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FEBRUARY 2, 2026 ₹100

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TODAY

The GEMS of INDIA

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INSTITUTIONS WHO ARE
TRANSFORMING LIVES
ACROSS REMOTE VILLAGES,
STRESSED CITIES AND
FRAGILE ECOSYSTEMS

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GEMS OF INDIA

FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Elderly village women on the edge of the Thar desert, whose sole interaction with energy was through dry twigs and cowdung, are being turned into solar champions. In bone-dry Saurashtra, dozens of new lakes have been blooming. A pristine Aravalli forest has grown from scratch in the middle of Gurugram, one of India's most haphazardly growing hypercities. A couple helps sustainable ecosystems blossom in the harsh landscape of peninsular India; their very mention brings a smile to thousands of tribal farmers. A non-profit in Bengaluru that calls itself Janaagraha, or 'the wish of the people', has made inspired citizen participation central to urban solutions: urgent tasks, such as battling the traffic chaos in India's Silicon city, are brought within the ambit of collective oversight. A motley set of actors, operating in quite diverse realms, but all have one thing in common. They are a sampling of stellar individuals and institutions doing transformative work at the exact place where it is the hardest: the last mile. But they are doing it quietly, beyond the glare of headlines and hashtags, even as their work merits comparison with the best global benchmarks. Across sectors as varied as healthcare, education, ecology, justice, urban governance and agrarian livelihoods, these outstanding endeavours have built organisations and movements that value rigour over rhetoric, outcomes over options and dignity over dependency. They have become forces that generate a greater good, and goodwill.

In this Republic Day special issue, we feature 20 such institutions, with their individual protagonists who have reproduced their vision in the unforgiving laboratory of real life. Some have earned a wider renown, partly because of the more universal impact of their work. Like cardiac surgeon Devi Prasad Shetty of Narayana Health, whose self-given mandate of affordable healthcare is animated by the simple credo that all the advancements in medicine would be meaningless if not delivered to "the common man". Aravind Eye Hospital in Madurai replicates that vision in its own subfield; it has gained visibility by dint of a battle against 'needless blindness' that has now run for half a century. The India Health Fund's vital work in reducing the disease burden across the country is enabled by the fact that it stands on the shoulder of a giant, the Tata Trusts. But in our mix are also those gaining stature on their own. Like former IT professional Prasad Bhide in Pune, whose encounter with the vacuum in eldercare during his own mother's senescence sparked Aaji Care, devoted to assisted living for the old, marrying enterprise with conscience.

We take that varying scale of visibility to all domains, recognising rather than penalising success, but also shining a torch on those whose fame is limited to their chosen field; even if it impacts millions, these remain microcosms in the larger scheme of things. For instance, Sanjit Bunker Roy's Barefoot College, in Tilonia, Rajasthan, has a transformative potential way beyond the innumerable rural lives it has touched, creating those 'solar mamas'. The Dholakia Foundation's Mission 100 Sarovar has finished creating 75 ponds till now. But businessman Savjibhai Dholakia's idea of scaling that up to revitalise entire river systems is one all of India urgently needs. Many institutions we have chosen intervene on that complex development canvas, encompassing livelihoods and ecologies. The 1967-born BAIF Development Research Foundation in Pune, for instance, brings together two natural companions, food security and climate resilience. The work of Aranya Agricultural Alternatives, a mission born to the Narsanna and Padma Koppula couple in 1987, touches not only the tribals of Andhra/ Telangana but also worldwide enthusiasts interested in how permaculture

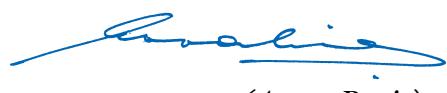
can transform arid environments. A different kind of degraded aridity was the focus of ecologist Vijay Dhasmana's miracle: an abandoned mine in the heart of Gurugram is now a biodiversity park, rewilded with native flora, real estate for avian and four-legged fauna.



▲ Aug. 21, 2017

Many of them operate in India's most difficult contexts: in remote villages, amid fragile ecosystems and marginalised communities. Some venture into areas left fallow despite decades of policy. Like Pratham, which is setting benchmarks for quality education. Some come in where even the justice system often fails: a Majlis Legal

Centre, for instance, offers crucial judicial and other forms of support to victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse. Some work in tandem with official systems, like the Akshaya Patra Foundation that now provides free mid-day meals to 2.35 million children across states. Strewn among these are hidden treasures like the Ecotourism and Conservation Society of Sikkim that is revitalising the rural landscape with its vision of sustainable tourism and water management, or the National Research Centre on Equines that's striving to save rare Indian horse breeds. This issue is a special collection, curated with care from a longer list of worthy institutions, to make it representative across sectors and regions. We are calling them the Gems of India, all of them polished with inspiration and perspiration. Not only does their lustre illuminate us, they offer templates worth replicating. Meaningful revolutions that are making our Republic stronger, they are awaiting not applause or recognition but emulation.


(Aroon Purie)

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Volume 51-Number 4; For the week

January 26-February 2, 2026, published on every Friday

• Editorial/Corporate Office Living Media India Ltd, India Today Group Mediaplex, FC-8, Sector-16A, Film City, Noida - 201301; Phone: 0120-4807100

• Subscriptions: For assistance, contact, email: wecare@intoday.com; Phone / WhatsApp: +91 8597 778 778 (Monday to Saturday, 9.30am - 5.30pm).

• Sales: Direct all trade enquiries to General Manager (Sales), Living Media India Limited, C-9, Sector-10, Noida-201301 (UP).

• Regd. Office: F-26, First Floor, Connaught Place, New Delhi-110001.

• Impact Offices: 1201, 12th Floor, Tower 2 A, One Indiabulls Centre,

(Jupiter Mills), S.B. Marg, Lower Parel (West), Mumbai-400013;

Phone: 022 69193355; Fax: 66063226

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26560929; Fax: 26565293 • Copyright Living Media India Ltd. All rights

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Printed and published by Manoj Sharma on behalf of Living Media

India Limited. Printed at Thomson Press India Private Limited,

18-35 Milestone, Delhi Mathura Road, Faridabad-121007, (Haryana)

and at Rajahans Enterprises, 134, Industrial Town, 4th Main Road, Rajajinagar,

Bengaluru-560044, (Karnataka).

Published at F-26, First Floor, Connaught Place, New Delhi-110001.

Editor: Raj Chengappa.

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Pratham CEO Rukmini Banerjee at a government school in Bengaluru

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GEMS OF INDIA

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Cover Photograph by CHANDRADEEP KUMAR



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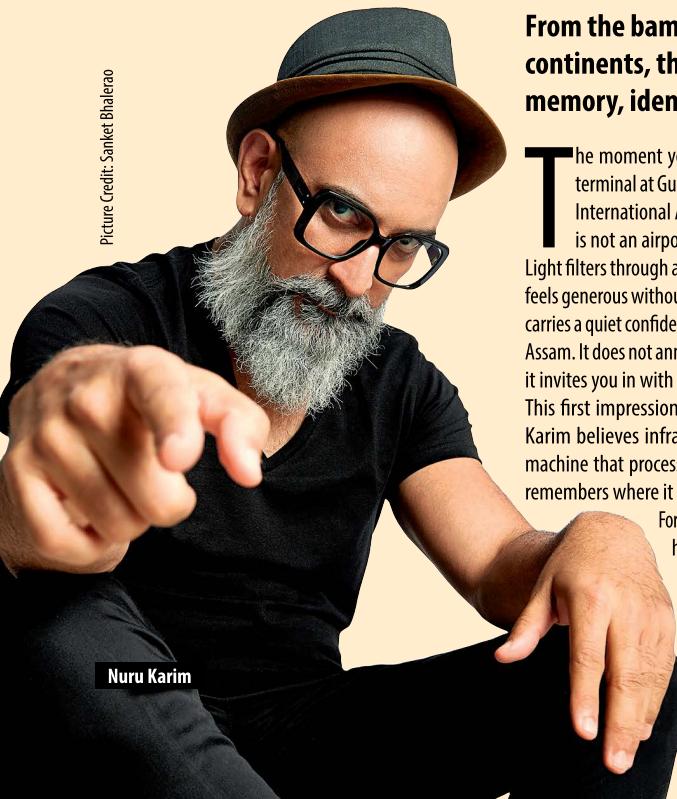
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NURU KARIM: Where Architecture Learns To Listen

Picture Credit: Sanket Bhlerao



Nuru Karim

From the bamboo-orchid terminal at Guwahati airport to projects across continents, the Mumbai-based architect explores how infrastructure can carry memory, identity, care and cultural meaning across diverse landscapes

The moment you step into the newly inaugurated terminal at Guwahati's Lokapriya Gopinath Bardoloi International Airport (LGBIA), it becomes clear this is not an airport designed merely for movement. Light filters through a sweeping bamboo canopy, the scale feels generous without being overwhelming and the space carries a quiet confidence rooted in the verdant landscape of Assam. It does not announce arrival with spectacle. Instead, it invites you in with warmth and familiarity. This first impression is deliberate. It reflects how Nuru Karim believes infrastructure should behave, not as a machine that processes people, but as a civic space that remembers where it stands.

For the Mumbai-based architect, architecture has never been about isolated objects or singular gestures. It has always been about systems and relationships that unfold between people, climate, material and time. At LGBIA, developed as part of a new generation of

terminals under Adani Airport Holdings Limited (AAHL), these ideas come together with unusual clarity. The terminal meets global benchmarks of efficiency and performance, yet it does so without erasing local identity, demonstrating that large-scale infrastructure can still carry emotion, memory and a sense of belonging.

Karim's way of thinking about space was shaped long before he formally encountered architecture. His earliest influences came from observing nature and reading widely, particularly about social insect engineering. He was fascinated by how ants and termites create complex, adaptive environments collectively, without drawings, hierarchy or a central authority. These structures respond intelligently to climate, movement and resources, evolving over time rather than being imposed all at once. As he travelled across regions and cultures, Karim noticed similar patterns in human settlements, where spaces grow through use, adaptation and shared behaviour. Architecture, he realised, was not a static form but a living system shaped continuously by place and people.

His academic journey through Mumbai, Montreal and London

Picture Credit: Nudes



Lokapriya Gopinath Bardoloi International Airport



Nuru Karim's biophilic design



Forest School, Pune

gave this intuition structure and discipline. Studying architecture and urbanism grounded his thinking in systems design and sustainability, teaching him to see buildings as part of larger social, climatic and infrastructural networks.

Yet professional practice forced him to unlearn the idea of certainty. Real projects rarely offer singular answers. They demand negotiation, adaptability and constant questioning. Over time, Karim learned to let design emerge from constraints and context rather than relying on predefined formulas or stylistic comfort.

This openness explains why his work moves seamlessly across scales, from private homes and hospitality projects to cultural institutions and large public infrastructure. What keeps him curious is not typology, but the opportunity to challenge inherited models.

In the context of India's rapid urbanisation, this impulse becomes critical. Karim believes architecture must move beyond replication toward innovation and that India should be seen not as a follower of global trends, but as a potential generator of new paradigms. His practice is driven by the belief that research-led, thoughtful design can position Indian architecture as a contributor to global discourse rather than a response to it.

Across regions and cultures, a quiet instinct runs consistently through Karim's work: the need to listen before drawing. The land does not reveal its answers all at once. It speaks gradually through climate, craft traditions, labour patterns, belief systems and invisible flows of people and energy.

Architecture, in this view, is not an object imposed on a site, but a system in dialogue with its surroundings, expected to work hard, age with dignity and support both ecological and human systems.

That philosophy is particularly visible in Guwahati. From the outset, the terminal was imagined not just as a gateway to the world, but as a doorway into the North-East. Airports are often anonymous and interchangeable, yet here the ambition was to ensure that the first encounter with the region felt unmistakably rooted in its geography and culture. Efficiency was non-negotiable.

At LGBIA, developed as part of a new generation of terminals under Adani Airport Holdings Limited (AAHL), Nuru Karim's ideas come together with unusual clarity.

Circulation, capacity and operational clarity had to perform flawlessly. Yet Karim and his team kept returning to a deeper question: should an airport be measured only by how efficiently it moves people, or also by the memories it leaves behind?

The answer lies in the terminal's use of bamboo, a material deeply embedded in the everyday life of the North-East. For Karim, working with bamboo was never about nostalgia or symbolism. It was about understanding how the material behaves, its strength, lightness, renewability and modular intelligence and allowing those qualities to shape space,

light and movement. By scaling it up and choreographing it spatially, bamboo becomes structure rather than ornament, collaborating with tradition rather than quoting it.

Karim's global experience reinforces this sensitivity. In places like Malawi, the landlocked African nation known for its vast lake systems and rural landscapes, design begins with humility, with listening to climate, soil, vegetation and light before form takes shape.

Constraints become sources of intelligence rather than limitations. In contrast, the Middle East demands clarity and discipline in the face of scale, speed and ambition, teaching him the importance of robust systems that can adapt over time without losing sensitivity.

Looking ahead, Karim sees airports evolving into living ecosystems rather than static terminals. Responsive materials, clean energy generation and AI-managed flows will create environments that adjust seamlessly to human needs. Yet for him, the future of infrastructure is not only technological. It is deeply human. Sustainability, he believes, should function as invisible infrastructure, enhancing everyday experience through ecology that cools, filters and restores calm at scale. India, with its urgency, diversity and pace of change, excites him most. Across its varied geographies lies a reservoir of indigenous knowledge waiting to be reinterpreted through contemporary tools. At Guwahati airport, that future already feels tangible, a place where ambition meets restraint, efficiency meets emotion and architecture listens before it speaks.

UPFRONT

GLASSHOUSE: SKILL DEFICIENCIES PG 12

MUMBAI: THE NEW BIG BROTHER PG 16

**WELCOME
ABOARD PM**
Modi with new
BJP president
Nitin Nabin at the
party HQ, Jan. 20

ATUL KUMAR YADAV



► BJP

BIG SHOES TO FILL

The BJP gets its youngest president as the party hints at generational change. But there will be no idling time, Nitin Nabin will have to hit the road running

By ANILESH S. MAHAJAN

ON JANUARY 20, THE BHARATIYA JANATA PARTY (BJP) FORMALLY ELECTED NITIN NABIN as its new national president, marking the culmination of a high-stakes, 13-month-long search for a name acceptable to all sides involved in the consultations. The choice was telling—at just 45, Nabin is the youngest to take charge of what is touted as the world's largest political organisation.

The party's parliamentary board had appointed him working president in mid-December. A five-time MLA from Bihar's Bankipur constituency and minister in the Nitish Kumar-led cabinet there, Nabin has now been catapulted to the national stage. The election process was a mere formality; all 37 sets of nomination papers had

just one name. Nabin's predecessor, J.P. Nadda, who completed six years in office on January 20, passed on the baton in a ceremony that bore all the hallmarks of BJP discipline and symbolism. Indeed, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in a rare moment of humility, described Nabin as his new "boss", a "millennial with youthful energy and vast experience". "When it comes to party matters, *maananiya* (honourable) Nitin Nabinji...I am a worker, and you are my boss," the PM said in his speech. The message was clear, especially to the veterans—they would be wise to let go of any leftover rancour at young Nabin taking over the top job. The optics was also unmistakable, a generational handover was under way, even if the Modi-Shah duo still held the keys.

Party sources say Nabin was handpicked by Modi after a rigorous procedure, which only key people knew about. A 100-candidate list was whittled down to 41 after leadership skillsets/ideological moorings were ascertained via assignments. Nabin's name emerged on top after a further narrowing down which included Intelligence clearances and such. On December 12, Union home minister Amit Shah met RSS sarsanghchalak Mohan Bhagwat at an event in Port Blair where the latter was informed about the party's choice.

BAPTISM BY FIRE

For Nabin, this is both a monumental ascent and a baptism by fire. He inherits a party at the peak of its electoral dominance but facing new kinds of fatigue, within the organisation, among the cadre and across its voter base. He will be the first president whose career map has hitherto been confined to the BJP; he has not worked directly with any of the apolitical affiliates of the Sangh. Nabin's only national forays were as general secretary of the party's youth wing, the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha; besides being election in-charge for Sikkim and co-incharge for Chhattisgarh in 2023.

A FRESH PERSPECTIVE

The new BJP chief has a proven record, and could be presiding over a momentous time for the party

Nitin Nabin has a few firsts going for him. The youngest BJP president at 45 (in fact, he was born after the party was formed in April 1980), he also got into active politics in the post-Babri Masjid demolition era when the ascent of Modi had begun in the BJP. He is also the first person from Bihar to lead the party.

Coming to the state, Nabin was just 26 when he first became MLA from Patna West (inheriting his late father Nabin Kishore Sinha's seat), going on to win Bankipur (the seat after

delimitation) four more times consecutively.

The BJP president's tenure is for three years, so Nabin will finish his term in January 2029, just months before the next Lok Sabha election. The next three years are critical for the BJP. For one, a spate of state assembly elections await. Nabin has big shoes to fill; his predecessor J.P. Nadda took the party to wins in 30-plus state elections during his time. Then, of course, there is the possibility that he may also preside over a generational change of guard at the top....

NABIN MUST MAKE SPACE FOR INDEPENDENT DECISION-MAKING WHILE RESPECTING THE INVISIBLE RED LINES THAT COME WITH MODI'S LEGACY AND THE LONG SHADOW OF THE SANGH

His first, paramount test will be to manage continuity and ensure there are no shocks to the system in the transition period. It will not be easy. A series of difficult assembly elections—in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Kerala where the BJP and allies are mounting a challenge, and in Assam and Puducherry where anti-incumbency will be a big factor—are up in just months.

Compared to that, the BJP's internal contradictions may seem more manageable. For one, the national apparatus remains heavily centralised; Modi and Shah have shaped party culture around strict loyalty metrics; decisions cascade top

down. For Nabin to lead effectively, he must show that acquiescence can co-exist with autonomy. He will need to make space for independent decision-making in appointments, campaign strategies and state-level negotiations, all the while respecting the invisible red lines that come with Modi's legacy and the long shadow of the Sangh. It's a delicate dance between deference and assertion. In the past, Shah and Nadda carefully looked for cues and played to their respective strengths.

Striking an equilibrium between the ideological parent's expectations and the BJP's growing appetite for power management will also be an

ask. The Sangh itself is on a gradual restructuring exercise, with younger pracharaks being handed more responsibilities and assignments. It would be in the BJP's interest that Nabin and the Sangh leadership work to make the party more relevant to this cohort.

Nabin's next challenge will be managing the broad coalition of the old and new guard in the party, those who cut their teeth under Vajpayee and Advani, like Rajnath Singh, Shivraj Chouhan and Vasundhara Raje, and those who grew to prominence during the Modi years, like Yogi Adityanath, Devendra Fadnavis, Himanta Biswa Sarma, Dharmendra Pradhan and others. Nabin must navigate a generational overlap too. At 45, he's a decade younger than most Union cabinet ministers (average age: 58.7 years) and state unit chiefs (average age: 54). Senior leaders command their own loyal constituencies. The BJP's strength, a top party leader argues, has always been its ability to absorb leaders without fracturing. Balancing the aspirations of his contemporaries will be no easy task. They, too, are now desirous of larger roles, either in the national team or the respective state units and government.

CADRE AND COMPLACENCY

It's a strange situation: after a decade in power, the BJP's biggest challenge is not from the Opposition, but from complacency. The party's cadre, its true engine, has begun showing signs of exhaustion. Booth-level workers, who once campaigned with missionary zeal, now expect rewards, visibility and recognition. Nabin's mandate will be to reignite this fading spark. His maiden speech as party president also stressed on this.

Geographically, too, the BJP's dominance hides a few fragilities. It remains formidable across the Hindi heartland, but is yet to crack the deeper South or consolidate in parts of the East. Nabin's Bihar origins give him credibility in the North and East, but expanding the BJP's organisational depth in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Telan-

CHALLENGES AHEAD

► **Assembly polls in April-May in four crucial states, with West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Kerala traditionally weak spots for BJP**

► **In the top-heavy party that is BJP, Nabin has to be assertive while managing the expectations of both Modi-Shah duo and Sangh**

► **He must manage aspirations of old guard and new. Being youngest in the room may not be a plus**

► **A decade into power, complacency has set in. Cadre is not as motivated**

Nabin's Bihar colleagues say he has always kept the party's interests above his own. "It's a quality that has won him friends across party lines..."

gana and Andhra Pradesh along with Punjab will need innovation beyond Hindutva and Modi charisma. It will mean cultivating the local leadership, new allies and cultural idioms that speak to regional pride.

The politics of coalition, too, has returned centre stage. The BJP, which once sought to swim alone, is now learning to govern in partnership again. From Nitish Kumar in Bihar to Chandrababu Naidu in Andhra Pradesh, allies have regained leverage. Party insiders say Nabin must master

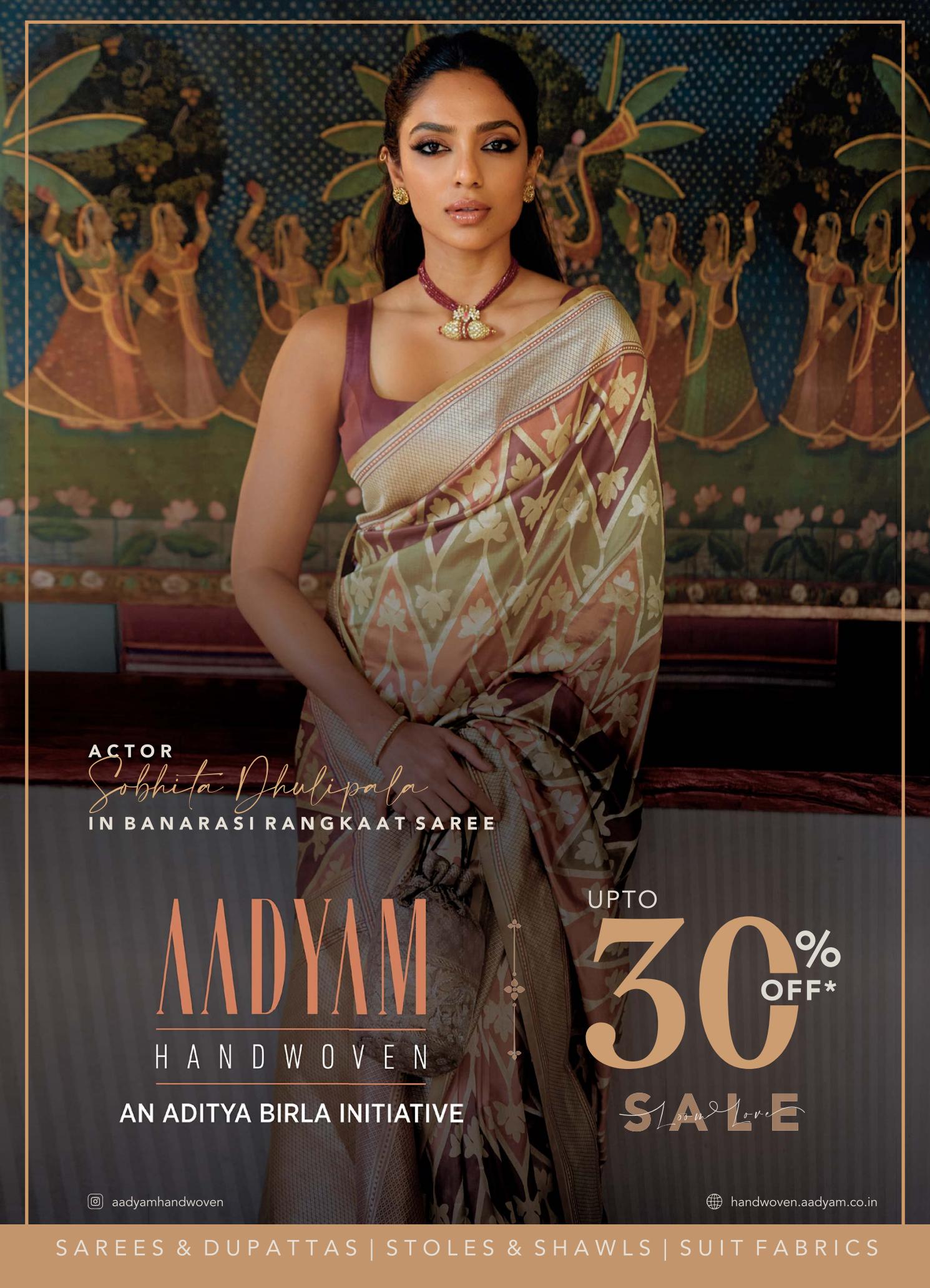
the art of accommodation, balancing firmness with flexibility, persuasion with respect. Nabin seems to have the right mindset here. Colleagues from Bihar tell INDIA TODAY that he has always kept the party's interests above his own. "It's a quality that has won him friends across party lines in Bihar...a trait he has inherited from his father, the late BJP veteran Nabin Kishore Sinha," says one of them.

LOOKING FORWARD

Equally important is the relationship between party and government. Under Modi, the government has often overshadowed the BJP's organisational voice. After the 2024 general election, even the Sangh has been asking for a more robust feedback mechanism—seen inside the party as a way to prepare it for the post-Modi era. Dovetailed to this process, Nabin's tenure will also be judged by how he restores the BJP's image as an ideological force, and not just as a vehicle of governance. So the Sangh leadership will be watching closely. Nabin's ability to reconnect with their grassroots ethos, from 'swadeshi economics' to 'civilisational self-confidence', could define his presidency.

Beneath all this lies the question that lurks unspoken under every conversation in Delhi's corridors—what comes after Modi? The PM remains the BJP's unmatched vote-getter, but the party knows that leadership changes are inevitable. Nabin's big contribution may be to anchor a smooth generational transition, to begin grooming the next set of national leaders without threatening the existing order.

Nabin inherits the world's most formidable political machine—well-funded, disciplined and ideologically anchored—but one that must evolve to sustain its dominance. This presidency may not be about how Nitin Nabin leads the party to its next election, but about how he prepares it for its next generation. The BJP, which once prided itself on being a "party with a difference", is at an inflection point again. ■



ACTOR
Sohbhita Dhulipala
IN BANARASI RANGKAAT SAREE

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SKILL DEFICIENCIES

On January 12, the final day of the Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue 2026, Prime Minister **Narendra Modi** held a closed-door interaction with young leaders, exchanging ideas on India's future. Asked which ministry he would choose if he was not the PM, Modi named skill development. The choice was interesting, for a recent audit by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) of the Rs 12,000 crore flagship Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) flagged serious lapses: 94.5 per cent of the beneficiary bank details were found fudged or unavailable; photos were duplicated, mobile numbers invalid; placement just 41 per cent; and enrolments blind to age, education and work experience criteria. Perhaps a pointed message for the minister in charge since 2024, the RLD's **Jayant Chaudhary**, to put the house in order.

