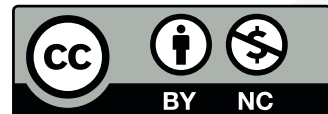




52

PARINDEY

52 Parindey
Published in 2018



You can modify and build upon this document non-commercially, as long as you give credit to the original authors and license your new creation under the identical terms.

Written by Rahul Karanpuriya
Edited by Udit Chaturvedi and Chhaya Dabas
Translated by Udit Chaturvedi & Raman Upadhyay
Designed by Bhawana Mahariya

Supported and published by Digital Empowerment Foundation
Institutionally supported by Swaraj University and Shikshantar

You can read the online copy at www.defindia.org/publication-2

Contact
Digital Empowerment Foundation
House No. 44, 2nd & 3rd Floor (Next to Naraina IIT Academy)
Kalu Sarai, (Near IIT Flyover), New Delhi – 110016
Tel: 91-11-26532786 / Fax: 91-11-26532787
Email: def@defindia.net | URL: www.defindia.org

52 PARINDEY



ABOUT 52 PARINDEY

52 Parindey is a project dedicated to identifying and documenting the lives of 52 innovators who are making a conscious and sustainable living for themselves and the planet through alternate careers in Indian towns. Initiated in 2016 as a 52-week travel-based endeavour, the aim of this project was to celebrate those trailblazers who are involved in eco-careers, can inspire youth to lead a similar path and eventually help regenerate the ecosystems in India and the world. The idea of 52 Parindey has never been to simply share the stories of innovators across India but to inspire youngsters to learn from the innovators.

In 2016, Rahul Karanpuriya, a vagabond and explorer, travelled across 52 locations in the country, in search of such innovators and spend a week with each of them, learning and unlearning with them.

The 52 Parindey journey was supported by Digital Empowerment Foundation, and institutionally supported by Swaraj University and Shikshantar.

ABOUT RAHUL KARANPURIYA

Rahul Karanpuriya is a poet at heart, and speaks the language of love. He is a passionate traveler and explorer. Dissatisfied with the existing systems, from an early age, he often found himself pondering over real issues of education, social injustice and the role of money, among others. When he realised that his questions and inquisitiveness do not have a place in the formal education set up, he decided to walk out of it in pursuit of learning through alternative modes of education and working with various grassroots movements to deepen his knowledge. He extensively traveled across India, and created a gap-year project called 52 Parindey to bring out the stories of change of common people, and expand his understanding of deeper issues such as climate change, sustainability and education. He is now determined to create a platform that facilitates self-designed learning through travel and space that celebrates such questioning and deep inquiry.





TENZIN CO

ROHIT	14
SUNNY & MANOJ	18
DEEKSHA	22
BRIJENDRA	26
Khameesha Khan	32
DINESH	42
MUZAFFAR	48
DINESH	54
SURESH	62
MUSTU	70
PANKAJ	74
AMIT	80
SHWETA	88
SUNIL	94
MADHUKAR	100
RAJESH	106
DEEPIKA	116
AMIT	122

HASMUKH	128
MALHAR	134
JILL FREQUSON	144
SULOCHANA	150
PARAG	154
VARSHA	160
RAGHAVA	170
SHANTI NAYAK	176
PRIYA	182
SAMMILAN	288
MEENAKSHI UMESH	198
SNEHAL	204
BIJU	210
SANGEETHA	216
PARTHASARATHY & REKHA	224
GOWRI & KRISHNAN	230
ANAND & GIRIJA	236
MANSOOR	242

TIRUMURUGAN & SHIV RAJ	252
SARASWATI	258
JAGANNATH	264
ISHTIYAQUE	270
ANKUR & VARTIKA	278
ARUP & RUBY	284
BAKUL	290
BHAGWAN	296
NISHA & MAHESH	306
VIVEK	312
VIPIN	318
NAVIN	324
NEKRAM	330
SARIT & SANDHYA	336
KULBHUSHAN UPMANYU	342
AMARJEET	348

shortcomings of our education system. The inadequate and the stagnant curriculums have failed to adapt to the growing needs of our nation. Despite a growing realization, the system refuses to budge.

Schooling is and has become synonymous to rote learning and instructed guidance. The learning taught in our schools is popularly a tool for social conditioning to attain compliance to majoritarian social systems. This is understood to be a core recipe for a successful and viable future and social acceptance.

Presently, unfortunately there is no other way to keep the children engaged till they are of the age where they can work and earn. Education should be held accountable for academic success; if it is relieved of its role as a criterion as a necessary economic placeholder; which is the real reason that it still exists, despite the speculations.

In exchange to the underlying religious and cultural prejudices that, in my opinion, work to pivot one against the another and challenges our integrity and unity, a new model must emerge that holds learning as fundamental and a model that is based on the understanding that human beings exist in integrity and that love is our universal, essential and core quality. As parents and

educators, our ability to love, respect and nurture our children should allow for the free flow of infinite wisdom of each individual. If given the right impetus, each one of us can nurture and unfold our deep-seated, unique qualities.

As adults, our ability to form relationships with children, who honour their integrity as well as ours, can create a mutually benefiting bond that can be termed as 'co-inspiration.' This bond emerges when we are allowed and able to author and design our lives in accordance with our desires and passion. This relationship helps in bringing forth certain qualities in each of us, which are impossible to achieve if we work individually. This synergy lies at the centre of the mentor/learner relationship, where each person, at any given time, is choosing to be engaged in mutual fascination and symbiotic learning.

The stories of 52 Parindey, challenge the linearity and one-dimensionality of popular narratives about biographies and individual feats. These are not the kind of vocations or choices that one would expect young people to make in an urban and cultural milieu, where we are increasingly being defined by rapid urbanization, our social and online standing and we are growing accustomed to mushrooming shopping

malls and lastly, have continuously budding incentives to escape the boredom of village life. This stands true for our country which is characterized by a dichotomy of being one of the fastest growing economies of the world but also having 60 per cent of its engineering population as unemployed/able.

These 52 Parindey are challenging these labels that define them as poor, primitive, illiterate, first-generation learners, backward and dropouts. They are making constant efforts to 'unlearn' the doctrines, are holding a mirror to the society and are assessing success not in terms of individual feats but collective growth.

They are refusing to cooperate with the establishments without awareness and understanding. Small communities, movements and local practitioners are re-thinking the concept of learning. It is being viewed as collective intelligence, local cultures and roots and a democratic way of understanding the world. In short, they are discovering many new paths, patching up the downtrodden once and making their access more free, open and inclusive.



01

ROHIT

A wanderer for a few years with a mission to find himself, he finally established Banyan Roots that recognises the importance of organic farming and sustainable environmental practices. His organic store seeks to fulfill these needs through a range of natural, local and pure food products.



Innovator: Rohit Jain
Vocation: Organic farmer
Location: Udaipur, Rajasthan

Route to Roots



FROM A VERY YOUNG AGE, PEOPLE ARE TOLD TO BE CONSCIOUS AND COMPASSIONATE TOWARDS THE ENVIRONMENT. HOWEVER, IN REALITY, THERE ARE VERY FEW PEOPLE WHO ACTUALLY FOLLOW THIS TEACHING.

Through this project called 52 Parindey, I hope to share a series of stories about people who are leading a life full of consciousness and compassion towards the environment. With this aim in mind, I found my first story in Udaipur.

This story is about Rohit Jain. Rohit was born in a village but he received formal education in Udaipur and Pune, and went on to be trained in information technology (IT). During the course of his education, he felt deeply connected with issues of farmers, rural to urban migration, and the various difficulties faced by the people in Indian villages. After completing his education, Rohit was offered a job at a big company. However, he declined this offer and decided to spend a year to “find himself”. In that one year, he volunteered with several non-government organisations and found solutions to problems by understanding grassroots-level issues and the economic cycle of farmers. It was then that he developed a love for villages and villagers. Taking forward this love, he established Banyan Roots, which employs organic

farming to fulfill the manure demands of the people.

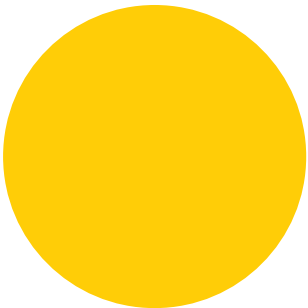
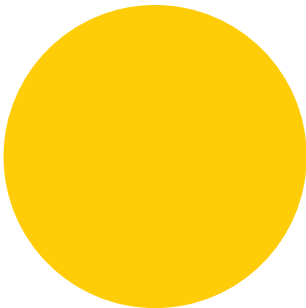
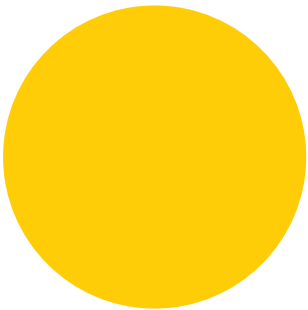
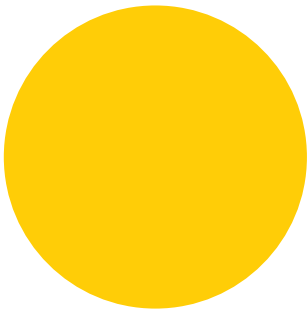
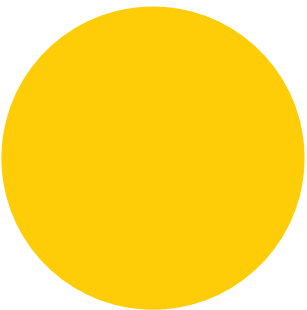
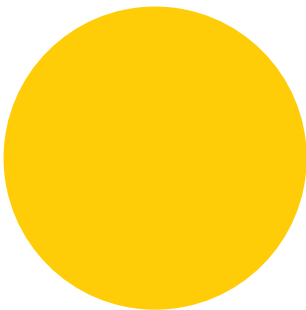
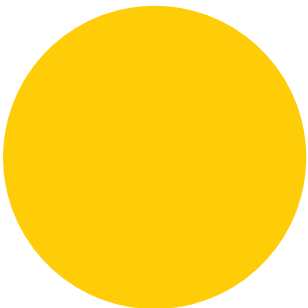
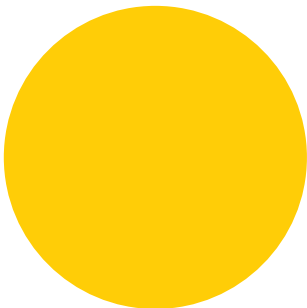
During his college days, Rohit often saw farmers and other villagers, who had migrated to the city, living in filth in a slum behind his college. This forced him to question why were people leaving behind their clean villages for filthy localities in cities. In an effort to get answers to his questions, he started educating children in the slum. It was there that he was able to delve deeper into the lives of migrants and understand their problems. He realised that in today’s market-driven economy, it was extremely difficult for farmers to lead a sustainable life, especially due to high debts. This, clubbed with the razzatazz nature of the city pulled these villagers to urban areas. However, they failed to understand that the “shining urban life” was like a mirage. It was only later they understood that not everything that shines is gold, and if they had to save their lives, they had to do something about it.

