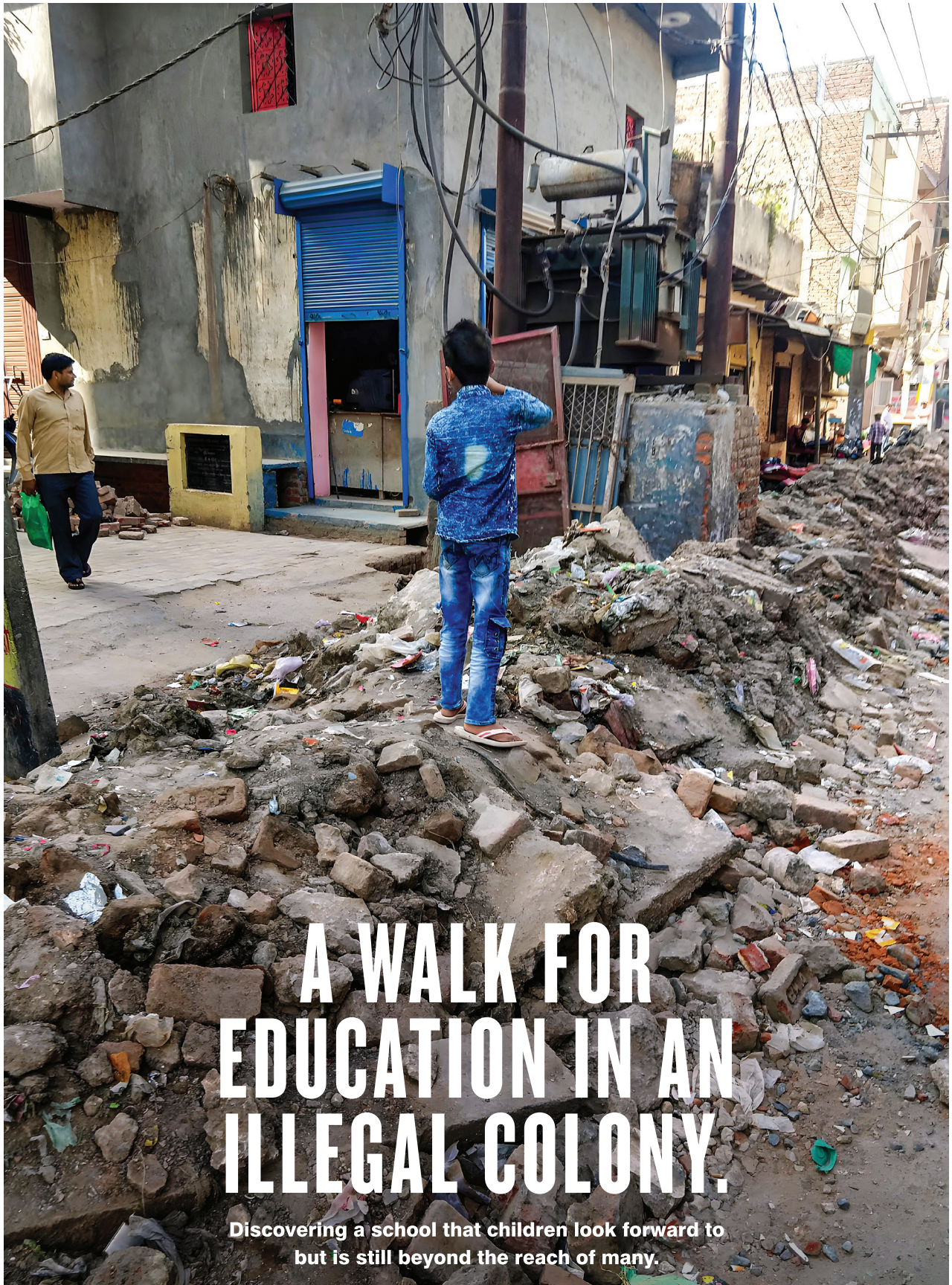
Focus: Enabling isolated desert communities to drink water by leveraging traditional knowledge and appropriate technology.

Impact:

- 2,000+ water harvesting structures in 500+ villages in the Thar Desert
- More than 550,000 people benefit

from year-round water availability.

- Harvesting 4,000+ million litres of rainwater each year.



A WALK FOR EDUCATION IN AN ILLEGAL COLONY.

Discovering a school that children look forward to
but is still beyond the reach of many.

Photographs: Madhav Kumar Bagri



The streets around the RASTA school are filled with dirt and filth



Prayer in morning assembly

The share-a-rick I got into, already had 11 people in it, and I was the twelfth! I squeezed out at my destination and followed the directions to the Khora Colony school in Ghaziabad. I held my nose while walking past open, overflowing drains on almost invisible roads ripe with rotting garbage. People were even walking over garbage to reach

their destination. I had to remind myself that this was home to many. In search of work, 1.2 million migrants from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar lived here. This was to be my base for the next few days. I was going to a school where many of the teachers were volunteers. A school that children looked forward to.

It suddenly struck me that I was privileged. I took education,

transport, and regular income for granted. I thought it was my birthright and that I was naturally entitled to them. It slowly dawned on me that education, safe transport, sanitation, and clean neighbourhoods are unknown to many. These are way beyond the dreams of people living on daily wages.

I made my way to the principal, who was surrounded by almirahs



The approach road to the school

overflowing with registers, files, and papers, and who confirmed that my task was to digitise the records, consolidate and analyze them, and document trends and other patterns. This simple clerical task made me discover a deep-rooted, hard-to-break gender bias. I was stunned by the number of interruptions and gaps across all ages in their education.

The place is Muslim-dominated,

and most parents prefer local madrassas over regular schools. Liberal parents allowed girls to study but pulled them out of school by the eight grade. Tenth grade was a pipedream for most girls. Not just that, families would often pack their bags and leave overnight without giving a thought to their children's education. While most would return after gaps of 1-3 months,

we found instances of many who never returned. A girl got in touch with the school after one and a half years, asking for a school transfer certificate. I know why this happens, but it's still difficult to accept it.

Since digitizing records was a fairly simple task, I volunteered to do other things as well and met



Sports day

A female student resisted filial pressure, by funding her education with saved pocket money and odd jobs instead of dropping out of school to study at a local madrassa.

quite a few parents, children, and teachers. I met families with as many as five children who dreamt of and encouraged their male children to study in private schools till their 12th, but baulked at sending girls to any kind of school other than a madrassa.

Despite this grim reality, many girls recognise the importance of education and understand that it will only lead to a better life. This desire for a better future motivated a female student to

NGO: RASTA, NEW DELHI

Inception: 1994

Focus: Committed to girl child education and women's empowerment for the economically disadvantaged.

Impact:

- 2,237 children have been reached through educational

programmes ranging from early childhood to secondary education

- 260 children are mainstreamed to government/private schools this year
- 2,400 women have been empowered

through Mahila

- 78994 migrant workers were made aware and tested for HIV/AIDS under the Targeted Intervention (TI) Project



Students before a Quawalli performance

resist filial pressure by funding her education with saved pocket money and odd jobs instead of dropping out of school to study at a local madrassa.

One of the teachers confided that her job at Rasta gave her the satisfaction no corporate job could ever offer. The senior-most teacher, currently pursuing her Masters in Social Work, defined her

experience there as a life-changing one. These school teachers regularly conduct community visits to identify children who can benefit from joining the Rasta school. During such a visit, they came across a little boy, who was perceived to be dumb but was corrected by his mother, who said that the absence of interaction had resulted in his present condition. His mother wept with gratitude when the teachers suggested enrolling him

at school.

I was grateful for what I had, resolved never to take anything for granted. I realized that we, the privileged, need to consciously work towards a sustainable society where we transfer the surplus to areas with a deficit so that more people have at least their basic rights before a few are allowed the untold privilege. ●

By
Madhav Kumar Bagri



Children learning computer skills from Rasta Vocational Training Centre

THE ECO-WARRIOR RETINUE

Vinay Jaju, the CEO of SwitchOn Foundation, shares its beginnings and experiences with DoCC students.

When did you start thinking about the environment? How did it lead to SwitchON?

Vinay: Like most teenagers, I dreamed of a good B school, a corporate job with a handsome salary. I wanted to be 'rich and famous' I studied at St. Xaviers College, Kolkata, and enrolled in the Family Managed Business programme

at SPJIMR on a friend's recommendation, because of the family business in edible oils.

While I had very little interest in the business, I still gave it a try because of family expectations. I soon realised that that that it was something that I did not want to do. After graduating from SPJIMR in 2007, I applied for a position at

GE in Sydney, Australia. I had this suppressed desire to travel, and the opportunity came at the right moment.

It was in Australia that I was exposed to environmental conservation. I realised how human intervention was leading to severe environmental destruction all over the world. The numbers startled me. I was

shocked when I read that 60 % of the wildlife population across the world had declined because of human behaviour. I got interested and then involved in the climate change debate and even started working with local communities in Sydney.

I decided to return to India and work in the environmental



Photographs: SwitchON Foundation

Sanjay Dhar with a solar pump at Mongolekote, Purba Bardhaman



Alpana Pal, a beneficiary of solar pump installation at Mongolekote, Purba Bardhaman district West Bengal

VINAY KUMAR PRIOR AND HIS



space. I met and started working with Ekta, who was promoting organic farming and organic products. Things fell into place and we married. My brother Piyush showed an interest and we joined hands towards the end of 2008 to start a non-profit organisation. We visited schools and colleges in Kolkata to increase awareness about climate change and its

solutions. This is how SwitchOn started. I believe that all of us introspect and, at some point in life, grapple with this question: “What is my purpose in life and what is my inner calling?” Working for the environment and generating sustainable solutions for its protection is my epiphany, my “inner calling.”

What are your thoughts on initiatives like DoCC becoming standard parts of the management curriculum?

Vinay: I think it is a must, not for a management institute but for any kind of educational institution. I feel it is extremely important for the youth to be sensitive to things happening around them,

Left to right: Say no to Cycle Ban 2019; SHG worker making mask during COVID pandemic 2020; Varunmitra training of Solar Water Pump technician. Latehar district Jharkhand

be it the environment or anything else that matters to society at large. It is only when individuals learn to put others before themselves, that their strengths can increase manifold.