Illustrations by **SIDDHANT JUMDE**

▼ NOBLE PURSUITS

YOGI'S SOFT SIDE

The viral 'chips' exchange between Uttar Pradesh CM **Yogi Adityanath** and a child in Gorakhpur on January 15 was more than a social media moment. It reinforced a softer persona he has cultivated alongside his image as a tough, no-nonsense administrator. In recent months, the former instinct has kicked in: on January 1, the Lucknow house of an ill Anjana Bhatt was cleared of 'land mafia'



encroachers within 24 hours of her meeting with Yogi; on November 26 last, differently-abled Khushi Gupta from Kanpur got the CM's assurance of support for her education and future. Beyond the symbolism, the official numbers underline the effort: between 2017 and 2025, the Yogi government apparently got 12,426 child workers back into school and provided financial assistance to 1,089 of their relatives.

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FILIAL FRICTIONS

On January 13, Makar Sankranti day, Lalu Prasad's estranged elder son **Tej Pratap Yadav**, who was expelled from the RJD in May 2025, visited mother Rabri



Devi at her home and invited the family to his ritual *dahi-chura* feast. The next day, Lalu visited Tej Pratap's home, though brother and party chief **Tejaswi Yadav** stayed away. Tej responded with a barb, suggesting that a 'modern-day Jaichand' may have prevented his brother from attending. The fault lines deepened days later, with sister **Rohini Acharya** echoing Tej's thoughts and taking a swipe at Tejaswi.

Delhi vs Dravida Model

Tamil Nadu CM **M.K. Stalin** has done it again. With the BJP-led Centre delaying the announcement of the Sahitya



Akademi awards, Stalin has stepped in, declaring a new set of Tamil Nadu-backed national literary honours—the *Semmozhi Ilakkiya Virudhu* (classical language literary awards). In its first avatar, the award will recognise writers from seven non-Hindi Indian languages. It's a familiar script: when Delhi falters/provokes, Stalin converts the situation into an opportunity to underscore the 'Dravidian model'.

THE NEW 'RSS'

Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party (SBSP) chief and minister in the Yogi government **Om Prakash Rajbhar** has launched his own militia—the Rashtriya Suheldev Sena or RSS! Rajbhar led the first training camp in Azamgarh on January 18, where some 2,500 workers were issued yellow uniforms and long, yellow canes. Party leaders describe the new 'RSS' as a non-political wing, but one with district-level commanders and an ambitious target of 40 volunteers in every village across UP.



By Kaushik Deka with Ashish Misra, Amitabh Srivastava and Kavitha Muralidharan

HEALTH WATCH

INDIA'S WAR ON TB A NEW, SHORTER-TERM CURE

By Sonali Acharjee

Mumbai's tuberculosis programme has reported an encouraging milestone: 89 patients, from the over 1,000 with drug-resistant TB (DR-TB) placed on a new six-month treatment regimen, have been declared cured. For a disease where treatment once stretched to two years, this marks a potentially transformative shift.

The new BPaL-M regimen—a combination of bedaquiline, pretomanid, linezolid and moxifloxacin—condenses treatment to six months, all oral. Early evidence suggests it is shorter, more effective and far easier to tolerate. Mumbai began rolling out BPaL-M over the past year, focusing on eligible DR-TB patients. The initial cure numbers are small but significant:



India carries the world's highest TB burden, and drug-resistant forms represent its most punishing edge. DR-TB develops when the TB bacteria no longer respond to first-line drugs such as rifampicin and isoniazid. Until recently, patients faced 18–24 months of daily pills and painful injections, often with severe side-effects—hearing loss, kidney damage, nausea, depression—and high dropout rates.

they signal that shorter, patient-friendly regimens can work in real-world public health settings.

Wider availability will depend on careful national scale-up over the next few years—training clinicians, monitoring side-effects, and ensuring uninterrupted drug supply. Crucially, experts warn that strict stewardship is essential. Misuse could rapidly erode the effectiveness of these last-line drugs.



LAKSHMI ARUNA

A Motherly Leader in Blazing Ballari!

"He was like my son, too."

When Lakshmi Aruna, wife of BJP leader Gali Janardana Reddy, spoke these words to a mother who had lost her son to mob violence, the moment transcended politics.

As she handed over a ₹10 lakh personal cheque on behalf of the BJP and offered a comforting embrace, it marked the emergence of a "motherly leader" in the often-volatile political landscape of Ballari.

The circumstances were remarkable: the boy belonged to the very mob she accused of attempting to kill her husband. Even knowing he was a Congress worker, Lakshmi remained undeterred. To her, all that mattered was a mother's grief. She was compelled by empathy to reach out and console.

Yet, this sentimental side is only half of the

story. Her "warrior face" unraveled later that day. Speaking at a BJP rally protesting the January 1st attack on Janardana Reddy's home by followers of MLA Bharath Reddy, she was fearless. "The whole world knows that the mayhem was a clear attempt on my husband Janardana Reddy's life," she declared, demanding a thorough CBI probe. She argued that the state's CID investigation was merely an attempt to protect the perpetrators.

Political circles now agree: Lakshmi Aruna has truly arrived.

While she is a new face in active politics—having first contested the Ballari City seat in the last Assembly elections—she is no stranger to the region's pulse. For decades, she worked away from the public glare, dedicating herself to the aged, the needy, and orphans at Vishwabharathi Kalanikethan Society, a charity



organization established by her husband Janardana Reddy.

Her growth since that election loss has been immense. Following the January 1st attack, she did not react with grief or shock. Instead, she surrendered to faith, climbing 512 steps barefoot to Bhagawan Anjaneya's Anjanadri Hill at dawn to pray and seek strength. Upon her return, she became a source of calm and stability to thousands of BJP workers who poured in from all over the state to express their solidarity. She personally supervised arrangements for their stay and meals for more than 15 days, ensuring their spirits remained steady and their focus remained calm during a period of high tension.

Her journey is a transformative one: born into a farming family in a small Andhra Pradesh village, she moved to Ballari, mastered the language, and navigated years of personal and political trauma.

Today, the party cadre sees her as an inspirational leader who blends faith with fortitude and empathy with execution.

Lakshmi Aruna Janardana Reddy's journey is no longer just about standing beside a leader—it is about becoming one.



► BMC ELECTION

The New Big Brother

The BJP-led Mahayuti prevails despite the Thackeray reunion in the Mumbai civic battle

Text by DHAVAL S. KULKARNI
Graphic by TANMOY CHAKRABORTY

ON JANUARY 15, MUMBAI VOTED to decide the fate of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC)—India's richest civic body, with an annual budget of nearly Rs 74,500 crore. This election was fought amid sharp polarisation—between Marathi and non-Marathi voters, and across religious lines. In a rare turn driven by political necessity, estranged cousins Uddhav Thackeray and Raj Thackeray reunited after two decades. The Bharatiya Janata Party, meanwhile, ran a localised campaign, relying on state and city leadership rather than national heavyweights—Prime Minister Narendra Modi notably stayed away from the trail. The strategy paid off: the BJP-led Mahayuti alliance won over half of the seats, with the BJP emerging as the single largest party.

MUMBAI'S POWER MAP: WHO TOOK THE SPOILS

BJP

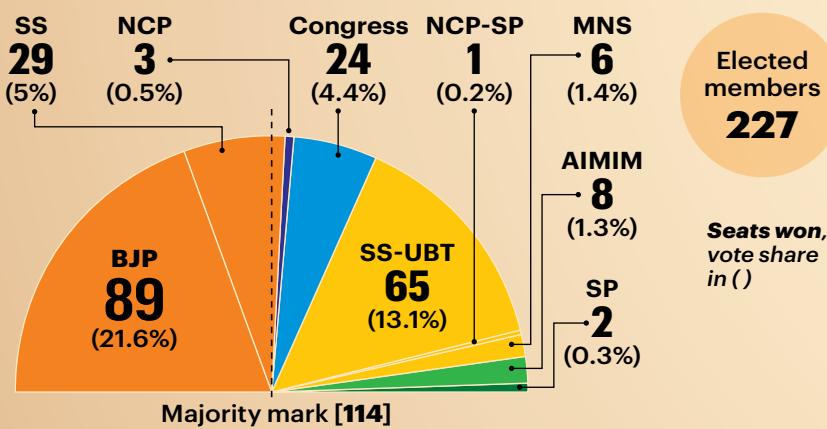


It has increased its BMC tally by seven seats over the previous election, rising from 82 to 89 and emerging as the single largest party. In a long-running grudge match with the Thackerays, the result is a clear feather in the cap for Maharashtra CM **Devendra Fadnavis**

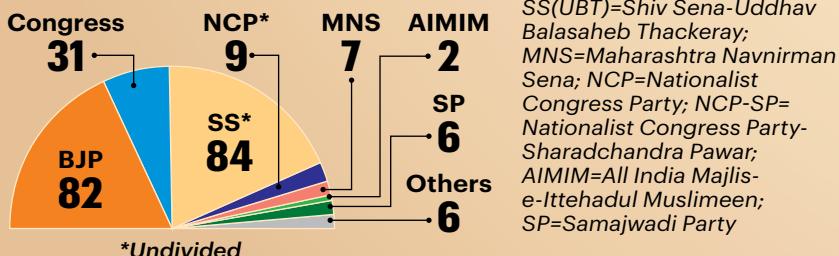
SHIV SENA

Though its performance fell short of expectations—winning just 29 of the 91 seats it contested—the **Eknath Shinde**-led Sena holds the keys to power in the BMC after BJP failed to secure a majority on its own. The deputy CM is driving a hard bargain for a larger share of power, including the mayoral post

2026 RESULTS

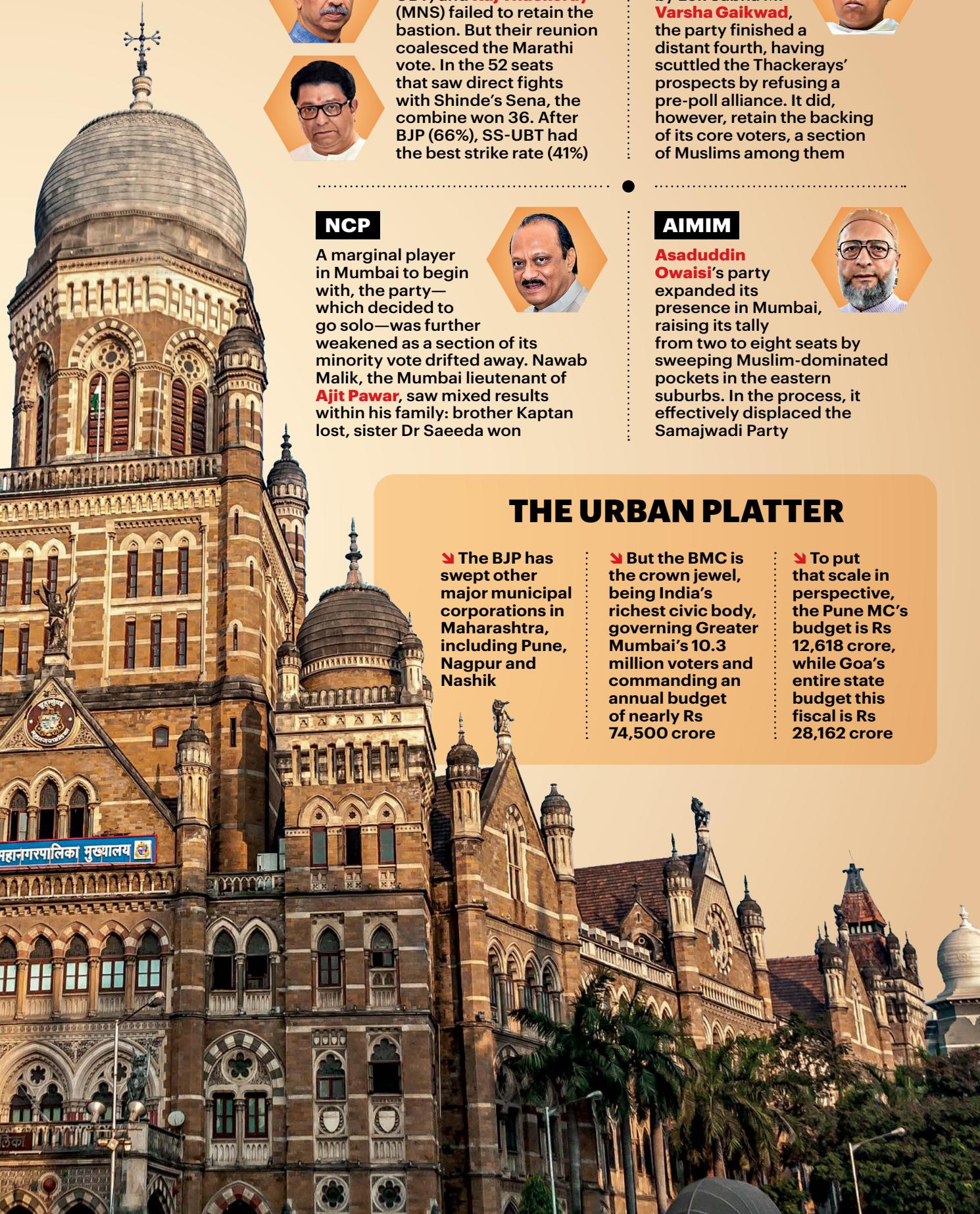


2017 RESULTS



BJP=Bharatiya Janata Party; SS=Shiv Sena; SS(UBT)=Shiv Sena-Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray; MNS=Maharashtra Navnirman Sena; NCP=Nationalist Congress Party; NCP-SP=Nationalist Congress Party-Shardadchandra Pawar; AIMIM=All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen; SP=Samajwadi Party





SS-UBT & MNS



Uddhav Thackeray (SS-UBT) and **Raj Thackeray** (MNS) failed to retain the bastion. But their reunion coalesced the Marathi vote. In the 52 seats that saw direct fights with Shinde's Sena, the combine won 36. After BJP (66%), SS-UBT had the best strike rate (41%)



CONGRESS



Led in Mumbai by Lok Sabha MP **Varsha Gaikwad**, the party finished a distant fourth, having scuttled the Thackerays' prospects by refusing a pre-poll alliance. It did, however, retain the backing of its core voters, a section of Muslims among them

NCP



A marginal player in Mumbai to begin with, the party—which decided to go solo—was further weakened as a section of its minority vote drifted away. Nawab Malik, the Mumbai lieutenant of **Ajit Pawar**, saw mixed results within his family: brother Kaptan lost, sister Dr Saeeda won

AIMIM



Asaduddin Owaisi's party expanded its presence in Mumbai, raising its tally from two to eight seats by sweeping Muslim-dominated pockets in the eastern suburbs. In the process, it effectively displaced the Samajwadi Party

THE URBAN PLATTER

→ The BJP has swept other major municipal corporations in Maharashtra, including Pune, Nagpur and Nashik

→ But the BMC is the crown jewel, being India's richest civic body, governing Greater Mumbai's 10.3 million voters and commanding an annual budget of nearly Rs 74,500 crore

→ To put that scale in perspective, the Pune MC's budget is Rs 12,618 crore, while Goa's entire state budget this fiscal is Rs 28,162 crore



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GEMS OF INDIA

Individuals and institutions who have reshaped people's lives across remote geographies, stressed public infrastructure and fragile ecosystems

By KAUSHIK DEKA

IN

a state-run hospital in Nagaland's Mon district, tuberculosis once followed a predictable path. Patients came late, diagnosis took days or weeks and treatment often began after the disease had already taken root. The hospital did not even have a radiologist.

Things changed when a compact, battery-operated diagnostic system was installed. The device delivered results in 90 minutes, patients were screened and placed on treatment within a day. No one announced the change in status quo. The system simply began to work better than it had before.

The India Health Fund, which supported the deployment of that diagnostic tool in Nagaland, was the catalyst for this silent revolution. Founded in 2017 by Tata Trusts and shaped by Ratan Tata's belief





that science and technology must serve neglected public health challenges, it identifies gaps within public healthcare systems and supports tools that make diagnosis faster, surveillance smarter and care more accessible.

It is individuals and institutions like India Health Fund that this Republic Day special issue of INDIA TODAY celebrates. These are the Gems of India, solving problems where they are the most entrenched and the outcomes uncertain.

They do not come from any single sector or ideology. They work across healthcare, education, ecology, justice, urban governance, livelihoods and inclusion. Many work in conditions that are punishing—remote geographies, fragile ecosystems, overburdened public systems, marginalised communities, chronic underfunding. Yet they deliver results, big or small.

So, if Aravind Eye Hospital in Madurai does not treat scale as a threat to quality, Pune-based Aaji Care refuses to expand faster than quality allows. Aravind was founded in 1976 by Dr Govindappa Venkataswamy, and grew from an 11-bed clinic into a globally respected eyecare system that performs hundreds of thousands of surgeries every year. Nearly half its patients

receive free or highly subsidised care. Yet the institution maintains clinical standards that rival the best hospitals in the world.

Spanning fields as diverse as healthcare and ecology, these are practical efforts to solve problems that are most entrenched in our country

Aaji Care emerged from a more personal crisis. When Prasad Bhide's mother was bedridden for months, he saw how fragile India's eldercare arrangements were. His response was structural: professional caregiver training, assisted-living centres for dementia, post-operative and palliative care. Aaji Care is not only a service provider. It also seeks to dispel the unease that shadows families who seek outside help.

Other transformations unfold outside institutions. In Gujarat's Amreli district, Sayjibhai Dholakia revived groundwater through rainwater harvesting, restoring agriculture and livelihoods. In Telangana,

Narsanna and Padma Koppula have demonstrated that regenerative farming can be both productive and resilient. In Gurugram, ecologist Vijay Dhasmana restored a wasteland—an abandoned mine, at that—into the Aravalli Biodiversity Park by scrupulously planting native trees. Today, it supports hundreds of plant species and significant wildlife, while serving as a reference point for urban ecological restoration.

Justice, too, is being quietly shored up. The Majlis Legal Centre for Women and Children, founded by Flavia Agnes in 1991, recognised that survivors of violence needed empathetic legal help, and not a system that caused further harm. By combining individual legal aid with training and policy reform, Majlis helped reshape courtroom procedures. In Assam, UTSAH worked with the police—not against them—to institutionalise child-friendly policing through the Assam Police Sishu Mitra Programme.

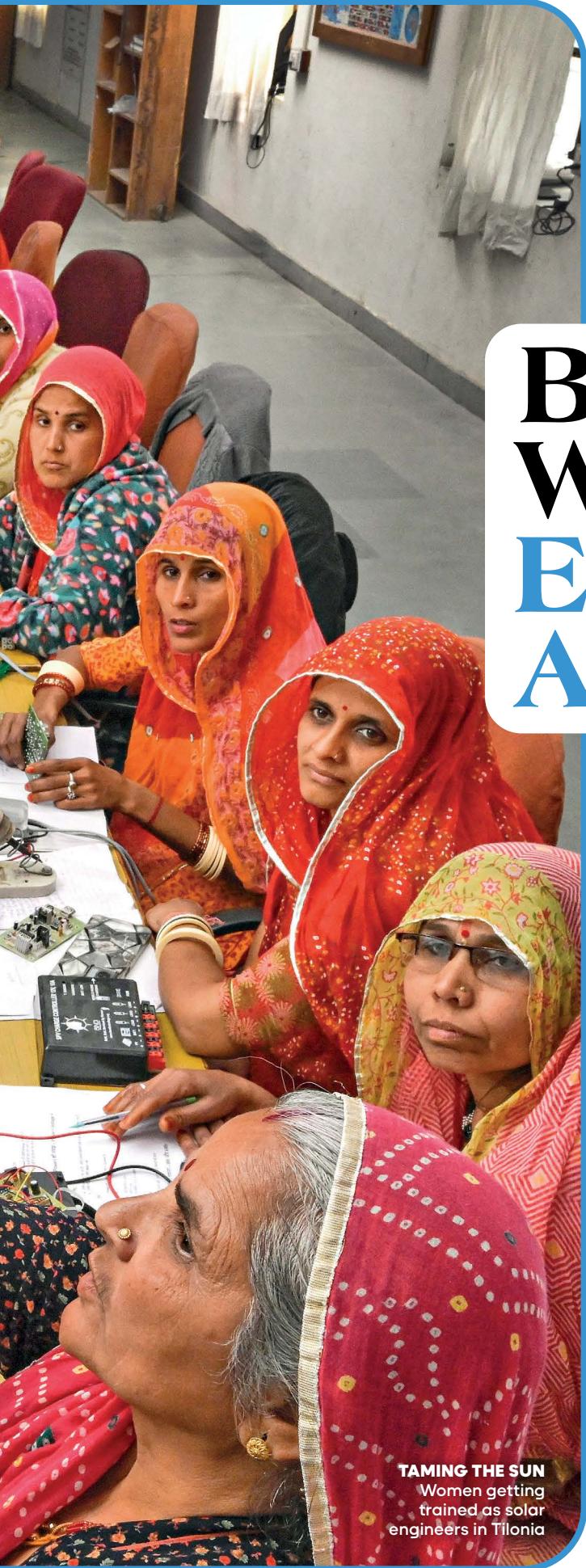
Collectively, these initiatives form a Force for Good, a constellation of change-makers working quietly across India. Driven by the pursuit of positive change, they are shaped by a vision in which prosperity, social welfare and environmental responsibility are not competing goals, but mutually reinforcing ones. They are shining examples of how to transform the Republic: by helping others to help themselves. ■

BAREFOOT COLLEGE, Tilonia, Rajasthan

Key people: Sanjit Bunker Roy, Founder;
Sowmya Kidambi, Director & CEO

Year of inception: 1972





TAMING THE SUN
Women getting
trained as solar
engineers in Tilonia



BAREFOOT WAY OF EARNING A LIVING

By removing education as a barrier to learning skills such as solar engineering, Barefoot College has **empowered rural folk to make a livelihood for themselves and train others too**

By ROHIT PARIHAR

Photograph by CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

WHY IT IS A GEM

- **3,000 women from 96 countries trained in solar engineering**
- **250 night schools and 100 pre-schools across multiple states**
- **300,000 patients treated through rural healthcare systems**

Barefoot College began as a deceptively simple idea. In the early 1970s, Sanjit ‘Bunker’ Roy—an alumnus of The Doon School and St Stephen’s College—set out to address water scarcity in India’s most arid regions. A relative at Mayo College in Ajmer advised him to begin in Rajasthan. Roy chose Tilonia, a village in Ajmer district, and started by educating locals about water harvesting and conservation.

It was during this work that Roy encountered a persistent rural problem: when hand pumps or tubewells broke down, villages often waited weeks for a mechanic to arrive from a town. Roy began repairing pumps himself to demonstrate that such skills could be learned locally. If villagers could repair bicycles or work as ironsmiths, he reasoned, they could also handle basic mechanical tasks—if they were trained.

With government support, Roy was allotted an abandoned tuberculosis hospital building in Tilonia, which became the Barefoot College campus. A three-month residential training programme was launched to train barefoot mechanics—crucially including women. Initially, the government was reluctant to waive minimum education qualifications for technicians, but soon enough Barefoot College’s early success persuaded authorities to relax norms and eventually extend the model across Rajasthan.

Soon enough, the college expanded beyond water and mechanics. To address teacher shortages, Barefoot College trained Class 8-pass women and Class 10-pass men to teach children up to Class 5. Over time, children outnumbered adults in classrooms, and the programme evolved into a scalable model of community-led primary education.



COUUPLE GOALS
The Roys at their house in Tilonia

FOUNDER SPEAK

“It is not easy to persuade women to leave home for six weeks to three months of residential training, but most of them return empowered and bring lasting happiness to their families”

SANJIT BUNKER ROY, Founder

Healthcare became another pillar. Locally trained health workers provided basic services in villages where doctors were scarce. Alongside this, Roy’s wife, social activist Aruna Roy, played a key role in mobilising women and developing Tilonia’s now-recognisable handicrafts—parrots, bells and other artefacts—eventually expanding into carpentry, weaving and leatherwork.

Barefoot College, meanwhile, continued to evolve. In later years, it took on solar energy—long before it became mainstream in rural India. Women, including those with little or no formal education, were trained as solar engineers through residential programmes. “I dropped out of school after Class 3 and never imagined doing a formal job,” says 59-year-old Leela Devi, a master trainer. “I joined Barefoot

College 23 years ago, learnt solar technology, trained women from 96 countries, and have travelled to four countries.” As solar adoption grew, women from other states in India as well as in some African countries joined Tilonia for training.

