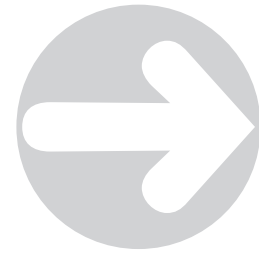




india TOMORROW

CELEBRATING LIVES
OF INDIVIDUALS WHO
ARE SHAPING THE
NATION'S FUTURE





Celebrating the Human Spirit, Twelve Stories of Untold Possibilities

Anniversaries and birthdays resonate with significance. They are opportunities to celebrate, mark progress and provide a frame to gauge future potential. The birth of a nation is even more significant, it provides an occasion for an appraisal of larger issues – the state of the economy, polity, future directions, past follies. As India marks her 64th year as an independent country there will be no shortage of tributes, souvenirs, specially designed programmes and unravelling of exhilarating statistics.

But far away from the debates and events is a universe in which a number of individuals are transforming the way we think about ourselves as a nation. They are certainly not household names nor do they follow any set formula but given their passion and pragmatism they have become a vital part of the India story, perhaps a key to her future. Representing diverse fields, they are innovative, dynamic, hearts and heads perfectly matched; all working towards making India a better place. They are proof that you don't have to be supported by the government or large institutions to make a difference.

These are not standard-issue heroes but ground-level activists, entrepreneurs, cultural figures reacquainting us with the indomitable will of the human spirit.

India Perspectives showcases some of these icons-in-the-making. This selection is not a celebrity circus nor is it the result of a popularity contest. It is also not a complete list by any means nor is it a balanced regional or professional representation.

What it is, is an attempt to highlight

performance-based, result-oriented individuals who are in the business of shaking things up by bringing important and serious issues into the national mainstream. Often unsung and unnoticed, these crusaders are so sure of what they want to do that they have happily left greener pastures to follow their convictions. The 12 committed and compassionate people profiled in this special issue represent a slice of India.

Like Harivansh, who took a leap of faith when he shifted from the life of a high profile metro journalist to become the editor and guiding force of the widely-circulated, multi-edition *Prabhat Khabar* by determinedly sticking to the basic principles of journalism – in spite of the prevailing belief that nothing succeeds like sensationalism. For many consumers of news Harivansh has changed how people feel about the media. Then there is 34 year-old Saima Iqbal, an architect who has brought conservation and preserving one's architectural heritage into the discourse of Jammu and Kashmir. See what Anshu Gupta has accomplished when he left a blue chip company to set up a professionally-managed distribution network that gives clothes to the needy all over India. Or Chhavi Rajawat, a peppy MBA, who as the village head of Soda in Rajasthan has taken charge of the area's development. Among the stories are also those of individuals realising their potential. One such is about the rise of the Prince Dance Group, run by Krishna Mohan Reddy and made up of 25 illiterate daily wagers, whose only aim in life is to dance, dance, dance.

These then are inspiring stories of untold possibilities. Many happy returns, India. ■



POLITICS CHAVVI RAJAWAT

The Will Do Lady

TEXT: URMILA MARAK

An MBA graduate is India's youngest village head in Soda, Rajasthan

With her long tresses and willowy figure, Chhavi Rajawat can easily pass off as a slinky model or a Bollywood actor. But instead this MBA from Pune has donned the role of a *sarpanch* or a village head of Soda, 60km from the state capital Jaipur, located in District Tonk, one of the most backward areas of Rajasthan. Only it's not a role. This is real life for the thirty-year-old, clad in jeans and a T-shirt, driving her jeep to supervise the desilting of an old water body or taking a municipal officer to task while villagers listen to her with respect and sometimes shock. It was the same feeling Rajawat encountered when she addressed the 11th Info-Poverty World Conference at the UN when she spoke of the imperatives of

including new technologies in achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

This grit and glamour is all in a day's work for Rajawat ever since she left her senior management position with Airtel group's Bharti Televentures to return to her roots. Last year, Rajawat contested the *panchayat* elections and won with a handsome margin following in the footsteps of her grandfather Raghbir Singh who had been *sarpanch* of Soda for 15 years. "It was primarily the love, faith and respect for my grandfather, who also looked after the development of this area, that people here wanted someone from the same family to stand for elections," she says with her trademark candour. Since Soda is a seat reserved for women, Rajawat faced competition from 18 other women candidates who had whittled down to 2 as voting day drew closer.

A popular leader she is constantly helped by numerous villagers as she implements her projects.



In spite of the number of rural development schemes on paper the villagers are still suffering and struggling. Someone has to take steps to fix it.



“ The MBA degree has also helped me plan and manage things a lot better and also made government officials realise that I mean business and I am not here to kill time.



Rajawat's priorities include ensuring safe drinking water for the villagers in this acutely saline-prone area besides building water harvesting structures. In charge of implementing the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act in Soda, she is also trying to increase job opportunities by involving NGOs. "For the reservoir revival project, which covers an area of 100 acres, I thought I would receive support from NGOs and corporate houses," explains the young *sarpanch*. But the response was slow. She needs ₹ 35 million for the project but as yet has been able to collect only ₹2 million with help from her immediate family and friends. "In spite of the number of rural development schemes on paper the villagers are still suffering and struggling. Someone has to take steps to fix it," she says.

In many ways, Rajawat's MBA degree has helped in putting Soda in the public eye. The *sarpanch* has been able to tap well wishers for funds even strangers have contributed to her efforts after hearing her interviews on the radio. "The degree has also helped me plan things and also made government officials realise that I mean business and I am not here to kill time," she says.

The thought of her contemporaries in the corporate world earning the big bucks doesn't faze her. "I have no regrets because the satisfaction I receive from being able to execute projects and improve the lives of

10,000 plus people is far more than any fat salary can bring me," she says.

Rajawat has already been instrumental in opening the first bank in Soda but her to-do list remains packed. Water conservation, water management are top items followed by sanitation, reforestation, electrification, education, with a huge emphasis on primary education and focussed vocational training and schemes for self-employment.

Grassroots politics has always inspired Rajawat. Still, being a *sarpanch* is not exactly a remunerative career path. So this young politician-cum-entrepreneur, together with a friend, who has represented India in international equestrian championships, has taken her love for the great outdoors and her passion for horses by teaching horse riding in the Equest Horse Riding Academy. In between, her packed schedule she also looks after the family hotel in Jaipur.

Educated in Rishi Valley, Bengaluru and Lady Shri Ram College, Delhi and then Pune, Chhavi represents the new face of pan-India: Educated, committed and community-oriented. The road ahead is daunting but just after a year-and-a-half as a *sarpanch*, Chhavi is confident that within three years she will be able to transform her village and bring about the change that Soda as yet has been only dreaming about. ■

More on Chavi Rajawat at www.soda-india.in



TECHNOLOGY GYANESH PANDEY

The Energy Star

TEXT: USHA RAI

He generates electricity from husk power providing a brighter future for Bihar

Without light and energy it is not possible to change the face of rural India. “The backward villages of India cannot be mainstreamed for development unless there is education and access to education should not be blighted by a lack of electricity.” The thought drove Gyanesh Pandey and his friends to look for alternative power for some of the remotest villages of Bihar in east and west Champaran, Muzzafarpur, Sitamarhi and Laksarai.

Pandey knew about life without electricity. From Baithania village located in power-starved Chamaparan, his school years were spent outside the state. After completing his engineering from Banaras Hindu

University, he went to the United States for his masters in engineering. It was there he began studying non-conventional energy sources – solar, wind energy and bio-diesel – but they did not seem workable options for Bihar.

