

TIME FOR TEAMWORK

Villagers overcome decades of government apathy and build their own bridge

By RAMESH VINAYAK



GOD, THEY SAY, HELPS THOSE who help themselves. In a quiet corner of God's earth in Solan district in Himachal Pradesh, residents from two dozen villages helped themselves. But there was no assistance from God or officialdom—who often think they are closer to Him than most.

Over five decades, 2,000 memorandums were submitted to the powers that be in government, asking for a bridge to connect Chamba and Malaun parganas with Ramshahr town. When that failed, 20,000 affected locals ignored officialdom and built one themselves: a bridge 173-ft long and 5-ft wide, constructed at a cost of Rs 7 lakh in 105 days. And as they celebrated their triumph to the thumping of drums at the inauguration of the bridge last month, the state's former chief minister Shanta Kumar acknowledged their efforts: "It's a shining example of development through public participation."

The administration was hardly as encouraging, though, when the villagers begged that the bridge be built. "We grew grey making the demand but it proved to be a cry in the wilderness," says Dev Raj, 70, a farmer from Panjali village. Four times—on the eve of assembly elections—surveys were carried out for the construction. And four times—once the elections were over—the plans fell through. "The pwn men marked the proposed site for the bridge. They never returned after the polls," says Jugla Ram, a poor farmer from Nanoha village.

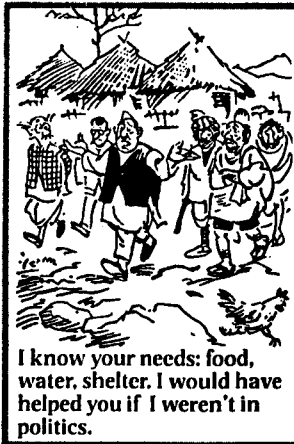
Anger and resentment bred in the villagers a firm resolve. For years, in summer and winter, they had to wade through waist-deep water to go from Chamba and Malaun to Ramshahr. And during the monsoon, when the Ghambar swelled and overflowed, they were completely cut off. "It was like living in a huge prison," recalls Hem Raj Thakur, 26, who grows vegetables for a living. The 150-odd children had to stop going to school during the monsoon. Flash floods were common and every year, cattle and people were swept away. Unable to transport crops from their fields, the villagers lost money every season. "By the time the waters receded, either the crops perished or the prices crashed," says Ram Log, 26, a farmer from Panjali.

Three years ago—after a massive loss of cash crops and the death of four villagers—the simmering anger boiled over. The villagers formed a 25-member Jhoola Nirman Samiti (Bridge Building Society) and approached two local contractors, H.N. Singh and Deepak Kumar, with the plea: You build bridges for the Government, now build one for us. The project began in December 1996. Donations poured in, from Jugla Ram's Rs 5 to Hem Raj Thakur's Rs 500. Those who couldn't give any money, offered to chisel stones, mix mortar and do other odd jobs. They carried 12 tonnes of building material on their heads from Chamdar—the nearest motorable spot—2 km away from the site. Savati Devi, a widow who runs a watermill on the banks of

SHARAD SAXENA
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DONATIONS POURED IN FROM MOST VILLAGERS. THOSE WHO COULD NOT GIVE MONEY OFFERED TO CHISEL STONES, MIX MORTAR AND DO OTHER ODD JOBS.



I know your needs: food, water, shelter. I would have helped you if I weren't in politics.

the Ghambar, often offered free meals to the workers. The contractors—both experts in bridge construction—bought the raw material from dealers to cut costs and offered their sheds as workshops.

"It's a laudable effort on their part," says state pwn Minister J.B.L. Khachi. Today, the villagers savour a sense of fulfilment. "We have shown the Government how we can do it ourselves," boasts Yashoda, a local housewife who contributed Rs 50 while her husband chipped in with his labour. Their resolve seems to be showing others the way. Residents in the remote village of Lusan are constructing a 5-km link road, having given up on the state Government.

Yashoda recalls how she was stranded for three days during the monsoon last year when she went visiting relatives across the Ghambar. Now she has a bridge over troubled waters to fall back on.



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Gandhiji included the following song of Kabir in his daily prayer book—(Jhini jhini bini chadariya . . .)

What is the warp and what is the woof
what are the threads from which the *chādar* is woven?
Inglā and *Pinglā* are the warp and woof
Sushaman are the threads from which the *chādar* is woven.
Eight are the lotuses and ten are the spinning wheels
five are the elements and three the qualities of the *chādar*.
The Master required ten months to weave it
and made it well-woven by hitting it and beating it.