Alpana Pal, a beneficiary of solar pump installation at Mongolkote, Purba Bardhaman district WB

NGO: SWITCHON FOUNDATION, KOLKATA, WEST BENGAL

INCEPTION:

2008

BELIEF:

Rural India is the heartbeat of India. A huge population

that just needs to be explored. This can happen only with change. SwitchON puts into practice the simple idea of encouraging people to change and improve

their livelihoods by giving them skills and introducing them to market-driven entrepreneurship ventures while protecting the environment.

FOCUS:

Agriculture: Encouraging smallholder farmers to pursue sustainable livelihoods while also protecting the environment.

If we set goals with compassion, and use technology wisely with care, we can all find solutions to most of the problems. I feel initiatives like DoCC at SPJIMR give students opportunities to learn this way of thinking. Today, we receive

interns from quite a few institutions, but the interns from DoCC - SPJIMR stand out. The importance given to field experience is what makes the difference. I think it is important to listen to and engage with the local community, especially for students,

if they want to make a difference.

Can you describe projects where students have made a significant contribution and how they have done it?

Vinay: Our association with SPJIMR and

DoCC started in 2017. I remember Harsha Pillai from the 1-year programme of PGPM. Back then, in 2017, we were in the nascent stage of our after school programme. Harsha had some unusual insights from the field, and we had interesting



Paddy Harvesting at Hanskhali, Nadia

Energy: Providing access to clean energy technologies ensuring livelihood.

Skills: Training of youths in skills that are demanded

by industry to enhance livelihood

Environment and Climate Change: A network of citizens across the seven

non-attainment cities in Bengal dedicated to the environment and curbing air pollution in the state through policy level and lifestyle changing interventions.

IMPACT:

Lives Impacted: 10,00,000
Villages: 5,000
Skill training: 5,000

discussions.

Aman Agarwal from the 2-year programme of PGDM also came in the same year and worked on our skill development initiative. He took the initiative and developed quite a bit of content for the skill development programme on our

website. While it is no longer there, at that stage when we were just starting off the idea, his contribution was of immense help. Another student whom I fondly remember is Shreyans Upadhye from PGDM, who worked on our Farmer

Producer Organisation programme in 2019.

While all the other students who have come to us so far have made contributions in their own way, I clearly remember these 3 students because of their attitude to learning and the skills that they had,

which were picked up by our team.

Our team does not have the skills that accompany management students, and this internship format is a great opportunity for us to have these skills, even though it is for a limited time. ●

While we encourage interns, the students from SPJIMR stand out. They are not only aware, but they also question the team and provide insights from a different perspective. The students often jump in and offer solutions that improve our workflow, which allows us to manage our projects more efficiently.

Vinay Jaju
Co-Founder & Managing Director
SwitchON Foundation, Kolkata





The unbelievable life of widows fighting the lethal combination of superstition, misfortune, and climate change in the mangroves of the Sundarbans.

IF YOUR HUSBAND IS EATEN BY A TIGER, IT'S YOUR FAULT

The Sundarban mangroves, home to an estimated 500 endangered Royal Bengal Tigers, are a case study of the unforeseen effects of climate change. Seawater has ruined rice farms in the area, and in recent years, many farmers have sold their land for next to nothing. Others converted it to

shrimp farming, which requires a brackish mix of fresh and saltwater. But now it has become too saline for that, and those who remain are increasingly turning to fishing. The overfished seas and rivers are now forcing

The marshlands of Sunderbans is the only source of income for farmers who have been forced to become fishermen



Photographs: Soumya Chakraborty



The swampy marshlands of Sundarbans



Salt water standing still in the fields

The killing of a married man by a tiger is blamed on the wife

fishermen to venture deeper into the mangroves where the tigers are experiencing shrinking habitats as well. Tigers now kill approximately 120 people per year in this area, mostly men, and injure many more in attacks.

Tiger widows

The unfortunate widows of these attacks are known as *'bagh bidhobas'* or tiger widows and are held responsible for the deaths of their husbands by the community. Branded as "husband-eaters," their mere presence at social gatherings is considered a bad omen.

Buli Mondol is one such tiger widow. Fishing was the only source of income for her family. Her husband rowed into the canals of the Sundarbans to catch fish and sell the catch at the

daily market. One day in 2002, her husband, rowing into the Sundarbans forest unaware that he was marked by a tiger (tigers only attack the one they've set their eyes on), was killed and dragged away into the depths of the forest. Buli became a tiger widow.

Simple thinking

Her answer to the question "Why don't the men kill the tiger in self-defence?" *"The forest is their home. If they come to our village and kill one of us, we strike back. But we go to their forest of our own volition. We do not have the right to attack them there. Not even in self-defence."* Its simplicity tore at my heart.

Losing one's husband is a traumatic event, but it can become life-threatening in these backward areas of Bangladesh.

NGO: LEDARS, SATKHIRA, BANGLADESH

Inception: 1996

Focus: Contribute to the reduction of poverty among the poor and marginalised groups by

making the best use of local resources

Impact:

- World Water Showcase Prize at

the 7th World Water Forum 2015

- The Kyoto World Water Grand Prize, as well as the Kyoto



A fisherman's hut on the banks of the Sundarbans at Harinagar

The killing of a married man by a tiger is blamed on the wife. The woman is seen as a bad omen—someone who brings bad luck to those around her.

Perpetuating the myth of bad omens

Buli feared for her daughter Anita's life. She had already lost her elder daughter soon after her husband's death. Her elder daughter was beautiful, intelligent, and hard-working. Besides attending college and doing well, she had a seamstress job at a tailor's shop. She was one of the few girls in Satkhira with ambitions and worked towards realizing them. She even kept her savings in a bank.

A group of young men abducted

her after work and took her to a shady room in an isolated area. She was gang raped many times and hung on display from the window of that room with her dupatta. A visibly tormented Buli blames herself for this. Because she became a mother by giving birth to her daughter, making her beautiful, and being responsible

for her brutal murder. She broke down and, with tears in her eyes, said, "If only she hadn't been so beautiful." If only I hadn't made her so... maybe they would have spared her".

Power corrupts

The far reaching contacts of the accused forced the doctor who



Saree making unit of LEDARS Cottage

- World Water Grand Prize in 2006.
- Weaving Lives is a project aimed at

improving the socio economic status of tiger widows and abandoned women.

- Worked with 11,249 climate affected families in southwest Bangladesh.



Tiger widow Bulfi Mondal

confirmed it as rape and murder in the post mortem to change it to suicide. Buli has been fighting the case ever since. A local journalist takes her to court every two months. “The goons follow me, but I am not scared,” Buli says with her gentle smile. Despite the government’s promise of the widow cards, Anita and Buli still have not received theirs simply because they cannot afford to pay bribes to the officials allotting these cards.

Unexpected Support

Fortunately, she got support from an unexpected source. LEDARS, a local NGO, launched “Weaving Lives” to improve the social and economic empowerment and inclusion of tiger widows and women abandoned by their husbands. They support “tiger widows” and help locals adapt to the challenges of climate change. The women are taught Kewda pickle making, saree embroidery and have even recently started making sanitary napkins. Buli was engaged in saree embroidery and dreamt of a better future. As she says, “We just want to be equals, nothing more.”

Having the courage to hope

Buli’s dream was to somehow get a passport and go to India. She had already managed to get a fake Aadhar card made. She wanted to see and experience the country where she imagined freedom was at its best. She wanted the freedom to be whoever she wanted to be without being judged. Freedom to earn well without being questioned about it. Freedom for her daughter to pursue her dreams and ambitions. Freedom from the shackles of her community and place in society. ●

By
Soumya Chakraborty

SEE YOU TOMORROW

The unforgettable welcome by Tiffany Brar, the visually impaired founder of Jyothirgamaya Foundation working towards empowering the blind

*By
Amala Thomas*





Tiffany enjoying a camel ride in Jaisalmer, Rajasthan during INK Fellows Conference



Tiffany doing sky diving in Belgium in 2017

“See you tomorrow”
These casual, everyday words took on a new meaning when I knew they were spoken by someone who could never see me. They emphasized confidence, acceptance, grit, and an unbelievable sense of purpose.

A TEDx speaker, with multiple awards from the state, National Association for the Blind, Rotary International, and yes, even the President’s Award, Tiffany Brar and her Jyothirgamaya Foundation are like none other.

Born into a well-off Army family, she became blind six months after birth due to a

medical accident involving an overdose of oxygen. Her father, Tej Pratap Singh Brar, a general in the Army, kept moving across different cities and continents. Early education in Great Britain focused on learning by doing. In Kerala, her next destination, it was the opposite, because Malayalam, the regional language, was the primary mode of instruction in blind schools. Shocked at the poor infrastructure, her father shifted her to a normal school. Mainstream school was not easy. She faced a lot of discrimination. Students and teachers often ignored her. This discrimination dogged Tiffany through her

NGO: JYOTHIRGAMAYA FOUNDATION, THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, KERALA

Inception: 2015

Focus: Empowering the blind in all spheres of life

Impact:

- Trained 200 people at home and through camps, and 1100 people in residential camps.
- Special consultative status from the United Nations
- The National Award for Best Role Model



Tiffany during her travel to Luxembourg

growing years across Delhi, Maharashtra.

It was finally at Dehradun that Tiffany found a school that accepted her the way she was and where she fit in. But that happiness was short-lived. A phone call in 1999 changed her life. Her father was called up for the Kargil War. When she tried to stop her father, he told her, “Country first, you and your mother later.” While he was away fighting in the Kargil War, her mother, Leslie Brar’s health deteriorated, and soon she lost her mother.

Her memories of Kerala during her formative years kept

her going. Although born into a Punjabi family, she could speak Malayalam. She cherished her memories of shopping with her mother when she, a little girl, clinging to her mother’s hands, conversed with the vegetable vendors and shopkeepers since her mother did not know Malayalam. They all liked and spoke lovingly to the fair, beautiful Punjabi girl who spoke Malayalam. These memories drew her back to Kerala after her mother’s demise. She stayed in a hostel, learned proper Malayalam, and graduated with a Bachelor in Literature and a B.Ed. for visual impairment from Ooty.

Tiffany then worked as a receptionist, travelling 15 km using public transport against her father’s wishes. She proved her determination to work and be independent. This fire is what defines her.