When he returned to India he stumbled on the idea of generating power from rice husk through a person providing gasification technology for rice mills. However, instead of using diesel for turbines he hit on the idea of rice husk. Some research work had already been done on rice husk power in the Indian Institute of Technologies but Pandey’s job was to make it happen. The first plant of Husk Power Systems (HPS) – born from the combined efforts of Pandey, his two friends, Ratnesh Yadav and Manoj Sinha and Charles W. Ransler, an American who studied with him in the US – was set up in 2007 in the wilderness of Tamkuha, West Champaran, some seven hours from Patna.



PHOTO: SAPARISHI BISWAS / OUTLOOK BUSINESS

The backward villages of India cannot be mainstreamed for development unless there is education and access to education should not be blighted by a lack of electricity.





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With a network of roads, wire facilities coming to the region we will piggyback on the plants to set up medical care and health units in 2014.

The plant converts waste rice husk to combustible gas that drives a small turbine. Today HPS has set up 60 mini-power plants, each generating enough power for about four villages — depending on the size of the villages and the power consumed. The mini-plants are also lighting up over 250 villages helping a population of 300,000.

Eighty five to ninety percent of the homes in the villages where power is available are buying a six-hour supply at ₹ 80 a month from HPS. It is enough to charge a mobile phone and turn on two CFL bulbs ensuring children finish their studies for the day and women their household chores. On a monthly basis HPS collects ₹ 40,000 to ₹ 50,000 as revenue from sale of electricity but gives back to villages about ₹ 10,000 a month by generating employment. With the amount of rice husk generated in the state, Pandey estimates that Bihar has the capacity to run 2,000 mini-power plants. Now HPS is developing a franchising model which will catapult it onto the global social enterprise stage. It will also enlist Indian partners who want to open their own HPS franchise.

The environment-friendly HPS power plants have reduced the annual consumption of 42,000 litres of kerosene and 18,000 litres of diesel in the villages. Since they are non-polluting, it is estimated that the HPS plants have saved 50,000 tonnes of Co2 being

released into the atmosphere between 2007 to August 2010. All these plus points have won HPS this June the coveted £120,000 Ashden Award for innovations in sustainable energy.

Pandey has developed other streams of activity too. Providing power to rural India is just one part of his big dream. Health, education, agriculture and women's empowerment are other aspects of rural life that he seeks to delve into. "With a network of roads, wire facilities coming to the region we will piggyback on the plants to set up medical care and health units in 2014," says Pandey.

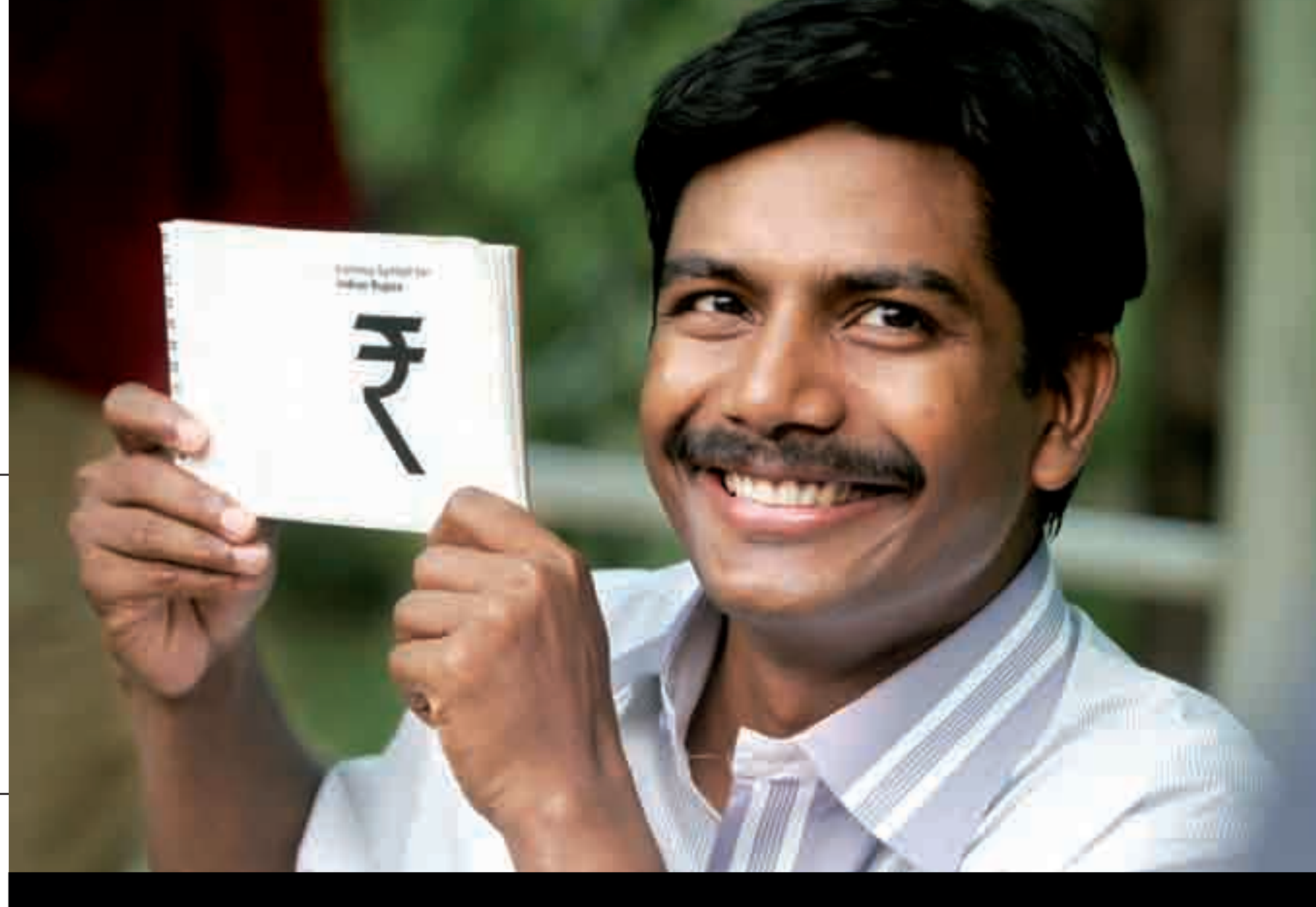
A Husk Power University — run independently of HPS through a foundation called Samta Samridhi — has been set up training people to run the power plants. Thus his vision for employment and empowerment of women is already taking shape. Using the char from the rice husk women are being trained to make incense sticks. To speed up production and ensure quality of the incense Pandey developed a machine that costs about ₹ 3,000. Some women have been given machines and trained so that they can earn at least ₹ 60 a day.

"It has been a continuous struggle but when you actually see villages light up and children studying at home, there is a huge sense of satisfaction," admits Pandey. ■

More on Gyanesh Pandey at www.huskpowersystems.com

ECONOMY **D. UDAYA KUMAR**

Symbol of Success

TEXT: **SWATI BHASIN**

The designer of the rupee symbol now turns his attention to making jewellery from junk

A year ago Dharmalingam Udaya Kumar, 32, invented the rupee symbol. This month it has emerged from the mint stamped on coins of various denominations as well as ₹ 10 notes. Now, everybody in India, from a child buying a toffee for 50 paise in Nagercoil to a person paying ₹ 10 for parking at a busy bazaar in Delhi will be familiar with Kumar's design, which was the winner of a contest organised by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. Kumar, who pursued his doctoral studies at the Industrial Design Centre at IIT Bombay, beat 3,000 other participants to

take the prize of ₹ 250,000, which he has donated to Prajwala, a Hyderabad-based NGO.