Rohit didn’t really have a plan in mind but his experience led him to a tribal village in north Gujarat where he lived and taught tribal children. This opportunity helped him discover himself and understand village life more deeply. Living there and eating traditionally grown organic food, he realised that the food in urban areas is

very different from what is found in rural India. He believes that food hasn’t only lost its taste but its originality too. He also understood that the problem in villages is not of lack of education but of dwindling traditional knowledge. Today, traditional seeds and traditional methods of farming are on the brink of getting lost. Farmers’ disconnect from nature is leading to their poor plight. Rohit, thus, believes that this is an issue that needs to be addressed not just in rural areas but among urban citizens of India as well.

This is the reason Rohit decided to live with the locals and learn their practical and traditional knowledge of farming in an effort to preserve the same. He was then encouraged to develop a business model through which he could bring back the traditional seeds and traditional methods of farming into the mainstream. Rohit now dreams of making Udaipur a toxic-free city. For this purpose, consciousness towards environment is the key.

“Today, people have become very narrow minded, and they are living in oblivion. Based on my experiences, I believe, we have to first understand the challenges before our environment, and share stories or experiences with others to find the best possible solutions,” says Rohit.



02

SUNNY & MANOJ

The two friends with the same passion run a restaurant called Millets of Mewar, which experiments in amalgamating traditional crops with contemporary food. Conceptualised from an idea and revolution to promote better health and environment, their menu comprises Ragi Tacos, Kangani ka Pizza and Hamo ki Tikiya, amongst others.



Innovators: Sunny and Manoj
Vocation: Health-oriented restaurantiers
Location: Udaipur, Rajasthan

Duo with a natural passion

THERE WERE ONCE TWO FRIENDS WITH A SIMILAR PASSION. ONE OF THEM USED TO HELP HIS FATHER SELL KACHORI AND SAMOSA ON A CART WHILE THE OTHER WORKED AS A HELPER AT PEOPLE'S HOMES. HOWEVER, BOTH LEARNT TO COOK FROM THEIR FATHER AND MOTHER, RESPECTIVELY, AND DECIDED TO CARVE OUT A NEW ROAD AHEAD OF THEM.

The two friends travelled across the country in pursuits of more knowledge about matters that interested them —treatment through herbs, innovation from waste and farming. Eventually, they decided to go back to their passion and make a living out of it.

This is the story of Sunny and Manoj, who now run a restaurant in Udaipur called Millets of Mewar. Millets of Mewar is not just another restaurant but stems from an idea and a revolution to promote better health and environment.

Sunny and Manoj believe our bodies are like temples. To nourish our souls, we have to give ample food to it.

There is a saying in Mewari language that goes something like this: "As is the food, so will be the thinking." This saying forms the basis of Millets of Mewar. The two friends believe that what we consume goes to our hearts, our minds, our emotions, eventually becoming a part of us.

Millets of Mewar experiments in amalgamating traditional crops with contemporary food. So their menu comprises of delicacies like Ragi Tacos, Kangani ka Pizza and Hamo ki Tikiya, among others. This way, the restaurant serves it customers food that is not made of maida, is not instant food and has not lost its nutrients in the process of being cooked. At Millets of Mewar, Sunny and Manoj, thus, promote Slow Food — food that is cooked over a longer period of time or in leisure, ensuring retentions of maximum nutrients.



At Millets of Mewar, one realises cooking is an art and learns about the true diversity of healthy food.

In today's global food chain, most people, in India especially, depend on wheat and rice as staple food. These do not only harm our body but also cause damage to our environment. To grow these crops, farmers have to spray chemicals, pesticides and water, thereby "poisoning" our soil and the eventual consumers of the food.

The restaurant, thus, uses desi (native) crops in its food. Desi crops are naturally grown around us, without the need of any chemical or pesticide and with just one-fourth amount of water compared to what we need to grow wheat and rice.

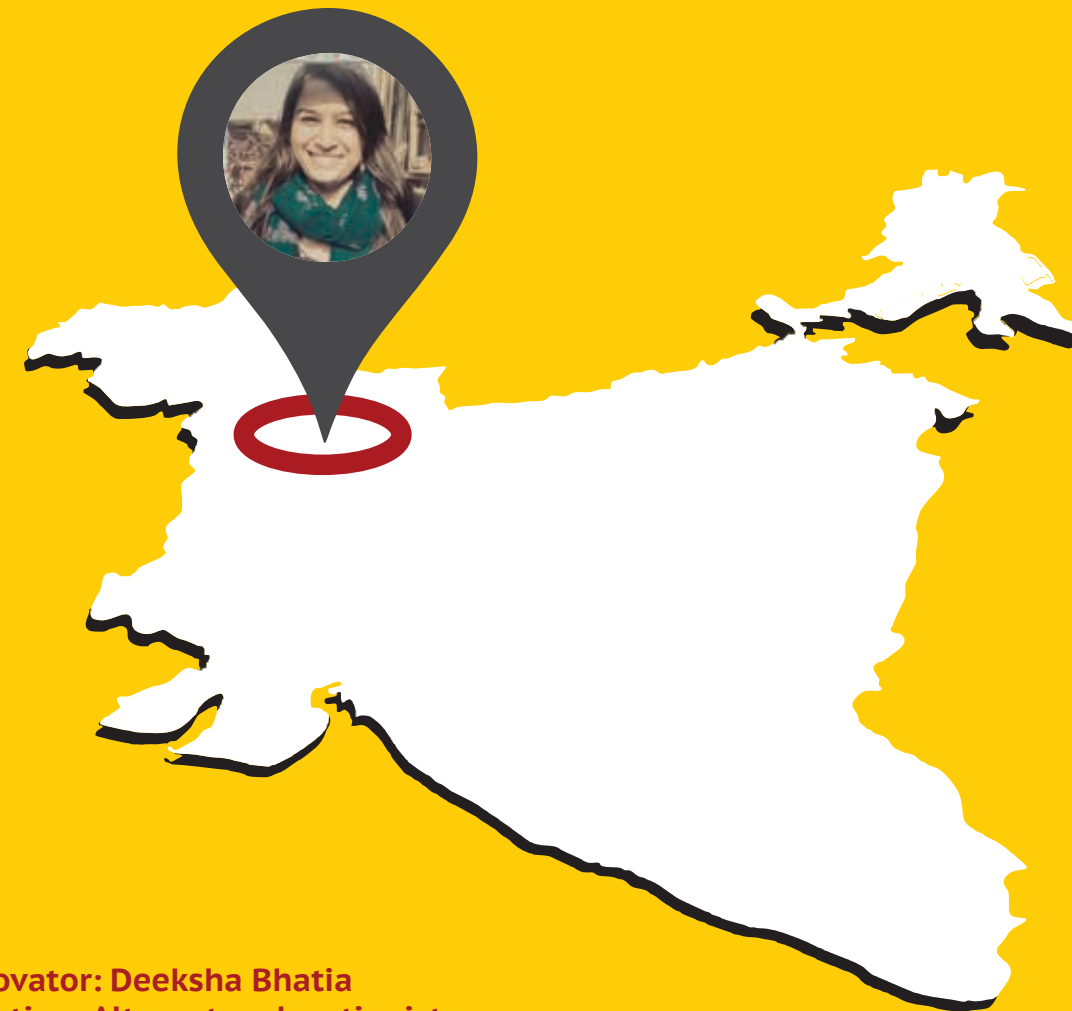
Sunny and Manoj can be an inspiration for people with a passion of cooking. They are an example for people who can set new standards for natural crops for healthy eating.



03

DEEKSHA

A passionate believer of alternate education, she works with Sweccha for holistic education and development of youngsters. When she first started working with Sweccha after a short career in the corporate world, she thought children will be able to learn a lot from her but, in turn, she learnt immensely from them.



Innovator: Deeksha Bhatia
Vocation: Alternate educationist
Location: New Delhi

Learning and teaching

DEEKSHA BHATIA, WHO WAS BORN IN A SMALL TOWN IN HARYANA ON DECEMBER 5, 1989, GRADUATED IN ENGLISH FROM THE DELHI UNIVERSITY AND THEN PURSUED A MASTER'S DEGREE IN ADVERTISING AND PUBLIC RELATIONS FROM THE INDIAN INSTITUTE OF MASS COMMUNICATION IN NEW DELHI.

From a very young age, Deeksha had been interested in the creative fields. During her college years, she actively participated in street plays and stage plays, and contributed to scriptwriting, acting and direction. Through her plays, Deeksha helped raised attention towards various social issues such as drug addiction, rural migration, homosexuality, development, education to start a debate on these issues.

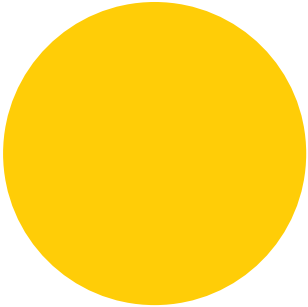
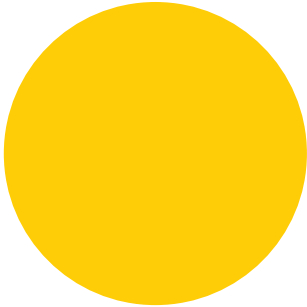
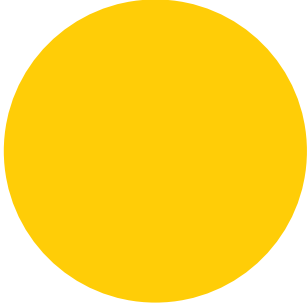
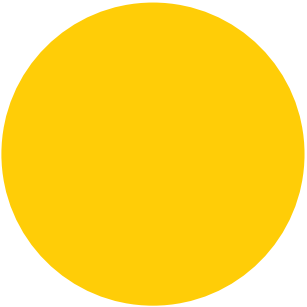
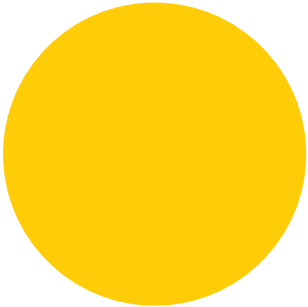
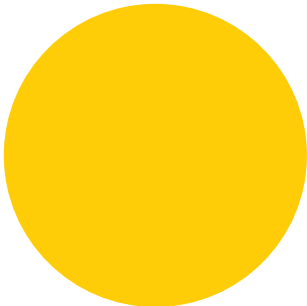
However, as is the case with most youngsters in search of a better livelihood, Deeksha

finished college and took up an advertising job in the corporate sector. Initially, she enjoyed her new well-paying job where she also saw scope for promotion. She thought she was living her dream but that didn't last long. She soon realised that the dream was just a mirage, and that she wasn't making any real contribution towards the society. Her work began to take her away from her real self. She was no longer happy at work and was questioning her job every day.