Tiffany with her mother Leslie Brar

among People with Disabilities



Tiffany then started working with an NGO as a trainer, barely using her potential and zeal. Anish, a colleague, and friend, recognized her zeal and encouraged her to start her own NGO in 2015. Initially, she went to the residences of the blind, encouraging them to step out beyond the comfort and the protection of the four walls of their house, using herself as an example-one of being a woman and the second of being blind. Rural training camps followed to build confidence and give a small taste of Jyothirgamaya's activities. Tiffany leads by example. She is a role model, not just for the blind but for all of us because she has practised and done it before, speaking and motivating others.

Disabilities do not prevent people from going places and raising their voices when necessary.

An eager learner, she is fluent in Malayalam, Tamil, Hindi, Punjabi, Nepali, and English. She has done paragliding, sky diving, and rock climbing and encourages her students to indulge in adventure sports to discover the confidence that often accompanies the lack of sight. She and her team even go to the movies. As she says, disability does not stop one from going to places and raising voices wherever needed.

Her selflessness often surprises, humbles, and, at times, petrifies



Tiffany enjoying an adventure ride



Tiffany at SPINDLE Awards in Netherlands



An evening well spent on the beachside with team mates

me. Despite her disabilities, she is financing the education and other needs of her family's caretaker. No one in need has ever walked away empty-handed. I am worried for Tiffany, that people may take advantage of her selflessness and hurt her.

She talked about how the activities at Jyothirgamaya can ensure their acceptance and inclusion into the mainstream activities of society. Her small team of 7 always motivates and encourages students in the hostel that they have established. This small free residential hostel accepts batches of 30 visually impaired students at a time, where they are groomed to become confident and independent individuals. With plans for a library and vocational training centre, amongst others, the comparatively new NGO, Jyothirgamaya, lacks funding and at times even has to resort to loans for survival. But there has been no stopping and no looking back. A very determined organization, run by an even more determined person, Tiffany's fire shines and illuminates the path for the blind.

No wonder, when Ram Nath Kovind felicitated Tiffany as a role model in her efforts to empower the blind, he addressed her as the "Courageous Daughter of India". This is extremely apt for Tiffany because of her residency across states combined with her inclusive personality that cannot tie her to a specific state. She is a daughter of the country, the daughter of a man who lived for this country. ●

By
Amala Thomas

IMAGINE APPEARING FOR YOUR 10TH STANDARD EXAMS AS A 25-YEAR OLD PARENT

It takes a lot of gumption, blood, sweat, and tears to complete education as an adult with responsibilities. One individual at a time, the Community Aid and Sponsorship Program (CASP) makes it happen.



Sangeeta practising her computer skills



Photographs: CASP

Sangeeta Dutta



Kamni Mehta

My father gave up his dreams of being a chartered accountant because of financial constraints, but he ensured that I could pursue my dreams. He taught me to value education, and I volunteered with an NGO as an undergraduate, teaching computers to underprivileged children. I was aware of the

internship but never expected an education project to fall into my lap. I was beyond excited when I realized CASP focused on adult education.

My enthusiasm was vindicated when the senior members of CASP asked about my interests before telling me their expectations. Discussions led to brainstorming, which motivated me further

because they not only heard my thoughts but also acknowledged them. This empathy is visible in all the people and even the students.

They pursue a dream of “No Citizen Left Behind,” which aims to provide education to everyone over 15 years of age who has had to drop out of formal education for various reasons. Forward-thinking, they have embraced technology



Kamni with her two sons at their residence



Sangeeta with her daughter

“Don’t listen to others, take a step forward and try things by yourselves. Everything will work out if you put in your efforts and have faith in yourself.”

Mrs. Kamni Mahto,
Learner (Age: 24 years)

and used various tools to make the learning experience engaging and interesting. The curriculum helps learners advance to the next levels of literacy: (i) Non-Literates to become Neo-Literates, (ii) Neo-Literates to Semi-Literates, and (iii) Semi-Literates to Literates. Currently, learners can complete their education till the 12th standard. Holding hands at every step in this process for a minimal fee or for free. This empathy spills over into personal life and the students’ association with each other and the teachers continue long after their education. This empathy, I think, is the secret sauce of their success.

Sangeeta Dutta

She studied till her 8th standard in a Bengali school till she got married at 16. Mrs. Sangeeta started attending 5th standard classes in 2012 and started taking her with her 5-year-old daughter along with her because no one in her family was willing to look after her while she was attending classes. She even missed a few exams for the same reason. Her determination to have a better life for herself and her daughter helped her overcome the numerous objections and arguments at her home. From being an introvert who was apprehensive about most things,

NGO: COMMUNITY AID AND SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM (CASP), NEW DELHI

Inception: 1976
Focus: Child Sponsorship, Health, Vocational Training, Education, Protection, Children’s and Women’s Empowerment,

Senior Citizens, and Community Development programs.
Impact:
• More than fifty thousand children have been assisted in

completing their basic education.
• Work-oriented training has helped more than ten thousand young people attain a



Kamni Mahto with her mother-in-law at her residence



Kamni helping her sons with their studies

she now runs the household and also supports her daughter's education. The skills that she has learned have given her a lot of confidence, and she finds life ahead easy. Courses in stitching, cooking, jewellery making, computer sessions, etc., boosted her confidence and she is now digitally savvy.

From being a hesitant Hindi speaker, she is now fluent not only in Hindi but also in English, along with her native Bengali. She finished her 12th standard and is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) while also working as a beautician. Now a source of inspiration to others,

she calls the CASP teachers her family and also helps others get enrolled with CASP to pursue education. As someone who always had rolemodels she looked up to, she is surprised that she has now become become a role model and an inspiration to others.

Kamni Mahto

The sudden deaths of both parents, followed by an early marriage, put an end to Kamni Mahto's education. She had completed fifth grade and wished to be treated on an equal footing with the rest of her family. Encouraged by her cousin, she enrolled in the 5th standard. She

is currently pursuing Level C, i.e., her 8th standard, as part of the programme. Mrs. Kamni wants to become a doctor but believes her financial situation might prove to be an obstacle. However, she is now focusing on one step at a time. She is now literate in both English and Hindi. She is also comfortable using a computer and helps her children study. She even helps her mother-in-law, a hospital worker, with online information to help her perform better. While she feels like she is flying, she hopes to go higher.●

By
Harsha Choudhary

- Numerous communities were provided with material assistance to build safer, better houses.
- Numerous community-based organizations were established to empower residents to uplift their communities.
- Collaborated with the government to help take government schemes and projects forward.

LEADERSHIP IS ABOUT LEADING WITH YOUR BRAIN AND YOUR HEART.

Gautam Karajgi is an advisor on social and environment impact. A passionate agripreneur, educationist and coach since April 2021, Gautam, a PGPM 2006-07 alumni, shares his life-changing experiences, from wearing a hard hat to being a wannabe manager to...

Gautam Karajgi

As an engineer with over 4 years of experience, I was trained to identify

problems and deliver solutions, so the SPJIMR experience was a change. The interaction with other students from

differing backgrounds and experiences forced me to look at things differently. The biggest change was the non-

classroom teaching. It changed my perspective from ME to WE. This was reinforced by my experiences at the



photographs: Gautam Karajgi



Personal Growth Lab, which made me value collaboration and the team. We bonded well and realized that it's

not just one person who's performing, it's the whole team that is performing. And the team can perform only

as well as its weakest link.

Spiritual awakening
Another aspect, in

hindsight, was the exposure to the Gita. While we didn't attach much importance to it, I realise the necessity of



Little moment, big memories..Gautam and Sheetal with young Sharvil

triggering the spiritual component or the emotional component of our thought process as well. My experience over the years makes me believe that not only do we need leaders with brains, but we also need leaders with heart. The only way to ensure this is through spiritual awakening. And yet, the only connection that will come between the heart and the brain is through a spiritual awakening.

This can only happen when one is at peace with oneself. The non-classroom sessions help that and are the signature programmes of SPJIMR.

The biggest change DoCC, is another non-classroom programme that changed my life.

With no exposure to rural life, I had to go and stay in a village with people I believed to be deprived and disadvantaged. Just 4-5 days of watching and observing them at Anandwan convinced me that they are much more superior to us in every way because they lead a life of dignity. In all my actions and interactions with the office bearers of the NGO, I was inspired.

So much so, that when I heard a talk by Dr. Shital Amte, granddaughter of the founder, Baba Amte, I fell in love. She helped me to understand what rural people needed, and we got married a few years down the line. DoCC wanted

us to understand the rural population and acknowledge the reality that most are unaware of. It was not focused on solutions from a management perspective, but about collaborating to improve things around harsh ground realities.

New learning

The next eight years of working with Shital made me realize the differences between corporate life and rural life. The absence of a framework in the rural context was an exhilarating experience. The unstructured format, so different from that of a corporate allowed us to ideate and explore every direction possible. It was a mix of finance, logistics, and supply, but in a

humane way where all decisions revolved around people. It would always start with Shital's question: what is it that the person needs? Instead of offering what I could, I was faorced to answer that question and work towards it. We toyed with the idea of transforming Anandwan into a smart village. And that necessitated understanding the people staying in the village and their requirements first.

I escaped the corporate rat race of proving my mettle because of DoCC. Now I think of how we can collaborate, how we can bring in people from different mindsets, different capabilities, and different exposures to create something.



Explaining how greeting cards are made by the specially abled residents of Anandwan to French counsel general HE Ms. Sonia B

Thinking more from the heart than the brain, because that's more important for large teams with a sensitivity towards people, which is often ignored in a corporate setup because of performance pressures. I believe these nuanced thoughts can make a difference as one grows and evolves.

Many Indias and its solutions

Traveling extensively across rural India, across villages, proves that every village is a mini India by itself. India is a country comprised of many little Indias.

We cannot copy-paste solutions because the needs, desires, aspirations, geography,

etc. of every village are different. The corporate approach of scaling cannot work in the social sector because local needs change every few km, despite some similarities.

We can create broad frameworks but need to be aware that solutions will be tailored around local needs. Just like people, every village is different. Cookie-cutter solutions are not the answer.

At best, we could provide a framework and encourage residents to change and offer solutions, so that it is workable and gives them ownership.