Currently an assistant professor at the Indian Institute of Technology in Guwahati, Kumar must be a proud man because India is only the second country in the world – the first being England – to have its currency symbol printed on its notes. And the fifth to have a symbol at all.

The Indian rupee mark is a blend of the Devanagari – '₹' and the Roman 'R' and is based on the Indian tricolour and arithmetic equivalence according to the designer. Kumar chose this fusion so that the mark would be unique and be easily differentiated from the rupiah of Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Passionate about graphic design, typography, type design and design research, the young designer has to his credit

a Tamil font, Parashakti, and a book on Tamil typography.

Born in Kallakurichi and brought up in Chennai, Kumar is fascinated by the ocean, so much so that he has designed Waterworld, a futuristic floating city to deal with congestion in Mumbai. A visit to his webpage www.dudayakumar.com reveals that the bachelor is a sports enthusiast, a nature lover and leads a simple lifestyle. Also, he strongly believes in himself and certain fundamental principles – righteousness, equality, love, trust, cleanliness and discipline. He says "Every time I see the symbol in newspapers and magazines, it strikes me, it is my biggest achievement so far." An achievement that has ensured his place in India's business history. ■

More on D. Uday Kumar at www.dudayakumar.com

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TECHONOLOGY RIKIN GANDHI

Life through a Lens

TEXT: ERAM AGHA

A US-born aeronautical engineer's green dream won the hearts of farmers in India

All that Rikin Gandhi required was a vision and a video camera to build Digital Green, a not-for-profit organisation that uses tools of information and communication technology for social change. "I visited India for a bio-diesel venture in 2006 and interacted with rural India for the first time. That's when I realised that farmers don't have an access to right information. I joined Microsoft Research in Bengaluru to figure out how technology interspersed with social organisation can be applied for the betterment of marginal and small farmers," he says. The result is the Bengaluru-based organisation, Digital Green. Over time it has spun off and is now an independent entity of which Gandhi is CEO.

Born and brought up in the US, Gandhi holds a Master's degree in aeronautical and astronautical engineering from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the US – he is mentioned in the institute's list of innovative thinkers. After completing his course he joined Oracle as a software engineer, but the 29-year-old with a pilot's licence for the US Air Force harboured ambitions of joining the US space programme. However, his visit to India five years ago changed all that. "While growing up I read biographies of astronauts, they would go to space and see the world differently from that formidable height. Questions like, 'What will I do when I come back to Earth?' occurred to them. Some of them became farmers or schoolteachers after coming back to Earth. Digital Green, for me is a step to reconnect with people."

Gandhi's story runs a trajectory similar to that of the character played by Shah Rukh Khan in the Hindi film



Our goal is to support livelihood of farmers across India and in the world. Problems of health, nutrition, and credit need to be dealt with as well.





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Because there is a need to build trust in any method of knowledge dissemination, our videos carry the names of the farmers and their villages. This adds authenticity.

Swades. “No. I am not inspired by that story as I have not seen the film,” Gandhi affirms. All the same like the protagonist in *Swades*, Gandhi too “reverse-migrated” to work with farmers in India. After arriving in India, Gandhi quickly grasped the loopholes of the traditional methods of disseminating knowledge among farmers. He worked out a plan that would make Digital Green different. “There were traditional ways like broadcast TV and radio which were very generic. Some programmes were intensive in their training and work but they were not cost effective. Because there is a need to build trust in any method of knowledge dissemination, our videos carry the names of the farmers and their villages. This adds authenticity. Use of videos makes the system demonstrative!” says Gandhi. The stars of the videos are the farmers themselves. They are shot by hand-held camcorders demonstrating farming techniques, the footage is then checked by partner NGOs for accuracy and then screened in villages using hand-held projectors. Gandhi’s interaction with the farmers has been facilitated by social groups already working with the local community.

The farmers recognise the change Digital Green, which reaches 56,015 farmers, has brought about in their lives. Says Mallappa Pudabangi, 52, a farmer from village Dasanatti, Belgaum in Karnataka: “It is a very useful

platform for us to learn about effective farming techniques. When I saw the film I was motivated to change my way of farming.” His enthusiasm is palpable when he says that the farmers need many more Rikin Gandhis.

In the course of his research, Gandhi discovered that urban Indians are disconnected with food. “In the sense they know what to eat and from where to buy but don’t know anything about agriculture and rural set-up,” says Gandhi. To help the urban population connect with the farming community Digital Green started a game called Wonder Village through which the urban population gets to understand issues of rural development.

So far, the farmers have shot around 1,609 videos. But this is just a beginning. Gandhi’s plans are as big as the fields he works for. “When one of our videos was shown to President Obama on his recent trip to India, there was talk on how India and the US can come together for agricultural development in Africa. Also, we have to work with the Institute of International Agriculture and look at best practices that can be used and shared with the local community. Our goal is to support livelihood of farmers across India and in the world. Problems of health, nutrition, and credit need to be dealt with as well,” says Gandhi. It seems Gandhi’s green dreams are becoming a reality. ■

More on Rikin Gandhi at www.digitalgreen.org



CRAFT SUMITA GHOSE

Artisans Turn Shareholders

TEXT: USHA RAI

A diminutive powerhouse develops a profitable community-owned company

It was towards the end of 2006 that Rangutra was set up as a bridge between, “artisans and customers, tradition and contemporary and change and continuity.” From the three groups of artisans who began working with Rangutra when it was launched the company now comprises 30 groups, each with 25 to 200 skilled artisans. In some 2,000 homes across the country artisans are working for Rangutra. Of them 1,100 are shareholders coming from remote parts of the country – the deserts of Rajasthan, the hills of Uttaranchal and the underdeveloped areas of Andhra Pradesh, Assam and West Bengal.

The driving force behind Rangutra is a diminutive powerhouse, the Delhi-based Sumita Ghose. A

Fulbright scholar, she was working with artisans in Rajasthan in the mid-eighties when, she, along with Sanjoy Ghose, set up URMUL, an NGO, which tapped the traditional skills of weaving and embroidery to help farmers to improve their lives. In 2006, she decided to go back on that road and work out how the artisan community could become part of a thriving India.

Ghose’s guiding principle has been to celebrate India’s rich crafts heritage, ensuring a sustainable livelihood for artisans by creating quality, handmade products and marketing them by strictly using fair trade practices. Profits from sale are ploughed back to provide for a better life for the artisan communities. “Socially”, says the bespectacled Ghose, “craftspeople and artisans come from some of the most disadvantaged communities with very little opportunity for self-development and growth.”

Making the company market-oriented was the real challenge since it was not mandated to be dependent



PHOTO: VISHAL KOLI/OUTLOOK BUSINESS

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I am confident that gradually all the 2,000 workers associated with Rangсутra will become shareholders.



PHOTO: VISHAL KOLU/OUTLOOK BUSINESS

on grants. Before asking artisans to step in with their financial contributions, Ghose took two loans – ₹ 2.3 million from Avishkaar, a social venture or angel fund and ₹ 3 million from Artisans Micro Finance, a subsidiary of FabIndia, an organisation which connects artisans to modern urban markets; Ghose's own contribution was ₹1 million. While her two big funders own 50 percent of the shares, she, along with other artisans, owns the rest. Gradually she hopes to raise the shares of the artisans to 49 percent.

The venture fund has paid twice the price the artisan paid for a share and barely five years down the line the value of a share has increased five-fold, from ₹100 to ₹ 500. "Though there are 1,100 shareholders, the number of workers associated with Rangсутra is over 2,000. I am confident that gradually all of them will become shareholders," says Ghose. All shareholders get dividends and in the last three years, Rangсутra's dividends have risen from 10 percent in 2008-2009 to 25 percent this financial and turnover has soared from ₹ 3 million in 2006-'07 to ₹105 million in 2010-2011.