Deeksha wanted to go back to the issues she was dealing with in college. She wanted to do something creative with children. But she didn't know what or how. She was like a caged bird who wanted to fly high but loved her cage too. One day, when she realised she could no longer be confused, she decided to break the cage.

She then approached Sweccha, an organisation she was part of during her college days. It's now been three years since she started working with Sweccha again. At Sweccha, she plays a key role in activities related to education and development targeted at youngsters. Initially, she thought children will be able to learn a lot from her but, in fact, she too has learnt immensely from the children.

Now when she looks at herself in the mirror, she feels at peace. She says, the decision she took three years ago has helped her find a new path in life. In the last three years, she has seen many changes in her and faced challenges but she has also bravely overcome the challenges. Now, her perspective of looking at the world has completely changed. She is working on issues, in depth, that mattered to her in college. And in this journey over the last three years, she has met many people from whom she has been able to learn something. And Deeksha says her journey of learning still continues.



04

BRIJENDRA

In his childhood, he had seen his father work with clay and had learnt the art of pottery from him. Soon, the hobby turned into his passion and eventually into his vocation. At a time when many discouraged him from taking up pottery due to fears of little economic benefits, he managed to revive the art in his village through contemporary productisation of traditional art.



Innovator: Brijendra Prajapati
Vocation: Potter
Location: Palwal, Haryana

Mould for the future

BRIJENDRA PRAJAPATI WAS NEVER REALLY INTERESTED IN SCHOOL. INSTEAD, HE WAS ALWAYS MORE INCLINED TOWARDS TRADITIONAL ART, CRAFT AND EVEN GAMES LIKE GILLI DANDA AND PITTHU.

By the time he reached Class X, he lost all interest in mainstream education.

He remembers that when he was in high school, he noticed that a lot of youngsters were migrating from his village to nearby towns in search of a job. Mesmerised by the razzmatazz-ness of the cities, these youngsters ended up doing menial jobs and giving very little time to their families. Every weekend, they would return home tired and leave again the next day for work. That is when Brijendra questioned if it really was worth doing a job that distanced a person from his family.

“If a person can’t give time to the people for whom he’s earning, then what’s the point of a job like that?” he asked. Brijendra also noticed that these people were being distanced from their culture, their village and their lands. And so, Brijendra decided

to drop out of school and find a livelihood in the village itself rather than finding a job in a fancy city.

In his childhood, Brijendra had often seen his father working with clay and had learnt the art of pottery from him. The art that was a hobby for him, soon became his profession and his father became his guru. Brijendra started travelling across the country for handicraft exhibitions and fairs.

This gave him the opportunity to meet other artistes and see their work, and he realised that what he was doing was not just a means to earn a livelihood but his responsibility towards the society – to keep the art alive.

Soon enough, Brijendra started innovating. Until then, potters were only making matke, diye and kulhads. But with Brijendra’s ideas, the father-son duo started making almost every kitchen utensil and tool in clay. They were making frying pans, hot cases, plates, bowls, and tea/coffee mugs, among other things. In the coming years, the

potter family went beyond the kitchen and started making lamp shades, toys, hukka and various decorative items. These were exhibited across the country and Brijendra was highly appreciated for his art. The appreciation soon turned into recognition, and the family began getting custom orders from across the globe.

However, Brijendra says that it’s not easy keeping alive the art and tradition of pottery. If the status of pottery continues to be as it is, the art might not live beyond the next 25-30 years. There are two reasons for this. One is that existent potters are facing a low market demand and suffering from poor economic conditions. The second is that the younger generation is no longer interested in learning the art and taking it forward. The story is no different in Brijendra’s house.

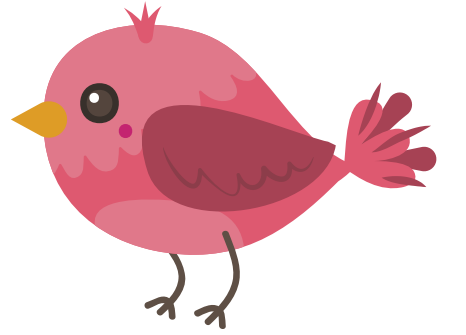
“The children in the house think that pottery is a messy work and poses a lot of health issues. But this perception is wrong. If you see the older generations, who have played and worked in clay, their immunity is much stronger than today’s children. Kids today start sneezing as soon as they get out of the house! They spend most of their time in front of the television or the computer,” says Brijendra.



Today, most potters don’t have enough and proper space to work. Heating the clay releases smoke, so the potters have to establish their workspace away from the residential area. When Brijendra’s business started expanding, he had to face the ire of his neighbours who were against the smoke being emitted. This forced Brijendra and his family to find a house away from the village community.

“However, nobody opposes the big factories that release poisonous smoke all day long in the name of development!” says Brijendra.

Unfortunately, even the government has given no support to pottery, and the urban population has almost forgotten about this art. Almost every household has a refrigerator and so they don’t need a matka to keep the water cool anymore, forgetting



that mud is one of the most natural resources. Keeping water in tightly-closed plastic bottles for more than a few days, makes it harmful for the body. However, water in plastic bottles is commonly stored and bought today. Kulhads made of clay have been replaced with plastic cups and clay pans have been replaced with non-stick pans, which have been made with various elements and chemicals. Sadly, these plastic bottles and cups have made an entry into villages as well. People equate plastic with pride.

This materialism is not only leading to the slow death of the art of pottery but is also distancing the people from their roots and harming the environment.

It's time people should think about what they want to leave behind for their future generations. Do they want to give them a healthy environment to grow in or force them to live in a poisonous one?

(Due to an unexpected death in Brijendra's family, a video of him could not be recorded.)

“रोज़ सुबह होती है सूरज उगने के साथ,
उठ तो जाता हूँ, जागना बाकी है।”

rich and luxurious lives but on the cost of being miserable. To this extent, social media platforms and mobile internet, while were created to connect with people, have also accentuated misery and mental illnesses.

In trains, on streets, in houses, no matter where I look, people are hooked up to some gadget or the other. The good old times when neighbours use to sit and chat in the evenings or the chaupal was held in the villages are gone. We all are chasing something or the other and have forgotten to appreciate the nuances of life. Everybody wishes for a change but we don't really want to change ourselves. We keep waiting for a new government, a new leader to lead us to a better tomorrow, but we never stop to think on how are we contributing to this conversation on change? It is imperative to remember Mahatma Gandhi's words here, "be the change you want to see in the world." We cannot bring the changes we desire by sitting in the comforts of our homes.

This time is now. This is the time to take this opportunity and create miracles of it. Internet is a very powerful tool that can be used to propagate our message to the entire world. We can bring people together in unity. The future of our coming generations is in our hands. How our tomorrow will shape up is up to us. Our generation is

perhaps the last one which can make a difference before it's too late. The present is perhaps the legacy of our ancestors, passed down to us. Now, it is our turn to choose how we want to lead our lives. It is up to us to decide whether we want to follow the crowd and live how others expect us to or do we want to do things our own way. We need to make our choices now.



05

KHAMEESHA

A permaculturist, he runs the Greening Jaisalmer Society in the heart of the Thar Desert, Rajasthan. Through this non-government organisation, he is not only dealing with effects of climate change and intensive farming but also reviving the cultural heritage and encouraging sustainable way of living among communities.



Innovator: Khameesha Khan
Vocation: Permaculturist
Location: Jaisalmer, Rajasthan

Greening Jaisalmer

BORN AND RAISED IN A SMALL VILLAGE IN BARMER DISTRICT, KHAMEESHA KHAN'S CHILDHOOD WAS UNLIKE ANY OTHER CHILD'S HE KNEW.

He was only 10 when he was struck by paralysis. This interrupted his education, and he was forced to spend a year on bed.

He tells me, “Just two days before I was left paralysed, I had planted two plants in the courtyard of my house. During my illness, these plants turned out to be my only friends. Most of my time was spent looking at the plants grow day by day. That’s when I realised the selflessness with which nature serves us, throughout our lives. Our lives start with it and end with it. There is no truer friend one can have than plants, and that’s how I fell in love with the two plants.”

During that one year, the illness was not the only thing Khameesha Khan had to face. He also had to face the regular taunts of his relatives. One day, when he was much

better, fed up with the nagging, he ran away from home to Jaisalmer. There, he washed tea cups at a small eatery. It was a very difficult period for Khameesha Khan. In winters, he used to sleep in a sack of sugar to shield himself from the cold.

However, it was in Jaisalmer that Khameesha Khan met a lot of foreign tourists and began to pick up English. He soon became a professional tourist guide but often missed the soil of his homeland and the two plants he had left in his courtyard.

One day, he returned to his village and established a shop for clothes. Everything was going well, his life was back on track and he was in the village he had been longing for so long until...Until the desert town was struck by a flood, and he lost everything he owned.

This, however, did not break him. He restarted his life in Jaisalmer with a restaurant which he decorated with beautiful plants. It was here that he happened to meet an

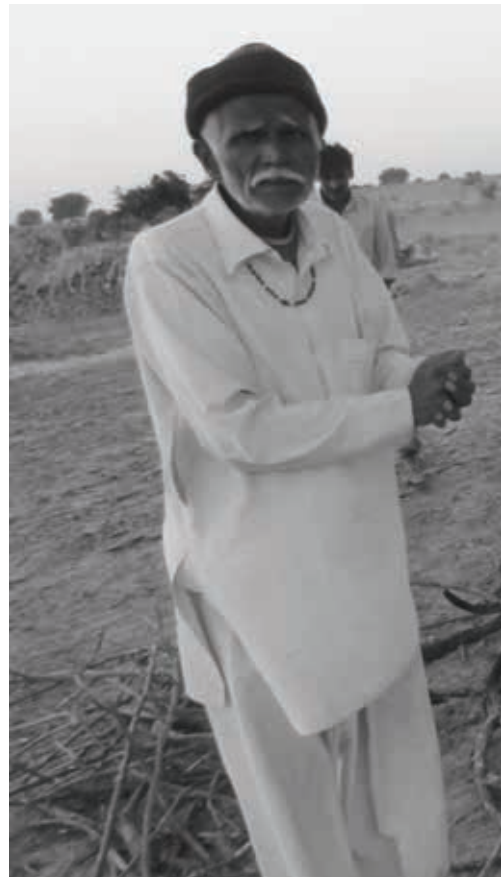
Australian lady called Rosy Jordon who was amazed by Khameesha Khan’s love for plants.

“She told me about a course in permaculture, and how it can help fight global warming,” says Khameesha Khan, adding that it was Rosy who told her that the flood in a desert was also the repercussion of global warming. Rosy explained him that if he agrees to enroll for the course, Khameesha Khan will be able to reform several lives. And so Rosy sent Khameesha Khan to Tanzania to pursue a degree in permaculture, and bore the complete cost of his education.