The art of listening
The first step of change

is listening. The desire to prove something makes people poor listeners. The spiritual component of DoCC, if paid attention to, can be invaluable in calming one's inner thoughts and becoming a good listener. This is imperative for collaboration and growth. The seeds of listening sown during the non-classroom programmes need to be nurtured and imbibed.

The experiences and the learnings of a unique internship will manifest themselves in most SPJIMR students only after 10 years of corporate life. Intelligent people need to be sensitized, and the rest will follow in due course. I was fortunate to not only see through the window that DoCC opened, but also to live through it. I feel enriched. ●



Visit to farmer producer company to explore possibility of setting up rural innovation and incubation centre with focus on farm mechanisation and paddy farming.

**When the unfortunate practice
of temporary movements for
a better living becomes one's
permanent identity**

By
*Aditya Kohli, Nihar Mehta and
Samiha Shah*

THE LANDOWNER WHO WORKS ON DAILY WAGES FOR 8 MONTHS SO THAT HER FAMILY CAN SURVIVE ON INR 40,000.00 PER YEAR

The incongruity of a woman drying freshly laundered clothes in front of a doorless hut made of small logs-and-hay hut made me pause. I decided to

approach her to continue my survey.

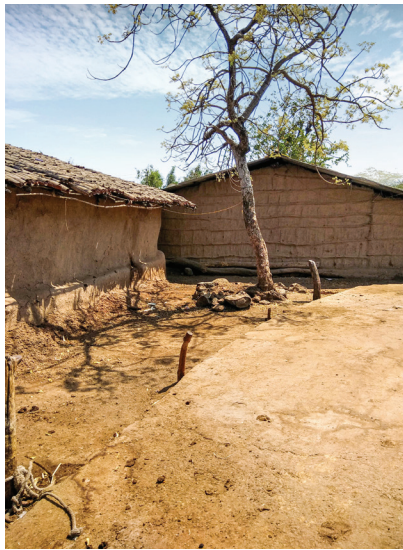
Munni, as she introduced herself, brought out a plastic chair from the dark interiors, dusted it, and asked me to sit

while she sat on the edge of the door-less entrance of her hut. Our conversation progressed in fits and starts as we struggled

Left to right Nihar with Munni and Anita

Photographs: Nihar Mehta





An afternoon around Pawle in Nandurbar



Houses on a street of Pawle village

with the words.

She could speak only in her Adivasi language, which was very similar to Marathi. Her calm, composed, confident outlook and matter-of-fact tone bewildered and surprised me. Her responses were at odds with her experience.

She was uneducated, and her husband had left her. He used to ill-treat her and then married someone else. She left him along with her daughter and now lived at Vatvi with her parents and her

daughter, who was now 14 years old.

Munni revealed that she was a migrant worker and would migrate for 8 months out of the year, every year, to work as a construction labourer in Surat. She usually travelled with a group of 10-12 other people, predominantly men, to Surat after the monsoons. They would wait at a naka, for agents called 'mukkadam' or 'thekedar' who took groups to the construction sites. No advance payment, booking amount, or contract was ever given to these contractual

NGO: DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT CENTRE, NANDURBAR, MAHARASHTRA

Inception: 1994

Focus: To provide knowledge-based support to NGOs, CSRs, government agencies, community-based organisations, and others in the field of participatory natural resource management (PNRM) and sustainable

livelihoods.

Impact:

- Directly works with 1.4 lakh rural households spreading in 19 districts across Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Rajasthan.
- Shares its experience

in research, implementation, training and policy advocacy initiatives in Natural Resource Management and promotion of Rural Livelihood in India.

- Collaborates and shares its knowledge with NGOs, CSRs,



Dry lands in Pati with no irrigation facilities



Empty village streets, the most visible impact of migration in Nandurbar

construction labourers. Everyone was given a polythene sheet, and Munni, like her peers, would set up a jhopda (tent) using the polythene sheet, in the open area of the site. With no toilets, Munni would find a nearby field for defecation every day. That's how her 8-month long tryst with migration would start for the year and remain so, till the very end.

At a daily wage of INR 250, paid at the end of the day, Munni was proud that she was

paid equal to the men at work. She not only had to take care of her daily expenses but also had to save for her family back home, who depended on her. Even when she fell ill, she had to pay for her treatment from her meagre wages. The employer, or thekedar, paid nothing, even in the case of on-site accidents or mishaps. She had to bear all the medical expenses, plus lose the daily INR 250 for every day she missed.

Munni mentioned an incident when she was bleeding badly because her foot was pierced by

3-4 nails. Her co-workers took her to a private hospital because of the apathetic response of the government hospitals towards such accidents. She couldn't work for a couple of days, didn't

**Farming 3 acres
of land with no well or
access to irrigation
fetched her family a net
annual income of about
INR 15,000.**

- philanthropic institutes, and knowledge partners such as colleges, universities, research organisations
- The Water to Wealth models have demonstrated higher standards of living in the rural community.

generating an additional income of about INR 29,000/ household/ year because of increased productivity from agriculture and allied activities with improvement in ground water levels, soil health, etc.

- Over 300 villages have become self-reliant and are living better life compared to past and serve as models.

The forced eight months of annual migration not only isolated and separated her from her loved ones, but also effectively eliminated her chances of benefiting from any government scheme or policy that was implemented in her village.

get paid for that, and had to bear the treatment cost in cash from whatever she had managed to save till then. This drastically depleted her savings, resulting in many starving nights.

She returned home with the princely sum of INR 22,000-25,000 after 8 months of back-breaking labour every year. As a landowner at Vatvi, Munni also owned a 3-acre farm in Vatvi with no well or access to irrigation. Farming fetched her family a net annual income of about INR 15,000. This, plus her savings from the construction sites at Surat, ensured the survival of her family. There was nothing left for livestock or anything that could increase their earnings. Being away for 8 out of 12 months also

meant that she could not become a member of any bachat gat (self-help group) nor benefit from any of the government schemes on skill training or employment.

Her view on migration shook me to the core. She said that this periodic migration burrows into every aspect of life and erases all chances of an alternate livelihood. The 8 months that she stayed away from her family and village not only isolated and separated her from her loved ones, but also effectively eliminated her chances of benefiting from any government scheme or policy that was implemented in her village. She could have benefited if she had been present to take advantage of them, but she had no choice but to migrate. It also snatched away the opportunity of



An elderly woman from Borpada who works for 6-8 months each year as a migrant worker



One of the interviewed women migrant worker from Bedki on the perils of migration.



A chirpy Aanganwadi Kid in Mendipada

RURAL MIGRATION, THE HORRIFIC GAP BETWEEN CONCEPTUALIZING A PLAN AND IMPLEMENTING IT.



Animals seeking shelter from the blazing Khandeshi summer heat

learning anything else from her and also accelerated her physical degeneration. A vicious loop that Munni has accepted, that she can never escape from—migration has become her identity.

Her friend, Anita, a single woman living by herself in Vatvi, joined us with an experience very similar to Munni's; she too worked at the same construction site as Munni. They both dreamed and wished for training in activities like sewing, handicrafts, nursing, beauticians, etc., or for an industrial presence in their cluster so that their conditions would improve, and they would be able to take better care of themselves and their family.

Shaken to my core with these insights, I thanked both of them for their time, completed my forms, and bid goodbye. An interview that I assumed to be like all other personal interviews on migration turned out to be a story of immense grit and honesty. The unanswered questions about the solutions to this migration cycle keep buzzing in my head. ●

Simple country folk, content with the little they had, dreaming of the day that they could earn enough to be able to pay off their debts and expenses. They trudged on like bullocks yoked to a wheel in the vicious cycle of migration. They weren't looking for a better standard of living but merely wanted to satisfy their basic needs, which were not being fulfilled by the wages prevalent in their village.

They bared their lives and shared details about what compelled their ritual migration for the better part of the year. The inadequate rainfall did not give them a choice. They went, changed their diet, fell ill, and lived in pitiable conditions, knowingly compromising their children's education, because they couldn't leave their children alone to fend for themselves.

While the villagers

valued education, even the educated ones migrated to do the same menial labour, making me wonder why they valued education. Probing revealed the motivation of the school to be the free mid-day meal system. They wished for a residential school where they could be assured of their children's wellbeing, education, and safety. All of these Scheduled Tribes were so deprived that education made no difference to them, and all of them worked equally as labourers.

It highlighted the failure of the system to generate employment in these villages, which was at odds with the claim that government schemes provided jobs to these villagers and many had benefited from them. Many of the villagers hadn't even heard of schemes like MGNREGA. The differing perspectives

of the government and the villagers were reinforced by the villagers' simple houses, many of which even lacked doors. Government officials claimed to have implemented several schemes to provide jobs while the villagers were unaware of any. They felt the government did nothing but talk, and so did the Panchayat.

The villagers felt exploited.

Is the gap between conceptualizing a plan and implementing it vivid? What steps could be taken to ensure that villagers get their dues when they don't feel empowered enough to fight for what they deserve? They consider themselves inferior and have given up on the possibility of any kind of improvement in their situation. This thought needs to be changed, but how?



BRIDGING THE GAP PERCEPTION AND



Photographs: Anagha Algaonkar





Upwade Village

How a feasibility report to understand and improve the rural economy changed the way I think

THE GAP BETWEEN REALITY

Sindhudurg, Konkan, Maharashtra conjured visions of sunshiny days and endless beaches- idyllic time under the sun and stars. I was sadly mistaken. Zarap, our base, the headquarters of Bhagirath Gramvikas Pratishthan (BGP), was an eye-opener in more ways than one. It was miles away from the beaches, and Upwade, which was to be our residence for the next three days, was a small village even further away from the sea.

I was dreading this trip because we were told that there was no mobile service in the area. We would be isolated, and I had never been away from my phone, and therefore the world. But I am getting ahead of myself here. It was a field trip like no other. We were researching the feasibility of an intervention by BGP to empower the residents and encourage sustainable livelihoods. Our primary task was to assess the dynamics of Upwade and determine the best suited interventions to meet the needs of the village.

The second component of this trip was to conduct an impact analysis of the interventions



Upwade Village



Left to right
The dirt road leading to the entrance of Bhagirath Gram Vikas Pratishthan; Upwade Village; The backyard of Bhagirath Gram Vikas Pratishthan; Me and my batchmates in a local resident's house in Upawade where we spent two days to conduct a village level survey

already introduced, namely promoting scientific and backyard poultry farming practises and biogas installations. Each one of us was given a case study of someone who has been a beneficiary of either of the interventions and studied the impact the intervention has had. We had to conduct a gap analysis and provide recommendations from a fresh perspective to make the interventions even more effective.