Today, under the guidance of Roy and the supervision of CEO Sowmya Kidambi, Barefoot College is working closely with governments. Recently, it signed an MoU with the Rajasthan government to advance the prime minister’s Solar Sakhi programme. “With the massive expansion of solar energy, our aim—along with the government—is to train as many people as possible in remote areas so that local solutions are available when problems arise,” she says. And with women constituting half the workforce across programmes, there seems to be no stopping this revolution. ■



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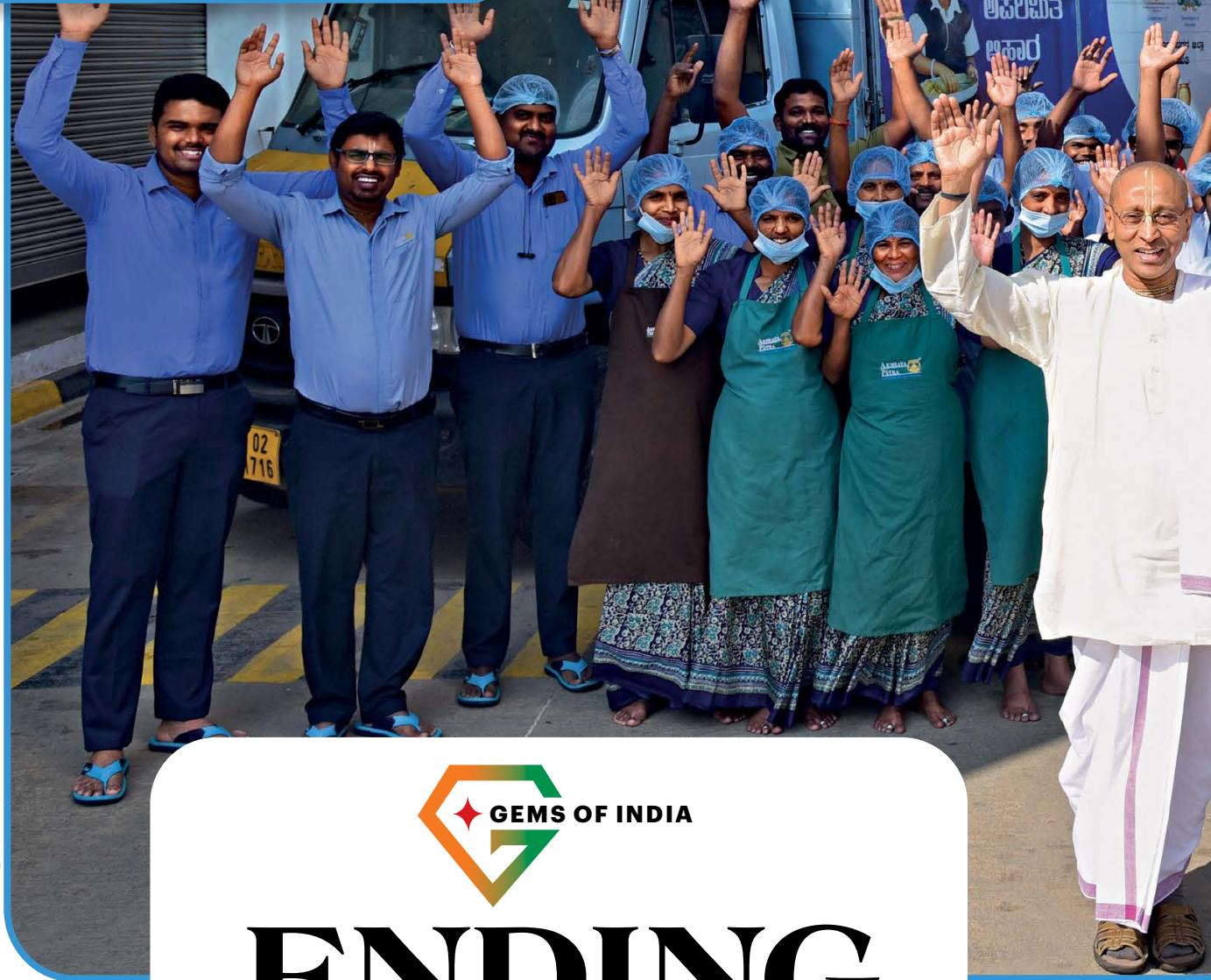


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AKSHAYA PATRA FOUNDATION, Bengaluru

Key people: Madhu Pandit Dasa, Founder and Chairman; Chanchalapathi Dasa, Co-founder and Vice Chairman; Shridhar Venkat, CEO

Year of inception: 2000



Photographs by HEMANT MISHRA



ENDING CHRONIC HUNGER

Indian children **missing school due to chronic hunger** has been a blight on the nation. Akshaya Patra is committed to fighting the food war and bringing more students to school

By AJAY SUKUMARAN

THE HANDS THAT FEED

Chanchalapathi Dasa and Shridhar Venkat (front left and right) with Akshaya Patra kitchen staff in Bengaluru



WHY IT IS A GEM

► **The founding ideal of Akshaya Patra is 'no child in India would be deprived of education because of hunger'**

► **It now feeds over 2.35 million children in 23,000 schools**

► **It has 78 hi-tech kitchens in 16 states and three Union territories**

► **Its next goal: to serve 3 million mid-day meals and an additional 3 million servings of morning nutrition**

M

Much before dawn breaks over the Bengaluru skyline, an assembly line kicks into production. Its processes, in which gravity plays a key role, flow from top to bottom across three levels. Tonnes of rice, vegetables and cooking ingredients stored on the uppermost

floor are released to the level immediately below, where pre-processing takes place through specialised machines. Then, these are funneled down a chute into 10 large steam-fed cooking cauldrons that churn out 2,100 kg of steaming rice and 3,600 litres of piping hot

sambar. As each batch is ready, they are transferred to insulated steel containers and ferried out by a conveyor belt into vans waiting outside. By 8 am, this kitchen on the outskirts of Bengaluru winds down. It is one of the 78 kitchens run by the Akshaya Patra Foundation



across India, which together ensure that 2.35 million children in over 23,000 government schools have their tummies full on a daily basis. Its vision: “No child in India shall be deprived of education because of hunger.” That makes it a larger force for good.

We have 9,000 ‘hunger warriors’ in Akshaya Patra, so called because they solve the problem of classroom hunger,” says Shridhar Venkat, CEO of Akshaya Patra Foundation (APF). The first NGO to partner with the government midday meal programme, now called PM Poshan, APF started by feeding 1,500 children from five schools in Bengaluru in 2000. In due course, it built the world’s largest mega-kitchen in Hubballi in Karnataka, serving 150,000 meals a day, and, over a quarter century, followed up with centralised kitchens across 16 states and three Union territories. It now

CEO SPEAK
“For one lakh children, we needed two lakh rotis a day. We adapted a papad-making machine and worked with a manufacturer to re-engineer it. This kind of innovative scaling is central to Akshaya Patra’s model”

CHANCHALAPATHI DASA
 Co-founder & Vice Chairman

runs the world’s largest school meal programme by a non-profit.

The goal is to provide a midday meal to three million children and an additional three million servings of morning nutrition (ready-to-eat

healthy snacks) daily by 2030. Currently, it provides 800,000 servings of morning nutrition. Menus change day to day and across regions, from *dal-dhokli* in Gujarat to *pitha* in Assam, keeping in mind the local flavour. If rice is the staple in the South, machines that can churn out 40,000 rotis an hour cater to the northern palate.

A zero-debt organisation, roughly 55 per cent of the cost of running the programme comes from the government through cash and grain subsidy; APF raises the remainder from corporate and individual donors. However, as Venkat puts it, fund-raising is like “being on a treadmill” constantly. To reach its target of six million servings, the non-profit will require Rs 2,500 crore a year, a nearly three-fold jump from total expenditure of Rs 867 crore in FY25. But money is one thing. “What really matters is the transformation it brings in the lives of children,” says Venkat. And that starts with a full stomach. ■

POWERED BY DOUBLE ENGINES UTTAR PRADESH ATTRACTS AN INVESTMENT BOOM

Over the past eight years and nine months, Uttar Pradesh's identity has undergone a rapid transformation. Once considered a challenging destination for investment, the state has today emerged with strength on India's industrial map. The double-engine government at the Centre and the state has, through policy reforms, infrastructure expansion and decisive administrative action, created an ecosystem where investor confidence has been restored and industries find it easier to translate intent into implementation.

The impact of this shift is clearly visible. Uttar Pradesh has received investment proposals worth nearly ₹45 lakh crore, of which projects exceeding ₹15 lakh crore have already been grounded. This has generated direct employment for over 60 lakh youth, while creating indirect livelihood opportunities for millions more. This transformation is not confined to statistics alone; it is evident in the emergence of new industrial hubs across districts and sectors.

From the Centre's PM MITRA Park Scheme to the state government's sector-focused strategies, large clusters are being developed in textiles, leather, plastics, perfumes, chemicals and pharmaceuticals. Whether it is the mega textile park at Lucknow-Hardoi road, the leather clusters in Kanpur and Hardoi, the plastic park in Gorakhpur, or the proposed textile and leather parks named after revered saints, each initiative reflects rapid industrial expansion anchored in social connect.

Platforms such as the UP International Trade Show have further strengthened this momentum by bringing together government, industry and global institutions firmly positioning Uttar Pradesh as a reliable and rising investment destination.





Built on policy, powered by technology, driven by trust

Uttar Pradesh attracts investors

"Over the past eight years and nine months nearly nine years, Uttar Pradesh has taken a decisive leap in the direction of economic and industrial development, placing it firmly among the country's leading states. This transformation is the outcome of well-planned policies, a strong administrative framework and an investment-friendly environment."

- Yogi Adityanath, Chief Minister

Under the leadership of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, the policy and administrative reforms introduced in Uttar Pradesh over the past few years are now clearly visible on the ground. Once regarded as a difficult state for industries, Uttar Pradesh has moved beyond investments confined to paperwork or announcements. Today, investment is translating into new factories, production units and tangible employment opportunities.

The inauguration of Ashok Leyland's new plant in Lucknow stands as a concrete example of this transformed ecosystem. It sends a strong message that Uttar Pradesh has emerged as a reliable and stable destination for investors.

Top ranking in "Deregulation 1.0"

Uttar Pradesh securing first place nationally under the Central Government's "Deregulation 1.0" programme is considered a major milestone. Reforms across 23 key areas including land, buildings, construction, labour, environmental clearances, electricity and water have significantly dismantled decades-old complexities.

Measures such as flexible zoning, digital land-use conversion, GIS-based land banks and online approval systems have eased the path for industries. As a result, large industrial players are now viewing Uttar Pradesh as a serious investment destination. The Ashok Leyland plant is a clear symbol of this renewed confidence.

With the commencement of this unit, not only will the state's industrial profile be strengthened, but thousands of direct and indirect employment opportunities will also be created. The surrounding

MSME sector, small enterprises and supply chains are set to benefit directly from this investment. This investment underlines a crucial shift: industrial decisions in Uttar Pradesh are no longer driven merely by low-cost resources, but by policy stability and transparent processes.

Labour reforms reinforcing growth

Labour reforms form another vital link in this transformation. Provisions such as permission for women to work night shifts, flexible working hours, and third-party certification systems have made industrial operations more practical and efficient. Online processing of environmental and other licences has eliminated unnecessary delays, while electricity and water connections are now being provided within defined timelines.

The cumulative impact of these reforms is evident: investment in Uttar Pradesh is no longer limited to proposals alone, but is increasingly visible in production, expansion and employment generation.

Unprecedented progress in ease of doing business

The progress achieved by Uttar Pradesh in the area of ease of doing business is clearly reflected in the data. In 2017-18, the state ranked 12th in the Ease of Doing Business rankings; by 2019, it had risen to second place nationally. Subsequently, in 2022 and 2024, Uttar Pradesh was placed in the 'Top Achiever' category.

In logistics rankings as well, the state was recognised as an 'Achiever' in 2022, 2023 and 2024. Securing the top position in the Commerce and Industry category in the Good Governance Index 2021 further underscored this trajectory of continuous improvement.

Under the Business Reform Action Plan (BRAP) 2024, Uttar Pradesh was declared a 'Top Achiever' in three key areas—enterprise establishment, simplification of labour regulations, and land administration. In addition, under BRAP and BRAP Plus, 426 major reforms across 24 reform areas were implemented

after 2024. Processes related to enterprise registration, investment facilitation, land reforms, labour registration, environmental clearances, single-window systems and construction permits were simplified. The government also placed special emphasis on reducing compliance burden and rationalising penal provisions.

A strong foundation of digital governance

Digital governance has emerged as the strongest pillar of this transformation. The digital single-window portal 'Nivesh Mitra' has become the hallmark of Uttar Pradesh's investment framework. More than 525 services across 43 departments are available on this platform. To date, over 20 lakh approvals have been issued digitally, with more than 97 per cent of applications disposed of.

The mandatory online application system for all licences and approvals has ensured both transparency and time-bound delivery. Investor satisfaction levels with this system remain consistently high. To further strengthen this framework, the government is now developing 'Nivesh Mitra 3.0', which is expected to be launched shortly. The upgraded platform will offer investors a unified and intelligent digital experience.

Nivesh Mitra 3.0 will be fully integrated with the National Single Window System, enabling central and state-level approvals to be accessed on a single platform significantly reducing project implementation timelines. It will also be linked with IGRS, Chief Minister's Dashboard Darpan, Nivesh Sarathi, and the India Industrial Land Bank, allowing grievance redressal and project monitoring to extend directly to the Chief Minister's Office.

An AI-enabled smart dashboard will facilitate real-time data analysis, live tracking of investment proposals, and performance assessment of departments. Early identification of potential bottlenecks will make the decision-making process more efficient and proactive.

How Uttar Pradesh emerged on the investment map

Policy-driven governance in Uttar Pradesh has emerged as a strong foundation for investment and industrial development. Under the leadership of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, the state government's sector-specific policies have positioned Uttar Pradesh as a leading state on the national and global investment map. By aligning administrative decisions with a clear and structured policy framework, the government has ensured that industrial growth remains purposeful and targeted. As a result, the state today has over 34 objective-driven, sector-specific industrial policies, directly aimed at attracting investment, generating employment, and expanding industrial capacity.

↗ Investment strategy focused on priority sectors

Policy support has been extended to key sectors such as IT/ITeS, data centres, electronic system design and manufacturing (ESDM), defence and aerospace, electric vehicles, warehousing and logistics, tourism, textiles, and MSMEs. These policies include incentives such as capital subsidies, 100% SGST reimbursement, and exemptions on stamp duty and electricity tariffs.

↗ Initiative for Fortune 500 companies

For the first time in India, the Yogi government implemented the "Uttar Pradesh FDI Fortune Global and Fortune India Investment Promotion Policy-2023." This policy marked a major step by the state towards attracting global investment. It offers incentives including front-end land subsidies, 100% exemption on stamp duty and registration charges, complete waiver of electricity duty, and incentives for skill development and research and development.

↗ Announcement of next-generation policies

In 2024, the Yogi government announced several forward-looking policies, including the Semiconductor Policy, Green Hydrogen Policy, Higher Education Promotion Policy, Bio-Plastic Policy, Multi-Modal Logistics Park Policy, Aerospace and Defence Unit Policy, and GCC Policy. These policies were fast-tracked in 2025, giving fresh direction to the state's economy.

↗ Special focus on exports and manufacturing

The Yogi government implemented the "Uttar Pradesh Footwear, Leather and Non-Leather Sector Development Policy 2025," while the Uttar Pradesh Export Promotion Policy (2025-2030) and the Uttar Pradesh Electronics Component Manufacturing Policy 2025 received approval from the State Cabinet. The objective of these policies is to boost investment, promote exports, and position Uttar Pradesh as a leading industrial state.

Rising investor confidence in Uttar Pradesh

De-regulation 1.0

Uttar Pradesh ranked number one

First position in the national ranking of business reforms

Approval processes simplified

Defined timelines

and online systems provide relief to industries

Benefits of the single-window system

Faster approvals

End to unnecessary delays and repeated visits

Digital land bank and online clearances

Land, building and environment

utility approvals made easier

Boost to MSMEs and supply chains

New opportunities opened for ancillary and supporting units



From electronics to semiconductors

Uttar Pradesh emerges as a new manufacturing pivot

Under the leadership of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, Uttar Pradesh's industrial identity has undergone a rapid transformation in recent years. Once associated with complex procedures, weak infrastructure and concerns over law and order, the state is now being viewed as an emerging hub for manufacturing and high-tech industries. In sectors such as electronics, component manufacturing and semiconductors in particular, the government's clear policy direction, swift decision-making and a reliable ecosystem have firmly positioned Uttar Pradesh on the national industrial map.

A major hub of mobile manufacturing

The changing industrial landscape of Uttar Pradesh was recently reflected in the third phase of the Central Government's Electronics Component Manufacturing Scheme (ECMS). Of the 22 proposals approved, four were from Uttar Pradesh a development that goes beyond numbers to signal the state's growing importance in the electronics supply chain. Among the 11 states that received project approvals under ECMS, Uttar Pradesh's presence underscores the fact that investor confidence is now translating into on-ground commitments.

Under this scheme, estimated investments of ₹41,863 crore and the creation of 33,791 direct jobs are expected nationwide, with Uttar Pradesh set to derive significant economic and employment benefits. The Yogi government has consistently worked at the policy level to create an investment-friendly environment. The Uttar Pradesh Electronics Manufacturing Policy notified in 2017, followed by the Electronics Components Manufacturing Policy

2025, has provided long-term clarity to investors. Strong law and order, transparent processes, and improved physical and digital infrastructure have placed Uttar Pradesh among the states where establishing industries is considered comparatively easier. As a result, Uttar Pradesh has today emerged as India's leading mobile manufacturing centre. More than 55 per cent of smartphones manufactured in the country and 50–60 per cent of mobile components are produced in the state. Alongside leading brands such as Vivo, Oppo, Samsung, Lava, Haier and LG, component suppliers including Holitech, Transsion, Jahwa, Sunwoda and Samkwang have also established manufacturing units here. This expanding network is accelerating manufacturing activity while strengthening the local supply chain.

Sharpening focus on semiconductor manufacturing

As the next phase of manufacturing growth, the Yogi government has turned its focus to the semiconductor sector. In a Cabinet meeting chaired

by the Chief Minister on 6 January, a key decision was taken to attract large investments under the Semiconductor Policy introduced in January 2024. Approval to provide special incentives on a case-by-case basis for investments of ₹3,000 crore or more clearly signalled the government's seriousness towards this emerging industry.

At a time when global competition in semiconductor manufacturing is intensifying across regions such as the United States, Europe, Japan and Taiwan, Uttar Pradesh is working to secure a strong position within this global value chain. Under the policy, semiconductor units will be eligible for incentives including interest subsidies, reimbursement of employee costs, exemption from net SGST for ten years, 100 per cent EPF reimbursement for domiciled workers of Uttar Pradesh, concessions on water charges, and a ₹2 per unit rebate on electricity tariffs.

The objective of these measures is clear to attract large-scale investment and promote employment

Startup ecosystem delivers remarkable results

Under the leadership of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, Uttar Pradesh has taken a major leap in innovation, entrepreneurship and employment generation, emerging as the third-largest startup ecosystem in the country.

Over the past year, nearly 5,000 new startups have commenced operations in the state, taking the total number of startups to over 21,000. Among these, more than 9,000 startups are led by women, promoting gender diversity in entrepreneurship.

According to official data, by December 2024, the number of startups registered with the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) in Uttar Pradesh stood at around 16,000, which increased to 21,559 by December 2025. Of these, 18,568 startups are recognised under Startup India.

The number of startups registered under 'StartInUP' stands at 2,991, while the Startup Incubation and Innovation Centre (SIIC) at IIT Kanpur hosts 521 startups. This growth is not limited to numbers alone; the state has also recorded a strong presence in terms of quality, investment and employment generation.

Policy-driven governance, ease of doing business, and digital processes have enabled startups to scale rapidly. Clear policies, robust infrastructure and a youth-centric approach have positioned Uttar Pradesh as a trusted destination for investors and entrepreneurs.

The startup ecosystem has not been confined to large cities alone. Startup activity is now active across all 75 districts of the state. Earlier, startup hubs were limited to cities such as Noida, Ghaziabad, Lucknow and Kanpur, but they are now expanding rapidly into smaller towns as well.

Alongside urban centres, agritech, food processing, handloom, dairy and local service-based startups have emerged in Bundelkhand, Purvanchal and the Terai regions, directly benefiting both urban and rural economies and creating new local employment opportunities.

Initiatives such as the Chief Minister Yuva Udyami Vikas Abhiyan, women startup promotion schemes, and easy access to finance have encouraged women to pursue self-employment with confidence. Through startups, women are not only achieving economic empowerment but are also assuming leadership roles in society.

To provide a strong foundation for startups, the state has 76 incubators and 7 Centres of Excellence in operation. Dedicated Centres of Excellence have been established in sectors such as IT, electronics, healthtech, agritech and green energy, providing institutional support to innovation.

generation at the local level, while positioning Uttar Pradesh as a future-ready manufacturing destination.

Promoting investment through Global Capability Centres

In the same sequence, the government is also focusing on service-based sectors that generate high-skill employment. In a Cabinet meeting chaired by the Chief Minister, approval was granted to the Rules, 2025 for the effective implementation of the Uttar Pradesh Global Capability Centre (GCC) Policy 2024. With the enforcement of these rules, the state is expected to attract global investment, high-value services, and large-scale employment opportunities.

By designating Invest UP as the nodal agency, procedures for investors will become even more streamlined. Under the GCC Policy, Indian and foreign companies will be able to establish captive units in Uttar Pradesh to handle strategic functions such as IT, research and development, finance, HR, design, engineering, analytics, and knowledge services.

The fact that 21 companies have already begun investment during the current financial year highlights the potential of this policy. To attract GCC units, a comprehensive incentive framework has been put in place. From front-end land subsidies and stamp duty exemptions to capital and interest subsidies, opex, payroll and recruitment subsidies, EPF reimbursement, and skill development and research incentives, the government has created support mechanisms at almost every level.

In addition, technical assistance, industry linkages, regulatory facilitation and fast-track disposal of applications have together created a reliable and investor-friendly environment.



Growing employment through industrial progress

From the Ashok Leyland plant Direct and indirect Employment
3000+
Skill development Every year
10,000 youth

State-level employment
Investment-led employment
60 lakh+

Industrial registration and employment
Registered factories
30,219
Total employment generation
3 crore 63 lakh

Nivesh Sarathi Portal Potential employment from every signed MoU
Over 90 lakh

ARAVALI BIODIVERSITY PARK, Gurugram

Key person: Vijay Dhasmana, Ecologist

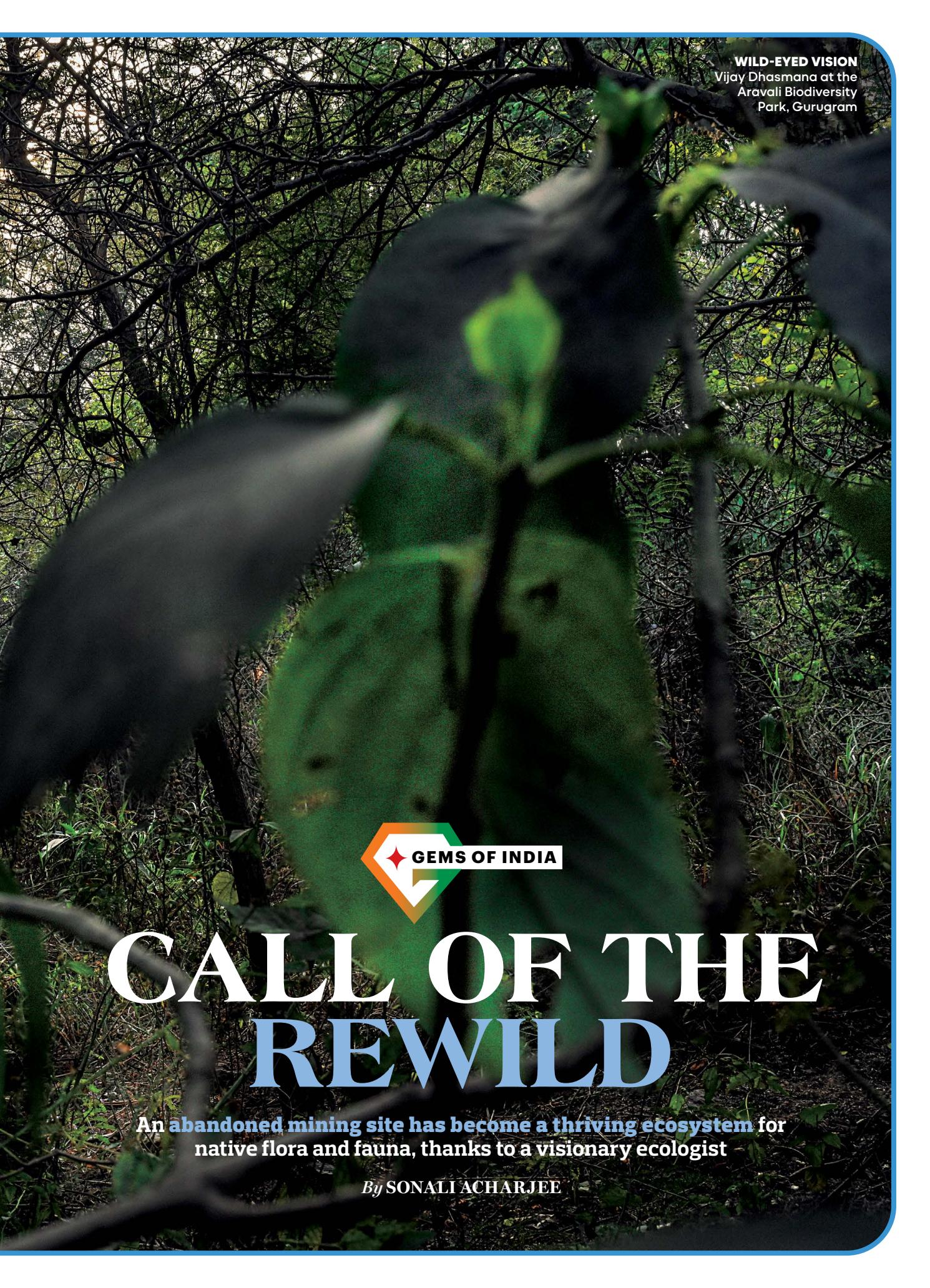
Year of inception: 2011



ECOLOGISTSPEAK

“We must save what still remains. Only after safeguarding our landscapes can rewilding truly begin”

VIJAY DHASMANA, Rewilding expert



WILD-EYED VISION
Vijay Dhasmana at the
Aravali Biodiversity
Park, Gurugram



CALL OF THE REWILD

An abandoned mining site has become a thriving ecosystem for native flora and fauna, thanks to a visionary ecologist

By SONALI ACHARJEE

W

When the NGO iamgurgaon first invited Vijay Dhasmana, a pioneering restoration ecologist, to build the Aravali Biodiversity Park in 2011, he encountered a severely degraded site, ravaged by decades of mining, quarrying, cattle grazing and waste dumping. “The extent of the degradation was striking,” he recalls. “It was immediately clear that simple plantation or cosmetic greening would not be enough. We needed a larger vision, one that reflected what Gurugram represents: aspiration.”

Today, the 392-odd acres of reclaimed wilderness, carved out of an abandoned mining site at the Delhi-Gurugram border, is one of the largest urban ecological restoration efforts in the region.