In Tanzania, Khameesha Khan learnt about the effects of global warming across the globe, and understood that the only way to revert these effects was to plant as many trees as possible. However, digging the ground and planting trees randomly will not help. One has to plant trees according to the geographical and climatic environment of a location so that it not only benefits the humans living in the region but also the wildlife.

Living in this part of the world is not particularly easy. Yet, for centuries, generation after generation has lived in India. However, if the rate at which climate change and intensive cultivation exists, continues; we’ll soon lose our cultural





heritage. Modern-day development has completely destroyed our ecological system. In the olden days, our ancestors' wisdom helped them live a happy and healthy life. They used those techniques in their daily routine that ensured no harm to the environment, this included saving every drop of water. Lakes, bore-wells and step-wells had water round the year in those days. But now, in this race for materialism, we've ruined our environment.

And so he returned to Jaisalmer and decided to protect the environment and fight this evil through Greening Jaisalmer Society, which he established.

"Getting water from another region is not a sustainable solution because that literally means that you're quenching your thirst by drinking somebody else's water. If that water runs out too, what will the inhabitants of that region do?" he asks, adding that he has, thus, made it his responsibility to create awareness about people in the village and promote traditional techniques of farming and rainwater harvesting.

He encourages people to plant as many trees as possible to improve the ecosystem, strengthen the local resources and create better jobs for the people.

"Through this effort, I've decided to bring about a change in the environment. At present, I'm working in a village, about 30 kilometres away from Jaisalmer, to set an example to tell people that it's not impossible to grow a forest in a desert. And that's just the beginning of some of my plans," says Khameesha Khan.

06

DINESH

He has spent several years of his life dealing in arms and narcotics for the criminal world. Then, it was in Tihar that his life took a new course when he enrolled himself for Art of Living. When he got released from prison, he became a meditation instructor. Today, he is an organic farmer who has encouraged other farmers to give up chemical fertilisers.



Innovator: Dinesh Gurjar
Vocation: Organic farmer
Location: Jodhpur, Rajasthan

Arms to Farms

IT IS SAID THAT THE ACT OF COMMITTING A CRIME IS A TENDENCY THAT IS NATURALLY FOUND IN HUMANS. IN SOME PEOPLE, THIS TENDENCY IS MORE DOMINANT WHILE OTHERS ARE ABLE TO EXERT A GREATER CONTROL ON IT.

This is the reason crimes were being committed thousands of years ago, and crimes are being committed even today.

People have been carrying out research on crime and criminals for years, but nobody has been able to pinpoint one common reason to prove why a person turns into a criminal. Some theories suggest that criminal nature preexists in humans while another explains that the society, environment or circumstances turn a person into a criminal.

We're now in the 21st century, and over the years researchers have progressed in the

study of crime and its reasons. However, there was never a crime-free world nor will it ever be. Rather, it would be better if researchers focus on the reasons that turn a person into a criminal, and work on those tendencies to make this planet a better place.

You must be thinking why am talking about this instead of narrating my latest innovator's life. Well, that's because I was forced to think about it because of the innovator I met in Jodhpur.

The latest innovator under this project, Dinesh Gurjar, spent most of his life in activities that are termed "criminal". There was a time when he was the rising star of the criminal world. He was the villain of the society. From drugs to weapons, he's done business in all.

Dinesh tells me, "When I was in school, I often saw serious conflicts between ethnic

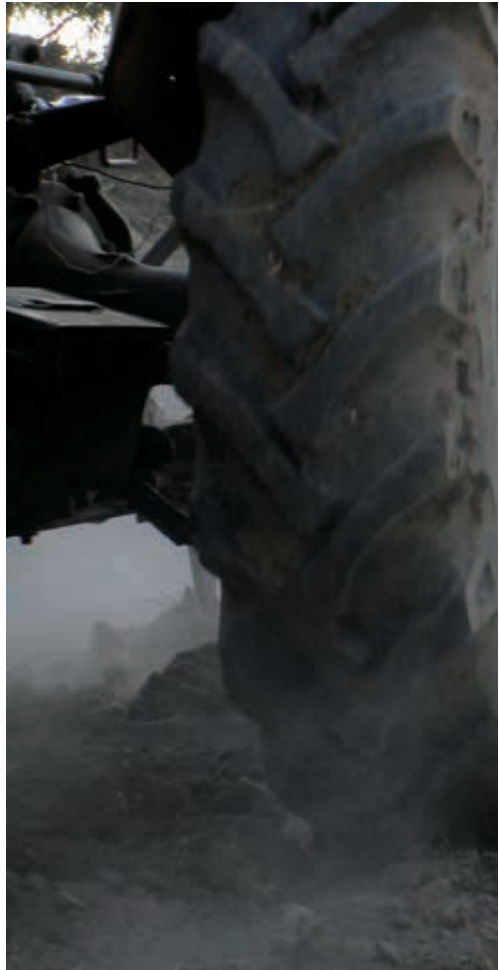
groups around me. As I grew older, I began to adopt that kind of violent nature. Fistfight and felony seemed natural to me. It was in 1970 that the first case was filed against me. However, during the hearing, somebody else would always go and take my place. This way, I got rid of the little fear that I had in me. I figured how to play with the law to save myself. I became bolder and braver, and eventually was a time when there were 50 cases against me."

In this "boldness", Dinesh killed a man in 1986. And this time, he couldn't get away. The case went on in court for four and a half years in court, and he was awarded life sentence. However, he broke the prison a year later, and was on the run. In this chase with the police, he committed one crime after another. Soon, he reached Mumbai and began to deal in illegal arms and narcotics for the dangerous underworld. He was almost caught several times, but changing his identity helped him get away every time.

In 2001, however, he was part of a major crime racket and realised he couldn't get away this time. So he decided to serve his prison term in Tihar Jail. There, he got the opportunity to enroll for the Art of Living meditation course.

A MA and Hotel Management graduate, Dinesh says, "Modern education system does not allow room for analysis even though it's supposed to be an integral part





of 'learning'. If one cannot analyse his/her activities, then how will he/she know which path to take. That is what happened with me. I never reflected on my decisions to notice in which direction I was heading. I just did whatever was in front of me, without thinking if it was right or wrong. Art of Living gave me the chance to reflect upon myself, and I started participating in almost every Art of Living course that was offered in the prison."

Taking a step forward in that direction, when Dinesh was released from prison in 2011, he became an Art of Living teacher and began to introduce meaningful changes in the lives of people. In early 2014, during an Art of Living session he learnt that whatever toxins the body releases through yoga and meditation, are taken in again when a person eats.

He says it is rightly said that a person becomes whatever he/she eats. "Today, our food is the greatest enemy of our physical and mental wellbeing."

Everybody wants to eat healthy food but nobody wants to grow healthy food, Dinesh laments. Unfortunately, even the farmers have been engulfed in the paradoxical web of the government and corporates which make them believe that organic farming cannot sustain a farmer's life.

"With an aim to bust this misconception, I decided to get into organic farming," he tells me, adding that he made it his mission to earn a sustainable living through organic farming to set an example in front of other farmers in the region. "I wanted to prove that through organic farming, one cannot only earn a better livelihood but also ensure one's own and other's wellbeing," he says.



Dinesh's effort will reach a milestone in 2016, by the end of which he would have promoted organic farming across a thousand acres of land. The impact is already visible around him. Some of his neighbours have given up chemical-based agricultural practices to adopt organic farming.

"The journey is long and difficult, but I've always given my 100 per cent to whatever I've done, be it crime or this. And this is important for our generation. This will decide the future of our upcoming generations, then why shouldn't I give my 100 per cent to this?! I'm sure I will achieve the goal I have set for myself," he says with confidence.

07

MUZAFFAR

He hasn't been to a high school, yet he's been a research guide for several Ph.D. scholars. He is a grandfather but his agility is remarkable. He is also a calligrapher, historian, photographer, author, traveller, tourist guide, numismatist and weaver. Also, The man can read and write in more languages than you can imagine.

Innovator: Muzaffar Ansari
Vocation: Historian and tourist guide
Location: Chanderi, Madhya Pradesh

Lessons from history

THOUGH THIS STORY IS ABOUT KALLE BHAI, IT IS ALSO ABOUT ALL THOSE CHILDREN WHO ARE FORCED TO “GROW UP” AND MATURE TOO SOON TO EARN A LIVING FOR THEIR FAMILY.

It’s about those children who, in their childhood, learn about the good and the evil in this world. Despite the hardships that they face in an early age, they never lose their innocence of their childhood.

If you ever take a close look at them, you’ll notice that the everyday challenges of their lives are not able to curb their smiles, their laughter or their excitement. They will always find time to fool around and “be children”. These kids are as ignorant, innocent and understanding as any other child of their age group. So how do you know when a child has “grown up” and left his childhood behind?

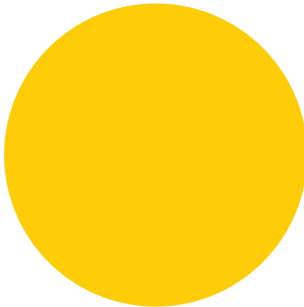
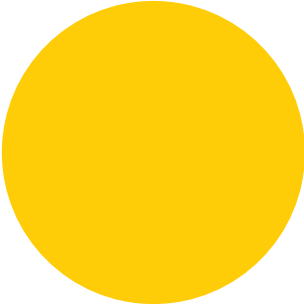
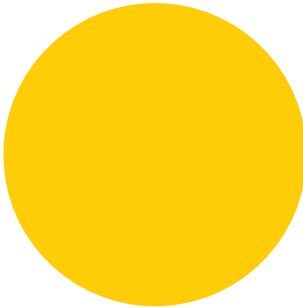
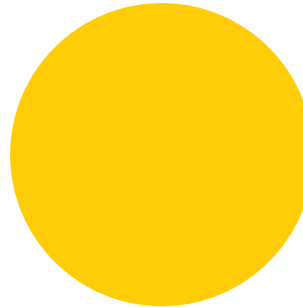
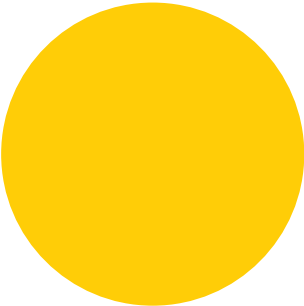
Well, that’s hard to say. But what I know is that these children need the right education. Indian mainstream education

shows these children the path that they must take but what they need to learn is how to walk first. If they know how to walk, they’ll be able to find their own way and their own destination, just like Kalle Bhai did.