We stayed in the village for 3

days, surveyed it, and met around 40 people-people who are happy with what they have and don't believe in living beyond their means. Set in their ways, they resist change. Tradition even ignores economics. Farming rice is a traditional practice, and they eschew cashew, kokum, and jackfruit plantations despite being more lucrative. Following tradition makes them feel secure and gives them comfort, and they are not willing to let go of that even if it hampers their prosperity.

NGO: BHAGIRATH GRAM VIKAS PRATISHTHAN, ZARAP, MAHARASHTRA

Inception: 2004

Focus: Act as a catalyst for economic growth in marginalized villages by introducing newer and more advanced methods of agrarian practice, energy and fuel generation, etc.

Impact:

- Empowered 70

villages from 7 tehsils by introducing them to newer and advanced methods of farming, energy and fuel generation, horticulture, poultry, goat rearing, etc.

- Have stopped villages to cities migration and even witnessed

reverse migration!

- Installed 20,000 biogas systems
- Facilitate micro and mini loans
- Initiated village weekly market where farmers, housewives, and micro-entrepreneurs gather to sell their products.



The families and households we met cut across local social and economic strata but were bound by economic deprivation as we understood it. Despite that, all of them were extremely friendly and hospitable. Talking to them made me realise how villagers manage their day-to-day activities. No one in the village drinks tea with milk in it, they drink and offer only black tea, or “Kori Chai.” They barely consume milk because it is too expensive for day-to-day use. I also realised how important a market is to economic progress.

Upawade has no market, which limits the villagers’ options of what they can buy or sell. This, unfortunately, pushes up the price of commodities, making it even tougher for villagers to live our definition of a comfortable life. The poor road connectivity doesn’t help either. Despite all of this, or maybe because of this, I have had an experience like no other, with each day being more memorable than the previous one.

I vividly remember two families: the richest farmer family in the village and a moderately well-off

How beliefs and value systems influence behaviour and how, contrary to popular belief, these actions and behaviour have nothing to do with financial capability.

family who worked extremely hard to maintain their current standard of living. My friends and I went to both the houses at the same time, 1 PM, but on two different days. We expected the richer house to offer more refreshments than the poorer one. Our experience was the exact opposite. We were forced to have lunch at the poorer household. They personified “Atithi devo bhava” and considered the guests’ blessings from God, going out of their way to provide as much as possible for the guests. We could taste the love with which the meal was prepared in the poorer house, while the richer house offered nothing. I realised how

beliefs and value systems dictate the actions of people, and contrary to perceptions, these actions and behaviours have nothing to do with financial capability.

One afternoon, after finishing the interviews, we were about to leave for lunch when the NGO’s administrator unexpectedly asked us to start cleaning the courtyard. It was scorching hot and dusty, but we started sweeping the floor with brooms, despite being overwhelmed by the area that needed cleaning. I thought this was an endless task and I would collapse because of the heat. Much to my surprise, we slowly and steadily swept the compound clean. It pained me to think of how men and women in rural areas have to do laborious tasks every day for a mere pittance. It was a humbling experience and made me proud that we managed the task.

I now feel privileged to have lived the life I have lived and firmly believe you can execute even the toughest tasks if you have your team by your side! ●

By
Anagha Ajgaonkar

REFUGEES IN THE THAR OVERCOME ADVERSITY . . .

Photographs: Urmul Seemant

Artisan of Western Rajasthan rejuvenating an almost extinct craft of *mukka embroidery* on chanderi fabric.



How Urmul Seemant's initiatives revive and monetize traditional art forms by encouraging women from remote places in Rajasthan

... ONE STITCH AT A TIME

Santosh!!
Santosh!!!



Kamala Devi in conversation with Anshuman

Her voice reached us before she did. An old woman in colourful local attire almost rushed into our rooms in search of her granddaughter, who had decided to play in our rooms in Bajju village in the Kolayat administrative block of Bikaner district in Rajasthan.

Other than the word Santosh, we couldn't understand each other initially. She was rushing through a local Marwari dialect. It took some effort, but we bridged the language gap, despite our speaking in Hindi and her in Marwari.

NGO: URMUL SEEMANT SAMITI, BAJJU, RAJASTHAN

Inception: 1972

Focus: Organize communities for collective action, developing their skills and levels of confidence to lead them to self-reliance.

Impact:

- Reached 300 villages.
- Improved health-care

services for 1,62,242 villagers

- Established a community and increased the earnings of over 5000 artisans, including 550 families displaced by the Indo-Pak war in 1971.



A group of artisans from Delhi Talai with the gorgeous Diwali festive collection which has been handcrafted by them with mukka embroidery on the chanderi fabric.

Kamla Devi was an artisan working for URMUL and was visiting the campus for a 3-day training workshop organized by the Kashida unit here. With a mix of pantomime, broken Hindi liberally sprinkled with Marwari, she explained that

she was also associated with URMUL for seven years. She was a craftsman and had been doing Kashida embroidery for a living.

Her association with URMUL began when she was forced by her friend in the village to attend a session on women's empowerment. This session had a positive influence on her and she was convinced to join a Self-Help Group (SHG) pioneered by URMUL trust. Her journey to becoming an empowered and

self-sustaining individual started here, where she got exposed to the various activities conducted by the trust which encourages the empowerment of village women and girls. However, this decision was tough to take as she was just a normal housewife, rearing goats like other women in her village to supplement the family income. Destiny favoured her. Her decision to join URMUL led to exposure and development of her embroidery skills through

training by experienced Kashida practitioners.

Kashida, a traditional embroidery technique, was passed down through generations of women in the Sindh and Kutch regions. Urmul helped the women artisans to upgrade their traditional skills, provided technical support, and linked them with national and international markets. The



The craft of embroidery at the craft centre gives women of the cluster opportunities to share heartfelt conversations.



Artisan embroidering the Urmul Diwali collection whose major purpose was to revive the vanishing craft of Mukka embroidery.



Women artisan giving the traditional and slowly dying embroidery technique of Mukka a modern contemporary look.



Embroidery is just not a mere an art technique but an integral part of the daily lives of the rural women where they sit together and share heartfelt conversations. In the frame is the mother daughter duo of Tari Bai and her daughter Sangi.

non-profit also freed them from the stranglehold of exploitative middlemen. Women artisans started getting organized into self-help groups and further enhanced their skills. Orientation and guidance by famous designers and graduates from the National Institute of Design and National Institute of Fashion Technology have also helped the women hone their skills.

Looking back, Kamala is happy because she has gained a lot of confidence and self-satisfaction in these few years and wants the same for Santosh, her granddaughter, who had introduced us inadvertently.

What intrigued us was that she was from a refugee family

who had crossed the border from Sindh province during the 1971 war. She had childhood memories of wondering about an alien land when she had crossed over with her parents and an older sibling. We didn't probe further as she was uncomfortable talking about it. It was fascinating to hear the story of a woman who had come to a foreign land with two children and stayed in government refugee camps for some years until she was handed over a barren land piece by the state. However, that didn't help much as the cultivation of crops was next to impossible in these hostile lands. She remembers accompanying her mother and a few other ladies to do masonry work as there weren't many options available for labour.

Observing our fascination with her story, she told us about other families with similar experiences. Some families even had to stay in the Jaisalmer camps for more than 15 years after being displaced from their homes during the 1971 war.

Kamla now heads an SHG of 12 women and is busy training new artisans. With an income of INR 5000 every month and working in the comforts of her own home, she is happy to be associated with URMUL. On being asked if she misses Pakistan or her ancestral home, she gave a half-smile and said that she was content here, but her parents definitely missed their land and would have been happier over there. ●


By
Anshuman and Mehvesh Ibrahim

IDENTIFY THE HOUSES BUILT BY INDENTURED CHILD LABOUR

1,66,66,666 children under the age of 14 work across 2,00,000 brick kilns across India to help their parents pay off their debt.



Shutterstock



I grew up next to a brick kiln in Bengaluru. Because of rapid urbanization, the kiln has now been replaced by skyscrapers. The city limits have expanded and swallowed the site. The smile that accompanied my memories of the brick kiln gave way to consternation and disbelief

as I pored over various survey reports on brick kiln workers at the office of Mumbai Mobile Creches (MMC). The description of the working conditions and migrant labour in the kilns surprised me. The notes on bonded labour made my skin crawl, and I was horrified to learn that migrant workers



Children reading at Veetbhatti site, Panvel



children enjoying playtime outside day care centre in Wadala

were compelled to work almost as slaves in tormenting conditions. A brick kiln, a barometer of growth and urbanisation, depended on forced labour while catering to an oblivious urban society.

It was a project like no other. I was unaware that almost all brick kiln workers were migrant workers when I started my DoCC project on the brick kiln industry. The initial curiosity about this almost invisible and yet essential business was piqued. It changed to disappointment, then to horror as I studied this labour-intensive industry.

I imagine a so-called friend and well-wisher offering a loan to help you and your family, then doing an about-turn by suddenly demanding the money back with interest; failure to do so would compel you and your family to work for him in pitiable working and living conditions without any questions till the unasked loan, growing rapidly with usurious interest rates, was cleared. Incredibly, this is how brick kiln workers are recruited. The only difference is that poor, often illiterate people are lent a few thousand at unbelievable

The more bricks a family produced, the more they earned, often by forcing children as young as 6 to work.

rates so that they can celebrate an occasion or an event in their family. The same money lenders take advantage of the borrowers, illiteracy, ignorance, and these compounded loans that grow each day, compelling them to work at



A routine health check up on a child at Veetbhatti in Navi Mumbai, near Taloja/Panvel



Chai - pani meeting with parents at construction sites reached through Care on Wheels Bus

NGO: MUMBAI MOBILE CRÈCHES, MUMBAI

Inception: 1972

Focus: Supporting the health, education, and safety of children living on construction sites.

Impact:

- Reached over 100,000

children across 270 construction sites in Mumbai, Navi Mumbai, and Thane.

- Over 4,000 children are reached every year
- Over 1,000 women

and men were trained as teachers as part of the teacher training program, with 30% coming from the labour community.

brick kilns for a pittance at bare sustenance levels and completely at the mercy of the brick kiln owners.