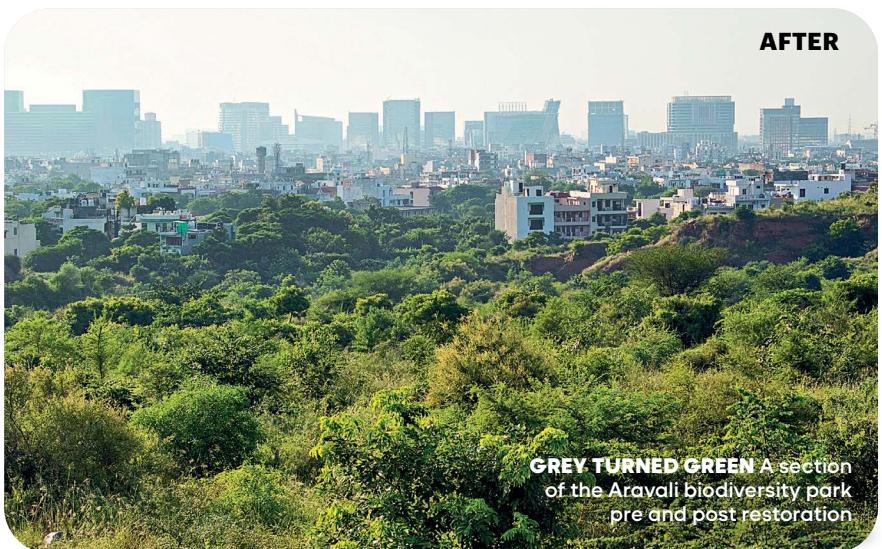
Instead of conventional landscaping, Dhasmana and his team concentrated on restoring native plant communities and ecological function—“systems that could support life and offer refuge to wildlife,” as he puts it. Any scepticism over this approach vanished as the wasteland took shape as a living ecosystem, with over 300 native plant species, a thriving wildlife, including jackals, nilgai, mongoose, and more than 180 bird species.

Validation came in 2016 when the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature), in an independent assessment of the project, recognised it as one of India’s most exemplary restoration landscapes.

With that seal of approval for



BEFORE



AFTER

GREY TURNED GREEN A section of the Aravali biodiversity park pre and post restoration

ABHILASH SINGH

VIJAY DHASMANA

► WHY IT IS A GEM

► Spread over 392 acres, the Aravali Biodiversity Park serves as a carbon sink for millennium city Gurugram

► The park now has over 300 species of native plants, including babool, ronjh and hingot, and 185 bird species using the park, besides animals like jungle cat, common palm civet, jackal, porcupine, nilgai

his ecological methodology, the park became a living classroom and research hub as university students, PhD scholars, policymakers and forest department trainees lined up to study its flora, fauna and ecological processes.

Today, the park’s influence goes far beyond its acreage—as a case study for Haryana’s Aravalli Land Restoration Programme and as inspiration for urban ecological consciousness. Underlining Dhasmana’s work is the fundamental belief that protection comes first. “We must save what still remains,” he says. “Only after safeguarding our landscapes can rewilding truly begin.” And, with it, how cities conceive of nature, resilience and sustainable futures. ■



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INDIA'S LIVESTOCK SECTOR

Initiatives, Impact, and Future Prospects

INTRODUCTION

India's livestock sector is the backbone of its rural economy. Livestock sector plays a multifaceted role in providing livelihood support to the rural population. Livestock sector apart from contributing to national economy in general and to agricultural economy in particular also provides employment generation opportunities, asset creation, coping mechanism against crop failure and social and financial security.

Livestock production systems in India are mostly based on low cost agricultural residues, agro- byproducts and traditional technologies, primarily for the production of milk, draft power, meat, egg, fiber etc. About 100 million rural household own livestock of one species or the other and 80 million among them own cattle and / or buffaloes. The livestock sector, besides contributing to the national economy, plays a key role in providing livelihoods to 80 million rural households. In the rural areas, most of the livestock rearing activities are handled by women. As many as 75 million women are engaged in livestock sector as against 15 million men. There is an increasing trend towards participation of women in livestock development activities. This has led to empowerment of women-headed households in the rural communities.

Importance of Animal husbandry in rural economy can also be understood from the fact that the land in our country is not equitably distributed among the farmers whereas more than 90% of the dairy animals are with small, marginal and landless labourers and 12-26% of the rural household income comes from the Animal Husbandry and dairying sector.

Low capital investment, short operating cycle, and steady returns make Animal Husbandry a preferred livelihood activity among rural households. Animal Husbandry also acts as a cushion by minimising agriculture losses at the time of environmental adversities like floods and droughts.

The large network of dairy cooperatives has helped in providing market access to millions of dairy farmers as they integrate and empower our dairy farmers. The dairy cooperatives in the country pay back more than 70 percent of the consumer rupee to the milk producers, which is the highest in the World. Milk and milk products are important constituents of Indian thali, consumed by more than 75 percent of the households and about 20 percent of total food expenditure is spent on milk & milk products.



CONTRIBUTION OF LIVESTOCK SECTOR TO NATIONAL ECONOMY

Livestock Sector is an important subsector of agriculture in the Indian economy. It grew at a CAGR of 12.77 per cent during 2014-15 to 2023-24 (at constant prices). As per the estimates of National Accounts Statistics (NAS) 2025 for sector wise GVA of agriculture and allied sectors, the contribution of

livestock in total agriculture and allied sector GVA (at constant prices) has increased from 24.32 per cent (2014-15) to 31 per cent (2022-23). Livestock sector contributed 5.5 per cent of total GVA in 2022-23. Development of livestock sector has led to improvement in per capita availability of milk, eggs and meat. Value of output of livestock sector is 18.9 lakh crore at current price during 2022-23 (as per

National Account Statistics 2025). Value of output of milk alone is more than Rs.12.77 lakh crore (67% of the total value of output of livestock sector) which is the highest of the agriculture produce and even more than the combined value of Paddy and Wheat.

GROWTH IN DAIRY SECTOR

India is global leader in milk production contributing



25 per cent of global milk production. Milk production reached to 247.87 million tonnes in 2024–25, from 146.31 million tonnes in 2014–15, an increase of nearly 70%.

Post-independence dairying has been integral to India's growth story with the Government playing a crucial role in harnessing the livestock sector's potential for economic growth, food security, and rural prosperity. It has proved to be the most effective tool for development of rural areas and for socio-economic empowerment of Crores of Dairy Farmers. Over the last 7 decades, initiatives through the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) under the enabling policy environment provided by the GoI have ensured that the dairy sector has grown by many folds, placing India at the top position in world milk production. The dairy cooperative movement has transformed the entire dairy sector covering all major value chains related to milk and dairy animals.

Dr Meenesh Shah, Chairman, National Dairy Development Board said, "Today, India is 'Atmanirbhar' in milk production, thanks to the sustained and systematic application of scientific and technological innovations, supported by both the Central and State Governments. With continued momentum and strategic interventions, India is on track to become the 'Dairy to the World'- a global leader in dairy excellence, sustainability and cooperative-driven growth."

PATH BREAKING INITIATIVES- PRODUCTIVITY ENHANCEMENT

The dairy sector of India has witnessed a transformative growth over the past decade, with milk production peaking at 247.87 MT, a remarkable increase of 69.4% in the 11-year period. This surge has been propelled by a 36.63 %productivity rise, highest in the world, increasing to 2251 kg/ animal/

year in 2024-25 from 1,648.17 kg/ animal/ year in 2013-14.

NATIONAL DAIRY PLAN-I

World Bank funded Central Sector Scheme of GoI with a project outlay of Rs. 2,242 Crore namely, National Dairy Plan Phase I (NDP-I) was launched in April 2012. NDP I was implemented by NDDB from 2011-12 to 2018-19 across 18 major dairying States with an outlay of about Rs 2,250 Crores. The project aimed to increase milk production, improve productivity, and provide rural milk producers with access to the organised milk processing sector.

Key achievements included making 2456 High Genetic Merit Bulls available, producing 119 million disease-free semen doses, and improving conception rates from 35% to 44% in the project area.

The project covered 2.87 million milch animals under the Ration Balancing Programme, reduced feeding costs by 12%, and increased milk producers' daily income by about Rs 8,000 per lactation. It also promoted fodder development, constructed 120 biomass bunkers, and provided market access to 1.69 million milk producers. Additionally, NDP I empowered women, with 0.77 million women members enrolled in village-level dairy cooperatives, and contributed to social inclusion and reduced distress migration. By the end of the project during the year 2020-21, India's milk production stood at 210 million tonnes, thus meeting projections. With an economic rate of return of 60%, the World Bank rated NDP I as "Highly Satisfactory".

INITIATIVES UNDERTAKEN UNDER RASHTRIYA GOKUL MISSION

As GoI initiative, Nationwide Artificial Insemination programme implemented in 623 districts with less than 50% AI coverage and 126 districts out of 623 districts brought above 50% AI coverage. With this, AI coverage in the country increased from 25% of the breedable bovine females to 40% of the breedable bovine females.

A technology that ensures the birth of female calves not only reduces the financial burden on dairy farmers by eliminating the need to care for male calves but also offers the potential to produce more replacement heifers from the best cows. In India, there was a need for a cost-effective sex-sorting technology that can boost the income of dairy farmers. However, the available technologies were owned by a few multinational corporations, making the products unaffordable for the average farmer. In line with the 'Make in India' and 'Atmanirbhar



Nationwide Artificial Insemination Programme

Implemented

623 district with < 50% AI covered

Achieved

126 districts brought above 50% AI coverage

Outcome

Increase in AI coverage of breedable bovine females from 25% to 40%

Bharat's vision, the Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying through National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) has developed sex sorted semen production technology making India self-reliant in producing sex-sorted semen doses'. With this initiative, sex sorted semen is now available to all farmers at reasonable costs.

For the first time in the country bovine IVF technology is initiated under Rashtriya Gokul Mission. The IVF technology is crucial for enhancing productivity of bovines as work which requires 7 generations can be done in single generation through IVF technology. Under the scheme 24 IVF labs have been made operational for promoting IVF technology among cattle and buffaloes in the country. The indigenous media for in-vitro fertilization (IVF) has been developed by the Department through National Dairy Development Board. The indigenous media, offers a cost-effective alternative to expensive imported media. With the use of media cost of embryo production will be reduced from Rs 5000 to Rs 2000/embryo

Developed dairy nation are using DNA based selection called genomic selection to increase rate of genetic gain among cattle population. The genomic chip developed by advanced dairy nation was suitable for exotic breeds namely Holstein Friesian (HF) and Jersey. To accelerate genetic improvement of cattle and buffaloes, the Department, has developed fully indigenous unified genomic chips namely, Gau Chip for indigenous cattle and Mahish Chip for buffaloes, specifically designed for initiating genomic selection in the country and So far more than 75,000 animals genotyped for creating referral population.

BHARAT PASHUDHAN PLATFORM: TRANSFORMING LIVESTOCK GOVERNANCE THROUGH DIGITALIZATION

Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying (DAHD) along with NDDB has developed data base named as "Bharat Pashudhan". This database has been developed utilizing a unique 12digit



Tag ID allocated to each livestock animal. So far 36.10 crore animals have been registered on the database. All the stakeholders are connected to the same database through an open source API based architecture. The Bharat Pashudhan Portal will serve as the IT front and back-end for all beneficiary-oriented schemes of DAHD, as well as for veterinary and breeding services from the private sector—ensuring full digitization, transparency, and efficiency. Major achievements made are: (i) Creation of Database "Bharat Pashudhan" with unique 12-digit Tag ID as a primary identification key; (ii) 1962 Mobile application for Livestock farmers; (iii) Sero-surveillance and Sero-monitoring application for Disease monitoring; (iv) Traceability solutions for Gir cow ghee, Badri cow ghee, Pashmina and other Livestock products and (v) Presently more than 150 Crore transactions have been entered into the system by field officers and workers.

Complete digitization of the livestock ecosystem will enable data-driven governance, real-time monitoring, direct benefit transfers, and integration of farmers with national markets. Through these interventions, the livestock sector will become a key driver of rural prosperity, employment, and export growth- contributing significantly to the vision of a Viksit Bharat.

NATIONAL PROGRAMME FOR DAIRY DEVELOPMENT

The National Programme for Dairy Development has already transformed India's dairy landscape by establishing and strengthening over 32,331

dairy cooperatives, enrolling 20.97 lakh farmers (with more than 76% women in MPOs), and adding 41.45 lakh litres/day of milk procurement capacity. Infrastructure gains include 5,647 Bulk Milk Coolers with 138.64 LLPD chilling capacity, 56,916 AMCU/ DPMCU units, and 252 upgraded laboratories, which together have improved milk quality—evidenced by a 40% rise in MBRT from 63 to 90 minutes.

The Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying introduced an interest subvention component in 2020-21 to support dairy cooperatives facing liquidity issues due to COVID-19, under the SDC&FPO scheme implemented through NDDB. The scheme aims to help producer-owned institutions make timely payments to milk producers. It provides interest subvention on working capital loans to alleviate financial stress. The schemes such as the Dairy Processing & Infrastructure Development Fund (DIDF) and Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Fund (AHIDF) are enabling large-scale investment in processing, value-addition, and feed manufacturing. DIDF officially merged into AHIDF in February, 2024 Post-liberalization, private dairies have made significant investments, and AHIDF is providing a level playing field for the private sector, offering interest subvention for creating milk processing plants.

Such initiatives have led to a thriving dairy cooperative network with 22 State Federations, 240 District Milk Unions, and 1.7 lakh village-level societies, associating 1.7 Crore members nationwide. This remarkable achievement is a testament to the power of prudent and timely decisions, grounded in a scientific approach. The network procures about 675 lakh kg of milk daily and sells 445 lakh litres of liquid milk, with a collective processing capacity of over 1100 lakh litres per day. Notably, the private sector has created a similar capacity, underscoring the sector's growth and potential.

DISEASE CONTROL PROGRAMME

Foot & Mouth Disease (FMD) is a highly contagious





transboundary viral disease of cloven-footed animals and is endemic in India, causing major economic losses due to reduced productivity and trade restrictions. Under the Livestock Health & Disease Control Programme (LHDCP), India aims to control and eliminate FMD by 2030 through systematic vaccination. For this, quality-tested trivalent FMD vaccines are centrally procured and supplied to States/UTs. The programme implements biannual vaccination for all eligible cattle and buffaloes (and sheep/goats in select pastoral States), with a booster dose for first-time vaccinated calves after 30–45 days. The interval between vaccination rounds is maintained at less than six months. Since 2020, over 125 crore FMD vaccinations have been administered. States receive 100% central financial assistance for vaccination, logistics, cold-chain infrastructure, vaccinators, ear-tagging, data entry on the Bharat Pashudhan Portal, and awareness activities. State Animal Husbandry Departments are responsible for on-field implementation and micro-planning. All vaccinated animals are uniquely ear-tagged and vaccination records are digitally captured.

PROMOTING ENTREPRENEURSHIP – INFUSING YOUNG BLOOD & EMPLOYMENT GENERATION

India's livestock economy includes goats, sheep, pigs, poultry, and feed/fodder enterprises. The National Livestock Mission (NLM) encourages entrepreneurship and job creation, integrating women Self-Help Groups into Livestock entrepreneurship, creating more rural employment. The Central Government through its schemes offers 50% capital subsidy for setting up parent layer farms and sheep or goat breeding farms and piggery, promoting rural poultry and livestock development.

ANIMAL HUSBANDRY INFRASTRUCTURE FUND-POWERING PRIVATE SECTOR INVESTMENT

The Rs 29,000 crore outlay AHIDF has been approved for incentivizing investments by individual entrepreneurs, private companies, MSME, Farmers Producers Organizations (FPOs) and Section 8 companies to establish (i) the dairy processing and

value addition infrastructure, (ii) meat processing and value addition infrastructure and (iii) Animal Feed Plant. Keeping in view of the success of AHIDF, the erstwhile Dairy Processing Infrastructure Development Fund has been subsumed with the AHIDF on 01.02.2024. Now total size of the fund is Rs 29110 crore. Till date ₹24500 crore investment has been leveraged in 523 approved projects. AHIDF ensures broad sectoral coverage by supporting activities such as dairy and meat processing, animal feed manufacturing, breed improvement and multiplication farms, veterinary vaccine and drug production, animal waste-to-wealth initiatives, and primary wool processing infrastructure. Over time, these areas have gained significant momentum, attracting projects even from remote districts that previously had minimal participation, underscoring the scheme's extensive outreach and transformative impact on the animal husbandry sector.

LIVESTOCK SECTOR AS A CIRCULATORY POVERTY ALLEVIATION INPUT

The livestock sector acts as a powerful circulatory poverty alleviation mechanism, especially for small and marginal farmers, landless households, women, and youth. Animal Husbandry sector provides livelihood support to more than 10 crore rural households and about 8.5 cr farmers engaged in dairy.

By promoting entrepreneurship, doorstep veterinary and breeding services, value addition, organized procurement, and feed-fodder self-sufficiency, income opportunities are created across the entire value chain—from input supply and animal rearing to processing and marketing. Increased productivity, assured market access, and disease-free livestock lead to stable and recurring incomes, improved nutrition, and enhanced resilience in climate-vulnerable and low-literacy regions. This continuous flow of income, employment, and services generates a multiplier effect, strengthening rural livelihoods and enabling inclusive and sustainable poverty reduction.

WAY FORWARD

Looking ahead to Viksit Bharat @2047, India envisions a technologically advanced, sustainable, and globally competitive livestock sector. By 2047, milk production is targeted to reach 600 million tonne, egg production 588 billion, and meat production 27 million tonnes. Per capita availability of milk is projected to double to 1 kg per person per day, and average productivity of cattle and buffaloes to rise to 5,500 kg per animal per year. Our goal is to make India free from all major livestock diseases by 2047. This will open new markets for our farmers, improve food safety, and strengthen India's position as a global leader. To realize this vision, the focus will be on entrepreneurship development, technology-driven and traceable animal rearing, value addition and processing, and self-sufficiency in feed and fodder. Promoting Entrepreneurship will have a multiplier effect to create wealth ensuring quality services at doorstep of farmers. Supporting start-ups in the animal husbandry sector and providing incubation facilities will lead to self-sufficiency as well as provide employment and income to the youth of the country.

CONCLUSION

India's livestock sector has witnessed steady transformation in the last ten years driven by increased production, rising GVA, and improved international trade. Growth in milk, meat, and egg production has enhanced nutritional security and rural employment. The staggering increase in GVA shows the sector's growing importance within the agriculture and allied sector and has highlighted the role of livestock in stabilizing rural livelihoods. Livestock acts as a safety net for small and marginal farmers and generates alternative employment opportunities and strengthens India's position in global markets. The increasing export footprint of India's livestock sector underlines the need for harmonized quality standards, disease-free zones, and product diversification to fully capitalize on emerging global opportunities. Moving forward, it is important to generate investment avenues in technology, genetics and climate-resilient practices to ensure fodder availability, disease control, and continued production and productivity so that this momentum is sustained and further strengthened.

A LARGE HEART FOR AFFORDABLE HEALTHCARE

Narayana Health is revolutionising affordable cardiac care across the country with low-cost insurance plans

By AJAY SUKUMARAN

Photograph by BANDEEP SINGH

T

The founding credo of Narayana

Health is simple. “If a solution is not affordable, it is not a solution. There is no point in me talking about all the developments in heart care if the common man can’t afford it,” says Dr Devi Prasad Shetty, the heart surgeon who has transformed cardiac care in India with his single-minded pursuit of providing quality healthcare at low prices. When he founded Narayana Health in 2000, Dr Shetty wanted to build a facility that could serve working-class people and be capable of performing 60 major heart surgeries a day.

Today, Narayana Health’s flagship hospital in Bengaluru achieves half of that number alone. In FY24, its three heart centres and 17 hospitals across India carried out over 21,000 cardiac surgeries, making it one of India’s largest private heart care institutes. For Dr Shetty, however, it’s the bigger picture of Indian healthcare that matters. “We

WHY IT IS A GEM

► **The company performed over 21,000 cardiac surgeries in FY24, making it one of India’s largest private heart care institutes**

► **Dr Shetty pioneered an insurance scheme for affordable and quality healthcare that the Karnataka govt adopted in 600 hospitals**

► **He now envisions health savings accounts for workers in the unorganised sector**

have addressed the access, we are now addressing the affordability,” he says.

The anecdote that Dr Shetty often recalls is how, back in 1989, when he returned to India after a stint in England to continue his career in Kolkata, his first patient paid Rs 1.5 lakh for a bypass grafting. Today, more than three decades later, poor patients at Narayana Health pay Rs 2.5 lakh—only about

a tenth, adjusted for inflation, and far lower than competitors. This was possible, as Viren Prasad Shetty, executive vice chairman and Dr Shetty’s eldest son, explains, by marrying scale with efficiency. “There are trade-offs. Our hospitals are not the fanciest,” says Viren. “You don’t get a luxury experience, but we make it up... we focus on the core, which is about medical services and how efficiently you can deliver them at international standards.”

The group’s focus is now on affordable health insurance and preventive care. Dr Shetty pioneered the Yashaswini micro-insurance scheme for farmers back in 2003, which quickly became a role model after being launched by the Karnataka government in 600 hospitals. “Within 12 years, 1.3 million farmers had varieties of surgeries and 130,000 farmers had a cardiac procedure by paying just Rs 5 per month. I can enumerate a number of instances where amazing things happened just by the volume of patients we are able to treat,” he says. Now, he is advocating Jan Dhan Yojana-like health savings accounts for employees in the unorganised sector, which he believes will transform healthcare for the masses. ■

BENEFICIARY SPEAK

“Dr Shetty said my father’s bypass surgery could wait till he recovered from his stroke. The robotic procedure cost 40 per cent less than at other hospitals. They even further reduced it on my request. That is their approach to patients”

ROHIT RAMMURTHY, Executive at manufacturing firm



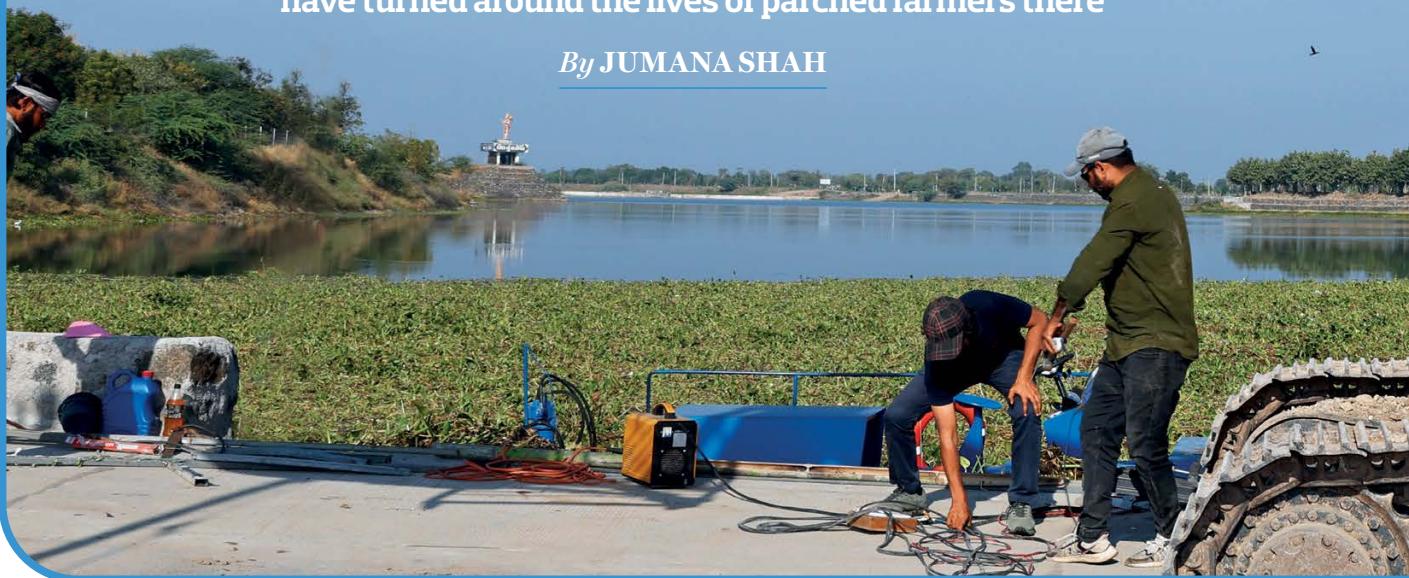
**NARAYANA
HEALTH, Bengaluru**

Key person: Dr Devi
Prasad Shetty,
Chairman
Year of inception: 2000

THE WATER WIZARD

Dholakia Foundation's lake rejuvenation efforts in arid Amreli have turned around the lives of parched farmers there

By JUMANA SHAH



F

For as long as anyone can remember, Amreli district in Gujarat has had a dry arid landscape. In many areas, water is found 600-700 feet below ground level, and with high levels of TDS (total dissolved solids). Migration for work is commonplace in the mostly agrarian community, which is how, in the 1970s, a few enterprising young men ended up in Surat and started in the diamond trade business, eventually setting up polishing units.

A few of these diamantaires developed into billionaire industry leaders. One of the biggest is Hari Krishna

Exports, led by Sayji Dholakia. In 2008, after the global economic crash, Dholakia returned to his village Dudhala in Lathi taluka of Amreli with a resolve to do some good for his native land. Water shortage, of course, was top of the agenda. The only source was

monsoon rainwater that flowed down from the seasonal Gagadiyo river, a tributary of the Shetrunji that flows through the region. That water usually dries up by Diwali (October).

Dholakia decided to use his company's CSR funds and create a 22-acre pond in the Gagadiyo riverbed, dredging and building check dams to store the monsoon water. They called it the Amrut Sarovar and it was soon a success. "Dudhala was also developed as a model village using the foundation's CSR funds," says Dholakia. The foundation recommended to the state government that they construct similar ponds in every village to store rainwater, as bringing Narmada Dam water to Saurashtra in pipelines through the SAUNI scheme was costing a bomb. But nothing came of it.