This *chādar* the gods, men and sages used
and used and soiled the *chādar*.
Kabir Das has used it very carefully
and kept the *chādar* back as it is. (Shabdāvali p. 74)

Congratulations to Anne & Andrew & Pemsco whose baby boy arrived last night.

Tickets \$15
concessions \$8
★
Music of Joy
Concert
Friday 1st August
Petersham Town Hall 8.00 p.m.
Available soon from Kim Pearce Ph. 9799 7580

SHRI MATAJI'S AMERICAN TOUR

Shri Mataji's tour of North America and Canada has started well. The American yogis have made an all out effort and raised considerable funds to ensure that every chance is given for things to work out in that country to which Shri Mataji attaches so much importance. Two thousand people attended the public programme in St John the Divine church in the business district of New York city. Apparently they were a very receptive audience who applauded Shri Mataji's fairly short talk. Afterwards Shri Mataji met a number of people from the audience in a private room. Prior to the presentation of this programme Shri Mataji requested a second venue for an additional programme on Her return from Toronto. The New York city hall has been booked for Friday the 29th June.

Preparations were made for the Mahakali puja at Camp Vacamas. Shri Mataji entered, was seated and announced, "We have decided this will be a Shri Krishna puja." A collective indrawn breath was heard. (This has a familiar sound does it not). Two hundred and seventy adults, including about ninety from outside America, and sixty-five children settled down to enjoy a beautiful Shri Krishna puja.

It would seem Shri Mataji is very well and energetically considering real estate matters among other things. The next few weeks list a formidable programme for Shri Mataji in America and we wish Her and our American brothers and sisters, present and future, every success.

Tasmania-it is Time

During the next two weekends there is a big push to spread Sahaja yoga in Tasmania. Yogis from the mainland are traveling south to assist the locals, firstly at a fair in Launceston and then in Hobart. Could all of us please keep our attention with the Tasmanians during this time.

A Mother

A mother is a person who holds you tight at night
and when you are frightened she always stays in sight.

A mother is a caring soul
who always stays in touch.

And when you look much harder you will see
she is much more than much.

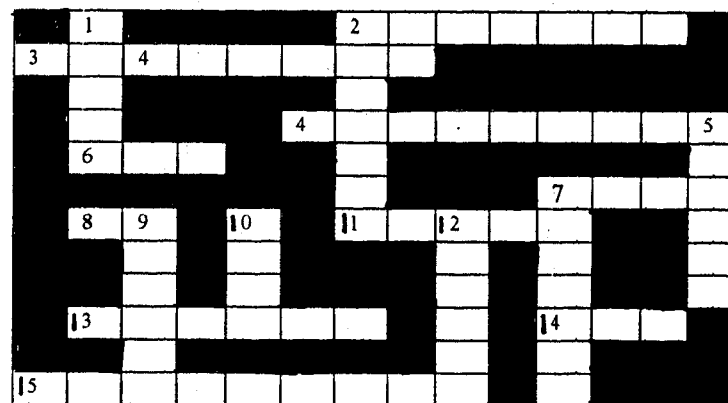
Written at international Sahaj public school by Mary rose Brownscombe age 10

The Guru - Ramaana Maharishi: The Sage of Arunacala

"The *Guru* is the *Self*. At some time a man grows dissatisfied with his life and, not content with what he has, seeks the satisfaction of his desires through prayer to *God*. His mind is gradually purified until he longs to know *God*, more to obtain His Grace than to satisfy worldly desires. Then *God's* grace begins to manifest itself. *God* takes the form of a *Guru* and appears to the devotee, teaches him the Truth, and, moreover, purifies his mind by associating with him. The devotee's mind thus gains strength and is then able to turn inward. By meditation it is further purified until it remains calm without the least ripple. That calm Expanse is the *Self*."

The *Guru* is both outer and inner. From outside he gives a push to the mind to turn inward while from inside he pulls the mind towards the *Self* and helps in quieting it. That is the Grace of the *Guru*. There is no difference between *God*, *Guru* and the *Self*."

Guru Puja is in Cabella this year on 18-19-20 July



ACROSS

2. Moon in sanskrit (7)
3. Treatment for hot heads (8)
4. Opposite of sick human (9)
6. Truth in sanskrit (3)
7. The coming Puja (4)
8. Jung thought of it first - part of the unconscious (2)
10. The narrow gate (5)
13. Simple, born within & spontaneous (6)
14. Ruler of the right channel (3)
15. Birthplace of Shri Mataji (9)

DOWN

1. A thousand petals (5)
2. Sahaja Yogis pilgrimage (7)
4. The first word (2)
5. The Buddha (6)
7. The first son (7)
9. The festival of lights (6)
10. Union (4)
12. ----- Nagar (6)