These poor borrowers soon pushed their children, often as young as six, to work because they were paid per brick. The more bricks a family produced, the more they earned. The children were made to work under the same conditions as adults. Hence, child labour was prevalent at the brick kilns. The seasonal nature of the brick kiln industry was another key factor in encouraging this cycle of indentured labour. The poor workers had to borrow so that they could survive the lean season when the brick kilns were non-functional. A vicious cycle that overwhelmed the borrower where the interest kept on ballooning.

Children under 5 were left to fend for themselves since the rest of the family was almost continuously engaged in the brick-making process. MMC set up mobile crèche services in these challenging circumstances. Having been to an MMC 'Balwadi' or a day care centre at a construction site in Panvel, I thought myself well prepared for a visit to another crèche, but at a brick kiln. I was expecting a similar setup at the brick kiln. However, the brick kiln was at a remote location and the



Children at Panvel brick kiln site learning to make clay structures as part of their art

conditions weren't the same. There was a stark difference between the Balwadi at the construction site and the one at the brick kiln. The brick kiln was dusty and dry. There were fewer children, and they were less active than the ones at the construction site. The caretaker told me that due to the remote location, at times it was tough to even get food delivered to the Balwadi and they had to make do with whatever they got.

While my project was about the challenges faced by MMC during the set-up of these crèche services, I was taken aback by the harsh, grim reality when I saw the children at the site. Education was a dream. The need for shelter, water, nutrition, and health for children was far more urgent.

I lost my focus.

I realized the growing brick industry is fuelled by enslaved migrant workers as young as 6 as kiln owners expand to keep abreast of the construction industry, which is projected to grow at a rate of 6.6 percent till 2030. The construction boom and rapid urbanization, while a barometer of economic growth, have an underbelly that defies and defiles convention and logic. We dream of living on higher floors, and the children who make the bricks that make up the walls of these houses dream of basic needs like water, food, and shelter. ●

By
Nishant Bangera



Photographs: CAPPED

MENOPAUSE



Unwanted hysterectomies, spelling physiological, psychological, and economic disaster for women, are quickly spreading across rural and impoverished India.

EAT 25?

A lifelong activist who worked with trade unions and tribal groups even as a student Bharath Bhushan, founder and secretary of Centre for Action Research and People's Development (CARPED) was disturbed and baffled. They



Bharath Bhushan, Founder of CARPED



Lambada (tribal) women with their health reports, in Sheri Thanda, Medak district, Telangana

were combating child labour in the villages of Medak district's Kowdipally Mandal, about 80 kms from Hyderabad, when they ran into families complaining of debt. They were borrowing money to pay for health care, especially women. In one village, almost half of the Lambada tribal women of reproductive age, some aged under 40 and many as young as 21, had their wombs removed at the advice of their local private practitioners.

CARPED conducted a door-

to-door survey and found 728 similar incidents. Women aged between 20 and 40 in this village in Medak have been pushed to menopause much before their time, allegedly by 'doctors' who prescribe hysterectomies for ailments as routine as abdominal pain and pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), which is best treated with a course of antibiotics.

Alarmed, the CARPED team surveyed the entire Mandal and calculated that people had spent almost INR 60 lakh on this

medical procedure. The affected women said that the local doctors they consulted advised them that a hysterectomy was the only cure for pelvic inflammatory disease, and neglecting it could only lead to death. Such instances have crossed state boundaries and are repeating themselves in impoverished, backward rural regions. Private doctors were cheating illiterate villagers forcing them into unwanted surgeries. They convinced simple

NGO: CENTRE FOR ACTION RESEARCH AND PEOPLE'S DEVELOPMENT (CARPED), HYDERABAD, TELENGANA

Inception: 1989

Focus: To promote a higher quality of life through community mobilisation and participatory governance based on sustainable natural resource management.

Impact:

- Persuaded the

government to construct 25 schools in Kowdipally Mandal.

- Putting an end to child marriages in the Gangireddulagudem community, which often occur during the preschool years:
- PIL to expedite

paediatric heart surgery for over 5000 children

- Enrolled over 4000 children from Lambada and other disadvantaged communities in government schools.



rural women that hysterectomy was a simple operation that relieved them of their monthly pain and other side effects. Most of these women are uneducated. They live in remote villages where reproductive health is rarely spoken of and believe their symptoms are an individual problem. That makes them easy victims. These poor families take loans, mortgage their land, or sell it at throwaway prices. Apart from losing a vital organ, these women also lose their land and life savings and are forced into indentured labour by unsavoury money lenders and landowners

as the procedure costs anywhere between INR 10,000 and 50,000, a princely sum for the daily wage labourers.

Hysterectomies have been reported in rural pockets of Gujarat, Rajasthan, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, and Maharashtra. The case studies are similar: poor illiterate women have been prescribed the procedure for white discharge, irregular menstrual cycles, and even abdominal pain. Their willingness to undergo the procedure stems from their fear of cancer, which doctors convince them of, and the belief that their

uteruses are of no use once they have had children.

According to the BBC and the Times of India, tens of thousands of poor families, hailing from Beed, Osmanabad, Sangli, and Solapur districts of Maharashtra, migrate to the “sugar belt” for six months to work in sugarcane fields. Couples work in jodis with shifts often stretching up to 14-16 hours per day. During menstruation, period pains affect productivity. Skipping work overall costs both the woman and her husband a

Rural family - intergenerational bond and modernity



day's wage (INR 100-200). As a result, women, most of whom are in the age group 20-40, get their uteruses removed to make themselves more employable.

The farmers often lend money to the labourers for the surgery and commit them to work until

A Reuters report in 2016 revealed that women were also being forced by families to undergo hysterectomies as a means of sterilisation to prevent unwanted pregnancies caused by the repeated sexual abuse of female labourers by supervisors and landowners.

the debts are paid. Many also sell their property: cattle, gold, land. Others bond their children to debt—letting them work for their debts. This turns into a circle of poverty from which there is hardly any escape, especially because women often cannot work after such an operation.

They are unaware of the lifelong health consequences of these operations. The side effects include hormonal imbalances, fatigue, faster aging, early menopause, and other ill effects on young women.



Poor and vulnerable women constitute majority of women who have undergone hysterectomy in private hospitals in Medak

The surgery can itself cause complications like infection, blood clots, etc. Some women suffer from severe back pain, bone loss, and depression. Because they need money for new treatments, they continue to go into debt.

A Reuters report in 2016 revealed that women were also being forced by families to undergo hysterectomies as a means of sterilisation to prevent unwanted pregnancies caused by the repeated sexual abuse of female labourers by supervisors and landowners. Paradoxically, the loss of daily wages during menstruation only makes

hysterectomies more appealing.

A representative, nationwide study (National Family Health Survey [NFHS-4], 2015-16), found that around three percent of women of reproductive age in India, over a crore of Indian women have had their wombs removed. It is unnerving when women, some still teenagers, have been operated on for a middle-aged medical condition.

A study on the subject found more than 20 lakh hysterectomies performed in erstwhile Andhra Pradesh, as per the District Level Household Survey (DLHS)-2007, conducted by the Ministry of



Work of a tribal woman never ends where health is the only wealth

The rate of hysterectomies was 920 per 10,000 women in AP, while it was 55 in the USA and 20 in the UK.

Health and Family Welfare. The rate of hysterectomies was 920 per 10,000 women in AP, while it was 55 in the USA and 20 in the UK. Two-thirds of these interventions take place in private hospitals through referrals. So-called health

agencies conduct health checks in villages and see who needs which treatment. Then they refer people to private hospitals. Operations become a business.

Andhra Pradesh woke up to this and the state health insurance no longer subsidises hysterectomies in private hospitals and pays insurance in state hospitals only if the intervention is necessary. It must therefore be justified. In Maharashtra, the government is taking action against sugar cane farmers who have forced women labourers into unwanted hysterectomies.

However, the exploitation

of ignorant women by the medical sector is a superficial issue. It's the vicious cycle of illiteracy, unemployment, and child marriage that needs to be tackled. This requires national attention of the government and civil society to help the hysterectomised women to cope with the side effects and save millions of vulnerable women from becoming prey of the medical malpractice. ●

By
Jacob Sunny Madathil, Modupalli
Murali Krishna, Phani Krishna,
Syeda Farheen Fatima

BUILDING RELATIONSHIP BEYOND THE CALL

GAYATRI SEVA SANSTHAN, UDAIPUR, RAJASTHAN

INCEPTION:

1986

BELIEF:

To bring peace and prosperity in society by empowerment of the people

through integrated and sustainable development by making continuous, comparative and integrated efforts in different sectors to uplift the quality of life of the people.

FOCUS:

Providing access to clean energy technologies ensuring livelihood.

900 villages

- Impacted 10,00,000 households
- Treated 8,000 hectares of land

IMPACT:

- Covered 14 districts and

What made you decide to pursue social issues?

Chetan: I started working at Cognizant, Pune after I finished engineering in 2009. It took me just 4 months to realise that I was not cut out for that life and

I returned to Udaipur. The set up was so that employees sitting on the same floor often did not know each other's names. I didn't even know the client I was working for. It was in

this frame of mind while returning from dinner that I barely escaped being hit by a car when crossing the road. It made me question myself. Would my company and its work

be affected if anything had happened to me? The answer was no. I realised that I wanted to work where my presence or absence made a difference. I returned home to Udaipur and



Mandili water conservation- Rejuvenated the defunct existing Anicut in Dayli Village



Orchard establishment for the tribal farmers

Photographs: Gayatri Seva Sansthan

ONSHIPS THAT GO L OF DUTY.

Chetan Pandey; the CEO of Gayatri Seva Sansthan (GSS) shares his 9 years of SPJIMR student internship experience

decided to restart Gayatri Seva Sansthan, which my father had started in 1986. It was functional till 2000 when my father Laxminarayan Pandey decided to join politics. I restarted it towards the end of 2010. My life changed after this. Starting with just 1 member now we are 550 plus team.

What do interns and students mean from SPJIMR to you and Gayatri Seva Sansthan?

Chetan: As a social organisation with its inherent constraints we need help. Help from

people with a strong educational background and skill sets. Interns allow us to benefit from that. SPJIMR was our first student internship initiative and special for us. They are sensitized and build a good rapport with the field staff. I recall a field coordinator Nandalal Meena mentioning that the staff have no issues in working with SPJIMR interns as they are very accommodating.