For the next eight years, a dozen villages in the region requested

BENEFICIARY SPEAK
“Earlier, with one harvest, we could barely make ends meet. Today, with three, some households earn up to Rs 20 lakh. Groundwater input costs are down 75%”

HIMMATBHAI SHANKAR
Farmer, Dudhala village

Key person: Savjibhai Dholakia, Founder

Year of inception: 2008



WHY IT IS A GEM

- **Dholakia's first effort was a 22-acre pond created on the Gagadiyo riverbed in his village Dudhala in 2008. 'Amrut Sarovar' was a success**
- **Next project was in 2017—the 120-acre Hari Krishna Sarovar created at a junction between three villages. Caters to needs of 50,000 people**
- **Dholakia has put aside 10% of his wealth for the foundation. It is planning 100 ponds, 75 are ready. Is also planting 10 million trees by 2030**
- **State govt has asked foundation to create similar ponds on cost-sharing basis in other arid areas**

Dholakia to construct similar ponds for their villages. Finally, in 2017, Savjibhai decided to go back and take it up in earnest. The first project was Hari Krishna Sarovar, created at a meeting point between three villages, and spread over 120 acres. The soil dredged out was used to create a garden nearby, which has since

become a popular picnic spot for villagers. The three villages, with some 50,000 residents, have now become so self-sufficient that they do not need government water at all.

Buoyed by this success, Dholakia decided to divert 10 per cent of his personal wealth to the foundation to build 100 such ponds, of which 75 are ready.

From Chamardi village to Krankach, a span of 52.9 km are now lined with 149 check dams. The land surrounding the river has roads lined by fruit trees on each side.

In Amreli's arid landscape, this region has transformed into a green oasis. The birds have returned and aquatic life is thriving. In the past eight years, water tables have risen to 15 feet (from 600 feet in the past) in some areas. Best of all, farmers now take three harvests a year. "We have infused no new source of water; this is simply from harvested rainwater," says Dholakia, adding that 75 villages currently benefit from the changed ecology.

The state government has now taken note and has requested the Dholakia Foundation to create similar ponds on a cost-sharing basis in the semi-arid river basins in Siddhpur taluka in north Gujarat. ■



Shri Narendra Modi
Hon'ble Prime Minister



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With a 25% contribution, Guja

Through the 'PM Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana', Gujarat has set a new benchmark. Under various state and central government schemes, more than **11 lakh** rooftop solar installations have been co

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सत्यमेव जयते
Government of Gujarat
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The objective is not merely electricity generation, but to provide future generations with energy security. **Harsh Sanghavi**, Hon'ble Deputy Chief Minister, Gujarat



**ICAR'S NATIONAL RESEARCH
CENTRE ON EQUINES, Bikaner**

Key people: Sharat Chandra Mehta, Head;
Talluri Thirumalai Rao, Senior Scientist

Year of inception: 1989

SAVING DYING BREEDS

The Bikaner branch of the National Research Centre on Equines is researching **surrogacy to improve the health of horse breeds**, has developed technology to track ancestry and disease risks, and has even made their work commercial

By ROHIT PARIHAR



LEAPING THE FENCE

Dr S.C. Mehta, head of the National Research Centre on Equines, at the Bikaner facility next to horses born via surrogacy

Given this centre's efforts in reviving and certifying indigenous horse breeds, the next step is categorising them separately in sports, since their traits differ from imported polo ponies, warm-bloods and thoroughbreds

RAGHUVENDRA SINGH DUNDLOD

Vice President, National Confederation of Indigenous Horse Societies

course—they are trying to certify it as a separate breed and establish standards for its treatment and trading. It is popular in the adjoining Punjab and considered close to the Marwari in DNA.

That's only one of the many efforts being spearheaded at the centre for the wellbeing of Indian horses. They have researched artificial insemination to improve the health of breeds, particularly the endangered ones; developed technology to better track ancestry and disease risks; and even made some of their work commercial. Two Marwari and two Zanskar foals have been produced by the scientists via surrogacy, a process that can "help us save endangered species", says senior scientist Talluri Thirumalai Rao. An embryo transfer technology has been monetised and is being sold to private individuals at a whopping Rs 4 lakh per transaction.

Among the centre's achievements is the development of a DNA chip that can scan hundreds of thousands of locations in a genome and detect genetic variations. The centre is working to make horse semen specimens available around the country and train veterinarians in strengthening the network. The centre itself sells some 400 doses with proven DNA parentage annually, the market rate of a single dose varying from Rs 11,000 to Rs 7 lakh.

Other efforts include raising awareness through ecotourism and setting up a horse museum and carriage rides. ■

WHY IT IS A GEM

► **In a bid to improve the health of breeds, the centre has produced two Marwari and two Zanskar foals via surrogacy**

► **An embryo transfer technology has been monetised and brings in Rs 4 lakh per sale**

► **The centre has made a DNA chip to scan genomes and track ancestry/disease risks**

► **It is working to expand horse semen availability around the country and sells 400 doses annually**

Few know that the spotless white Nukra horse, a staple of North Indian wedding photographs, harbours a dark secret. Its coat is the result of low melanin (the pigment that shields skin from sun damage). Many Nukras suffer skin, eye and genetic problems throughout their life, but observers don't know the pain they undergo, buying them for lakhs of rupees. Four Nukras live on the Bikaner campus of the National Research Centre on Equines. Not bought for a fancy, of

THE TEACHER OF TEACHERS

Pratham has deeply influenced policy and teaching practices in schools across India by **focusing on outcomes rather than just access** and conducting benchmark surveys to assess the quality of education being imparted

By KAUSHIK DEKA



RESETTING THE LEARNING CURVE

Pratham CEO
Rukmini Banerji at a government primary school in Bengaluru

PRATHAM EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION, Mumbai

Key people: **Madhav Chavan, Farida Lambay**, Founders;
Ajay Piramal, Chairman; **Rukmini Banerji**, CEO

Year of inception: 1995

WHY IT IS A GEM

With a presence in 26 states, Pratham reaches 7 million children across India in a typical year

Its Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) and Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) initiatives have become benchmarks of excellence in Indian education

Its Hamara Gaon programme embeds Pratham in communities for 3-5 years to ensure foundational literacy and numeracy spans over 5,000 communities across 18 states



HEMANT MISHRA

P

Pratham began with a simple if unfashionable idea: that education reform in India would succeed only as a societal mission, drawing in government, business and civil society. That instinct shaped Pratham's mission—"Every child in school and learning well"—and continues to influence its work today.

Among Pratham's earliest work was setting up 150 balwadis in Mumbai's poorer neighbourhoods. Community-run and low-cost, these preschools relied on local women and minimal infrastructure. Within two years, Pratham was supporting nearly 3,500 balwadis.

By the late 1990s, though, Pratham's focus widened beyond preschooling.

rural district. By measuring basic reading and arithmetic rather than years of schooling, ASER shifted India's education debate from access to outcomes. Since 2016, ASER has been conducted every alternate year, with intervening editions focusing on specific age groups, including early childhood (ages 4-8) and adolescents (14-18).

The second is Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL), Pratham's answer to the stubborn reality that many children remain unable to read or calculate despite years in school. TaRL groups children by ability, uses simple assessments, temporarily sets aside grade-level curricula and delivers targeted instruction. Evaluated rigorously and replicated across India and in over 20 countries, it has been endorsed by the World Bank's Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel as one of the most cost-effective "Great Buys" in global education.

Pratham has since broadened its remit. Its Early Years programme,

CEO SPEAK

“Ensuring that children build strong foundations early, helping those who have fallen behind to catch up, and doing this consistently across systems and communities, remains our hardest task”

RUKMINI BANERJI, CEO, Pratham

Working with Mumbai's municipal schools, it pioneered urban 'bridge courses' to mainstream out-of-school children, besides the Balsakhi programme that provided remedial support to pupils already enrolled but lagging.

Over time, the organisation learned several lessons of its own. Enrolment, as CEO Rukmini Banerji notes, is not the same as learning. Children progress fastest when grouped by learning level rather than age. Dropouts deserve second chances. These insights found expression in two of Pratham's most influential innovations.

The first is ASER, the Annual Status of Education Report, a nationwide household survey conducted in every

aligned with National Education Policy 2020, emphasises play-based learning, low-cost materials and parental involvement, in statewide partnerships in Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. The Hamara Gaon initiative embeds Pratham in communities for 3-5 years to ensure foundational literacy and numeracy, now spanning over 5,000 communities across 18 states. Its Second Chance programme enables school dropouts—mostly girls and women—to complete Grade 10; nearly 12,000 are expected to sit board exams this year. Pratham has shown how commitment, community and caring can make the impossible possible. ■

REDUCING THE DISEASE BURDEN

AI diagnostics, clinical decisions, disease surveillance—IHF is backing tech start-ups to reimagine public healthcare** around India's lived realities**

By M.G. ARUN

From his office in Mumbai's iconic Elphinstone Building, Madhav Joshi, CEO of India Health Fund (IHF), often reflects on the building's quiet legacy. It was here that Ratan Tata spent his final working years as chairman emeritus of Tata Sons and chairman of Tata Trusts. It was also here, Joshi says, that Tata's vision took institutional shape: that technology-led innovation could make a meaningful difference in healthcare delivery.

Founded in 2017 by Tata Trusts, IHF's mission was ambitious—to eliminate infectious diseases and reduce public health risks in domains where private capital rarely ventures. And how was that to be achieved? By funding start-up technologies that diagnose faster, work more accurately and yet remain affordable.

The timing was critical.

India had announced targets to eliminate tuberculosis by 2025, malaria by 2027, and sharply reduce maternal and child mortality. "Innovation based on science and technology was identified as a potential disruptor," Joshi says, one that could help public programmes close the gap between policy and outcomes. When he joined IHF in 2020, the challenge felt immediate—sharpened further by COVID-19, which brought into focus how innovation could transform diagnosis and treatment.

Today, IHF positions itself as a rare global experiment: private philanthropic capital from a developing country backing solutions built in that country, for the developing world. While it began with TB and malaria, its remit has expanded to antimicrobial resistance, lung health, women's health, besides the growing health impacts of climate change.

Its work is structured around three priorities: enabling earlier diagnosis and treatment through technology; compensating for limitations faced by healthcare workers; and deploying voice and capital to catalyse wider action. The challenge is only growing, given the shift in disease patterns. Mosquitoes, for instance, are moving into regions previously untouched. The Himalayan belt is a good example, Joshi says, where massive outbreaks of dengue have led to high mortality due to a lack of immunity. So, climate-sensitive and water-borne diseases now sit squarely within IHF's focus.

For investments in digital technologies, it has zeroed in on three core areas: diagnostics, clinical decision support and disease surveillance, working closely with institutions such as the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation, National Health Mission, ICMR, AIIMS and the World Health Organization. Solutions are selected through a structured pipeline and subjected to a four-level evaluation.

The portfolio reflects that rigour. IHF-backed Qure.ai's qXR is an AI-powered tool that

EXPERTSPEAK

‘Developing and scaling affordable, easy-to-use point-of-care diagnostics is especially critical for countries like India. IHF’s focus on these core capabilities is aiding the cause of real healthcare’

MURALIDHARAN NAIR
Executive Director, EY

INDIA HEALTH FUND



WHY IT IS A GEM

- » **Deploys philanthropic capital in health domains where markets and investors rarely venture**
- » **Backs and scales affordable, technology-led solutions from India for India and the developing world**
- » **qXR, an AI-powered tool by IHF-backed Qure.ai, uses a smartphone to read chest X-rays for TB within minutes. So far, it has screened over 120,000 people across 128 sites**

BUSINESS ACUMEN
Madhav Joshi joined IHF after 25 years with multinationals like Nestlé and Pfizer

uses a smartphone to read chest X-rays for TB within minutes. So far, it has screened over 120,000 people across 128 sites in India. TrakItNow's Moskeet, a smart device, identifies and traps disease-carrying mosquitoes. Other investments include Medprime's AI tools for faster, cost-effective malaria diagnosis and Hemex Health's handheld Gazelle, now used in 27 countries for detecting sickle cell disease. Molbio's battery-operated TrueNat enables TB testing within 90 minutes, while Huwel Lifesciences' Quantiplus is India's first ICMR-recommended open RT-PCR solution. In a country with an acute shortage of radiologists, such gains are proving to be transformative. ■

FIXING BROKEN CITIES

From national policy advocacy to ground-up capacity-building, **Janaagraha shows how patient institutional reform can reshape Indian cities at scale**

By AJAY SUKUMARAN

When Janaagraha was founded in 2001, its faith was almost romantic: that the organised voice of citizens could be the lever that fixed India's broken cities. Swati and Ramesh Ramanathan, who walked away from successful careers in the US to return to India, believed participatory democracy would be the silver bullet for urban dysfunction. But reality intervened quickly.

"We came in with a very problem-solving approach," says Swati. "What is wrong in our cities? Why isn't government solving it? And therefore, what can we do?" That framing led to a crucial realisation: "You can't avoid working with government if you have ambitions of transformation at scale. Government is the vehicle through which scale happens."

At the same time, the founders insist that this engagement never meant co-option. Over

JANAAGRAHA, Bengaluru

Key people: Swati and Ramesh Ramanathan, Founders; Srikanth Viswanathan, CEO

Year of inception: 2001



HEMANT MISHRA

BENEFICIARY SPEAK

“Ward Samiti Balaga, a coalition formed through Janaagraha’s efforts, connects active citizens across wards and enables direct engagement with civic officials—not just to raise grievances, but to offer solutions”

VIDYA GOGGI, Core team member, Ward Samiti Balaga, Bengaluru

the next 25 years, the organisation would move fluidly between national policy advocacy and painstaking ground-up capacity-building—helping governments reform how cities are planned, built and financed.

Its first major policy breakthrough came with the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM), launched in 2005. The UPA government's flagship urban programme linked central funding to reforms in planning, governance and transparency. "Not many people

know that JNNURM was invented by Janaagraha," says CEO Srikanth Viswanathan. The programme made people look at urban reforms more seriously and push for them.

Alongside policy, Janaagraha experimented with citizen-facing tools—platforms like 'I Paid a Bribe' and 'I Change My City'—before achieving a visible breakthrough in urban design. In 2011, its sister organisation, Jana Urban Space Foundation, introduced TenderSURE, a

standardised road design that reimagined streets as public spaces. Continuous footpaths, cycle tracks, organised utility ducts—features long absent from Indian roads—suddenly became possible. Today, 174 km of TenderSURE roads operate in Bengaluru, with hundreds more under way there and across 17 towns in Uttar Pradesh.

The most consequential reform, however, came in 2020. Janaagraha's advocacy persuaded the 15th Finance Commission to make the publication of audited financial statements mandatory for urban local bodies to receive grants. The impact was far-reaching: nearly 95 per cent of India's 4,300-



WHY IT IS A GEM

- » **Helped embed urban renewal into national policy, making city governance more accountable and reform-oriented**

- » **Showed that working with government—without being co-opted—can make real change**

- » **Strengthened tools cities need to grow sustainably through audited municipal accounts and standardised road design**

plus urban local bodies now publish audited accounts. Janaagraha also helped build cityfinance.in, the portal that underpins this shift.

Why does this matter? Because credible balance sheets unlock capital. "The US built its infrastructure by channelising long-term pension and insurance funds into municipal bonds," says Viswanathan. "Once data credibility improves, you will see massive changes in urban financing." By 2050, more than half of India will live in cities. For Janaagraha, there's much to be done and no time to lose. ■



SOWING THE SEEDS OF SUSTENANCE

Through decades of grassroots work, the Koppulas have translated ecological principles into livelihood security for thousands of marginal and tribal farmers

By SONAL KHETARPAL

If you ask Samamma, Tuljamma, Syamamma or anyone else in Bidakanne village about the Koppulas, their faces soften instantly. Smiles arrive first, followed by stories—and often tears. For decades, villagers say, Narsanna, 66, and Padma Koppula, 56, quietly changed the meaning of land, dignity and survival for families who once lived at the margins of rural life in the harsh Deccan outback. Always dressed in simple cotton clothes, the husband-and-wife environmentalist duo has have worked across Telangana and Andhra Pradesh since 1987, enabling farmers who were landless to gain land and self-reliance.

In 1999, the Koppulas turned their home in Sangareddy district of Telangana into a learning and community space called Aranya—Sanskrit for forest. What was once 11.5 acres of rocky wasteland was transformed into a lush natural farm built on the principles of permaculture and forest farming. The idea is straightforward: produce food without destroying the planet. “Aranya was created to be a functional farm to show small and marginal farmers how even one to three acres can serve

all their needs,” says Narsanna. “They can grow everything they need for a healthy diet, whether it is cereals, pulses, vegetables, fruits or nuts, along with cash crops and also rear animals to ensure economic independence.”

Since 2014, the Koppulas have opened Aranya to the world through a 13-day residential permaculture course held every month for imbibing the principles of sustainable environment and natural ecosystems. Days begin at 6 am and often stretch late into the night, fuelled by discussions and farm work. Their daughter, daughter-in-law and community members help run the programme, ensuring that knowledge is passed across generations. “Land is the most ethical investment one can make,” says Padma. “It offers fresh

air, nutritious food and good health to the next generation.” While running the course is demanding, the aim, she adds, is to ensure that learning remains accessible to anyone who can spare 13 days. Without advertising, each course draws 20-50 participants aged 18-60 from India and abroad. Over the past decade, 5,252 students from 72 countries have been trained at Aranya.

Ajaya Kumar Vemulapati, chairman, Andhra Pradesh Township and Infrastructure Development Corporation, likens the couple to *Kung Fu Panda*'s Grandmaster Oogway—the ancient tortoise mentor who represents calm authority, deep wisdom and hard-earned life experience. “Since the 1980s, their lives have been guided by a simple principle: give back to nature

BENEFICIARY SPEAK

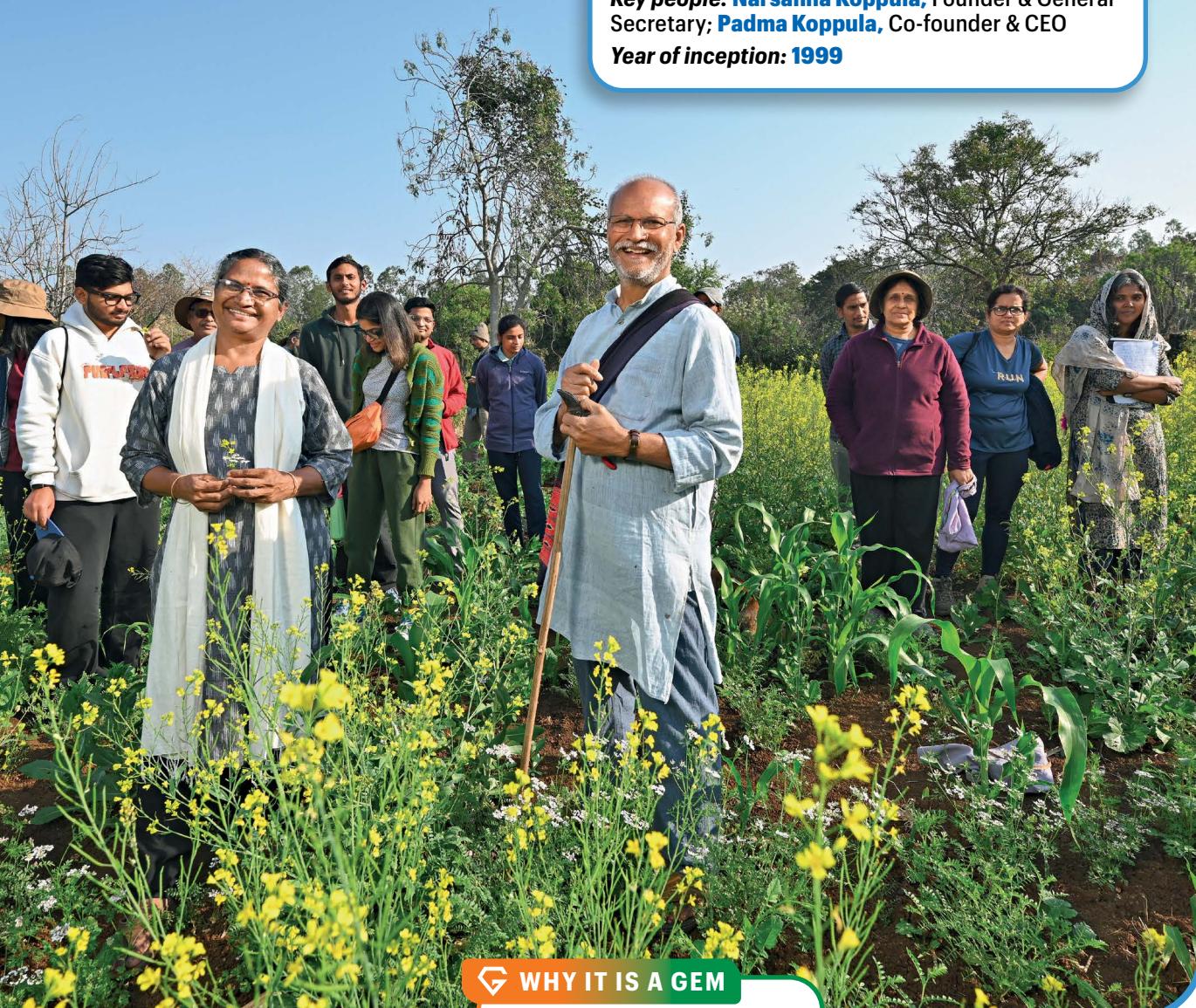
“**The greatest gift the Koppulas gave us was land ownership. Today, each of the 150 families here owns at least an acre of land. We practise regenerative farming, grow diverse crops, rear milch animals. Each family earns around Rs 10,000 per month and is self-reliant**”

SAMAMMA, Farmer from Bidakanne village, Sangareddy, Telangana

LIVING CLASSROOM Padma and Narsanna Koppula with participants of a residential permaculture course at Aranya

ARANYA AGRICULTURAL ALTERNATIVES, Sangareddy, Telangana

Key people: **Narsanna Koppula**, Founder & General Secretary; **Padma Koppula**, Co-founder & CEO
Year of inception: 1999



Photograph by ARUN KUMAR

what you take, and never take more than you need," he notes.

When not teaching, the couple travels extensively across Telangana and beyond, advising farmers on sustainable agriculture and water rejuvenation. They have worked with more than 1,300 tribal families in Nirmal and Adilabad districts and 2,600 farmers in Sangareddy, helping them secure land, improve yield and become self-sustaining, all through natural farming. Governments, too, seek their counsel. Today, Aranya Agricultural Alternatives serves as a Lead Natural Farming Institute

WHY IT IS A GEM

► **The founders have transformed an 11.5-acre rocky wasteland into a thriving natural farm, showing how permaculture can deliver food security, income and ecological balance**

► **250,000 farmers have been trained in drought-efficient water management practices; another 20,000 farmers and students in permaculture design principles**

(LNFI) for three Telangana districts under the National Mission for Natural Farming. In Andhra Pradesh, the Koppulas have tended to land's companion, water, supporting large-scale drought mitigation, involving 15,000 farmers across 36 villages.

Aranya also attracts unexpected visitors—filmmaker S.S. Rajamouli among them—who arrive seeking guidance on building food forests. Titles are left at the gate. What remains is the Koppulas' quiet ethic: plant indigenous trees, respect land and animals, honour organic matter and ensure jobs for the locals. ■



LENINNIYAN



THE GIFT OF SIGHT

Trained medics and top doctors **operating the latest machines have restored the eyesight of millions, mostly for free.** Day in, day out, this is what Aravind Eye Hospital does to remain true to its founding vision

By KAVITHA MURALIDHARAN



ARAVIND EYE HOSPITAL, Madurai

Key people: Dr Govindappa Venkataswamy, Founder; Dr R.D. Ravindran, Chairman
Year of inception: 1976

F

From the early hours of the morning, the corridors of Aravind Eye Hospital in Madurai are a hive of activity, teeming with patients. Many are elderly, many come from rural areas. They wait patiently for consultations, screenings and surgeries. What began as an 11-bed eye clinic has grown into the nerve centre of the Aravind Eye Care System, a globally recognised institution built around a simple goal: eliminating needless blindness.

Founded in 1976 by Dr Govindappa Venkataswamy—a retired government ophthalmologist known as Dr V—Aravind was born out of both urgency and conviction. “That single vision of eliminating blindness continues to guide everything we do,” says Dr R.D. Ravindran, chairman of Aravind Eye Hospital. The hospital emerged from the merger of five private ophthalmology practices run by Dr V and four of his colleagues, who formed a trust dedicated to charitable eye care.

Within a year, Aravind’s focus shifted towards community outreach. By 1977, eye camps became central to its work, taking services deep into rural areas. “What began as a small initiative grew rapidly,” says Dr Ravindran. “Last year alone, eye camps accounted for around 110,000 surgeries.”

Yet the leadership soon realised that camps alone could not offer a solution to rural eyecare. This led to the establishment of vision centres in 2004—permanent, facilities located in rural areas. From a single centre serving about 3,000 people a year, Aravind

now operates 120 vision centres across Tamil Nadu and Puducherry, serving roughly 3,500 patients daily. “Over 1.1 million patients were treated in these centres last year,” Dr Ravindran notes.

Staffed by trained paramedics and digitally connected to doctors across Aravind’s hospitals, the centres ensure that only about 10 per cent of patients need referral for surgery or advanced investigation. “Nearly 80 per cent of our patients receive free treatment, covering a rural population of nearly ten million,” he says.

BENEFICIARY SPEAK

“I nearly lost my sight due to an eye ulcer. At Aravind, they performed a surgery and fully cured me. The care I received there was extraordinary”

S. VELLAIAAPPAN, an onion shop owner from Tiruchy

Supporting this ecosystem is Aurolab, Aravind’s manufacturing arm, which produces 3.5–4 million intraocular lenses annually at a fraction of global costs. “Every ten seconds, somewhere in the world, a patient is operated on using an IOL made in Madurai,” says Dr Ravindran. Despite handling nearly 20,000 outpatients and up to 3,000 surgeries a day, Aravind maintains one of the lowest infection rates globally. Nearly five decades on, Aravind Eye Hospital stands as proof that scale, compassion and clinical excellence can coexist. And it can transform lives. ■

WHY IT IS A GEM

► Aravind took quality eyecare to rural areas, treating 90 per cent free of cost

► Eye camps are central to its work, with 110,000 surgeries in 2025 in over 3,000 camps

► These, with 120 vision centres, perform 700,000 surgeries and handle 5-6 million patients

► Aurolab, Aravind’s manufacturing arm, makes 3.5-4 million intraocular lenses a year at a fraction of global costs

**ECOTOURISM AND CONSERVATION
SOCIETY OF SIKKIM (ECOSS), Sikkim**

Key people: Prem Das Rai, Chairman;
Rajendra Prasad Gurung, CEO

Year of inception: 2001



HEALTHY LIVING
Paul Karna Rai at his
homestay in Assam
Lingzey village, Gangtok

Photograph by ARUN KUMAR

THE ECOFRIENDLY CHAMPION

An **NGO in Sikkim** is empowering villagers through sustainable tourism and water management strategies that reverse environmental damage

By ARKAMOY DATTA MAJUMDAR



WHY IT IS A GEM

► **The NGO has helped 100 new homestays come up around Sikkim that are both lucrative and environmentally responsible**

► **It has renewed springs and groundwater sources that villages need for drinking and farming**

Two planks are central to this NGO's work in Sikkim: water and tourism. By combining them adeptly, they have started a virtuous cycle of healthy farm produce, steady passive incomes and lucrative skill-building across local communities. Called the Ecotourism & Conservation Society of Sikkim (ECOSS), it is a

grassroots organisation that has been working in one of India's most eco-sensitive regions for more than two decades to nudge locals towards homegrown environment-friendly policies. Founded in January 2001 and based in Gangtok, it

is inspired by the simple idea that Sikkim's natural wealth cannot be protected unless local communities steer the conversation.