Driven by a commitment for excellence, Ghose, along with her two young designers, Ritu Suri and Ruchi Tripathi, both graduates of the National Institute of Fashion Technology, is constantly motivating the artisans,

giving them new designs, searching for fresh markets and sourcing new talent and group specialisations. For instance, Mahila Sannathkar's forte, in the old city of Hyderabad, is *aari* embroidery, quality stitching and tailoring. In the Sundarbans area of West Bengal, there are some 200 artisans who specialise in silk *batik*. While Rangсутra's biggest buyer is FabIndia, it also exports a small amount of its exquisite products to France, the Netherlands and the UK.

Seventy percent of Rangсутra's workers are women. Working part-time from their homes and depending on the level of their skills they are able to earn anything from ₹ 3,000 to ₹ 5,000 a month whereas earlier they may have sporadically earned anything from ₹ 500 to ₹ 1,000. Working full-time skilled male workers can earn up to ₹ 10,000 in a month: the payment piece rate is the same for men and women.

For many, being a shareholder in a profitable venture is a huge sense of accomplishment. The shares women have in Rangсутra are not just scraps of paper. For them it is a new form of saving, as valuable as the chunky silver they wear, which probably explains why one of the artisans has chosen to frame her share and hang it prominently on a wall in her house – an obvious symbol of a resurgent India. ■

More on Sumita Ghosh at www.rangсутra.com



SOCIAL ENTREPRENEUR ANSHU GUPTA

The Material Man

TEXT: SWATI BHASIN

A social innovator takes on the charge of clothing the needy

It was while Anshu Gupta was on a freelance assignment with the *Deccan Chronicle* on a bitterly cold winter night in Old Delhi that he realised how extremely privileged he was. He stumbled upon a barely clad man trying to keep the cold away with liquor. It was a troubling narrative. But for the twentysomething Gupta those images gave an insight into the importance of clothing: the lack of which could lead to death; the presence of which was a road to dignity. Not long afterwards, leaving a job with a blue chip company, Gupta set up Goonj (literally echo) devoting his life to collecting clothes contributed by the advantaged and distributing them to those in need.

From a niggling idea that thought has now become

a streamlined movement. Gupta, a strapping forty year-old with the build of a basketball player, is at the hub of a collection centre-cum-office-cum-recycling unit in Delhi's trendy Sarita Vihar. In a very functional office where the walls are decorated with precious awards, charts showing schedules, goals, Gupta and a team of five, along with 300 volunteers, collects, coordinates and dispatches clothes. From the 67 items that Gupta initially picked out of his own wardrobe Goonj presently provides 70,000 kgs of clothes, utensils, school material and old furniture every month to various parts of India. Helped by 250 partner groups Goonj's collection centres operate in seven cities distributing to 21 states. Looking back, Gupta says: "I never followed any conventions. I didn't know anybody who could guide me. I made my own rules for approaching people, giving presentations and fundraising."

It was uncharted territory for this powerful



PHOTO: PUNEET SINGH

I never followed any conventions; I didn't know anybody who could guide me. I made my own rules for approaching people, giving presentations and fundraising.





PHOTO: PUNEET SINGH

“ I really do not believe in charity. That is why we have to change our thinking from donor’s pride to receiver’s dignity. ”

entrepreneur but the results have been satisfying. The size and the scope of the operation have grown dramatically. Contributed clothes are divided according to gender, age, size and other demographic and geographic needs. And the art of giving has extended beyond clothes to toys, books for children, electronic gadgets and office furniture. A separate unit is dedicated to making sanitary napkins for rural women from sun-dried cotton cloth filled with unused material donated by export houses. Five units are packed together and sold from ₹ 1 to ₹ 5 depending on the spending capacity of the women in the villages. Presently, Goonj produces around 200,000 napkins every month for distribution to the rural hinterland. Additionally, meetings are held to educate village women on hygiene and destroy myths about menstruation.

Gupta never intended Goonj to be an organisation that pitied the deprived. Respecting the dignity of the needy has been his mantra. That’s the reason why the projects and schemes being put in place enhance the receiver’s self-worth. The organisation’s Cloth for Work initiative, for instance, ensures that clothes collected for villagers are not distributed gratis. The villagers need to ‘earn’ the clothes just like wages. In the remote areas of Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Orissa typically villagers



collectively construct bore wells, bridges and repair damaged roads in exchange for value-added clothes. Similar guidelines are also developed when toys and books are being distributed to children.

The core philosophy of Goonj lies in not wasting anything that is contributed. If it is not worthy of distribution it is all transformed creatively by untrained hands: audio tapes are used to decorate handbags, colourful stress balls are made from swatches, mats and mattresses from waste material are some of the items sold in fund-raising camps or distributed in villages.

Innovation and strategising has been a key element of Gupta’s thinking. From an empty till, Goonj today has a turnover of around ₹ 40 million: around 50 percent comes from individual contributions, the rest from the sale of products. “People invest their money and they get happiness in return, he says.

It’s a trade-off which that has worked well which is why Gupta prefers to call himself a social entrepreneur instead of a social worker because he knows he has to generate enough money in order to meet the basic requirements of logistics — staffing and transportation. “I really do not believe in charity. That is why,” says this iconic entrepreneur-activist, “we have to change our thinking from donor’s pride to receiver’s dignity.” ■

More on Anshu Gupta at www.goonj.org



DANCE PRINCE DANCE GROUP

Rhythm of Life

TEXT: J.K. MOHAPATRA



Daily wagers beat the odds and form an award-winning dance group

Six years ago, a 23-year-old daily wage labourer working in Mumbai's construction industry saw a dream of building a dance troupe in his native village of Ambapua of Orissa's Ganjam district. T. Krishna Mohan Reddy was not content with a life of lifting bricks and mixing cement. His passion was dance. He left Mumbai and organised a small group of like-minded friends in the town of Berhampur and called it the Prince Dance Group. After work, the group would start practising on the premises of a dilapidated Kali temple. His partners were twenty five

other boys, most of them school dropouts and daily labourers, two of them were even afflicted by polio. Though none of them had any formal dance training, they were all keen to make a mark in local dance shows.

Things changed in 2006 when the Prince Dance Group became runners-up in a TV reality dance show, *Boogie Woogie* on Sony. Mixing contemporary dance with mythology the group put up a stellar performance though they missed the crown by a whisker.

Life took on a more dramatic turn in 2009 when the group auditioned for the first edition of *India's Got Talent*, a reality show on Colors channel. Their dance, *Saare jahan se achha* choreographed by Reddy had everyone in tears "Everyone, starting from the cameraperson to judge Shekhar Kapoor was crying. It

was the happiest day of my life," recounts Reddy.

As scores of labourers and the general public in Orissa, as well as in his village in Ambapua and neighbouring Berhampur town, watched the finals on huge television screens, the group trumped their rivals by putting up a scintillating act called *Das Avatar*, the ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu. The ₹ 5 million prize money was divided equally among all the members while ₹ 50,000 was earmarked for the construction of a new Kali temple, the premises on which they started their practice.