There was a time when Muzaffar Ansari aka Kalle Bhai lived in a small hut, in Chanderi (Madhya Pradesh), that didn’t even have a door. There were days in his childhood when there wasn’t enough food in the house to feed every member. On those days, fruits grown in the wild used to be his only meal. In a financial situation as his family was in, it was difficult to think of even sending children to school. However, Kalle Bhai studied till Class V. When he was promoted to Class VI, his father didn’t have the money to buy school textbooks immediately, so Kalle Bhai requested his teacher to allow him few more days to arrange the books. However, the teacher insulted Kalle Bhai and refused to give me extra time, following which Kalle Bhai decided to drop out of school.

At the young age of 11, Kalle Bhai had started working at a general store to earn for his family. It was here that he found a guru in his employer who taught Kalle Bhai to read and write.

In his childhood, Kalle Bhai had also heard a lot of stories about Chanderi’s history and culture from his maternal grandfather. Listening to these stories, he developed a keen interest in history and came across a book called Chanderi: Ek Parichay. While reading this book, he found several contradictions between what he was reading and what he had heard from his grandfather. The curiosity to find the truth led him to the depths of Chanderi’s history. However, stepping into this deep ocean of history wasn’t easy for him. In his research, he found hundreds of inscriptions across Chanderi but all of them were in different scripts. Kalle Bhai, however, only knew Hindi. Eager to decipher the inscriptions, Kalle Bhai began learning different scripts. Today, he can read and write in 10 scripts. Not only that, he has also authored several books on the history of Chanderi. In fact, many scholars across the world have read his work, and several students have submitted their PhD thesis on Chanderi under his guidance. All this, despite the fact that Kalle Bhai holds no degree or diploma, he didn’t even finish school.





Over the years, Kalle Bhai has become Chanderi's favourite man and a history book! He picked his passion of history and converted it into his occupation. He is now a certified tourist guide, who is extremely popular among foreign tourists. Kalle Bhai is also a calligrapher, an artist, a handloom activist, a numismatist and a historian, of course. In fact, so much is his love for history that he has led several excavations in Chanderi, especially in Raj Mahal, independently (or asked INTACH to carry out an excavation). It was during these excavations that he found several ancient coins, utensils and pieces of Chanderi's history.

It was while reading up about the history of Chanderi that Kalle Bhai also learnt about the ancient lifestyle which highly impressed him. He understood how the town had evolved, and how its people had very intelligently and consciously built it, using only the locally available material such as stones from the surrounding mountains. And the mountains weren't just carelessly broken down. There was a thought behind it. They chiseled those parts of the mountain where rainwater could be collected. This ensured that if there was no rainfall some season/year, they could use

the harvested water. In case of excess rain, they could easily divert the water into the river without letting it overflow into the town. The people of Chanderi had created a system within the environment so that all their needs could be met without harming the nature in any manner.

Unfortunately, urban planning today hardly is all about erasing the heritage and replacing it with concrete jungles.

"Do you think the recent Chennai floods was a natural calamity? No, it was a manmade disaster. For the sake of the city's development, river banks have been covered with cement. Our ancestors consciously left a path for flowing water but we have erected houses over it today. Now that we have ignored our ancestors' knowledge and destroyed our nature, the nature has to take its revenge too," says Kalle Bhai, adding that the younger generation doesn't understand this. "They just call our ancestors ignorant and superstitious. However, that's completely untrue. Our ancestors were, in fact, far more connected with the environment than we are, and not just physically but even spiritually," he adds.

To prove his point, Kalle Bhai gives the

example of various ancient civilisations around the world. Gods and goddesses were always symbols of nature. Somebody worshipped the sun, somebody else worshipped the moon. The ocean had its own god and rain had its own.

"Do you think all of these were just stories? No, these promoted respect for the nature among the people," says Kalle Bhai, quoting Lord Shiva's family. Lord Shiva carried a snake around his neck. His sons rode on eagle and rat, respectively, while his wife Goddess Parvati's vehicle was a tiger. Shiva, himself, rode on a bull. "If you think of it, all of these animals are each other's enemies but they lived together."

Nature says the same! We're all connected to each other. However, today we have forgotten the morals hidden in these mythological stories, and have disconnected ourselves from nature. Thus inviting our own destruction.

What we need today is to understand the knowledge that our ancestors held and use that information to save our culture and our heritage. This is the path that if we take, we can conserve our planet and protect our nature.



08

DINESH

A chartered accountant by qualification, he now runs Banyan Tree, a publishing house that caters exclusively to genres of alternative learning and environment. Banyan Tree aims to undo the effects of mainstream education which hampers childhood and distances kids from their environment, their family and their society.

Innovator: Dinesh Kothari
Occupation: Publisher (alternative education)
Location: Indore

Joy of reading

हृद से बढ़े जो इल्म ज़हर है दोस्तों,
सब कुछ जो जानते हैं, वो कुछ नहीं जानते।

(Too much knowledge is like
poison, my friends,

A person who knows everything,
knows nothing actually.)

Born to a middleclass family in a village called Pratapgarh in Rajasthan, Dinesh Kothari’s childhood was very different from the childhood of today’s kids. He was never haunted by the pressure of studying and performing well in a classroom. His parents never forced him to become an engineer, doctor or chartered accountant. He had complete freedom to play around and there were no restrictions imposed on him.

Dinesh’s mother looked after the responsibilities of the house while his father managed the shop. Nobody in his family interfered in another’s business. Similarly, Dinesh was never told what to do or how to do, he always had the freedom to choose his own path. Maybe this was the reason he never faced a barrier of any sort in his path and he sailed through one milestone after another.

The above lines describe the kind of upbringing that Dinesh’s parents believed in. However, years passed and Dinesh left the village for higher studies. Once he was out of his house, he began to be pulled into a large web.

Dinesh tells me, “I had decided to assist my father at his shop after college. However, my father’s shop was on way to my former

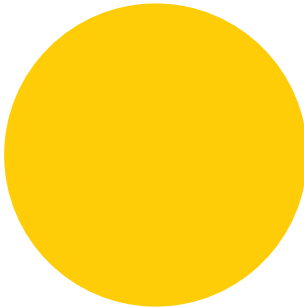
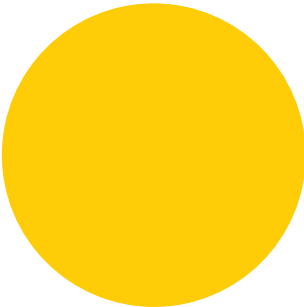
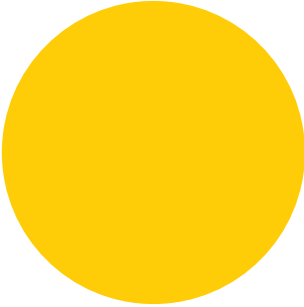
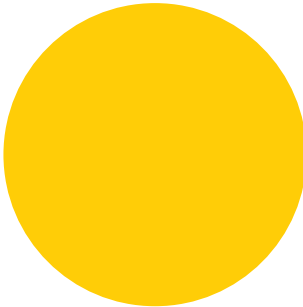
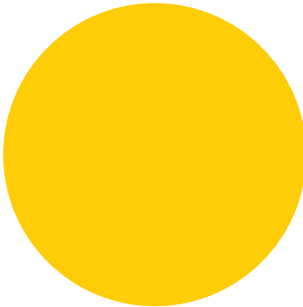
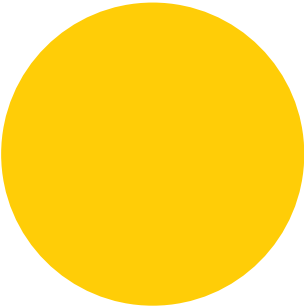
school and several of my teachers used to visit the shop. It was because of their persistent demands that I decided to leave for Indore to pursue CA. But I soon lost interest in the subject and returned home.”

Later when one of his CA friends came to Pratapgarh, he told Dinesh that if he completed his education, he too would have a good monthly income.

“I wasn’t too mature at that time. My thinking was just like any other youngster – I wanted a big home, a big car and a good stable income. So I completed my education, became a qualified CA and started working in Indore,” says Dinesh.

It was a time when Dinesh thought all was going well. He was earning well and had nothing to complaint about. However, he soon felt stuck in the system and realised that if he didn’t get out of it soon, he’ll be pulled deeper into it.

Coincidentally, he had to travel to Goa for some work during that phase. In his free time in Goa, Dinesh took long walks in the jungles. He paid key attention to the forest life around him, and developed an interest in environment. This interest stayed and, in fact, grew when he returned to Indore.





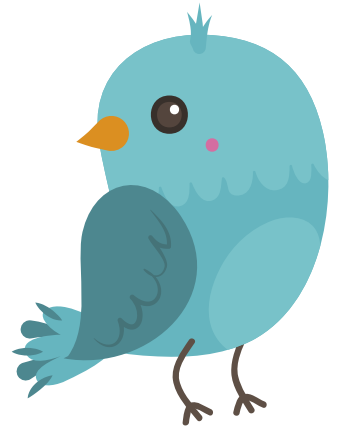
He read several books on the subject and realised what the citizens were losing out on in this race for urbanisation. He started bird watching and developed a deep fondness for birds. He spent hours under a tree, just looking at birds resting on tree branches or flying in the sky. It was during this period that Dinesh felt a strong connection with the environment, and began to learn from it – things that no school textbook had ever taught him.

It was also the time when India was going through a phase of change, a new definition of development was being written. Our economy was opened to the global market, and Indian cities saw a wave of “development”. In this name of development, concrete jungles replaced thousands of trees. Overnight, trees were felled along entire stretches of roads, including the one that led from Dinesh's home to office. He was so disappointed with this that he couldn't take the same route to office for about four days. Unhappy

with the government's moves, Dinesh filed a petition in the court seeking a stay on the indiscriminate felling of trees. However, it had no impact.

Dinesh then joined an environment society, and regularly addressed students of various schools to make them conscious about their environment. It was during this phase that he realised the root cause of the problem was in the Indian mainstream education system, which was nothing more than a prison for children. The mainstream education system was hampering childhood and distancing kids from their environment, their family and their society. On the other hand, the system was making children run behind competitive exams one after another.

Dinesh's daughter had also just passed out of school and wanted to pursue CA like her father. However, Dinesh suggested his daughter to take a year's break and start some work in Indore. Together, they opened an alternate learning book store.



However, as his daughter too had been moulded into the mainstream education system, she didn't enjoy this work and quit after six months. Dinesh, however, got the opportunity to read many books that explained the destructive development phase that India was witnessing. He also noticed that a lot of books related to environment weren't available in India. That's when Dinesh decided to start re-publishing such books. However, it wasn't an easy task. For some books, it took him two to three years to get permission to publish. He had to continuously write to the authors and explain them the importance of re-publishing these books in India. The other challenge was to make these authors understand that he couldn't pay them a lot of money.

Fortunately for Dinesh, many people helped him in this endeavour through which, so far, he has re-published more than 25 books in India under the name of his company 'Banyan Tree'.

SEARCH. SEEK. EXPLORE.