Ecofriendly homestays have been a big part of ECOSS's strategy. By studying models across rural Sikkim, documenting their economic and social impact and feeding these findings to the government, the organisation has helped ensure that regulations are grounded in lived experience. "Success has drawn in younger people, many of whom are eager to start homestays of their own. Trekking routes that had fallen silent are vibrant again, offering visitors organic food, clean moun-

tain air and an experience rooted in a living landscape," says Paul Karna Rai, a local homestay owner. "Once a few households saw homestays could actually generate income while preserving local cultures and dignity, the model sold itself," says Prem Das Rai, Founder and Chairman at ECOSS. The NGO has made a five-year ecotourism marketing plan under the Japan International Cooperation Agency project for the state forest department.

Water is the other critical local concern, which extends to the larger Himalayan region. In collaboration with National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development, ECOSS has implemented a water conservation project in Raigaon village to recharge the source of mountain streams. These interventions involve renewing springs and rejuvenating groundwater sources that villages need for drinking and farming.

Today, ECOSS stands as a rare example of an organisation that has evolved with Sikkim itself: grounded in local realities, trusted by communities and respected by governments and international partners alike. Its story is not one of spectacle, but of steady, thoughtful work, reshaping how development is imagined in the fragile Eastern Himalayas. ■

EXPERTSPEAK

“ECOSS’s greatest strength is connecting with local communities by speaking their language and understanding their customs. Locals take ownership of new initiatives”

OMI GURUNG

Environmentalist, also known as The Green Man of Sikkim

WOMEN POWER Majlis director Audrey D'Mello (centre, in black) with her team in Mumbai.



MAJLIS LEGAL CENTRE FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN, Mumbai

Key people: Flavia Agnes, Founder; Audrey D'Mello, Director

Year of inception: 1991

WAGING JUSTICE AGAINST ABUSE

With domestic violence and sexual abuse against women and children a sordid reality, Majlis Legal Centre takes this ogre head on and provides victims with the wherewithal and strength to emerge stronger from their ordeals

By DHAVALS. KULKARNI



MANDAR DEODHAR

WHY IT IS A GEM

- » **Majlis, through its all-women team of lawyers, provides socio-legal help to domestic/ sexual abuse victims**
- » **It also conducts training for police, public prosecutors, judiciary and social workers**
- » **It has supported over 100,000 women and child victims and trained around 40,000 officials**

If

justice is a hard-won commodity, it is even more so for victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse, mostly children and women. On one hand exists an unfeeling justice system bristling with masculine barbs; on the other, a harsh, judging society. This is where Majlis, launched in 1991 by Flavia Agnes, has been making a difference—from providing socio-legal aid to domestic/ sexual abuse victims to policy-level interventions, and capacity-building for stakeholders like the police. A victim of domestic abuse herself, Agnes left home and got a law degree. As she started practising, she realised there weren't lawyers with a feminist understanding. Today, the association of women lawyers and activists has an all-women team. Their focus is on helping women, especially victims of violence, to litigate. "Women feel their lawyers can be compromised as husbands are richer. Here, they feel secure as the lawyer cannot be compromised," says Agnes, adding that lawyers worked pro bono or for nominal fees for victims. "Majlis is a unique organisation that works on the rights of women and children. We started at a time when the term 'domestic violence' was not uttered," says Audrey D'Mello, director. "Transforming victims into survivors is the role it plays."

Not just that, Majlis conducts role-specific training for investigating officers, the judiciary, lawyers, members of the child welfare committee and social workers.

"The whole idea is to demystify the laws," says D'Mello. Agnes says that they made courts women-friendly through their policy interventions, including removing the ceiling on maintenance given to deserted women, making divorce accessible for Christian women and conducting identification parades with sensitivity for the dignity of rape victims. "The tidal wave of violence against women and children is far from over. We need not just lawyers who litigate, but women and children aware of their rights," says

BENEFICIARY SPEAK

“I was thrown out by my husband, with nothing to fall back on. Majlis placed me in a shelter, provided legal aid, supported me in the lockdown. My case is at the mediation stage”

SALONI, a cook, who was told about Majlis by a neighbour

Ingrid Srinath, a board member.

Majlis works with partners like the Akanksha Foundation, which runs schools in Mumbai, Pune and Nagpur with municipal corporations, and Creative Handicrafts, an NGO that provides skilling to underprivileged women. These groups refer women and children in distress to Majlis. How secure that safety net was became evident during COVID-19, when the Majlis team, at substantial risk, helped women abandoned by the system. ■

THE MENTAL HEALTH COLLECTIVE

As India's mental health needs surge, a new alliance is highlighting that coordination, and not launching more isolated programmes, is the missing link

By SONALI ACHARJEE

I

India's mental health crisis is most acutely experienced in moments of uncertainty—where to seek help, how to judge quality and whom to trust in a fragmented system. These questions became personal for Vasvi Bharat Ram, joint vice chairperson of The Shri Ram Schools, when her daughter began struggling with her mental health. “I was forced to confront a reality I had never fully understood,” she recalls.

Although her family eventually accessed care, the experience sharpened her awareness of inequity within the system. India continues to face an alarming mental health treatment gap—the share of people who need care but do not receive it is estimated at over 95 per cent. The gap has grown more acute in the post-COVID years, particularly among children and young adults. “Mental health is not

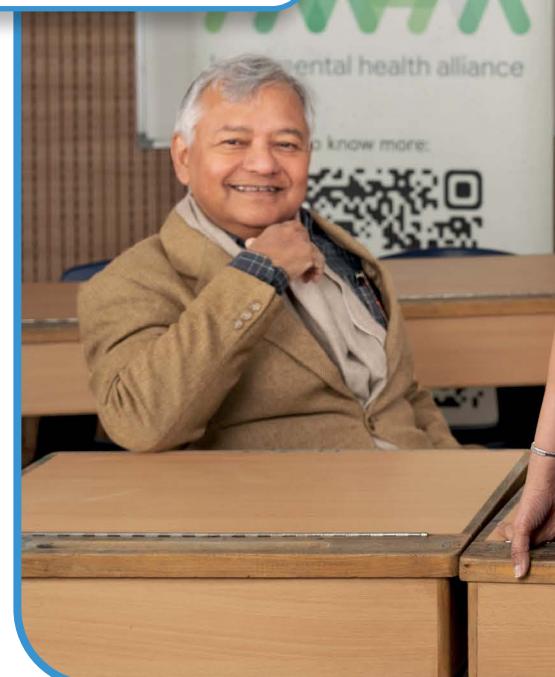
a niche issue; it cuts across education, livelihoods, gender, poverty, productivity and overall wellbeing,” says Vasvi. “With every fourth person in the country impacted, this is a core development issue.”

That understanding shaped the founding of the India Mental Health Alliance (IMHA) in 2023. Rather than pursuing siloed programmes, the alliance was conceived as a systems-level intervention. A cross-sector platform, it brought together service providers, researchers, philanthropists, policymakers and, most importantly, people with lived experience of mental illness. In its first year itself, it grew to include 250 member organisations across 30-plus states and Union territories, making it India's largest mental health coalition.

“India's mental health work is vast and community-rooted, yet often invisible, while philanthropists lack clear pathways to invest for impact. As awareness and prevalence rise, the challenge is scale—across prevention, intervention and postvention,” notes Dr Kavita Arora, a child and adolescent psychiatrist,

INDIA MENTAL HEALTH ALLIANCE, Gurugram

Key person: Vasvi Bharat Ram, Founding Trustee
Year of inception: 2023



who is the co-founder of Children First and part of the IMHA founding cohort. So the alliance works on curating shared knowledge, strengthening organisational and practitioner capacity, and enabling collaboration rather than duplication. A flagship initiative is its open-source online Knowledge Centre, aimed at making mental healthcare more navigable for families, practitioners and frontline workers.



“Mental health does not improve through performative urgency. It requires patience, trust and sustained investment. Our measure of success is not how often we trend but whether care pathways are clearer, professionals feel supported and people seeking help face fewer barriers”

VASVI BHARAT RAM, Founding Trustee, IMHA

GUIDING MINDS

Vasvi Bharat Ram and Ashish Bharat Ram (centre) with Dr Amit Sen and Dr Kavita Arora



HARDIK CHHABRA

WHY IT IS A GEM

► United 250 organisations across 30+ states/UTs, enabling knowledge sharing

► Reached 1,600+ mental health professionals in 130+ cities through capacity-building programmes

► Centred voices of people with lived experience of mental illness for better implementation of the Mental Healthcare Act

A defining principle of IMHA's approach is foregrounding 'lived experience expertise'. "Mental health cannot be looked at from a purely biomedical, expert-driven lens," explains Vasvi. "Care must be humane, trusted and responsive to communities." Alongside this, the alliance supports better implementation of the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017, working with governments as ecosystem partners.

Since its launch, IMHA has reached over 1,600 mental health professionals across more than 130 cities through capacity-building programmes, hosted national conventions, enabled peer learning, and mobilised philanthropic capital. Built quietly and collaboratively, it is working to ensure that mental health in India is accorded the structural priority it has long lacked. ■

LIFE LESSONS Suman More (with cap) and her friends with their solar dryer; (right) queue at the Sankalp 'milk ATM' in Urali Kanchan

Photographs by MANDAR DEODHAR



RURAL SALVATION

BAIF's work among the rural masses since the late 1960s, especially in dairying and women's empowerment, has helped lift thousands out of poverty

By DHAVAL S. KULKARNI

Uruli Kanchan village, located some 30 km from Pune, first emerged on the map in 1946 when Mahatma Gandhi came to start a nature cure ashram here. He selected Manibhai Desai, still in his 20s, to manage it. Desai was later involved in a raft of rural initiatives, such as India's first cooperative lift irrigation scheme in the 1960s, even a sugar cooperative, before launching Bharatiya Agro Industries Foundation (BAIF) in 1967.

In 1970, BAIF pioneered the doorstep delivery of artificial insemination (AI) services for dairy farmers. "This helped boost milk production from the two litres per animal then.... If cattle breeds had not improved, milk production in India would have stagnated," says Bharat Kakade, the current president and managing trustee of the BAIF Development Research Foundation, while pointing to its role in India's 'White Revolution'. BAIF has

WHY IT IS A GEM

BAIF's doorstep delivery of artificial insemination services for dairy farmers played a vital role in the White Revolution

BAIF's work now extends from women SHGs to climate-resilient farming to the 'Wadi' programme for tribal areas

3.9 mn families in 17 states have benefited from BAIF initiatives



BAIF DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH FOUNDATION, Uruli Kanchan, Pune

Key people: Hrishikesh Mafatlal, Chairperson, BAIF; Bharat Kakade, President & Managing Trustee **Year of inception:** 1967

created a cadre of technicians to help in AI procedures and animal healthcare, a model replicated by state governments and dairies, and has also developed a number of varieties of fodder. The organisation is also part of a consortium that has developed Single Nucleotide Polymorphism (SNP) chips for cattle and buffaloes, the DNA markers helping to identify superior quality animals. A few BAIF centres are now even furnished with unique 'milk ATMs' that dispense quality homogenised milk.

In 1982, BAIF launched the 'Wadi' programme to help boost incomes of families in the tribal areas of Maharashtra and Gujarat. Wadi combines agriculture, horticulture and forestry practices, and includes rejuvenation of village ponds and development of nurseries. Surveys, Kakade says, suggest it has helped increase green cover and reduce poverty in Gujarat's tribal districts. The programme is now being replicated in Maharashtra's Gadchiroli.

BAIF has also launched several

tion of 70 women from these groups, sells products manufactured by these SHGs. This has helped women like Suman Shankar More in Uruli Kanchan earn some extra money. She has a solar conduction dryer to make products like dehydrated onions and lemons, which retail at the Sankalp outlet.

Kakade says BAIF is also working on climate-resilient agriculture, especially in water-use efficiency, as well as soil and landscape management. The 65-acre BAIF Rural Innovation Centre (BRIC) campus at Uruli Kanchan features a range of innovations, including an agrivoltaic project, which generates solar energy while growing crops such as chillies, beans and bananas. Plans now include floating panels, windmills and even a hydrogen plant.

The BAIF president says that when working with a new community, their first challenge is breaking down barriers. There are times when local communities are fearful, especially if they have had bitter experiences in the past. Kakade cites an instance from 1997, when villagers in the Amraudha block in Kanpur Dehat made BAIF officials sign an agreement and even take an oath at the local temple that they would not swindle them or take over their land. "We later sank borewells there, which now help farmers grow wheat," says Kakade. The village was transformed in just three years. ■

BENEFICIARY SPEAK

“BAIF provides quality semen under its AI programme. I have six Holstein Friesian cows sired from it, and they give 25 litres of milk each on average. They have better disease resistance too”

GANESH DHAMAL, Dairy farmer in Uruli Kanchan, Pune

self-help groups to develop entrepreneurship and provide livelihoods, some of which now have a national presence. Lata Sharma, who heads the training and community health programme, says that around Uruli Kanchan alone, they have 132 SHGs with 2,000 women members. Sankalp, an umbrella federa-

Key people: Varsha Mehta, Chairperson; Pradyut Bhattacharjee, Executive Director
Year of inception: 2011

WOMAN POWER TO THE FORE

As SeSTA spurs development in the Northeast, it draws ever closer to its goals: eliminating poverty, empowering women, and ensuring good health and climate change resilient villages

By ATIQUIL HABIB



D

Development, covering the entirety of citizens' economic lives, is an inalienable right. Thus, it all began with a question: why is Northeast India, despite its dense networks of community action, deprived of development institutions that stayed long enough to understand local realities? Founded on the principle of *nirman*—constructive development—Seven Sisters Development Assistance (SeSTA) grew out of the belief that lasting change would

come not from short-term projects, but from building livelihoods, institutions and confidence from the ground up.

SeSTA's development works show up in quiet ways—women learning to negotiate market prices, households opening their first bank accounts, fallow land returning to use. The organisation sees itself as a catalyst enabling rural communities, especially women and marginalised groups, to move beyond cycles of poverty while holding on to cultural roots. SeSTA's work weaves together economic activity and social inclusion. Poultry and pig farms, handlooms and agriculture are paired with training, access to welfare schemes, financial/ digital literacy and climate-resilient practices.

Nirali Rabha runs a pig farm, initially funded by SeSTA, since 2021.

EXPERTSPEAK

“SeSTA knows that rural livelihoods are a way of life. This grounding gives it an edge: early investments in locally suited pilots to groom persons who combine skill with commitment to rural development”

DHRUBA JYOTI GOGOI
 State Project Manager, Assam State Rural Livelihoods Mission



NILOTPAL BARUAH

"Many schemes exist, but we don't know how to access them. SeSTA helps us reach what is meant for us," she says. Tribini Bala Rai, associated with SeSTA since 2017, rears goats, keeps bees, cultivates black rice and manages vermicompost. She sold vermicompost worth Rs 90,000 just in 2024. "Low-interest loans and training made this possible," she says.

SeSTA's work has its challenges. Executive director Pradyut Bhattacharjee points to staffing and funding as persistent hurdles. Attracting committed professionals—particularly women—to physically demanding fieldwork is difficult. SeSTA tries to address this by offering stable employment, statutory benefits and long-term career pathways. Funding,

too, is filtered. "We have turned down funds that compromise our ecological or social values," Bhattacharjee says. "Trust is our biggest challenge. We enter communities with new ideas, asking people to change long-held practices. That cannot be rushed. It has to be earned," he adds.

What works in Assam's flood-prone plains, SeSTA learned early, cannot be copied wholesale in Meghalaya's hills or Arunachal Pradesh's remote valleys.

Every intervention is shaped by terrain, culture and local markets.

From its headquarters in Guwahati, SeSTA operates field offices across 60 development blocks. Among its 184 staff members, nearly half are women—a reflection of its priorities. Rather than replacing government systems, SeSTA works alongside them. It commits to years, not months, in each block—long enough for skills to transfer and institutions to stand on their own. ■

WHY IT IS A GEM

► **SeSTA aims at economic development of the Northeast by building capabilities in rural areas**

► **It collectivises women and the marginalised to form self-help groups to start small businesses**

► **SeSTA has worked with 250,000 women farmers and families across 4,500 villages in 30 districts of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh**



AAJI CARE, Mumbai, Pune and Goa

Key people: **Prasad Bhide**, Founder and CEO, a former IT professional

Year of inception: **2012**

ENSURING DIGNITY FOR THE AGED

Aaji Care, an assisted-living centre for senior citizens, is raising standards of palliative care in three major cities and bringing long-overdue respect to caregivers

By SUHANI SINGH

A NEW LIFE FOR THE OLD
Founder Prasad Bhide at an
Aaji Care centre in Mumbai



MILIND SHETTY

WHY IT IS A GEM

Since its inception, Aaji Care has served almost 20,000 elders and trained 3,000 caregivers

It maintains five assisted-living centres. Their goal for the next five years is to have 1,000 beds across 10 cities

They also aim to provide 3,000 families with domestic caregivers



Around 20 senior citizens are seated for a yoga class, being assisted by a host of young caregivers. Though some days of the week are occupied by such fitness activities, including physiotherapy, there is leisure too—weekly movie nights, trips to gardens and restaurants, and bhajan renditions. Welcome to Aaji Care, an assisted living centre for elders diagnosed with dementia or in need of post-operative and palliative care. With a staff that includes nurses, geriatric counsellors and therapists, the centre is a viable alternative for those unable to devote time to ailing parents.

"I always knew I wanted to help people and make a difference," says Prasad Bhide, Founder and CEO of Aaji Care. In 2011, when his own mother was bedridden for three months and needed specialised care at home, Bhide discovered a giant void in the senior healthcare sector in India. "What struck me was that there was no training for those working at home with the elderly. In most cases, the domestic help would be asked to assist," he says. Bhide did a two-month diploma in home health education from Bayada, one of the largest providers in the United States, moved to India to understand the market and subsequently quit his well-paying job at TCS to start Aaji Care. He began with a training centre for caregivers which didn't just familiarise them with the challenges faced by the elderly but worked to change the attitudes of families towards domestic caregivers, so that they could have more professional dignity. "Everyone wants to be in the comfort of their home, that's the first choice. There's still a lot of stigma attached to keeping parents in assisted-living centres. Families wonder, *'Log kya kahenge'* (What will people say)? We offer them counselling to help them understand the benefits," he says. "To care for the elderly, one needs people who are compassionate

and patient. Before being hired, our attendants undergo a thorough psychological assessment."

As the demand to set up more centres across India increases, Bhide has so far resisted the franchise model. "Quality work is needed. We need to make it 100 per cent foolproof," he says. For now, his focus is to start a retail shop with products for senior citizens. Talks are on with builders to develop retirement homes for 55-80-year-olds in cities. "I don't want to disrupt their social circle," he says.

BENEFICIARY SPEAK

My father, 90, has age-related cognitive issues. Aaji Care's attendant gradually connected with him. Old people can be stubborn, but he went from never leaving the house to going for walks and doing crosswords. You want your parents to be happy. My father is

SANJAY MADHUKAR

KIMBAHUNE

Senior IT professional

From being the lone soldier in this field a decade back, Bhide has seen the sector grow, but admits that there is still a long way to go. India still has no council to register caregivers for elders and there are no standards in place for senior care centres. Bhide is working with the National Accreditation Board for Hospitals to release guidelines and get Aaji Care its certification. "Caregivers will transform the economy like engineers and nurses have," he says. "In the next 10 years, we will start exporting caregivers to other countries with an ageing population." ■



GEMS OF INDIA

SAVIOUR OF OUR RICE DIVERSITY

Basudha's yeoman service in preserving traditional rice varieties has **not just preserved forgotten seeds but also created a grassroots network of biodiversity custodians**

By ARKAMOY DATTA MAJUMDAR

A

A dedicated ecological farm and conservation initiative, Basudha functions as a trust under the Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies (CIS), an umbrella organisation working on preserving traditional crop diversity, especially for India's indigenous rice varieties. Basudha ('Earth Mother' in Bengali) now works out of a 1.7-acre farm in a tribal village in the Bissam Cuttack area of Rayagada district in southern Odisha, where farmers and researchers gather and learn about tra-

ditional agricultural practices, organic farming and ecological architecture.

At the heart of its work is the collection and regeneration of indigenous rice varieties. Founder and conservation scientist Debal Deb says over the past many years, he has collected 1,480 varieties of rice, of which some 800 varieties are preserved only on Basudha's farm or in national/international gene banks. Another 180 'rarest' varieties are not known to exist anywhere outside Basudha's farm. To maintain genetic integrity and purity, the centre verifies 56 phenotypic features in each rice variety every year. Deb points out that till the 1970s, the Indian subcontinent hosted an estimated 110,000 distinct varieties of rice. Decades of industrial hybrid seed adoption and modern crop practices have dramatically

SEEDING THE FUTURE

Basudha founder Debal Deb with young farmers and researchers



WHY IT IS A GEM

► **Basudha founder Debal Deb has collected 1,480 varieties of traditional rice; only he has 180 'rarest' ones**

► **17,000 farmers in 8 states have got seeds from Basudha; 20,000 more now cultivate these grains**

► **To maintain genetic purity, the centre verifies 56 phenotypic features in each rice variety every year**

Key person: Debal Deb,
Founder, Conservation
scientist

Year of inception: 2001
(Bankura campus), 2012
(Rayagada campus)



BENEFICIARY SPEAK

“This rice has helped maintain my standing in our community. A hectare yields 24 quintals annually. When my relatives or friends visit and we serve it, they are overwhelmed by the aroma and taste”

KRUSHNA KAMHAR, Farmer from Rayagada

reduced this diversity, leaving only around 6,000 varieties extant today.

Around 17,000 farmers across eight Indian states have received rice seeds from Basudha, 7,000 of them in Odisha alone. These farmers do not pay for the seeds; instead, they agree to share the benefits with others. With this multiplier effect, another 20,000 farmers have taken up cultivation of these traditional rice forms, creating a grassroots network of biodiversity custodians. Prof. Subhasis Mondal, from the department of plant physiology, Bidhan Chandra Krishi Viswavidyalaya, says, “Basudha’s conservation is not just on paper. It is through participatory farming, which helps these genes

survive and grow.”

Deb worked initially in Bankura, West Bengal, but the lack of interest among farmers there led him to relocate his conservation efforts to Odisha in 2012, where the work has flourished. Over the years, Basudha’s seeds and conservation practices have gained popularity among farming communities not only in eastern India but in states such as Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka and Maharashtra, where farmers are reviving and cultivating ancestral rice varieties.

To collect the rare seeds, Deb has travelled across states, often in punishing conditions. On one such journey in Bengal, he travelled through relentless rain for a whole day to reach a remote village in Lataguri, in Jalpaiguri district. The goal: collect seeds of a near-forgotten rice variety, Agnishal. “That day,” he remembers, “I was soaked to the bone. But I kept thinking—if I don’t reach today, the seeds may disappear forever.” It is this dedication that has built Basudha’s identity in rice conservation circles all over the world. ■

GUARDIAN ANGEL OF MINORS

Miguel Das Queah has helped many a child in Assam overcome their fear and speak up against sexual abuse by enabling a safe, child-friendly policing environment

By HRIJOY DAS KANUNGO

A

s a young graduate in 2008, Miguel Das Queah found the answer to the social stigma and systemic injustice around him in a question, posed to him by then president A.P.J. Abdul Kalam at an interaction. As he ranted about all that was wrong in the country, Kalam asked him, “What can you do to make it right? Do you have a plan?” Miguel did not. Kalam’s advice—“Go out and do things. You’ll figure it out”—became his North Star.

Miguel’s initial plan was to start an NGO in Delhi focused on youth issues. That changed when at an event at an old age home in Guwahati, he met celebrated litterateur Mamoni Raisom Goswami, who asked him what he was doing in Delhi. Her words—“If you can’t clean your own courtyard, you can’t clean the world”—stuck with him.

Miguel did start in his own courtyard—Hafiz Nagar, a slum near his home in Guwahati. In his conversations with residents, he found that while the adults spoke of abuse, low wages and hardship, the children were mostly silent. It alarmed him. Having been a survivor of child sexual abuse, Miguel realised that children often lack the language, space or safety to express their problems.



NILOTPALBARUAH

WHY IT IS A GEM

Since 2013, 300 child sexual abuse survivors have received end-to-end support, from FIR registration to investigation and trial

300 POCSO cases were legally supported, leading to arrests in all cases and 50 convictions

3,000+ police personnel have been trained under the Assam Police Sishu Mitra Programme on child-related laws, child-friendly procedures and investigation protocols



He had finally found his purpose: child welfare, protection and empowerment.

This became UTSAH, meaning inspiration in Assamese, the organisation Miguel formally registered in 2011. Starting with informal education sessions and cleanliness drives, UTSAH pivoted to structured legal intervention when during Holi in March 2013, it handled its first case of child sexual abuse, among the earliest prosecuted under the POCSO Act in the region. The conviction in 2014 placed UTSAH at the centre of Assam's child protection framework.

In 2017, UTSAH and the Assam Police jointly designed a structured

programme focused on child-friendly policing. Formally launched in 2019 as the Assam Police Sishu Mitra Programme, it placed empathy at its core—training police personnel to interact with children without uniforms, ensure timely production before Child Welfare Committees, maintain proper

documentation, coordinate with social workers and uphold justice.