We even have a WhatsApp group 'Friends of GSS' comprising only of SPJIMR students.

The relationship is not restricted till the duration of their internship. They remember us even when they leave. Some past interns who are now professionals still associate with us. They have even designed our annual reports long after their stint with us got over. We stay in touch. Whenever I am in a city where these students are, I try to meet up with them. We realized the contribution of the interns from the very beginning and currently receive interns from IIM Indore, IIM Ahmedabad,

IIM Udaipur, NMIMS and local colleges and universities.

Has this partnership with SPJIMR DoCC made any impact on your organisation and communities you work with?

Chetan: They definitely have an impact on our organisation and indirectly on the community we work with. The students directly help GSS across functions. They work faster which indirectly saves time and money. Our team learns these new skills which



CCT (Continuous Contour Trench) one of the most popular and effective SWC treatment



A progressive wadi farmer of the TDF project displaying vegetable produce



On-Farm Training Program for the progressive farmers of Farmer Field School (FFS)



The Wadi TDF Project funded by NABARD.

indirectly has an impact on our community. The new skills, processes and softwares developed by the interns eliminates things like manual data entry allowing the team more time on the field where they are really needed.

Can you share some instances where the students have made a difference in GSS and how?

Chetan: It is difficult to single out just one or two because almost all of the 47 SPJIMR students who have come to GSS so far have contributed to our programmes. Hansa and Bhavna, SPJIMR PGDM students were in our first batch of interns in 2013. They worked with our women’s Self Help Group (SHG) project. At that time we had

200 such SHGs, each with an average of 15 women. We needed to capture and store data about all their financial transactions like savings, bank loans, etc. but were unable to do so due to lack of funds. Bhavna and Hansa designed an MS Excel spreadsheet to record this information. While my team and I used Excel we were not aware of the functions and formulas. It was a godsend and we used it for 4-5 years till we got a professional software. They trained our technical team; even I learnt advanced Excel. They also designed a training module on how to set up, promote and run a SHG. This module comprising 14-15 sessions is used by us even today.

Another project

involved Riju Bhattacharya and Manali Das from PGPM in 2014. We were exploring expansion strategies in terms of both scope of work and geographical locations. The staff however lacked the desired skills to undertake such a plan. Moreover, we had performance issues with the staff and wanted to address that properly. Riju and Manali suggested a HR policy to cover performance management, appraisals, Key Responsibility Area, setting goals, remuneration, leave, etc. This would also align staff members to goals, and help them understand their roles and responsibilities better. We still use this policy today. Mitali and Narendra Mani from the

same group helped us create a logo and define the concept of a new initiative ‘Growth Fresh’ in 2013.

Ankit and Priyanka helped us in 2014 in an unforgettable way. While we had all the certification we were unable to tap any FCRA funds. After painstaking research and analysis they suggested that we categorise our work into themes, identify funds which were relevant and aligned with GSS’s vision and mission and selectively apply for them. We received our first FCRA funding within 4-5 months after they did the groundwork.

In 2017, Nikhil Jagadish, another SPJIMR intern was part of our core group devising the geographical expansion strategy of

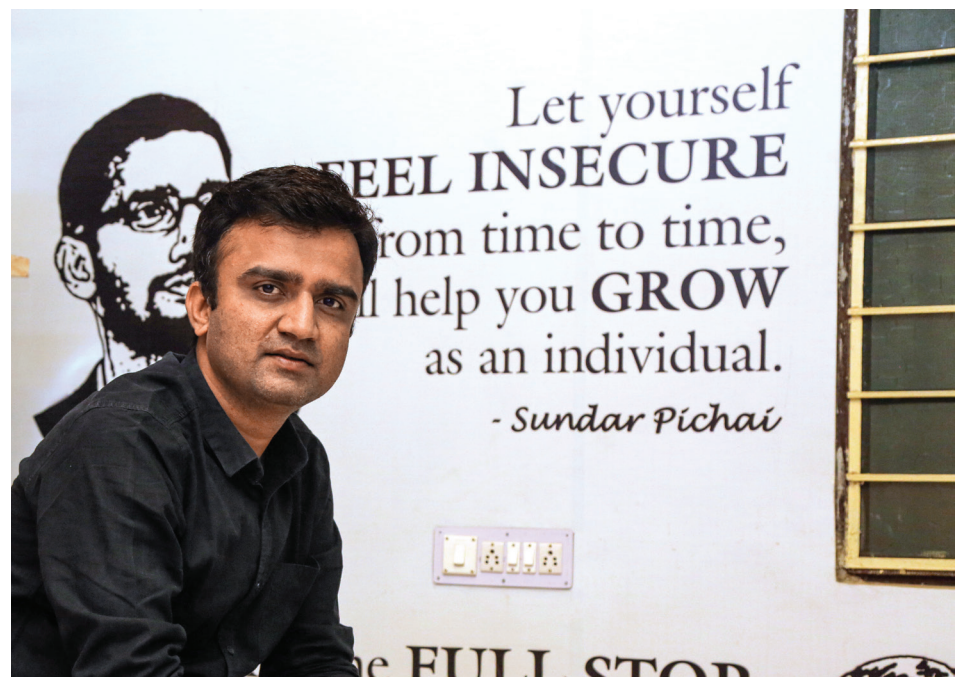


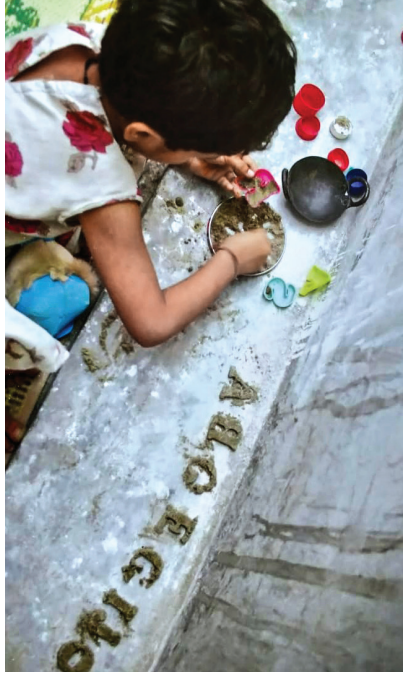
Farmers of the Najihar Watershed project displaying their wheat produce

GSS. We expanded our work beyond Rajasthan to states like Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh based on the ideas he generated. 4 students in 2019 helped develop the content of the 'Mandali-the model village' website; a project on sustainable tourism. They also helped us design strategies to market the concept. The most recent batch of 2021 had a mix of 2 offline and 1 online student. We had just resumed work post the series of lockdowns and they did a commendable job of conducting the impact assessment of our Wadi project.

Chetan Pandey
CEO, Gayatri Seva Sansthan
Udaipur, Rajasthan

SPJIMR DoCC students have an impact on our organisation and indirectly on the community we work with. The students directly help GSS across functions.





Mansi, now in college wants to become a doctor. She was 3 years old when she was found with her siblings begging on the Varansi railway platform. From house chores to taking care of guests, she is the go-to person. Clockwise: Mansi - the happy one, posing for a photograph; Mansi and her brother in Nadesar branch; Mansi when she was 3 years old

REBUILDING LIVES ONE DAY AT A TIME

Photographs: Vineesha Golla and Harshita Sharma

How abandoned children and women discover a family, embrace education, and start life afresh.

Kutumb village is special. It is self-sufficient. Almost. It's a home like no other. It is filled with the buzz of purpose and the laughter of children around a pond with fish, organic vegetable patches around the pond, a football and cricket ground, a stage for children to practise dance, a play area, and three buildings, each with a different purpose.

The beginning

When they discovered children as young as 9 addicted to sniffing eraser solution, Dr. Ashish and Puja

decided to make a change in the community. They stumbled across 3 abandoned children at Varanasi station and decided to start Kutumb, a home for abandoned children, to guide them to a better future and help them get over the demons and fears chasing them from the past.

New Directions

Kutumb grew, and so did the desire to reach out and help. Various initiatives to engage with and benefit the local villages took

shape. Sanskriti grew out of a desire to help women empower themselves financially. It started



A view of Kutumb village

with a sewing school, and soon after, a handicrafts centre. The residents soon started making trees from wire, earrings, key chains, necklaces, torans (wall hangings), and bracelets.



Losing motivation

They didn't know how to sell the products. Their shelves started overflowing and they slowly started to lose motivation because they did not know how to sell and market the products. The craft room decorated with the items that the residents made left me awestruck, and I struck up a conversation with Anjali, the 20-year old, who knew the ins and outs of Sanskriti, which meant the world to her.

Anjali's Story

Anjali (name changed to protect identity) lost both her parents and went to live with her aunt when she was 7 or 8 years old. A couple of months later, her aunt's friends asked her to accompany them. Knowing them to be family friends, she then 9-year old happily accompanied them.

The two women left her with an unknown man who took her to a remote place in Bihar. He informed neighbours that she was his daughter and regularly molested her. The child, barely 10 years old, controlled her pain and unshed tears for the next 7 years. Traumatized beyond belief, Anjali withdrew into herself and barely



Fun with nature



Outdoor group study

NGO: KUTUMB, BABATPUR, VARANASI

Inception: 2002

Focus: To provide shelter for underprivileged children and women, as well as empower women through their Sanskriti project .

Impact:

- Kutumb Village, an orphan care programme
- Sanskriti Women's

Empowerment

Programme to improve literacy and help them become financially independent, thereby uplifting their dignity.

- Kutumb Community Health Center provides free medical aid to the underprivileged communities in the

nearby villages.

- Child Development Program for low-income families with children who need help finishing their education.
- Matritv Poshan Mission to End Malnutrition in Poor Children and Mothers



Above: Ear-rings, Purse and decorative trees made by the residents of Kutumb
 Below: Dr. Ashish with children of Kutumb.

talked when the man forcibly took her to Varanasi when she was 17.

Since she was a woman now, the man passed her off as his wife in Varanasi. A withdrawn, visibly distressed young woman

barely in her teens was a rarity and was noticed by the Kutumb community. But Anjali did not dare to speak up till one day, unable to bear the pain, the torture, and the continuous molestation for over 10 years, she cried for help and the Kutumb family stepped in. The police arrested the man, and Anjali found

shelter at Kutumb.