We have been raised in a way that we are always worrying about our future and quantifying our present. Our unrest results in failing to make the best of our present. We are only concerned about ourselves and our needs. Everybody is busy pursuing things which they are made to believe they want or need. They have no time to think about the impact their actions will have on those who are often reduced to pawns – voiceless and without representation.

There are times when I think that our shrugging of our responsibilities and lack of concern for our actions and their consequences, make it easier for us to lead our everyday lives.

Having said that, I am aware this is not the kind of life I would like to live. I have spent a lot of time the pursuit of gathering my thoughts and realizing that I do not wish to live on meal by meal allowance. I have now, cultivated my personality to care for beyond common sustenance requirements.

These questions have for long jolted me out of a peaceful existence. They have haunted me and intervened in my daily dwellings to an extent that I was gripped with depression. For the longest time, I have questioned my worth and capability. What is my role in this universe? One day, I began on hunt for the answer. I too began with a

secure job in an organisation in Jaipur, with a plan to earn money and thus secure my future. I believed this was the ideal path to contribute to society's growth.

However, this lasted as a shortest stint of my life. Within a year, I realised that the usual, settled, secure life wasn't for me. I needed to create my own path. It wasn't going to be easy but was the only thing that made sense and was tangible. In December, 2014, I quit my job.

I was aware that the idea of quitting a well-paying job would not receive acceptance with open arms from my family friends and well-wishers. They had several questions of the possible consequences. Many termed this spur of the moment decision as foolish. But I always knew that my perspective and outlook were very different from others. I also knew and was hopeful for that handful few, who would have understood my perspective and would have identified with me. They were and are the ones who find this path as the right one.

I have tried to reassure myself and those who have doubted my decisions. But what makes it harder is the fact that I myself had no clue, as to what was next for me. This whole experience, as it began, was a confluence of wonderment and contradictions, all at the same time. What I

was planning to do was not merely a social service, but I was about to embark upon a journey of removing betraying masks of our culture, tradition and civilization and finding who I really am. This journey was about having complete faith in my abilities. Today, as I look back, I confirm that there couldn't have been any other way I could have found the answers that I was looking for.

From what I have observed and learned, there is necessity to be slightly selfish. When we finally begin to understand ourselves, we begin to see the word 'selfishness' in a whole new light. I have experienced this first hand. It is also crucial to understand the concept of 'self' and tether and gather our energies; the only way one can achieve inner peace. Following this realization, I joined a 10-day long Vipassana camp where I reconnected with my faith. I realized that my pursuits were hidden in my faith. And this faith was the foundation of all my upcoming chapters. Somehow, in the process, I stumbled upon the idea of 52 Parindey. And it has been the most delightful chanced upon idea.

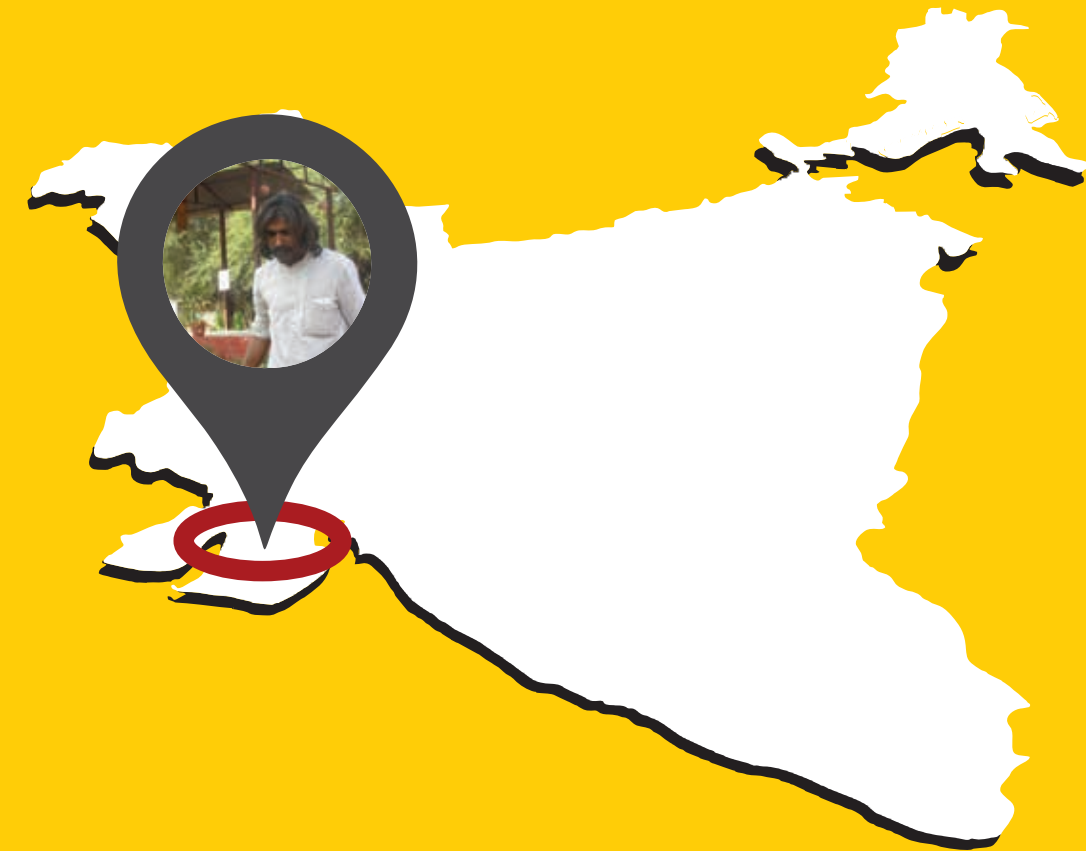
“THE MAN WHO GOES ALONE
CAN START TODAY;
BUT HE WHO TRAVELS WITH
ANOTHER
MUST WAIT TILL THAT OTHER
IS READY.”



09

SURESH

Inspired by Gandhian philosophy of life, he has selflessly devoted his life to the people of a small village in Ahmedabad district, where he promotes organic farming and has set up an alternate education centre to nurture love, compassion and empathy among children, thus strengthening their bond with environment.



Innovator: Suresh Bhai
Occupation: Social Worker
Location: Wakenada in Ahmedabad district, Gujarat

Nature's bond

EXPERIENCE DOESN'T
ALWAYS LEAD TO A
CHANGE AND CHANGE
DOESN'T ALWAYS GIVE
EXPERIENCE.

And what's the difference between evolution and spiritual experience? Experience creates awareness, and evolution brings about a change in life structure. Evolution doesn't always give experience. It simply organises the experiences together to heighten knowledge and memories, which in turn help in the evolution of a person. If you are in search of a spiritual path and want to improve your experiences and quality of life without changing your lifestyle, then it's not possible. However, the practice of love is a very powerful process which can completely change your being, externally and internally.

Enchantment is not about improving your quality of life. It is about risking the whole life to live on the edge, making an evolutionary leap into unknown, relying on your wits, your creativity, and deepened life intelligence to create a new context for human life, to help it achieve its highest possibilities.

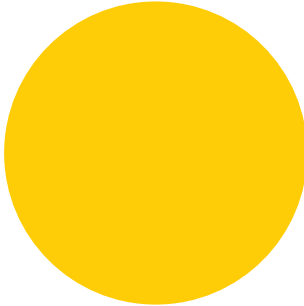
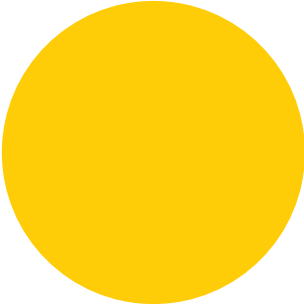
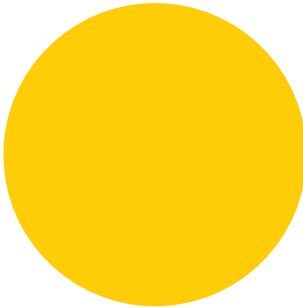
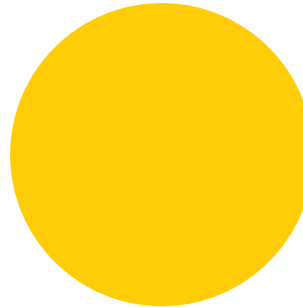
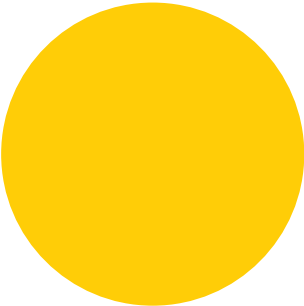
Reading all this you might think it is being spoken by some spiritual guru but these are the thoughts of a common man and our next "parinda", Suresh Bhai.

Suresh was once a government employee who stepped out of his comfort zone and stable future for the dream of a beautiful future. A future where love, honesty and compassion resides within people, and where people don't exploit the environment for their personal gains.

When Suresh Bhai was working in Patan, Gujarat, he realised that everyone was running after money. Nobody cared about the society or the environment. There were several questions in his mind regarding this and other pertinent issues of today's world. So, to find answers to these questions, he quit his job and enrolled for a Master's degree in Social Work at the Gujarat University.

That was a time when Suresh was going through a phase where he was angry with the current system. At the university, however, he got the chance to meet and interact with Gandhians like Narendra Bhai Desai and Gopal Dada who changed his views on life and lifestyle. Living in the proximity of such great men, Suresh studied in depth the lives of Mahatma Gandhi and Vinobha Bhave (two leaders known for their non-violent approach towards human rights). It was at the university that he learnt the real meaning of service, and decided to dedicate his life to the society.

While studying at the Gujarat University, he also met Ishwar Bhai, the founder of Safai Vidyalaya (Cleanliness School). While living with him, Suresh travelled across 1,800 villages in the state where he tried to raise awareness about cleanliness, environment and female foeticide. Despite doing all this, he felt something was missing. It





didn't seem quite right. He felt that he, himself, was not living up the words he was speaking. He wasn't living a life that he was preaching. That's when he decided he had to stop at one location and live the ideal life he was preaching.

With this thought in mind, Suresh reached a small village called Wakenada near Ahmedabad in Gujarat and began a new chapter in his life. When he first arrived in Wakenada, local villagers refused to support Suresh Bhai. This, however, did not sway him from his aim. He identified some of the dirtiest places in the village and, after eight days of hard work, transformed them into the most beautiful sites. At one of those sites, he laid the foundation of the Temple of Service. Every day, he spent five to six hours working for the village community, clean the surroundings and segregating plastic waste from household trash.

Suresh, who believes his work is his love, says, "I didn't have to teach anyone anything. I was sure that whatever I was doing, people would notice and be encouraged to do the same. I was sure people would begin to love nature."

"The government has devised several laws for the betterment of the world. Even the aim behind terrorism-led violence or government-led violence is somewhere to make the planet a better place but their course is wrong. If love, compassion and empathy would reside among everyone, the world would become a better place on its own," he adds.