In 2023, the Supreme Court upheld Sishu Mitra and UTSAH's founder as a shining example at annual stakeholders' consultations on child protection. Miguel could not have asked for a better validation. ■

SURVIVORSPEAK

“My daughter was 12 when an influential cardiologist in Guwahati sexually assaulted her. When confronted, he threatened us. UTSAH gave us the courage to fight back”

PARENT OF A CHILD SURVIVOR assisted by UTSAH


BETHANY SOCIETY, Shillong

Key people: Shirleen A. B. Sawkmie, President; Carmo Noronha, Secretary; Bertha G. Dkhar, Executive Director

Year of inception: 1981

AN EQUAL CHANCE

Visually impaired students at the computer lab of the Jyoti Sroat School

Photographs by NILOTPAL BARUAH

HELPING HAND IN THE HILLS

Bethany Society's work with physically and mentally challenged children in Meghalaya has transformed many lives

By APARMITA DAS

Pynhoi Tang, 42, still remembers standing on the roadside every morning, crying, as other children walked past with schoolbags. Visually impaired and repeatedly pushed out of school, she was labelled 'difficult'. In the mid-1990s, a neighbour took her to Bethany Society in Shillong. Later, when Pynhoi's mother returned to their village, she stayed back. Today, Pynhoi

works at the NEIGRIHMS hospital in Shillong, supports her family financially, and remains closely connected to Bethany.

Stories like hers have defined the Bethany Society's work since 1981. Founded by Sister Rosario Lopez, a Spanish nun working in the remote Garo Hills, the society began when she repeatedly encountered children who were



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HOTHOUSE OF TALENT
Danisius Manih, who is hearing impaired, was trained in agriculture and works as a field assistant in Shillong

WHY IT IS A GEM

► **Its Jyoti Sroat School became inclusive from 2006, as children with and without disabilities started studying together**

► **Works across health, livelihood and social inclusion, following a community-based approach**

► **Partners with organisations across the Northeast, sharing programmes and building capacity**

blind, deaf or intellectually challenged. What started as healthcare expanded into disability-focused intervention. By the mid-1980s, Bethany had shifted base to Tura and, in 1992, opened the Jyoti Sroat School and Roilang Livelihood Academy in Shillong, to promote education and vocational training.

"When the school began in the

later, when students began passing board exams, public opinion shifted."

The turning point came in 2006, when Jyoti Sroat became fully inclusive. Children with and without disabilities study together and follow the same state syllabus. What differs is the support: blind students use digital tools, deaf students work with

BENEFICIARY SPEAK

“Before Bethany, I used to cry on the roadside every morning as other children went to school. In Bethany, I learned I was not worthless. It gave me the tools to live, to defend myself, and to uplift others”

PYNHOI TANG, Visually-impaired former student

early 1990s, disability awareness was minimal in Meghalaya," recalls Bertha G. Dkhar, Bethany's executive director, who is herself visually impaired. "When I, a blind Khasi woman, joined the school, I was ridiculed. The school started with just eight students. Many dropped out. Only two from the first batch cleared Class 10. But a decade

sign language interpreters, autistic students follow flexible learning timelines.

The move was not welcomed initially. When Bethany first proposed such inclusion, government officials warned it would lower educational standards. That same year, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan was rolled out nationally, and Jyoti Sroat was later recognised by the educa-

tion department as a model school.

Alongside the school, Bethany follows a community-based development approach, working across health, education, livelihoods, social inclusion and empowerment. Bethany also links persons with disabilities and marginalised families to existing government schemes, focusing on access, facilitation and advocacy.

Bethany's operational focus remains within Meghalaya, but it partners with organisations across the Northeast to share programmes and build capacity. Once programmes stabilise, they are handed over or supported to function independently, allowing the organisation to move into new areas of need.

Today, Bethany operates through a combination of institutional services and village-level programmes, all grounded in the belief that systems must adapt to people—not the other way around. ■

BUILDING DESTINIES BEYOND DEGREES

Dr Mayank Agarwal's Vision for Education

When a leader from the domain of higher education is asked to balance scale with substance, tradition with technology, and regional responsibility with global aspirations, the descriptions get remarkably close to a person we know today as Dr Mayank Agarwal, who has established a prominent educational conglomerate dedicated to delivering excellence in education and training to the aspiring students of the country. He is a grounded visionary and his messages and speeches reflect a vision the aspiring students would love to achieve.

Dr Mayank Agarwal is a man with a responsible and sustainable vision in public interest. He leads the management of a diverse educational ecosystem that comprises 2 universities, 9 colleges, 2 hospitals, 3 schools, and 1 radio station.

One of the most ideal initiatives that Dr Mayank Agarwal heads and supervises is the IIMT Incubation Centre that exists in the Noida and Greater Noida hub, which serves as a perfect platform and an initiative, nurturing a startup culture among the students and equipping them with a beautiful and well-structured ecosystem where they can develop and transform their ideas into living enterprises.



Dr Mayank Agarwal
Managing Director - IIMT Group of Colleges
Pro Chancellor - IIMT University, Meerut

Thoughts that Shape a Legacy

Dr Agarwal says: *A true academic organization is not one that only confers degrees, but it's the one that awakens the courage to dream, the discipline to build, & the character to serve. At IIMT, we are not just producing professionals—we are nurturing pioneers who will definitely script the future.*

Every successful organization is shaped by vision, true dedication, and hard work. In the same spirit, the IIMT Group of Colleges reflects the dream of its Chairman, Shri Yogesh Mohanji Gupta, and Managing Director, Dr Mayank Agarwal, who relentlessly invest their full potential in nurturing thousands of students across the country every year.

Dr Mayank Agarwal is a law graduate, holding a postgraduate degree and a doctoral degree in management. Under his vision and guidance, IIMT has expanded into multiple campuses across the country, offering over a hundred programs ranging from nursery to PhD across diverse fields such as arts, management, engineering, teacher training, technology, computer science, law, and pharmacy. It is quite evident that Dr Agarwal has a strong belief

in rigorous faculty credentials, hi-tech environments, global tie-ups, personality development, and corporate engagement that define IIMT as one of the leading academic organizations in the country. Guided by his perspectives on education and value systems, the IIMT Group of Colleges is today known for its serious quest for ethics and knowledge; it prepares its students to meet the challenges of their times.

Where Vision Meets Transformation

Certain characteristics define Dr Agarwal, who shines among the existing educational and academic leaders and visionaries. Focus on the physical and infrastructural growth of his institutions does not take away from his objective to achieve recognition and credibility, where size matters but not at the cost of academic strength, ethical grounding, and global relevance.

Under his leadership, the IIMT Group of Colleges has achieved a rare balance between ambition and growth. Targeting both quantitative and qualitative growth for his institutions, Dr Agarwal wouldn't call it development if the progress is limited to academic outcomes alone; he believes that institutions must

aim to instil among their graduates the universal human values, creating thoughtful, kind and socially-responsible citizens.

According to Dr Agarwal, the education system of our country should be responsive to industry while preserving values and ethics among students, a balance that is often challenging. As the Managing Director of IIMT Group of Colleges, he stands today as a torchbearer of transformative education in India. Working as an incessant creator, mentor, and nation-builder, Dr Agarwal continues to show the Indian education sector the way forward and proves that when education is guided by both intellect and integrity, it becomes the most commanding force for societal transformation in the world.

Dr Mayank Agarwal's story is a compelling case study of what happens when both mind and heart lead a path of development. This reflects an educational leader who treats quality not as a slogan but as a commitment, and who envisions the students not as numbers, but as the future of his nation—responsible citizens, leaders, and innovators.



DHANUKA AGRITECH RESEARCH AND TECHNOLOGY CENTRE



INDIA IS CONSTRAINED TO EXPLOIT THE VAST POTENTIAL OF AGRICULTURE DUE TO NON-AVAILABILITY AND LACK OF FARMERS' AWARENESS OF NEW AND ADVANCED TECHNOLOGIES AND QUALITY AGRICULTURAL INPUTS

Unlocking India's Agricultural Potential: Bridging Technology, Input Quality, and Farmer Awareness Gaps

India's economic ascent stands as one of the defining narratives of the 21st century. Although this narrative is frequently conveyed through the expansion of services, manufacturing, and digital innovation, its most profound origins are rooted in agriculture- a vital sector that has supported Indian civilisation for thousands of years. From the fertile plains of the Indus and the Ganges to the increasingly technology-driven farms of today, agriculture persistently sustains 1.4 billion people, offers livelihoods to over half the population, and underpins rural India, which remains the foundation of the nation's social and economic stability. Nonetheless, despite its pivotal importance, Indian agriculture currently faces limitations in completely harnessing its immense potential. The core reasons are evident: restricted access to new and advanced technologies, the ongoing dissemination of counterfeit agricultural inputs, and a prevalent lack of awareness among farmers regarding modern solutions that could substantially improve productivity and incomes.

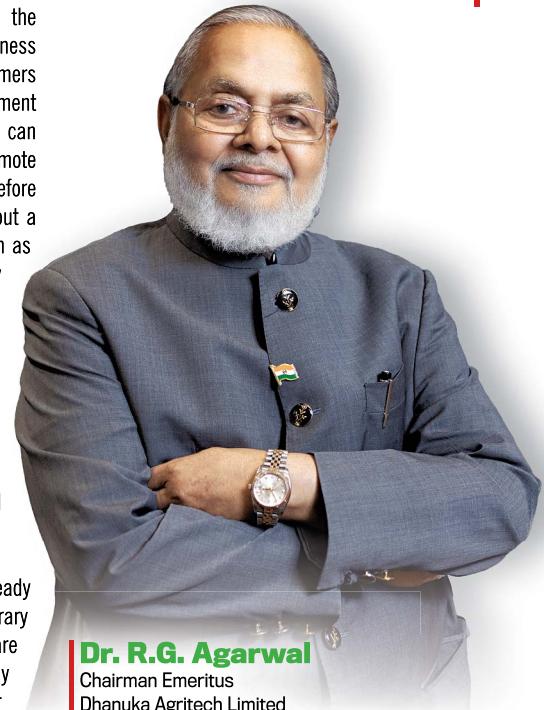
India's agricultural development has been extensive and commendable. The contemporary transformation commenced with the Green Revolution of the 1960s, a period during which the nation relied extensively on PL-480 food imports from the United States. Visionary leadership, robust political commitment, and scientific excellence have

fundamentally transformed India's trajectory. The adoption of high-yielding varieties, the extension of irrigation facilities, and the judicious application of fertilisers & pesticides allowed the nation to surmount persistent food shortages and attain food self-sufficiency. During the same period, the white revolution catapulted India into the world's leading milk producer, enabling millions of smallholders through cooperative institutions. These were not simply advances in agriculture; they represented pivotal milestones in nation-building that revitalised confidence, dignity, and self-sufficiency.

Over the following decades, Indian agriculture experienced growth in both scope and variety. Today, India ranks among the world's foremost producers of rice, wheat, fruits, vegetables, milk, seasonings, cotton, and sugar. It has become the world's leading rice producer, surpassing China, with output eclipsing 150 million tonnes. Indian rice exports currently serve as a vital component of global food security, supplying nourishment to populations throughout Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. These accomplishments exemplify the resilience and diligent efforts of Indian farmers, the valuable contributions of scientists, and the support of agricultural industry stakeholders functioning amidst some of the most formidable climatic and market challenges worldwide.

However, these accomplishments obscure an underlying contradiction. Although India is a global leader in production volumes, its per-hectare productivity and farmer incomes continue to lag considerably behind those of numerous developed and some developing nations. China's agricultural gross domestic product, for example, is nearly three times greater than India's, despite having broadly comparable land and natural resources. This disparity does not stem from any deficiency in ability or dedication among Indian cultivators. Instead, it signifies systemic limitations that hinder agriculture from realising its maximum potential.

One of the most significant limitations is the restricted availability of modern agricultural technology, especially for small and marginal farmers who comprise nearly 85 percent of the farming community. Fragmented landholdings hinder access to advanced machinery, precision agriculture technologies, premium seedlings, and contemporary crop protection measures. In numerous regions, agricultural practices have remained largely unchanged for decades, rendering producers vulnerable to climate fluctuations, pest infestations, and unpredictable market conditions. Without access to advanced technology, productivity declines, input expenses increase, and agriculture continues to be a high-risk, low-yield enterprise.



Dr. R.G. Agarwal

Chairman Emeritus
Dhanuka Agritech Limited
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Exacerbating this challenge is a significant deficiency in awareness. Even in contexts where modern technologies are available, a significant proportion of farmers remain oblivious of their existence or are uncertain about how to implement them effectively. Government survey data reveal that approximately 60 percent of farming households did not obtain information on modern agricultural technologies from any formal source, resulting in a significant portion remaining disconnected from innovations that could enhance productivity and income levels. Reliable government and ministry estimate further indicate that approximately 40 to 45 percent of producers are acquainted with advanced agricultural technologies. This deficiency in awareness is equally detrimental as the lack of technology itself, since innovation holds limited value unless it is accessible to producers in a manner that is comprehensible, cost-effective, and reliable.

The issue is further compounded by the extensive proliferation of substandard and counterfeit agricultural inputs. Counterfeit seedlings, contaminated fertilisers, and counterfeit pesticides have emerged as a covert epidemic in many regions of the country. These inputs not only diminish yields; they also devastate crops, pose health risks to human and environment, undermine farmers' confidence in scientific and institutional authorities, and drive families into debt. Recent enforcement actions in states including Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Haryana, and Telangana have revealed extensive interstate operations involved in the production and distribution of hundreds of thousands of counterfeit fertilisers stocks each day. The seriousness of the issue is highlighted by the Uttar Pradesh government's decision to invoke the National Security Act against individuals engaged in fertiliser counterfeiting and black marketing. This constitutes not merely an economic offence but also poses a direct threat to India's food and nutritional security.

India currently maintains robust regulatory frameworks, including the Seeds Act, the Fertiliser Control Order, and the Insecticides Act, complemented by ongoing reforms such as the proposed PMB 2020. The primary difficulty lies not in the lack of legislation, but in their inadequate and inconsistent enforcement. When enforcement is weak, unlawful operators prosper, legitimate enterprises get adversely affected, and farmers ultimately incur the repercussions. What is urgently needed is rigorous enforcement complemented by digital traceability, QR-code-based authentication, accredited laboratories, and prompt, exemplary sanctions for repeat and deliberate offenders. Protecting farmers from substandard and counterfeit inputs is essential to restoring trust and improving productivity.

Another significant structural obstacle is the restricted scope of farmer education, awareness and extension services. With over 14 crore farmers distributed across 6.5 lakh villages, no government mechanism, regardless of its good intentions, can independently reach farmers in its most remote villages. Public-private partnerships are therefore essential, no longer a matter of coincidence but a deliberate choice for a progressive nation such as India. The private sector, leveraging its capacity for innovation, extensive field networks, and digital platforms, must be supported and incentivised to augment public initiatives in research, training, and the dissemination of technology. When public institutions and accountable private enterprises collaborate effectively, producers benefit from advanced scientific knowledge, dependable markets, and innovative technologies.

Encouragingly, collaborative models are already illustrating the potential outcomes. Contemporary advanced crop protection technologies are considerably safer, more precise, and markedly more efficient compared to those of earlier times. Pesticides that previously necessitated application in large volumes are now effective in few grams, providing increased efficacy with a significantly reduced environmental impact. Precision technologies such as drones, weather monitoring stations, soil and agricultural sensors, and data-driven advisory services are empowering farmers to optimise input utilisation, lower expenses, and enhance crop yields. However, these technologies remain confined to limited pockets and have yet to reach the majority of Indian farmers.

A vital driver of transformation is investment in research and development, where India persistently underperforms. National R&D expenditure stands at about 0.7 per cent of GDP, compared with nearly 2.6 per cent and 5.6 per cent in innovation-driven economies such as China and Israel, respectively. Ironically the Prime Minister's inspiring call of "Jai Anusandhan" cannot be realised without sustained and meaningful investment in agricultural education and R&D. Earlier incentives, such as the 200 percent rebate in income tax for R&D expenditure by DST-recognized companies, significantly contributed to promoting private sector innovation. Their withdrawal has diminished research funding during a period of heightened global competition and warrants urgent revisit.

India's national ambitions are ambitious and compelling. The goal of establishing a USD 5 trillion economy by 2028, with agriculture accounting for nearly USD 1 trillion, and a USD 30 trillion Viksit Bharat by 2047, cannot be realised without a fundamental transformation of the agricultural

sector. India's developmental path will inevitably traverse its agricultural territories, farmlands, and rural settlements. Agriculture must transition from reliance on subsidies to a sector characterised by productivity, resilience, and entrepreneurship, where producers increase their earnings per acre through access to advanced technologies, reliable quality inputs, efficient markets, and value addition.

The path ahead involves transitioning from short-term interventions to sustainable, long-term capacity development. Farmers should be safeguarded against fraud, equipped with knowledge, and provided with modern instruments. Awareness, education, and trust are pivotal as the technology itself. When producers receive proper training, information, and develop confidence, they transition into entrepreneurs rather than remaining perpetual recipients of subsidies. In doing so, agriculture can develop into a true driver of national development.

India possesses the land, the soil, the scientific expertise, the industry, and most importantly, the character of its farmers. What is currently needed is a system that assures the accessibility of innovative and advanced technologies, guarantees the quality of agricultural inputs, and addresses the awareness gap at the final stage. If India succeeds in addressing these constraints, agriculture will no longer be a story of unrealised promise. It will not only nourish the nation but also fuel India's ascent as a leading global economic power.



LE ! SURE

THE LISTICLE: ART EXHIBITIONS PG 86

ENTERTAINMENT: THE OTT GAME PLAN PG 90



SCULPTURAL SPACE
Mohit Gujral and wife Feroze at Gujral House, Delhi

ART ▶

Built of Change

Two new exhibitions in Delhi celebrate the extraordinary range of work by the late **SATISH GUJRAL**

Photograph by **BANDEEP SINGH**

Pure Vegetarian



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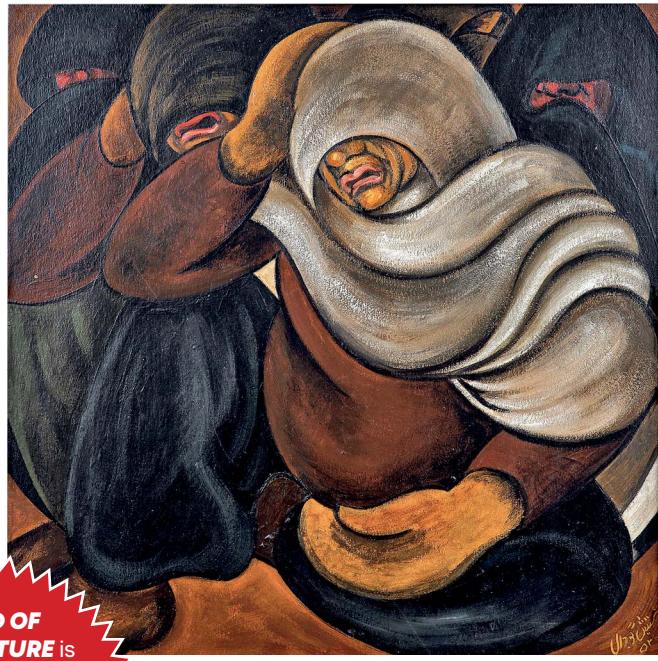
O

n the outside, the Gujral House in South Delhi is imposing in its scale and sweep. But once you step inside, it reveals its

impressionable heart that absorbs the spirit and essence of the people who inhabit it. For years, it was a playground and crucible for the artistic exploits of the late Satish Gujral, a crucial figure in the modern cultural movement after Independence. Conceived and built in 1969 with architect Raj Rewal, the Gujral House was a sculpture that adapted to the changing light, wind, and even time—a veritable shapeshifter. There are bare walls of exposed brick and raw concrete, lending it a canvas-like quality that now serves as a renewed gallery space that was opened to the public in November 2025.

"This idea was, in fact, conceived by my father during his lifetime, and I had promised him that I would do it, besides the fact that I, too, felt like doing it," says the artist's son, the architect Mohit Gujral. Growing up with his father meant having a ringside view of the social and cultural flux the country was undergoing as a fledgling democracy. His art was more abstract in comparison to the "figurative and pretty work" being done by his contemporaries. "He told me that he wanted to build a house with volumes, spaces and surfaces that can teach people how art should be experienced—almost like a mannequin: how art should be dressed, how it should be placed, how it takes light. In that way, people begin to understand the three-dimensionality of art and how to experience it. He felt, therefore, that this house was a living studio," Mohit says.

WORLD OF ARCHITECTURE is on display at the **GUJRAL HOUSE** from Jan. 30; **SG100** is on display at **NGMA, Delhi**, till Mar. 31



So, throughout his lifetime, the house changed shape and form as Satish constantly reconfigured it—shaking things up, moving things around, and using each nook differently on different days. "My father never had a gallery represent him, but he knew everyone because of how socially active he was, and he entertained guests in this house all the time. It was a coffeehouse, gallery, studio and a living space all at once," says Mohit, who has carried this lesson into his own practice, advising young architects to make spaces that are malleable enough to accommodate the

ART GALLERY ▶

NETWORKING, HARAPPAN STYLE

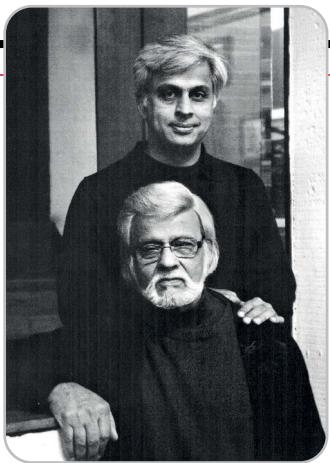
A brand new gallery at Mumbai's **CSMVS OFFERS WORLD HISTORY** from an inclusive and Indian perspective



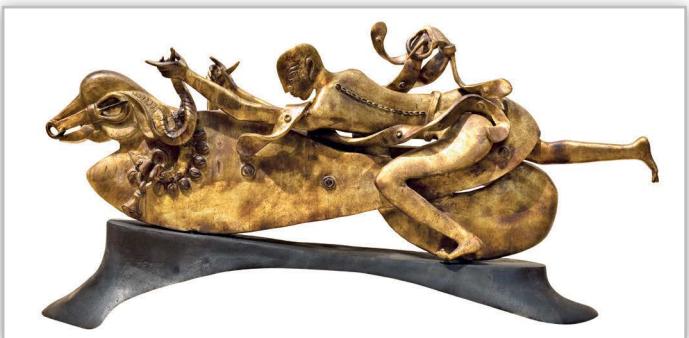
When one of the country's premier museums announces a new gallery, the culturati take notice. When it's Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya (CSMVS) collaborating with 15 other museums, Indian as well as international, to create a 10,000 sq. ft space dedicated to 300 artefacts that position ancient India at the crossroads of global historical exchange, it is time to witness the magic for oneself. *Networks of the Past: A Study Gallery of India and the Ancient World* is geared towards shining a spotlight on India's history within a broader global context in the period between the Harappan civilisation, which was at its peak around 5,000 years ago, and the Gupta Empire in the sixth century CE. Dr

PAST ECHOES Below left, weights from Mohenjodaro; right, a sculptural relief of 'mother and child' (2nd century CE); below, a bronze hand from Yemen (2nd-3rd century CE)





MASTER'S TOUCH
(Far left) 'Mourning En Masse' by Satish Gujral; two untitled metal-works by Gujral; (left) the artist with his son Mohit



evolution of the people who call it home.

However, now, in its reimagined form, the space needed to reinvent itself once again to keep up with the times. So, when Mohit began work in late 2024, he wanted to restore the house as closely as possible to its original materiality, form and skeletal intent. "Over time, as 'Gujral' evolved,

the house had morphed into many things. Because of financial constraints at the time, it wasn't designed for air conditioning and relied on air coolers, with smaller openings and tighter spaces. My task was to bring in more light, modern air-conditioning, restore materiality and remove unnecessary rooms to create larger, more experiential spaces," he says.

It comes in time to celebrate the birth centenary of the legend, whose commemoration kicks off with a retrospective exhibition titled *SG100* at the National Gallery of Modern Art, Delhi. According to the show curator, Kishore Singh, "Gujral's practice has encompassed contemplation, deep reflection and compassion, ensuring that his art continues to be appreciated by the beating heart of the nation—and humanity—that it represents", especially from the "recesses of silence in his studio". This retrospective attempts to capture seven decades of an artist whose idioms were limited not just to mediums but sought roots in the constantly shifting cultural milieu of his times.

In continuation of these celebrations, the Gujral House's inaugural show, *World of Architecture*—a retrospective of the artist's architectural career, curated by Rhea Sodhi—will be on display from January 30. ■

—Arshia

► NETWORKS OF THE PAST: A STUDY GALLERY OF INDIA AND THE ANCIENT WORLD will be on display at the CSMVS for three years

Sabyasachi Mukherjee, director general, CSMVS, conceptualised this exhibit, which will remain on display for three years. "It's an attempt to reinterpret our civilisational roots and their continuity, rather than uncritically adopting western narratives centred on the Mediterranean. India has often been portrayed as

a passive receiver in the ancient world," he says.

While one can only imagine the complexity of the logistics of shipping and displaying such precious antiquities, Joyoti Roy, assistant director (Projects and Public

damage. The lighting designer worked closely with the conservation department to calibrate the exact amount of light from luminaires in the displays. "This is the 17th international exhibition that we are hosting, and

be one of the world's oldest signboards (found there) placed behind it. Sculptures, inscriptions, edicts, coins, paintings, jewellery and pottery form the core of the display. The last room focuses on the two most famous centres of learning and knowledge in the ancient world: Nalanda in India and Alexandria in Ptolemaic Egypt. In both cases, the scrolls may have been destroyed, but the idea of a knowledge collective endures. Yet another way in which the East and the West, the past and the present, reveal themselves as part of a continuum. ■

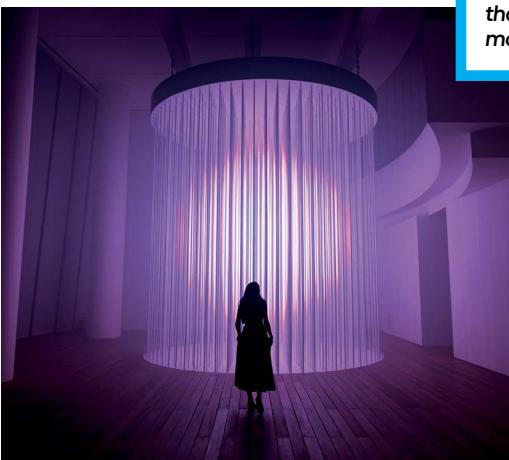
—Priya Pathiyan

SCULPTURES, INSCRIPTIONS, EDICTS, COINS, PAINTINGS, JEWELLERY AND POTTERY FORM THE CORE OF THE EXHIBITION

Relations), explains the nuances of loan agreements, custom clearances, furniture and display cases custom-built for climate control as well as an air exchange rate of about 0.01 per cent to protect artefacts from

with each one, we have built a trust with partner institutions," says Roy.