The group members are now full-time performers, travelling from festival to festival. They are starting a dance school on a one-acre plot donated by the Orissa government near the Gopalpur-on-Sea beach. From labourers to celebrities it's been such a rewarding journey. ■

More on PDG at www.princdancegroup.org

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YOGA T.K.V. DESIKACHAR

Master of the Mat

TEXT: NINA MUKHERJI

The teacher spreads the belief that yoga is not merely a set of exercises for physical fitness

Founder of the Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandiram (KYM) in Chennai, T.K.V. Desikachar is one of the world's foremost yoga teachers and a renowned authority on the therapeutic uses of the discipline. It is difficult to believe that the master was once a reluctant student, going as far as to hide in a tree to avoid classes with his teacher and father Tirumalai Krishnamacharya, who was a strict disciplinarian and a demanding task master. No surprise then that the young Desikachar was glad to get away from home to pursue a degree in engineering.

He graduated at the top of his class and landed a good job. But before he could embark on his new career, an incident changed the course of his life. It was 1961, Desikachar was reading the newspaper sitting in the balcony of his home when he espied an elegantly

dressed woman stepping out of an expensive car in front of his house. Sounding very excited she called out to Desikachar's father. The moment she spotted Krishnamacharya, she hugged him and exclaimed, "Thank you! Thank you very much!" The yoga guru smiled and led her inside. Desikachar wondered why a Western woman was hugging his extremely conservative father.

Soon Desikachar would learn that the woman was a chronic patient of insomnia and was being treated by his father. The night before the visit was the first time in years that she had had a restful sleep without any medication. The relief was so great that she had rushed to thank Krishnamacharya. This was an eureka moment for Desikachar, in that instant he understood the value and importance of his father's work; that yoga was not an esoteric philosophy or about dogmatic rituals, it was about transforming lives. "I realised how great my father was, and how much he had to share with people. I decided to give up my career and become a



PHOTO: KAUSTUBH DESIKACHAR

I decided to give up my career and become a yoga student at a time when yoga was not popular. Such a decision from a young engineer with a secure job was unusual.



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My father's pioneering effort has resulted in KYM becoming one of the best known yoga therapy and research centres of the world.



PHOTO: KAUSTHUB DESIKACHAR

yoga student," says Desikachar. "It was a time when yoga was not popular and such a decision from a young engineer with a secure job was extremely unusual."

The son quickly turned disciple and asked his father to become his guru. Together they worked to give a fresh impetus to the spread of yoga in its pure form. If today yoga is a part of the lives of millions across the world, it is due in large measure to the efforts of Krishnamacharya. While preserving ancient wisdom and reviving lost teachings, he developed and adapted yoga practices that would offer health, mental clarity and spiritual growth to an individual. His knowledge of yoga was so vast that he taught each student differently, refusing to standardise the practice and teaching methodology. "We still adhere very strictly to our teacher Krishnamacharya's philosophy of teaching yoga as it applies to the other. So each individual is given a specific set of *asanas* pertaining to his or her needs and requirements," says Geetha Shankar, a senior member of the faculty at KYM.

Some of the world's best minds like Jiddu Krishnamurthy, a well-known writer and speaker on philosophical and spiritual issues, studied under Desikachar and his father. It was the meeting with Krishnamurthy that helped Desikachar take yoga beyond the shores of India. "My father's pioneering

effort in bringing different healing traditions of the world together has resulted in KYM becoming one of the best known yoga therapy and research centres of the world. He has popularised yoga in many countries across Europe and America," says Kausthub Desikachar, who is CEO of KYM. Krishnamacharya passed away in 1989, in 2006 Desikachar, along with Kausthub, founded the Krishnamacharya Healing and Yoga Foundation (KHYF), which is committed to spreading the holistic yoga teachings of T. Krishnamacharya.

Desikachar has authored many publications, including *Health, Healing and Beyond* and *The Heart of Yoga: Developing a Personal Practice*. Today, KYM, a registered public charitable trust, is a multi-departmental institution which employs over 30 teachers. His entire family, his wife, Menaka, sons, daughter and daughter-in-law are involved in one way or the other with the running of the place. The institute, which has over a thousand students on a monthly basis, offers courses in yoga studies and yoga therapy. Vedavani, a unit of KYM, also researches and teaches Vedic chanting while KYM-Mitra is an outreach programme that gifts yoga to the underprivileged and differently abled. Krishnamacharya had said, "Yoga is about life," and Desikachar and KYM continue to spread his message. ■

More on T.K.V. Desikachar at www.kym.org



CONSERVATION SAIMA IQBAL

The Heritage Warrior

TEXT: NASEER AHMAD

A young architect makes conservation part of the development discourse of the State

Most architects like nothing more than to talk about their buildings, plodding through PowerPoint presentations to show off their new constructions. But there are a few who believe that preserving historical buildings is a way to honour the past and define the future. Thirty four year-old Saima Iqbal belongs to the later category. In the face of inflation, apathy, neglect and uncertain times, Iqbal, Kashmir's only conservation architect, is determined to document and restore the diverse architectural history of Jammu and Kashmir. "The architecture of this state is unique. It has features of the Hindu period – typified by the massive stone temples like Martand, Awantipur, Naranga – the Muslim period and to some extent the Buddhist period."

Speaking from a cramped one-room office of the Indian National Trust for Arts and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) in Srinagar's Press Enclave area, Iqbal, together with six others, is diligently classifying hundreds of heritage monuments and buildings that dot Jammu and Kashmir, including 70 monuments protected by the Centre and 26 monuments protected by the State. Srinagar itself has 838 listed properties, though only 18 fall in a Grade1 classification and enjoy legal protection.

On any given day locals will see Iqbal with her short-cropped hair, laden with papers and a camera taking notes and pictures and red-flagging problem areas. It was as a student at Presentation Convent, the Valley's premier missionary school, that young Iqbal dreamt of becoming an architect. She recalls endlessly drawing sketches of houses, buildings, rivers and mountains while her father Zafar Iqbal, who was with the Military Engineering Services, would travel the State building



PHOTO: JAVID DNR

I have never thought of leaving Kashmir. As an architect, there may be better opportunities outside and a lot more money but moving out is not an option.





The architecture of this state is unique. It has features of the Hindu period — typified by the stone temples like Martand, Awantipur — and Muslim and Buddhist periods.