And so Suresh set up an alternate education centre or a school of fun where he could nurture love, compassion and empathy among village children, thereby creating their bonds with environment. This year, Suresh has also done a lot of work in the

field of organic farming to prove to the village folks that natural methods can, too, lead to a full growth of crops without harming the environment.

This man is doing so much for the village and, the important thing is, he is doing all of it for free and selflessly. His monthly expenditure is only Rs. 750. Aren't you surprised that a man can dedicate his entire life to a cause like this? But this is the truth. Even the change that he believes in is true and possible.

During my stay in this village, I heard so many stories of change from the local community, and the love that I received in Wakenada is the result of Suresh Bhai's selfless service and love for the people of the village. After all, love has the power to write stories of change and promise a better world.

10

MUSTU

A tribal culture conservationist, he has dedicated his life for the betterment of a tribal community in Gujarat. Over the years, he has helped tribals earn their rights, preserve their culture, protect their environment; increase their household incomes through parallel livelihood options and, take care of their children and senior citizens

Innovator: Mustu Bhai
Occupation: Tribal welfare activist
Location: Palanpur, Gujarat

The originals

AS A CHILD, MUSTAFA KHAN AKA MUSTU BHAI HAD ONCE CHEATED A SHOPKEEPER. MUSTU WAS NINE YEARS OLD WHEN HE HAD GONE TO BUY SOMETHING FROM THE SHOP.

However, the shop was so crowded that the shopkeeper forgot to take money from Mustu Bhai and instead gave him some money, which Mustu Bhai gladly took and returned home. At home, he was laughing while narrating the incident to his mother. Later, when his father found out, Mustu Bhai was heavily scolded and taken back to the shop, receiving a few thrashes from his father on the way. Mustu's father did not only make him return the thing that he had brought but also asked him to pay its actual price.

When Mustu Bhai questioned his father later as to why was he forced to pay for the thing despite returning it, his father said that it was the price for Mustu's mistake and his father's honesty and conscientiousness.

His father explained Mustu that day that there is nothing more important than being an honest person.

"Be whatever you want when you grow up but never be the reason for somebody's loss. Never cheat anyone. Help people as much as you can. The society is giving us a lot, so we have the responsibility of giving something back to it. And this responsibility can help create a better society," his father had told him.

This was the reason his father ensured that Mustu Bhai went to an institution where education was based on Gandhian principles, views and ideologies.

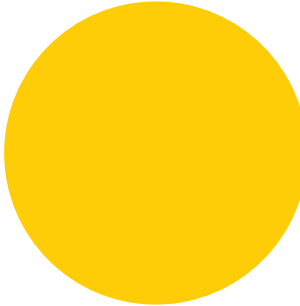
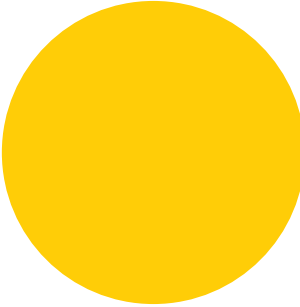
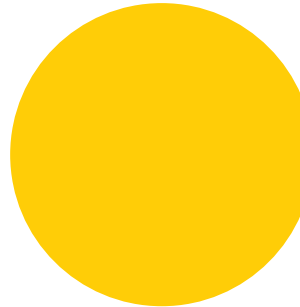
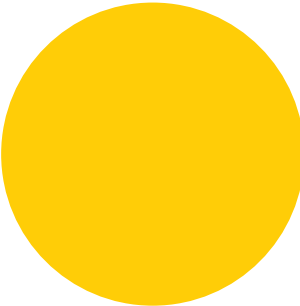
In the first year of college, Mustu experienced something that changed the course of his life forever. The college gave him an opportunity to visit a tribal village. The condition of the village and its people completely shook him. There was a house where a woman was feeding her child a chappati dipped in water. It was the winter season, the child was sitting naked and the

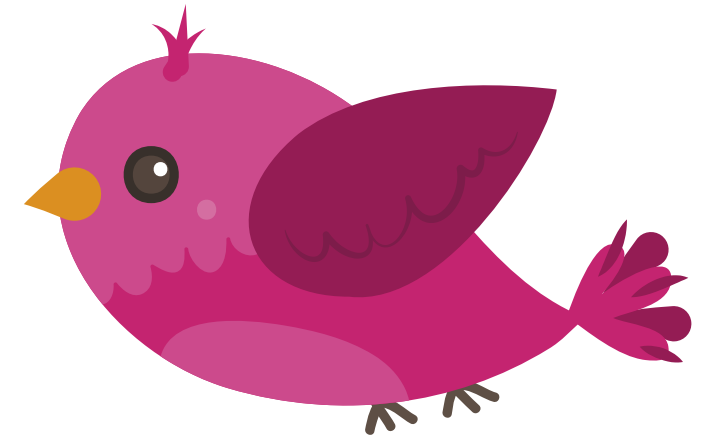
woman was barely covered in a torn saree. The house only had walls on three sides, and drinking water was stored in a dirty and broken earthen pot.

Mustu Bhai couldn't sleep for days after his visit to this village, and he often found himself crying. He was extremely disappointed that despite so many years after Independence, the government had done hardly anything for the tribal communities. He wondered who was responsible for their plight.

"Many people had visited the village before I had, why hadn't they done anything for the people?" Mustu had asked himself and then wondered how many more villages in India must be in a similar pitiable condition with barely any food to eat. That's when Mustu decided that he will no longer aspire for a government job and, instead, will work to serve a village community.

So after completing college, Mustu travelled to several villages in northern Gujarat until he reached Khatisitra. Here, he saw that the tribal village was completely cut off from the rest of the country. There were no roads and no electricity. It didn't even exist on a map of India. With a situation like this where there was absolutely no basic amenity, their rights seemed like a distant dream. Mustu Bhai decided to live in this village, work for its people and fight for their rights. However, Mustu Bhai was very





sure of one thing — that no harm should be caused to their indigenous culture and environment in this struggle for rights.

When Mustu Bhai began working in the village, he didn't even know their language. The tribal community didn't have complete faith and trust in him either. For the first three months, all he did was bathe children, trim villagers' nails and rear their cattle. Through this initial care work, he found a place in the hearts of the local tribal community and soon began imparting alternate education to the children.

However, people outside the village were apparently not too pleased with Mustu Bhai's good work. Some organisations that were working in nearby villages started instilling fear in the minds of the people of Khatisitra. They started rumours that Mustu Bhai was a terrorist, a Naxalite, a hooligan who would kidnap the village children and run away. Some even went ahead and said, "This Muslim man is trying to carry out religious conversations in the village." Even local politicians threatened to kill Mustu Bhai if he did agree not leave the village

but they didn't know that Mahatma Gandhi was Mustu Bhai's inspiration. Mustu Bhai was not one who would raise the white flag.

He continued his struggle for the betterment of the village, and today every taluk department in the district recognises Khatisitra with Mustu Bhai's name. Government officials are always willing to help the village people without taking a bribe — which is usually very rare. Recently, the village also received a grant for a project to light every house with solar energy.

"By next month, every house will have electricity," Mustu Bhai proudly tells me. He adds that his biggest achievement is not that the villagers are getting their rights but that despite collaborating with cultures and techniques that are alien to the locals, the village culture has stayed alive.

With the help of the villagers, Mustu Bhai organises a biannual tribal festival where people sing and dance merrily without being under the influence of alcohol. "It was the villagers who had decided a few years ago that no alcohol will be sold in

this village" he adds.

Now Mustu Bhai is working towards using the locally available resources to create better employment opportunities for the people so that youngsters don't have to migrate for jobs. With this aim in mind, Mustu Bhai is trying to ensure that the villagers get the right price for the pure honey that is produced here. Last year, the village earned three lakh rupees through the sale of honey. Besides this, he is also trying to figure out how he can create employment with the herbs that grow in the village. These days, Mustu Bhai is encouraging the villagers to adopt organic farming techniques so that their crops can be sold directly to customers at the right price.

With Mustu Bhai's help and the community's struggle for rights, the villagers now live like one big family in which everyone is willing to help each other without any selfish motive. And the village has learnt to speak the language of love now.

11

PANKAJ

At an age when children played in open fields with their friends, he made forests his friend. A biodiversity conservationist, he works in the Kutch forests with tribal communities to take traditional tribal knowledge to the government and scientists and thus, reduce the communication gap between the two in decision-making process.

Innovator: Pankaj Joshi
Occupation: Forest conservationist
Location: Kutch Forests around Bhuj, Gujarat

Learning from the best

IF THERE IS PASSION, NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE. BUT IF THERE IS NO PASSION, THEN EVEN SUCCESS AND ACHIEVEMENTS CANNOT GIVE HAPPINESS.

The world is full of examples of people who have earned great achievements in life but it didn't give them the same happiness as a small success in pursuing their passion gave them. And so it won't be wrong to say that to achieve something in life, passion is as important as breathing is for life.

But what is this passion? What gives rise to it?

It stems from a dream. When you have a dream, you put in all your energy to accomplish that dream. This energy, zeal and enthusiasm turns into an ambition, one for which you are willing to put in your heart, mind, soul and body. And this race to reach the ambition doesn't stop until that dream is accomplished.

Our next 'parinda' had immense love for plants, forests and wonders of nature from a very young age. As he grew older, this love turned into his passion. At an age when his friends would play in open fields, he had made the forest his playground.

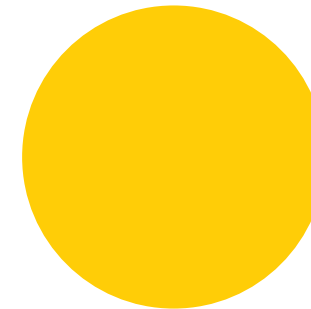
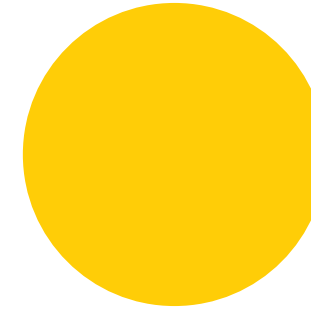
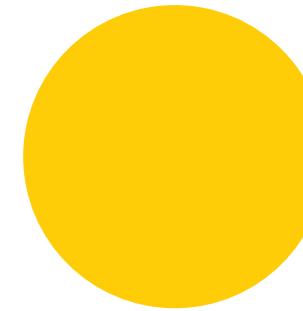
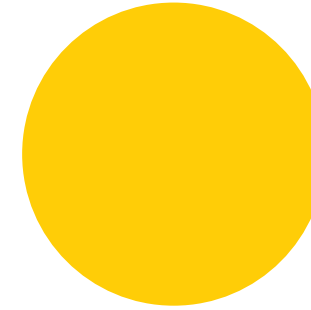
Brought up amid the Aravali wildlife, Pankaj Joshi spent his youth playing and roaming around in the jungle, thus learning from nature. He then went on to pursue his education in his interest field. After completing his PhD, he joined the Gujarat government and began to carry out research on the conservation of biodiversity in the forests of Kutch. As a scientist, he wrote several research papers on the topic and worked on various projects with the government.