The torment finally stopped after 7 years, but she relives those agonising days every time she testifies against her molester in court. She breaks into tears after every court visit as she relives her 10 years of torment with a heart-rending outburst. “Losing out on childhood and being molested is one of the most horrifying experiences; especially when you are a 10-year-old. I felt like I was living in hell and was numb the whole time. I was engulfed by guilt, sadness, pain, anger, and confusion. I still have nightmares about those days, and sometimes it is hard for me to even look at myself in the mirror”.





A mannequin in the womens workroom



Dhoopbatti making training

As the oldest resident of Kutumb, she cooks and takes care of the younger children. Having been abused, she empathises with the new members, especially the abused. Her experiences help children overcome the trauma of abuse. She speaks to them and encourages them to share their thoughts and feelings. Fiercely determined, she says, “My desire to alter my situation and not tolerate anything wrong gave me the strength to overcome the dark life that I had endured for almost 10 years. I won’t be able to forget those years, but yes, I am living a ‘life’ now. Kutumb is a temple of knowledge and love. It gave me everything I ever dreamed of” she continued after her outburst.

Five years later, still haunted by her past, the relieved Anjali is optimistic about the future. She has learned to read and write, has learned to sew, and is training to be a beautician. She is now

“Kutumb is a temple of knowledge and love. It gave me everything I ever dreamed of.”

Anjali

one of the core members of the Sanskriti initiative. She pours her heart and soul into learning and making appealing new products. Pujja, the founder of Kutumb, says that she will be given complete responsibility once the business picks up.

While Kutumb has started looking for prospective grooms for Anjali, she has mixed feelings about marriage and says, “I am not sure how I will be able to manage and build a family of my own. I am an introvert and will expect my husband to be understanding.” She wants to be financially independent before she takes that plunge.

I was left with the feeling that I needed to do something more, besides follow my interests in dancing and painting. ●

By
Harshita Sharma and Vineesha Golla



A goodbye picture with the kids and Pujja di



Photographs: Lakshyam

THE AGONY AND ECSTASY OF OPENING A ZERO BALANCE BANK ACCOUNT

Despite the authorities' claims about the spread and ease of financial inclusion and zero-balance bank accounts, it is not easy to open one.

Ghaziabad, barely 37 kms and an hour's drive from the PMO meant that I could have all the comforts that I was used to, and the project promised to be a cakewalk. In the 10 years of its existence, Lakshyam has already made its presence felt across 17 states, with a positive impact on over 3,00,000 people. It was focused on putting a stop to the widespread violation of fundamental rights, especially of women and children residing in the slums of India. All their projects aimed to empower the underprivileged through education and employment.

Generating income

The Rooh Project catered to 14 people. The beneficiaries, all women, were trained to stitch,



Women under Rooh project learning sewing

weave, and manufacture cloth-based products like bags, etc, which are sold through various exhibitions organised by the NGO. Along with this opportunity to earn and develop skills, the women were also sensitised to health, safety, and hygiene issues to improve the quality of their

lives. After addressing the issues of health and generating income, the next logical step was to check the beneficiaries' banking status and ensure that they had bank accounts, to move away from the insecurity of cash, and also benefit from financial inclusion and the banking system.

Lakshyam wanted to remit the proceeds of the sales directly to the women's bank account. Interacting with the women and their daughters to understand their current status on banking and making them aware of the benefits of a savings account, and promising assistance to those with

NGO: LAKSHYAM, GHAZIABAD, UTTAR PRADESH

Inception: 2012

Focus: Providing free education to underprivileged children, enrolling them in formal education, and assisting women in learning vocational skills to achieve

financial independence and better living standards through replicable models to bridge the gap between urban and rural India and stop urban migration.

Impact:
 • 3,00,000 direct

and 7,00,000 indirect beneficiaries

- A network that spans 17 states and three countries.
- 23,000 kg of waste repurposed as handicrafts



Clockwise: A ROOH beneficiary; Women wanting to become self-sufficient Empowered women under Lakshyam's project ROOH.



no accounts to open an account happened in a jiffy.

Banking anyone?

Having already opened bank accounts as a student multiple times, I was nonchalant about the process. For an educated, urban, net-savvy millennial, the prospect of opening a bank account for these women seemed as easy as ABC.

I visited the nearest PSU bank branch and asked for the relevant forms to open a zero-balance account. I was surprised when I was told that these types of accounts have to be opened at specific places, and branches and special kiosks/branches have been set up to open these accounts. I was directed to a specific bank branch in the city to get this work done.

The nightmare

The officials at the branch I was directed to, informed me that zero balance accounts were not opened at that branch and I would need to go to a kiosk dedicated to this. But they were unaware of the location of this kiosk, even though it was their bank. As a digital native used to having information at my fingertips, I was suddenly thrown into a never before experienced nightmare of running from one branch to another just to understand the procedure for opening a zero balance account. Forced to ask locals and workers about their banks, I finally found a bank kiosk equipped to open zero balance accounts.

The second roadblock

The bank official, explained the

Instead of responding to inquiries and assisting inquiries, officials not only delay but also scare people away with paperwork and processes.

process and the requirements. A PAN Card, an Aadhar Card, and 3 passport pictures. This was easier said than done for these impoverished, simple women. Unaware of the online process, they were at the mercy of unscrupulous middlemen and agents with sky-high charges. I assisted the women in obtaining PAN cards, told them about the other documents required, and also scheduled a visit to the kiosk to open the tantalising Zero Balance Account.

The toll of the system

Documentation and paperwork are often used by people within the system to harass people by delaying their work. Education and literacy help reduce the fear and anxiety associated with



Children of the ROOH beneficiaries



Women hard at work, sewing to become self reliant

paperwork. Instead of answering queries and helping people, officials not only delay things but also scare them away with ominous paperwork, documents, and processes. Very few officials go beyond their duty to help with the documentation. Most officials shrug off their responsibilities and prefer the easy solution of telling all inquiries to arrange for the documents without guiding them. This lack of clarity forces the majority to rely on agents and middlemen for usurious fees. I met agents asking for money for insignificant tasks and even agents who print and give fake documents for a fee.

Open sesame

I realised how people behave differently around English speakers. The value and the association of English with being learned and educated allows an English speaker to not only dominate a conversation but also open doors. This is socially acceptable and widespread.

The people who the service was meant for were treated so much differently than I was, simply because I spoke English. The tragedy is that this was happening barely 50 km away from Raisina Hill.

The big day

What I thought to be a simple, everyday activity turned out to be a big, exciting event. I could see the excitement and happiness on their faces as we proceeded

with the account opening process. Not only did they have all the necessary documentation, but they were also on their way to becoming part of the banking system and reaping its advantages. The happy, smiling faces are indelibly printed in my memory. I never realised a bank account could have such a strong impact. ●

By
Paras Bhatia



Hardworking ladies want to become self-sufficient

THE MAN WHO WANTED TO IMPROVE HIMSELF

An impoverished Dalit barely making ends meet forces an MBA student to look closer at his own motivations



In conversation with C Madurai Veran while he weaves a basket

Photographs: Prashanth R and Rajesh Devaguptapu

We tossed and turned on the straw mat, struggling to sleep in the 40 degree heat. The hard pillow was just not what I was used to, but then it was

my files and documents that were doubling up as pillows.

The only consolation was the presence of Prashant, my colleague and friend, right next to me, who not only knew the

language but was also going through the same experience.

I drifted off and was swallowed by my childhood memories of Vishakhapatnam, when I was 8 years old and lived in a small house with no AC and had similar temperature and humidity levels. I realised how we (my family) had come and how I was now used to comfort. The temperatures at which I used to play cricket for hours now just seem unbearable. Breathing the hot air was a challenge. We had just walked for 25 minutes in the sweltering night after our dinner and were drained.

We were staying at the office of Makkal Vilipurnavu Kalvi Sangam, an NGO in the village of Srivilliputhur, Tamil Nadu. It was just off a deserted highway that looked abandoned and would be our home for the next few days. I acknowledged my father's hard work for the privileged life I now led and realised what he meant when he said he had to cycle twelve kms to college every day and drifted off into tired sleep.

I didn't know the language, but I had made my peace. A field visit to Kaetaneri, a Dalit village, was an eye-opener.



MVKS Office staff in front of Madurai office

I was surprised to find everyone using smartphones and a robust 4G network in the village. The villagers, across generations and for generations, had been making baskets from palm fronds for

NGO: MAKKAL VILIPURNAVU KALVI SANGAM (MVKS), VIRUDHUNAGAR, TAMIL NADU

Inception: 2012

Focus: The emphasis is on empowering Dalit, tribal, and marginalised families, children, and women.

Impact:

- 3,00,000 direct

and 7,00,000 indirect beneficiaries

- A network that spans 17 states and three countries.
- 23,000 kg of waste repurposed as

handicrafts



One of the 68 Dalit houses of Katenari village who are involved in livelihood activities run by MVKS



Indira colony street-home to the hardworking Dalits of Katenari village



Mr. Santhanam and his wife Mrs. Pochiammal have been involved in basket making activity since the last five years and this activity has been their primary source of livelihood

Sivakasi. This was the only income, and no one was exempt. Even kids as young as 5 were busy weaving baskets. Exam days were the only days when school-going kids were formally released from this job by their parents. Lots of chats and conversations later, I inferred that the biggest obstacle hindering the progress of these Dalit villagers was their mindset. They were unwilling to change, nor were they willing to leave their village.


On our way back, we stopped to chat with a bare-chested man clad only in a lungi and industriously

working in the shade of the trees despite a bandaged but untreated wound. The same questions with similar answers were becoming monotonous. We spontaneously asked a question that was on top of mind for most students on the road to self-discovery. What was he passionate about? What got him excited about life? "He smiled and wryly answered, "I just want to improve."

This profound answer from a man sitting on the roadside struggling to eke out a living in the blistering heat humbled

me. His answer reverberated in my thoughts as I tried to make sense of the deplorable conditions and the lives of these villagers. I realised that having the right attitude towards life is the most important thing. I never even in my wildest dreams imagined that an impoverished Dalit barely making ends meet would make me think about my passions or life. ●

By
Prashanth R and Rajesh
Devaguptapu



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