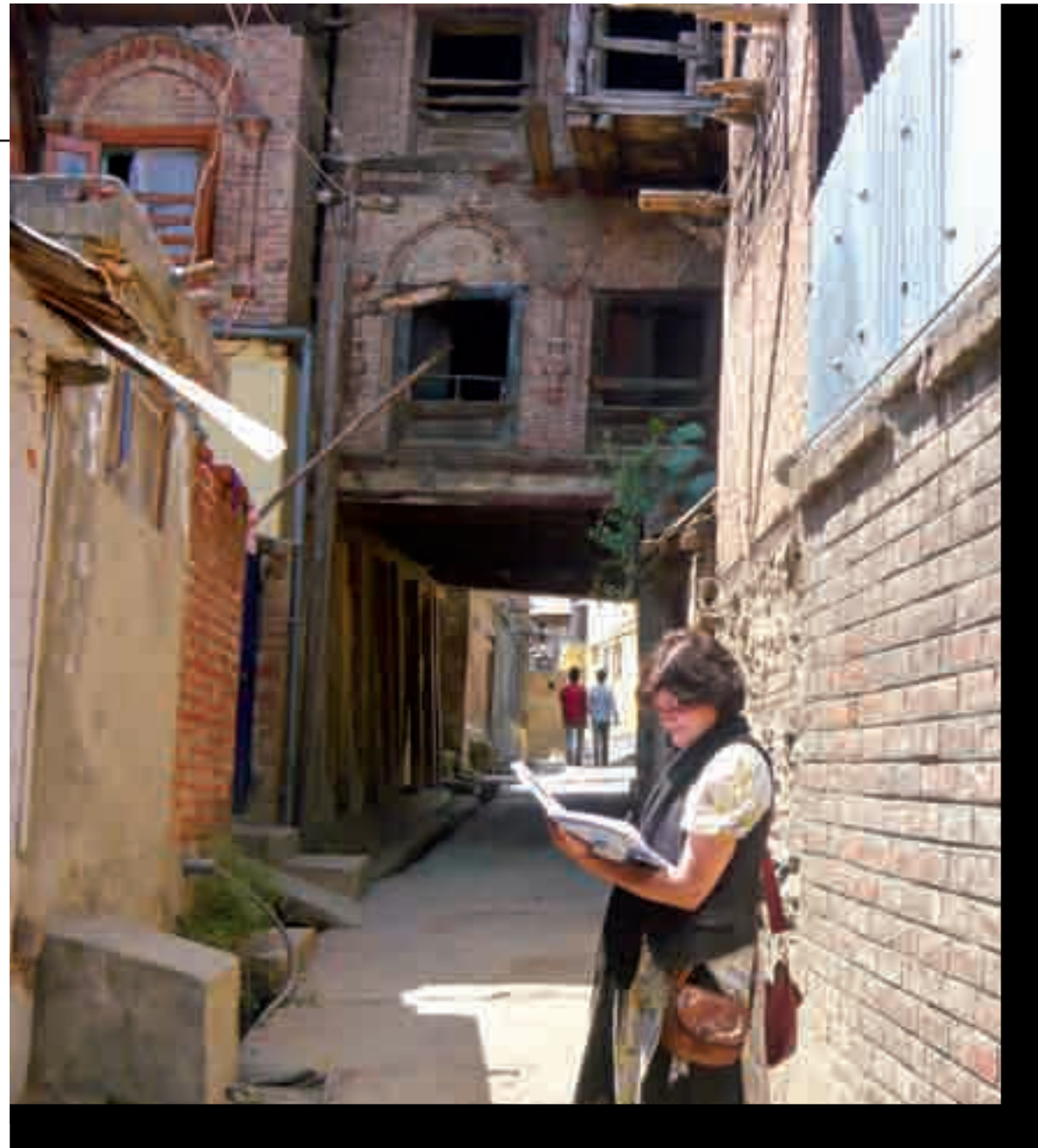


PHOTO: ANIL DUK

bridges. Having graduated in architecture in 1999 from MSIA, Bijapur she returned home and started work with some local architects. But she wanted something more than simply overlapping bricks with mortar.

Soon soul mates Sameer Hamdani, Jabeen Mehjoor and Abid Hussain Khan joined up and in 2004 the quartet established the INTACH chapter of Jammu and Kashmir. Later, Saleem Beg, whose expertise in heritage conservation made him the natural choice to head the chapter, joined in. “Saima was the first professional to join the campaign. Her efforts and that of her team have made conservation and heritage part of the development discourse of the State,” admits Beg.

The first major project the team undertook was the cultural mapping of 1,600 year-old Srinagar especially its downtown areas which contain 250 historical monuments within a 3km area. The heritage warriors went street by winding street, listing buildings, bridges, mosques, shrines and temples; dividing the area into heritage zones. The initiative was not easy. One day a man followed Iqbal upto her office threatening police action against the architect who, he thought, was taking photographs of his house to get a bank loan.

Eventually an exhaustive inventory of heritage buildings made its way into a five-volume book, *Cultural Resource Mapping of Srinagar City*. The widely acclaimed tome, now condensed into two volumes, is the only historical database available on the heritage

buildings of Srinagar. Another precious project has been the Aali Masjid, the second largest mosque in Srinagar after Jamia Mosque. Constructed in 1471 AD, during the rule of Sultan Hassan Shah, the mosque located near Eidgah in the Old City has been renovated becoming one of the best examples of Kashmir’s vernacular wooden architecture. The history of the mosque corresponds to four distinct political rules — the Sultanate, Mughals, Afghans and the Dogra periods during which the last known renovation was undertaken. “It was very rewarding. We actually worked with masons and carpenters to finish this INTACH project,” she says proudly.

Presently, Iqbal is working round the clock to include the Valley’s six Mughal Gardens — Nishat, Shalimar, Achabal, Chashma Shahi, Pari Mahal and Verinag — in UNESCO’s list of World Heritage Sites. The listing will help Kashmir become a global tourism destination.

Even with an M.Sc in Historical Conservation from Oxford, Iqbal is sure she does not want to leave Srinagar for better prospects. “I have never thought of leaving Kashmir. As an architect, there may be better opportunities outside and a lot more money but moving out is not an option.” Out of the original team, two have already left but for the indefatigable Iqbal, “There is too much to be done here.” Clearly, Iqbal’s journey of discovery has only just begun. ■

More on Saima Iqbal at www.intach.org



MEDIA HARIVANSH

Old School is the Right School

TEXT: MANNIKA CHOPRA

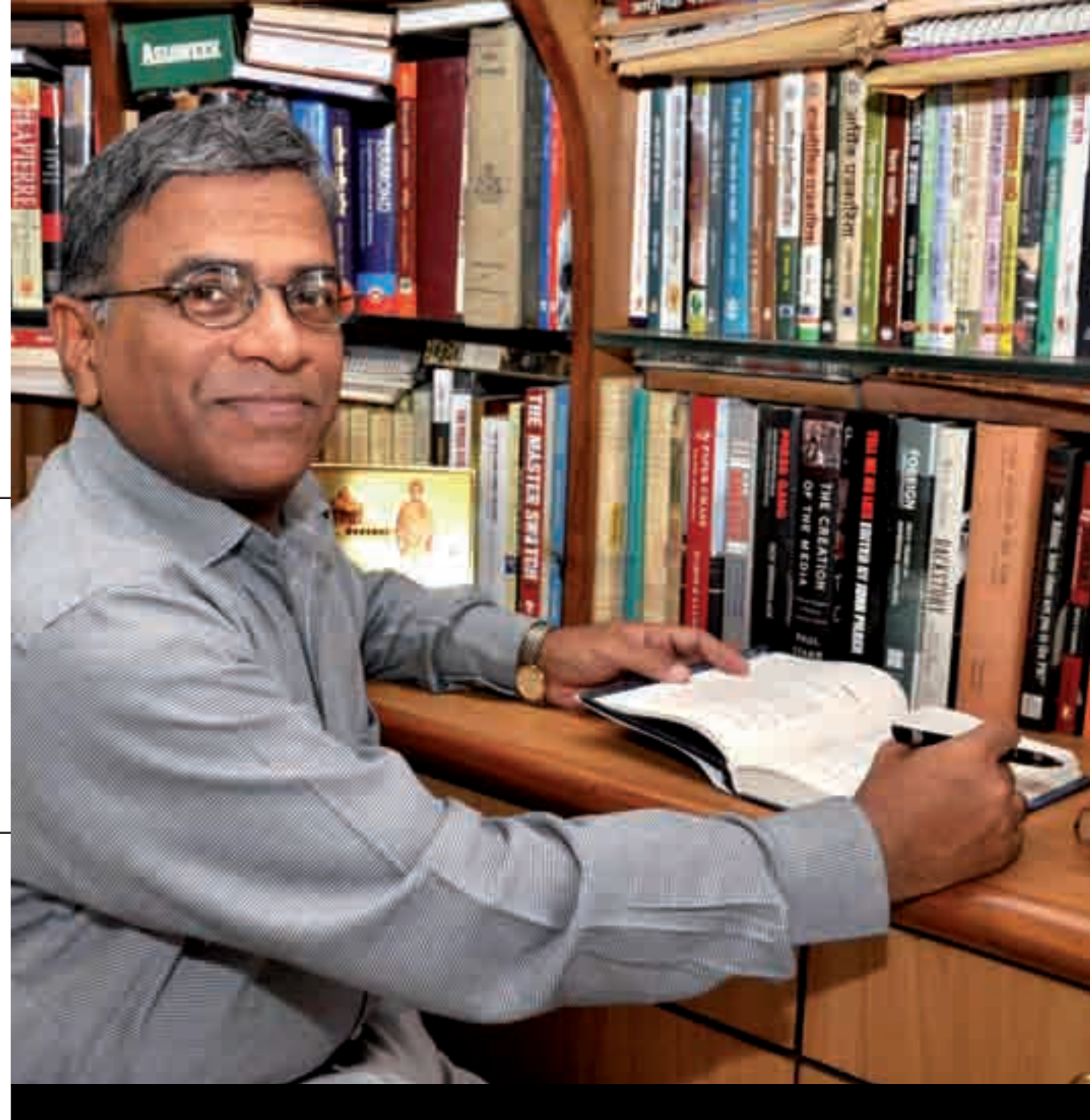
A determined editor from the Hindi belt creates a movement not a newspaper