What can you expect to see? A scale model of Dholavira, the well-known Harappan site, sits front and centre, with a replica of what could



TRYING TO CONNECT
The works on display include tactile and virtual artworks that explore the paradoxes of modernity; Doug Aitken (inset)

the result of a two-year collaboration between Aitken's studio and more than a dozen skilled Indian artisans. Walk up to the second floor, where Present transforms the gallery into a kaleidoscopic environment of mirrored walls and shifting screens inside Aitken's 'New Era' video installation. The film explores the history of the mobile phone with its inventor Martin Cooper pondering questions of human connection and identity. It's a striking installation that places mobile phones in contrast with vast natural landscapes, provoking reflection on the cultural and social shifts shaped by technology.

On the third floor, Future presents 'Lightfall/Other Worlds', a new immersive light sculpture by Aitken, commissioned specifically for the exhibition. The surreal exhibit is a luminous orb with a vertical core of hundreds of suspended LED tubes carrying smooth waves of light. The abstract sphere continuously expands and contracts above a rustic wooden flooring, enveloping viewers in a hypnotic drone soundscape, perhaps representing a pulsing abstraction of the future. ■

—Prachi Joshi
The exhibition is on till Feb. 22

EXHIBITION ▼

TIME MACHINE

A MULTIMEDIA EXHIBITION in Mumbai explores how we navigate time and space—and our place within it

Spread over three floors of the Art House at the Nita Mukesh Ambani Cultural Centre, Doug Aitken's *Under the Sun* takes viewers on a temporal journey across three narratives—Past, Present and Future. This is the first exhibition in India for the American multimedia artist and filmmaker and features multiple site-specific commissions. The exhibition is curated by Mafalda Kahane and Roya Sachs and

produced by Elizabeth Edelman, partners of the creative house TRIADIC.

On the first floor, Past draws viewers into a tactile landscape of raw materials—carved wood, reclaimed debris, woven fabrics, embroidery and stained-glass—all sourced locally. In the centre, spiralling wooden boats are encircled by six monumental human figures, while the walls feature six large-scale textile works, each tracing a sacred Indian river as veins across hands. The installation is



Rajesh Kumar Agrahari Managing Director

Rajesh Masala Udyog Private Limited

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THE LISTICLE

WHAT'S HOT AND HAPPENING IN THE
WORLD OF ART THIS MONTH



▲ GALERIE ROMAIN ROLLAND
| Alliance Française de
Delhi | New Delhi |
On view through Feb. 14

A NEW TOUCH

Spacescapes presents a contemplative body of abstract paintings by Sujata Bajaj, developed over six years. Shaped by her dialogue between Indian sensibilities and European modernism, they explore inner and cosmic spaces through layered textures, rhythmic movement and immersive colour fields. Resisting instant visual gratification, the paintings reward prolonged viewing. This exhibition marks Bajaj's first major abstract presentation in the city after 15 years.



► MUSEUM OF ART AND
PHOTOGRAPHY | Bengaluru |
On view through Dec. 3, 2028

ACROSS THE UNIVERSE

Beneath the Turning Sky explores how humanity has sought meaning within a vast and unfolding universe through more than 60 works that include paintings, textiles, manuscripts, sculpture and photography, picked from across time periods and regions.



▲ NATURE MORTE | New Delhi |
On view through Feb. 22

BACK AND FRONT

Nature Morte presents Ai Weiwei's first solo exhibition in India at its Dhan Mill space. The presentation spans time and material, from Stone Axes Painted White using Neolithic tools to ceramic vases and toy brick works shaped by digital culture.

◀ DAG | Mumbai | On view
through Feb. 14

COMING BACK TO LIFE

Presented by DAG, *Face to Face: A Portrait of a City* is a portraiture showcase tracing Bombay's political, cultural and civic life from the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries. Featuring 30 works, the exhibition examines portraiture as a marker of power, lineage, aspiration and identity. From colonial academic realism to modernist experimentation, the show unites princely figures, reformers, artists and everyday citizens to chart Bombay's social and artistic history.

▼ KOLKATA CENTRE FOR
CREATIVITY | Kolkata, Convergences on view through
Feb. 14 (Purvai and Field Notes on till Mar. 7)

Rooted in Memory

The Kolkata Centre for Creativity presents three exhibitions. *Convergences: A Shared Ground* is on view through February 14 and is about art, craft and architectural practices rooted in social memory. *PURVAI*, curated by Dr Paula Sengupta, surveys contemporary printmaking across eastern and north-eastern India, while *Field Notes (On the Afterlife of Trees)* marks Vishal Kumar Gupta's debut solo, reflecting on nature, fragmentation and material presence.



Why Awareness of Colorectal Cancer Matters at Every Age



Dr. Manish Jain

Director & Unit Head - Gastrointestinal Oncosurgery, Cancer Centre, Surgical Oncology, Gastrointestinal (GI) Cancer Programme, Cancer Robotic Surgery Programme
BLK-Max Super Speciality Hospital, Delhi

In many young patients I see with colorectal cancer, there is one common thread-long-standing lifestyle-related issues that were quietly building up over time. These are not people who were unwell every day. Most were working full-time, managing families, and leading busy lives. What they did have, however, were habits that gradually affected gut health.

I often meet young adults who spend long hours sitting, rely heavily on processed or outside food, consume very little fibre, and ignore regular physical activity. Over time, this can lead to chronic bowel irregularities-constipation, bloating, or altered bowel habits-that are accepted as "normal." When symptoms like blood in stools or unexplained fatigue appear, they are often brushed aside.

The positive side is this: when such patients come to us early, outcomes are encouraging. Younger bodies respond well to treatment, recovery is often faster, and long-term quality of life can be preserved. I reassure my patients that recognising symptoms early and correcting lifestyle factors plays a powerful role-not just in treatment, but also in prevention.

What I want young people to know is that colorectal cancer linked to lifestyle does not appear overnight. It gives warning signs. Paying attention to these signals, improving diet, staying active, and seeking medical advice early can make a meaningful difference. Small changes, when made consistently, often lead to long-term protection.

From what I see daily, awareness and timely action turn a serious condition into a manageable one-and that is an empowering message for every young adult.



Dr. Abhishek Aggarwal

Associate Director - Gastrointestinal Oncosurgery, Cancer Centre, Surgical Oncology, Gastrointestinal (GI) Cancer Programme, Cancer Robotic Surgery Programme
BLK-Max Super Speciality Hospital, Delhi

Another group of young colorectal cancer patients I often meet are those with underlying risk factors such as family history or long-standing bowel conditions. These patients usually did nothing "wrong," and it is important to say this clearly. Some bodies are simply more vulnerable, and recognising that early allows us to act wisely and confidently.



Issued in public interest, for you and your loved ones, by Meril.

I frequently speak to young individuals who have a parent or close relative with colorectal cancer, or who have lived for years with conditions like inflammatory bowel disease. Many are aware of their risk but hesitate to undergo evaluation because they feel well or fear the possibility of bad news. I always remind them that early checks are done to protect health-not to create anxiety.

The encouraging reality is that surveillance works. When we monitor high-risk individuals properly, we often detect changes at a very early stage, sometimes even before cancer develops. This allows for simpler treatment approaches and far better long-term outcomes.

Young patients in this category tend to be more informed and proactive, which works strongly in their favour. I see them approach treatment with clarity and confidence when issues are detected early, supported by family and medical teams.

My message is reassuring: having a risk factor does not mean a poor outcome. With timely screening, regular follow-up, and expert guidance, young patients can stay ahead of the disease and continue to live full, active lives.

CAUSES OF COLORECTAL CANCER



SMOKING &
TOBACCO



ALCOHOL



UNHEALTHY
DIET



LACK OF
EXERCISE &
OBESITY



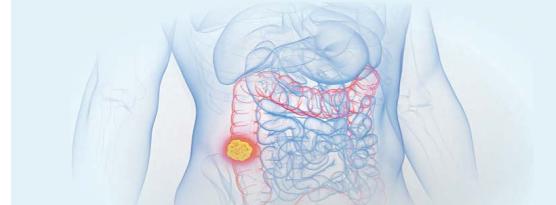
FAMILY
HISTORY



AGE



TYPE 2 DIABETES



*The pictures shown are for representation purpose only, any resemblance to any products is only a coincidence.

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BETTING BIG ON STORYTELLING

SAMEER NAIR OF APPLAUSE ENTERTAINMENT IS LOOKING FORWARD TO A PACKED BOUQUET OF SHOWS AND FILMS IN 2026

If you were Sameer Nair, managing director of Applause Entertainment, you'd give yourself a fairly good performance review for 2025. The studio started off with the acclaimed series *Black Warrant* (Netflix), followed it up with another one in *The Hunt: The Rajiv Gandhi Assassination Case* (SonyLIV), had one more successful season of *Criminal Justice* featuring Pankaj Tripathi (JioStar), and delivered a powerful and popular theatrical title in Tamil film *Bison Kaalamaadan*.

Ask Nair what was his biggest takeaway from what was also a prolific year with three more series, and he says, "What it tells me is that the audience is open to variety and is open-minded and welcoming. What they are telling us is that this whole 'this is what audiences want and don't want' is not right. They are like 'tell us a good story and let us decide.'"

Unlike most production houses, Applause works on a make-sell model, which implies that it first teams up with the creator and then offers a ready show to streaming platforms to acquire. A risky proposition, it requires much confidence in one's content. Nair clarifies that the company doesn't operate like "an independent maverick activity or universe of its own". "We have a fair idea of what the market and platforms want, what will fly; we do our own legal and vetting," he says. Once the show is renewed for a subsequent season, the streamer's participation increases. "The scope of the show expands, there are more cooks in the kitchen and more riding on it," says Nair. "They [platforms] have data too; some suggestions we agree to, some we don't. After

MAN IN CHARGE

Sameer Nair is confident that the OTT wave isn't going anywhere

After a prolific 2025, Nair feels that the audience is open to variety and is open-minded and welcoming



GETTY IMAGES

BIG DEBUT Karan Joshi (right), who plays the titular part in *Laalo: Krishna Sada Sahaayate*



all, it's in our interest for the platform to succeed with our show."

Nair has his work cut out to deliver a solid slate again in 2026. To do it when the streaming industry itself is going through a churn means a tough act, but Applause is ready for the challenge. In the pipeline is Hansal Mehta's *Gandhi*, another instalment of *Scam* and *Undekhi*, and a new show by Nitya Mehra. There will also be a bigger push for theatrical, with films by Imtiaz Ali, Pa. Ranjith, Kabir Khan and Jay Mehta lined up. "We want to do big theatrical entertainers, entertaining cinema which will have some message. I am not telling you what to think, but it's a film that makes you think," he says.

The studio has also acquired Jeffrey Archer's novels to adapt into films and series and is using AI to adapt more of the Amar Chitra Katha catalogue on its YouTube channel. As Applause continues adapting books and international shows—a strategy that has paid dividends for the most part—Nair is confident that the OTT wave isn't going anywhere. "There's no slowdown or downturn, there's no putting this genie back in the bottle," he says. Viewers aren't complaining. ■

—Suhani Singh

A Divine Turn

A modest, newcomer-led Gujarati film about faith and self-realisation has struck gold at the box office

Laalo, an auto driver in Gujarat's Junagadh, falls into bad company and takes to alcohol and smoking. The lure of quick money sees him entrapped in a house, with no help in sight. Just when all hope is gone, in enters Lord Krishna. Only he isn't blue-faced and per-

rived in cinemas. Its success is noteworthy given that behind it is a crew of underdogs: the director, writers, musician and lyricist are all newcomers. It's the first on-screen credit for Karan Joshi, who plays the titular part. "We dreamt that we'd come to Mumbai with our film, but we didn't

who gets to be the guiding light, has seen the film's impact, with audiences in tears. "Here they see God in the form of a friend who makes us understand," he says.

The film's a game-changer for Gujarati cinema, giving a much-needed fillip to the small film industry. "So far, we used to keep hearing that Gujarati audiences don't show up at theatres, so we cannot experiment or tell our stories," says Reeva Rachh, who plays Laalo's wife. "The film gives new filmmakers faith in their stories."

Meanwhile, Sakhya's producer friends are keen to collaborate and hit the jackpot again. "The responsibility has increased," he says. "Everyone feels like I am their best friend or brother. But I have to start from scratch." ■

"THE FILM GIVES NEW FILMMAKERS **FAITH IN THEIR STORIES**," SAYS REEVA RACHH, WHO PLAYS LAALO'S WIFE

forms no miracle. In fact, he looks like an ordinary Indian man. That's the premise of Gujarati film *Laalo: Krishna Sada Sahaayate*, billed as a "divine blockbuster" after becoming the highest-grossing film in the language, with collections crossing Rs 100 crore. On January 9, a Hindi-dubbed version ar-

think it'd happen in our first film itself," says Ankit Sakhya, whose college friends pooled in the money and became first-time producers in the process.

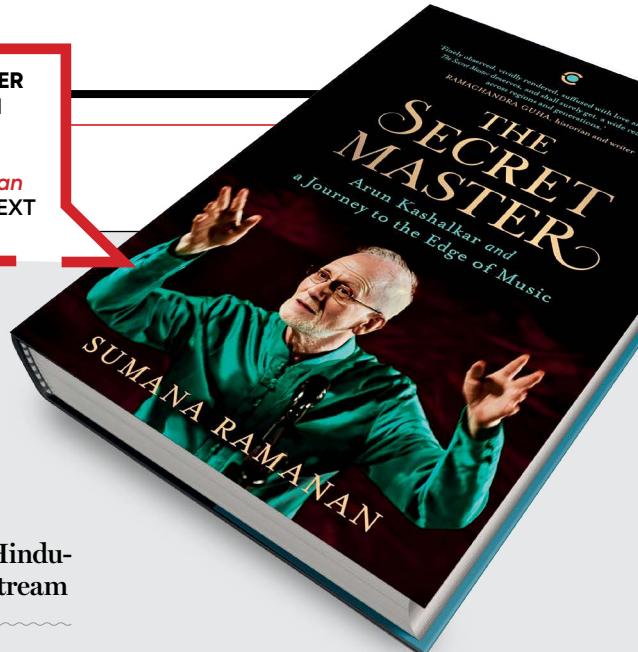
Through *Laalo*..., Sakhya intended to both focus on ethics and "activate the self-realisation mode" of audiences. Shruhad Goswami,

—Suhani Singh

THE SECRET MASTER

Arun Kashalkar and
a Journey to the
Edge of Music

By Sumana Ramanan
WESTLAND/ CONTEXT
₹899; 466 pages



BOOKS ▾

Beyond the SPOTLIGHT

SUMANA RAMANAN's *The Secret Master* is a fine study of Hindustani vocalist Arun Kashalkar, revered outside of the mainstream

Sumana Ramanan's *The Secret Master: Arun Kashalkar and a Journey to the Edge of Music* offers a rare and intimate portrait of Hindustani vocalist Arun Kashalkar, a musician revered by connoisseurs yet less visible within the mainstream. Blending biography, cultural commentary and personal narrative, Ramanan explores why an artist of remarkable depth has remained largely outside wider public visibility.

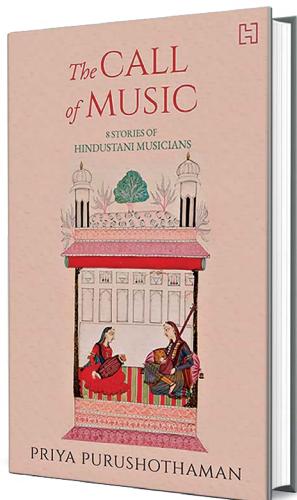
The book begins with her moment of revelation: hearing

THE AUTHOR
DETAILS THE ROLE OF INSTITUTIONAL PATRONAGE AND STAR-LED FESTIVALS IN POPULARITY, INDEPENDENT OF A MUSICIAN'S ACCLAIM

Kashalkar at a private gathering, an encounter that sparks a meticulous and deeply engaged quest to understand his life, his music and the ecosystem that shaped both. Through

interviews, archival material and her own experience as his student, Ramanan constructs a portrait that extends beyond the individual to illuminate the wider world of *khayal*.

Kashalkar emerges as a musician of exceptional intellect and versatility. Rooted primarily in the Agra gharana with formative grounding in Gwalior and some influence from Jaipur, he is also a composer under the pen name Rasdaas and a teacher whose rigour is matched by a reflective, understated presence. Ramanan captures his artistry with an admirable balance of detail and clarity.



THE CALL OF MUSIC:
8 Stories of Hindustani
Musicians
By Priya Purushothaman
HACHETTE
Rs 699; 304 pages

Singing in the Shadows

THE POIGNANT PROFILES IN *THE CALL OF MUSIC* SHOW THAT A LIFE OF MUSIC IS FRAUGHT WITH CHALLENGES

Vocalist-author Priya Purushothaman's unusual account of musicians is united by their modest and often marginalised positions within the world of performance.

There is the fraught story of vocalist Sudhindra Bhaumik, trained at IIT and IIM, whose quest for music was a restless oscillation between conventional

jobs and his artistic muse. Rumi Harish is a skilled vocalist who had to confront gender conventions in music while transitioning to becoming a man. Shubha Joshi struggled with her broad voice until she discovered that genres like thumri allowed for alternative conventions of singing. Shubhada Paradkar, as a young mother and homemaker, used every extra hour

she could find to continue her music training.

Suhail Yusuf Khan's grandfather was a celebrated sarangi maestro, but Suhail found the burden of musical conventions oppressive—particularly because his family belonged to a caste of traditional performers. Alam Khan, son of the legendary maestro Ali Akbar Khan, also found that the West-East divide was no

A Maestro Remembers

USTAD ALLAUDDIN KHAN's autobiography offers an intimate insight into Indian classical music of the early 20th century

The book's most compelling sections examine the structures that shape artistic recognition in Hindustani music. Ramanan looks at how patronage, institutional dynamics and the star-driven festival circuit influence musicians' careers. Kashalkar's modest public visibility, despite performances at respected platforms, becomes a lens through which she examines entrenched hierarchies and challenges assumptions about visibility, acclaim and value.

Equally affecting are the chapters that describe her own attempts to learn his intricate style. Her candid accounts of struggle, bewilderment and occasional triumph bring emotional depth to the narrative and reveal the profound interiority of a musician who has consistently chosen substance over spectacle.

The Secret Master is a notable contribution to contemporary writing on Indian classical music. It documents an important yet understated figure, interrogates the politics of recognition and affirms the vitality of tradition. Ramanan's affectionate writing makes for an essential read. ■

—Nikhil Sardana

IT WAS
DIFFICULT FOR
MANY PRACTITIONERS
TO BREAK SOCIAL
AND MUSICAL
STEREOTYPES.
MANY SHIFTED TO
TEACHING

easier, despite his lineage. Even the instrumentalists Kala Ramnath and Yogesh Samsi, are relative outliers in their fields.

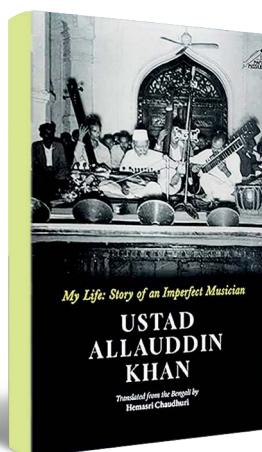
The first-person stories detail the risks in a life of music. It is difficult to break stereotypes—both musical

and social. Many expert Hindustani musicians accept defeat, choosing the modest life of teachers. Paradoxically, as the author suggests, it is these musician-teachers who have preserved the traditions' lifeblood. ■

—Partho Datta

In 1952, the legendary musician Baba Allauddin Khan accepted a professorial post at Visva Bharati, Santiniketan. There, over two sittings, he recounted to Subhamoy Ghosh some episodes from his life. Transcriptions of these narrations were clubbed with additional material, including an introduction by sitar exponent Pandit Ravi Shankar, and published under the title *Āmār Kathā* (*My Story*). (I am not sure

Rampur, to gain whose tutelage Allauddin turned to means as desperate as throwing himself in the path of the Rampur Nawab's cavalcade to obtain a recommendation. The chapter ends with him becoming the court musician of Maihar State. The second chapter concerns Baba's sojourns abroad. Ravi Shankar's introduction offers a fascinating glimpse into life and tutelage at Maihar, replete with anecdotes about Baba's temper,



MY LIFE Story of an Imperfect Musician
By Ustad Allauddin Khan, translated
from the Bengali by Hemasri Chaudhuri
NIYOGI BOOKS
₹499; 120 pages

where the 'Story of an Imperfect Musician' in the English title derives from.)

Baba traces his lineage to the Robin Hood-like brigand Dinanath Dev Sharma who adopted Islam to evade arrest. Young Allauddin was so obsessed with music that he chose to run away from home and seek tutelage in Calcutta. Dhrupad exponent Gopalchandra Chakraborty, known as Nulo or Lulu Gopal, taught him the basics of music. His untimely death led Allauddin to other preceptors, including sarod exponent Ahmed Ali and then the legendary Ujjir (Wazir) Khan of

kindness, devotion to music and simplicity.

Translating Baba's staccato, highly idiomatic, at times even disjointed narration style, poses a challenge. Chaudhuri does a competent job, commendable for someone still a school student. Occasional lapses do occur. For instance, Lulu Goswami's [sic Gopal] mandate of 12 years' sur sādhanā (dedicated study) is rendered as 'For twelve years you will have to learn to hold a tune' (p. 32). Overall, the book offers valuable insights into what Indian music used to be. ■

—Abhik Majumdar

A Dance Awakening

Dr Sonal Mansingh on curating the ongoing Festival of New Choreographies – KalaYatra 2026 (Jan. 13-29) in Delhi, which brings together 10 eminent dance institutions and gurus from across India

Q. How did you envision this festival and what is its main aim?

For many decades, I've been presenting different festivals and programmes, but most are based on a particular theme or issue. I thought of doing a festival of choreographies because people have to continuously be introduced to artists who are doing some meaningful work. There was no point presenting the same old choreographies.... It becomes comfortable to repeat them and I have never liked to be comfortable.

Q. Can you tell us a bit about the curation and why you chose particular choreographies?

I wanted thinking artists. Secondly, I was looking for those who have not performed in Delhi for many years. And thirdly, after speaking to them, the assurance that they will come on board to present something new, created especially for this festival.

Q. During your tenure as a Rajya Sabha MP, you highlighted the needs of performing artists. What do you think is the need of the hour now?

There are events and festivals happening by the dozen and the government is really pouring in money for such big events. On the other side, there is a crying need to create more hubs for cultural activities. Unfortunately, dance suffers the most. Also, it is a very delicate situation for dancers because their career span is short.

Q. You have been dancing for over six decades, yet you think of yourself as a work in progress. What do you wish to achieve now and what is your hope for yourself and the performing arts?

What I wish for myself is for my hair and teeth to remain intact (laughs). Secondly, to keep on contributing new ideas and energising the scene... and see some better days for art and the artists.

—with Deepali Dhingra



Photograph by CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

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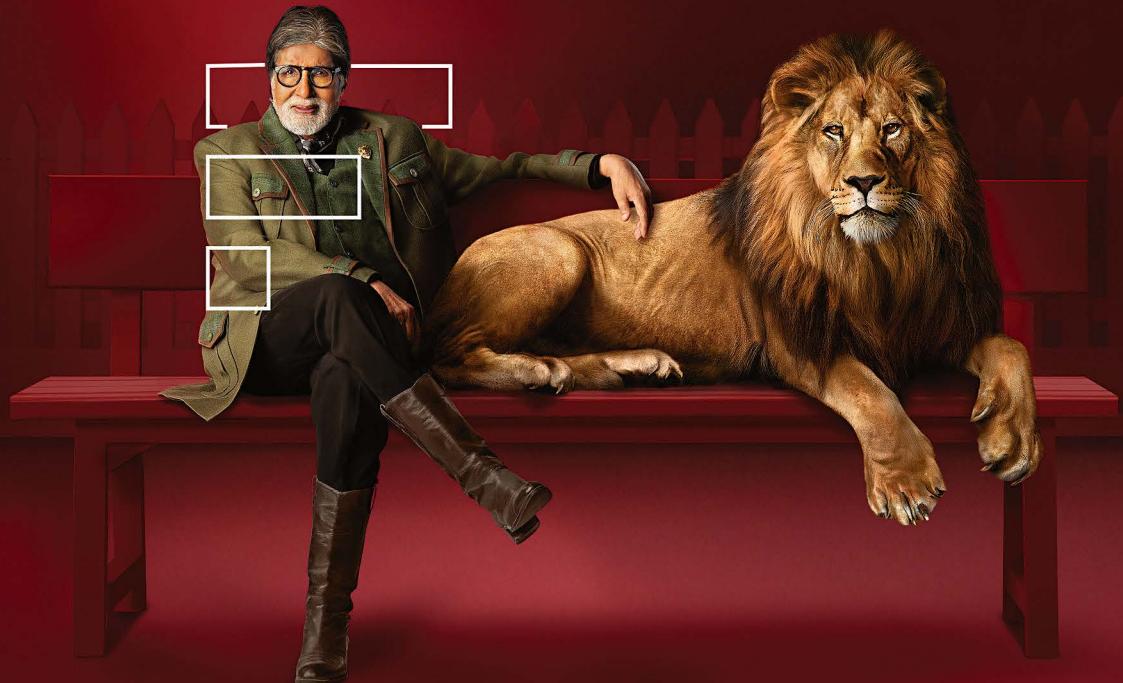
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