Can any list of India's leading editors and the name Harivansh will be somewhere near the top. The bespectacled, unassuming editor of *Prabhat Khabar* embodies the journalistic values of the old school: an irreverence for power, a strong belief that media is a tool for social and political change and a conviction in the Gandhian principle that it is readers who are the masters and the market is not the king. In an era when sensationalism masquerades as news; when celebrities make it to headlines more often than development issues; where a witty phrase can be shrunk to 140 characters, 56 year-old Harivansh is an anachronism.

But he is a successful anachronism. As he himself says, *Prabhat Khabar*, tucked away in central Ranchi,

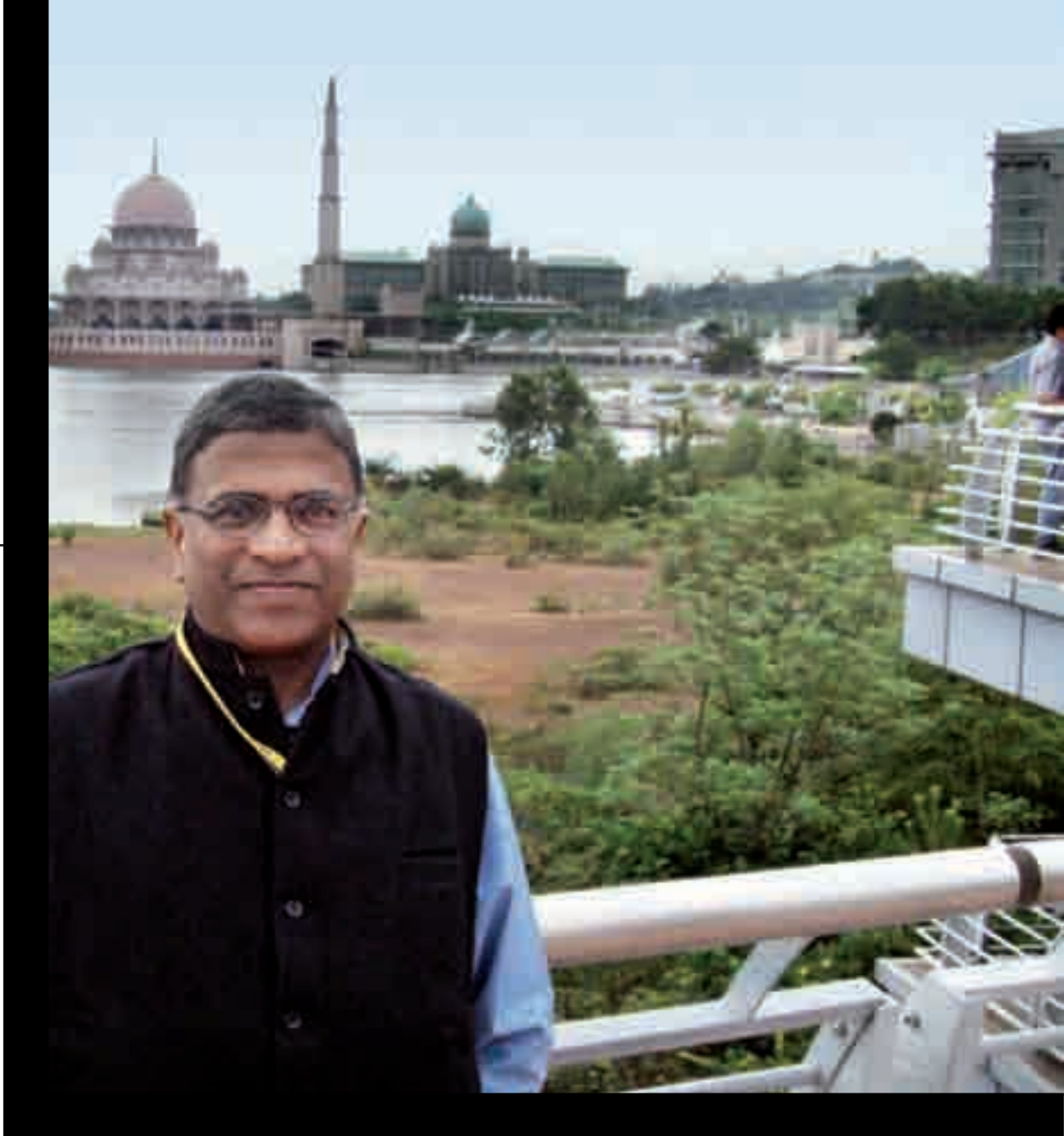
the capital of Jharkhand is an "experiment in today's journalism." At the helm of the paper since 1989, Harivansh has seen the Hindi paper grow from a shoddily produced, eight-page daily, with a circulation of 600 brought out by an outdated printing press into one published from 11 centres, with 60 editions and an audited circulation of 700,000 making it the eighth-largest Hindi paper in India and number one in Jharkhand.

In essence, the daily's story is the story of one journalist's determination to create, as its motto says, 'a movement not a paper.' Brought up in rural India, a former lecturer and bank officer, Harivansh opted for journalism as a chosen career path. Trained under iconic journalists like Dharmveer Bharati and S.P. Singh and hugely influenced by Jaiparakash Narain, a political leader and noted social reformer, Harivansh took up the challenge to edit *Prabhat Khabar* bought by the Kolkata-based business group, Usha Martin. It was, well



The newspaper is committed to the common man which is why we have an emotional bond with our readers.





“ Such reader interaction through these people’s forums was a new experience for us too. We also learnt along the way.

wishers said, a misguided leap of faith. With poor infrastructure the paper’s catchment area was south Bihar — perhaps one of the most backward areas of the country. But the pessimism was misplaced.

The root of *Prabhat Khabar’s* success has been its emphasis on the core values of journalism: looking with compassion and clarity at the life of the common man. The ideal people’s spy in the corridors of power, Harivansh has ensured that during the last 22 years the activist-paper exposed scams that have brought down politicians, reported on under-development resulting in a Supreme Court intervention and busted drug rackets. The paper even created a mass movement for the separation of a new Jharkhand state from Bihar which finally came about in 2000.

Harivansh’s pro-people approach runs counter to the over-processed, glossy, corporate-soaked tabloid strategy followed by other Hindi national dailies which are mopping up advertisements but leaving readers cold. “It has been a conscious decision not to follow the ‘lifestyle’ journalism that was adopted by the mainstream media. The paper is committed to the common man which is why we have an emotional bond with our readers,” says Harivansh.

On a shoestring budget he has put into place a modern newsroom, upgraded production technology, the paper’s design and layout and linked centres

through a computer network. He has also introduced the idea of ‘reader involvement’ in developing editorial content. Journalists organise regular readers’ meets in towns and villages in which people explain what they want to see in the newspaper. “Such interactions through these people’s forums was a new experience for us, too. We learnt along the way,” he explains.

The strategy has paid off. The paper has more than held its own against established Hindi dailies from large media groups whose aggressive marketing strategies have included distributing expensive gifts to enhance circulation and cutthroat cover prices. Circulation has increased dramatically and by 1996 the paper has been running without financial support from Usha Martin and launched several editions.

Alongside, there has been some inclement weather like the expected political pressure. Harivansh has 30 court cases lined up against him. Five years ago, there was even a chance that the paper’s ownership would change leaving its editor in a vulnerable position.

But the turbulence has passed. With a stronger bottom line, Harivansh is able to commit editorial resources for newsgathering that will make any accountant cringe. This son of a farmer clearly believes that, for the future of journalism, the old school is the right school. ■

More on Harivansh at www.prabhatkhabar.com



MUSIC SHILLONG CHAMBER CHOIR

On a High Note

TEXT: URMILA MARAK



Their music, a mixture of jazz, Khasi, Hindi films and pop, has won them global admirers

Few in India had heard the dulcet tones of the Shillong Chamber Choir till they had won the reality show, *India's Got Talent*, aired on entertainment channel Colors last year. But in point of fact the choir has been around since 2001 and had already received much international acclaim: last year, they were awarded three gold medals in the World Choir Games, an Olympic-styled event, in Shaoxing China. But it was when the group sang *Yeh dosti hum nahin todenge* from the Hindi film, *Sholay* or classics such as *Ajeeb dastaan hai yeh* from the film *Dil Apna Aur Preet Parai* that the whole of India got hooked.

However, neither the choir nor its mentor-cum director-cum-manager, 41-year-old pianist Neil Nongkynrih are consciously reaching out for fame and fortune. When the choir is not travelling it is ensconced in a house in Shillong, admittedly India's Rock capital, owned by Nongkynrih's family. Here the youngsters live together, pray together and practice eight hours a day in one seamless thread.

It's a dedicated and loyal group. Some members like Ibarisha Lyngdoh, a soprano with the choir has been offered a place at the prestigious Julliard School of Music in New York, William Basaiawmoit, a student of St Stephen's College has been offered a scholarship in France. But they're not leaving the choir preferring to stay in Shillong under tutelage of 'Uncle Neil.' As Nongkynrih says: "When you join a choir group, you have to look beyond the superficial and materialistic.

We are not just a choir group our goal is to promote peace, humanity and hope."

From single digits the choir has now expanded to a 20-member team ranging from 15 to 29 years. Most of them have come into the fold in search of a more meaningful life, others for inspiration, some for a gap year from their chosen career paths but they all have an almost spiritual faith in their music which is eclectic and timeless — a mixture of jazz, baroque, Khasi, pop, classical and contemporary.

It's a mixture that has won them admirers all over the world. The choir has performed with the Vienna Chamber Orchestra, the Sri Lankan choir in China, participated in two World Choir Games and preformed for the Presidents of India and the United States. And this unique music group is now headed towards Europe and Canada for a concert event sponsored by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations. ■

More on SCC at www.shillongchamberchoir.com

When you join a choir group, you have to look beyond the superficial and materialistic. We are not just a choir group our goal is to promote peace, humanity and hope.





ARCHITECTURE CHANDRASHEKHAR HARIHARAN

The Zero Hero

TEXT: ROSHIN VARGHESE

A former journalist reconciles architecture with environmental responsibility

He has built hundreds of homes in Bengaluru. But Dr Chandrashekar Hariharan is hardly a household name in India's IT city. Only the 'green' folk know him and the wanna-be greens who closely monitor his projects.

For Hariharan, is Bengaluru's, and perhaps India's, foremost green builder with his ecologically friendly and self-sustainable homes which goes under the brand name of ZED, an acronym for Zero Energy Driven. The Zed way is no grid supply for water, no grid sewage disposal, minimal dependence on the power grid and maximum dependence on green building materials.

A Johnny-come-lately to the building industry, Team Zed has managed to walk away with a clutch of

20 awards given for sustainable development, environment friendly homes, water management and excellence in sustainable architecture.

The world according to Hariharan is a long list of list of no's – no bricks, no clay blocks, no clay tiles, no ceramic or vitrified tiles, no forest timber, no incandescent bulbs, no regular fluorescent lamps, no halogen lamps, no geysers, no toxic paints, no export of waste and no import of municipal water.

These no's are replaced by soil stabilised blocks instead of brick, natural stone instead of vitrified tiles, plantation wood instead of conventional teak. The use of CFLs, LEDs, solar water heaters, recycled water and organic garbage which turns into bio gas are all baby steps that can make a home green. One of the main pillars that Zed homes adhere to is the concept of "embodied energy" which is the amount of energy consumed up to the point of use of a product or



PHOTO: ANAND K

The ancients moved water uphill in places like Amber in Rajasthan and in Hampi in Karnataka. How did they do it?



“There has to be respect for traditional knowledge with contemporary engineering understanding.



material, including the acquisition of raw materials, processing, manufacture, transport and construction. Senior project manager, B.S. Harikrishna says: “We are not building the way we do for getting a platinum award or for a better grading but to create a sustainable home.”

Hariharan’s real strength has been his nine years in water management while working with several NGOs. A former journalist who quit the profession because “it merely reported change and did not initiate change,” his expertise in water conservation and garnering of water resources has challenged mainstream builders. Looking back, he agrees that the history of water management has been his inspiration. “The history and architecture of water in India fascinates me. The ancients moved water uphill in places like Amber in Rajasthan and in Hampi in Karnataka. How did they do it? After all, Hampi had a population of 58,000 people who needed water for their daily use! They studied gradient levels and tanks were constructed,” he says passionately.

He has used the same principles in a project, T-Zed, completed in 2007. T-Zed with its 76 flats and 15 villas is located in Whitefield, a suburb of Bengaluru and a traditionally water critical area with no municipal supply. A combination of 44 interconnected shallow wells, the judicious pumping up of water, along with a system of water percolation and ground water recharge has been the success behind water sufficiency in T-Zed. Resident

Vinay Nair concedes that in the past four years, a water tanker has supplied the six-acre property with water only three or four times.

The Zed Collective has the added advantage of geo-thermal cooling which has been introduced to cool the building. A seemingly simple method of using laterite walls and mud blocks has also been used to cool the buildings thus bypassing conventional air-conditioning. This is due to a “respect for traditional knowledge with contemporary engineering understanding,” according to Hariharan, who has a doctorate in econometrics.

The Zed team of architects, engineers and designers are constantly thinking out of the box, designing energy efficient fans, lights, verdant lawns on sloping roofs, vertical gardens, engineered masonry blocks, using bamboo flooring that looks like wood, building homes and workspaces that consume less energy and are in harmony with natural surroundings. “Restoring the skin of the earth” as Hariharan says, is a priority, and the sensitive stewardship of the land with each project has earned them kudos.

The company which started off as Biodiversity Conservation India Ltd in 1995 and morphed into Zed has made a dent in the ecologically friendly, but stylish, chic homes segment, a far cry from the rustic homes one associates with the green homes of yesterday. ■

More on C. Hariharan at www.ecobcil.com