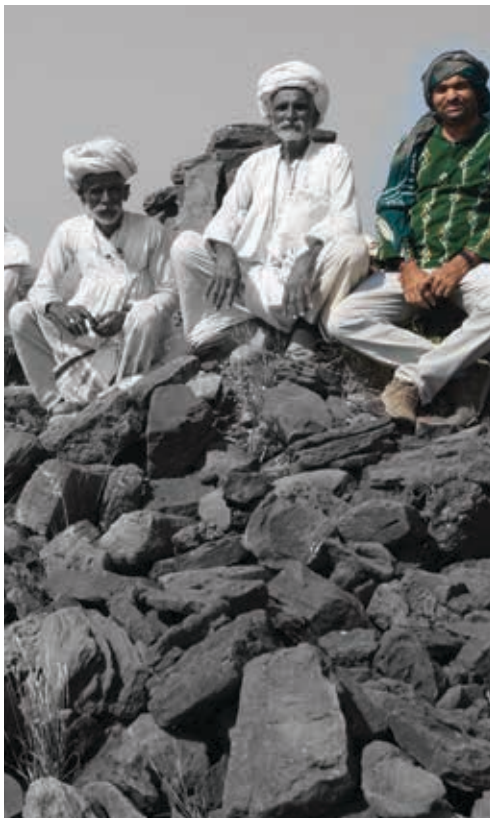
Even though he was working in a field he had always thought of pursuing — and he continued doing that for a decade — he did

not feel the same happiness as he felt as a child while playing in the forest. He felt that his research had little meaning if its recommendations were not being put to test. He didn't want his research to be just a bunch of papers catching dust in the corner of a government office rather than actually being implemented in the conservation and protection of the forests.

With this thought, about five years ago, Pankaj quit his research work for the government and spent the next two months in the forests of Kutch, interacting with the people living there. Having stepped out of the four walls of his office, Pankaj understood the ground reality and started looking for a place from where he could start the conservation process. It was during that period that Pankaj met Sandeep Vurmani, the Trustee of an organisation called Sahjeevan. Sandeep gave him a space to work and Pankaj went on to spend a lot of time with Maldharis — nomadic tribal herdsman who live in Gujarat — who helped him realise that the ground reality was very different from what he had been told.

While the government had warned that the Maldhari tribe was a threat to the forests and its fauna, Pankaj realised the tribe was actually responsible for protecting the forest life for thousands of years. It was the





centuries-old traditional knowledge that these tribals held that had helped conserve the forests till recent times. On the other hand, it was modern science and its consequence of unethical interference that had led to the degradation (and extinction) of various species of forest flora and fauna.

“I realised that if we have to save the forests, we have to follow the knowledge and traditions of the tribals. We have to give it the respect that modern society and education system hasn’t been able to give,” remembers Pankaj.

And so, three years ago, a network called Ramble was formed to take the traditional tribal knowledge to the government and

scientists, and to ensure that residents of the forests are a part of any future research or project that the government undertakes.

Pankaj believes that a change can only come if our approach towards it is democratic. “However, we’ve always seen this approach being suppressed at all levels, starting from the school level. Being a part of the system, we have become a part of the oppression as well, which is why I used to believe that my research conclusions were ‘correct,’” he says, adding that he had started believing that the tribals were illiterate people and had to be removed from their habitat in order to protect the forests. But it was later, when he started living and working with them, that Pankaj understood that knowledge comes

from experience and not from modern science.

“We talk about living in a democracy but there is hardly any democracy when it comes to these people,” he says. Whatever decisions are taken, are taken by top-level people who live away from the community, confined to the air-conditioned walls of their homes and offices. In a case like this, even though the patient is suffering from fever, he may just be given a medicine for stomach ache.

Until we live with the community and involve them in understanding the ground realities and finding solutions for it, “change” will only remain an illusion.

12

AMIT

A lawyer by education, he was working in the corporate world when, one day, a Teach for India advertisement in the newspaper struck a chord with him and he enrolled for the same. Today, he runs a for-profit company that works in the area of organic waste management and creates awareness among people about the problems of improper waste management.



Innovator: Amit Arora
Occupation: Promoter of Solid Waste Management
Location: Vadodara, Gujarat

Clearing our lives

OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH TRASH IN TODAY'S TIME, CAN BE PERFECTLY SUMMED UP IN THE PHRASE, 'OUT OF SIGHT, OUT OF MIND'.

No sooner do we clean our houses and the municipality clears out trash from our locality, we forget about its existence and believe that we have completed our responsibility. Does any of us ever think about what happens to the trash that we throw out? Where does it go after leaving our homes? Can that waste be used in any other way?

About 25-30 years ago, when our houses were swept, there would be just dust and dirt. At least, that was the case in my house, I don't know about big cities. Even during my various trips to different villages, this

is what I found. People in villages don't discard anything until it is completely utilised. So then what changed our habits?

Twenty-five years ago, our economy was opened to the world market. Consequently, our country sat on the horse of the so-called development and sped towards destruction. We saw several changes, even in the lives of middle-class families and their standards of living. I don't term any of it wrong or bad, however, it taught us the culture of 'use and throw' in our daily lives because of which almost every city is sitting on a garbage dump today. This culture is slowly seeping into our village as well.

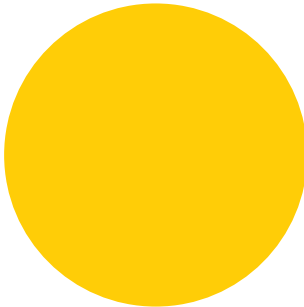
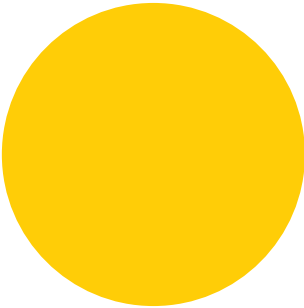
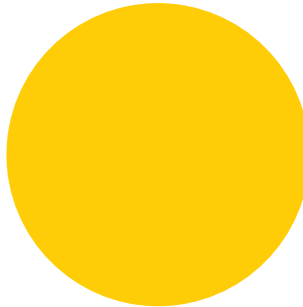
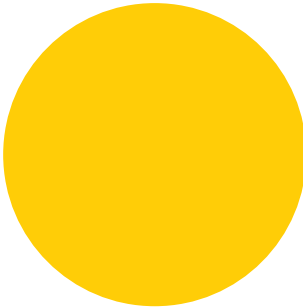
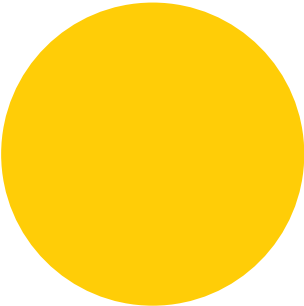
According to official figures, Vadodara (in Gujarat) alone produces 1,000 tonne of garbage every day. Out of this, 45 per cent is food, yard and agricultural waste. So we can imagine how scary the national figures must be! In a situation like this, if we are able to dispose of this waste properly,

we'll be able to solve many other related problems. We can produce several tonnes of organic manure through biodegradable waste, which can, in turn, reduce our dependence on urea and pesticides. The production of biogas can also be a solution to the problem of fuel. While all of this seems like an idealistic situation, the real question is who will do it in reality? The answer to this question can be found in the story of our next 'parinda'.

This story starts in 2008. Amit Arora's life was like any other person's in a city. A graduate from the Delhi University, Amit went to Meerut to pursue law before he joined the corporate world for a job. He was earning well and had a loving wife, what more does a man want? However, it wasn't what Amit aimed for.

One day, like any other normal day, Amit was reading the newspaper in the morning when he saw an advertisement for the Teach for India campaign. Amit had always had a lot of ideas and questions surrounding education and the education system but he had never thought of working in the area. After reading the advertisement, he thought we often talk about "bringing about a change" but when it's time to take a step, we usually step back.

"So if I'm getting an opportunity like this,





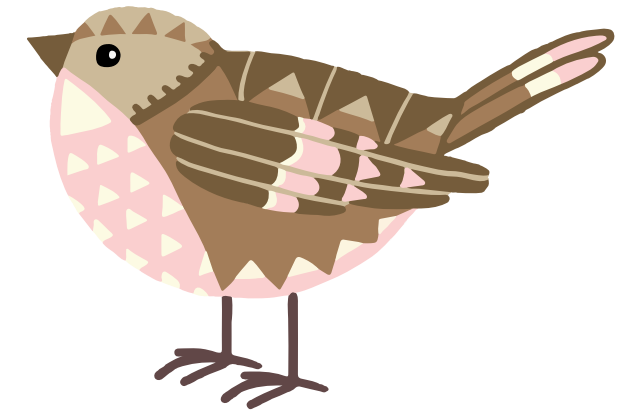
why not test myself once and see the results?” Amit had thought to himself that day. With this thought in mind, he filled in the application for Teach for India Fellowship. A few months later, he found that he had been selected. He resigned from his job and moved to Pune. Doing something like this is not easy for most people, it wasn’t for Amit either, especially since he was at a time in life when one aims for a secure future for his/her family. But Amit had the support of his wife; she too quit her job and moved to Pune with him.

While working with Teach for India, Amit learnt that, on one hand, there are people who have no shortage of resources. In fact, their resources are simply scattered around their house, with no purpose of use, and eventually land in trash. On the other hand, there are people who don’t even have the basic resources. He wondered how he could use the un-utilised and excesss resources

from one house for the benefit of those you didn’t have resources and, in turn, help in the latter’s education.

After Teach for India, Amit joined an organisation in New Delhi to impart digital literacy among children. While working at that organisation, Amit got in touch with a few companies and struck a philanthropic deal to get their old and unused resources for the purpose of education of children.

So far, Amit was only keen on working in the education sector. He felt that if had to truly help the children, he would have to quit his (then) current job and get involved in another way. However, Amit’s responsibilities had also increased in this period. He was now the father of a beautiful daughter. He decided to join the corporate world once again. His plan was to work a few years in the corporate environment,



save some money and then return to the education sector.

In his corporate job, Amit got the chance to carry out some research on waste and he realised that what he had seen through the eyes of Teach for India was just a trailer. The extent of garbage being produced and left untreated was much higher and dangerous that he had imagined.

“If nothing is done soon, it could take a ghastly shape, so ghastly that no solution would be effective,” he thought.

Amit then, once again, quit his job and moved to Vadodara with his family, about a year ago. He started his own company in Vadodara where he now works in the area of organic waste management and creates awareness among people about the problems of waste.

13

SHWETA

A performing artist, she uses her art, talent and platform to address people and connect with them on the issues of sexual violence, sustainable farming, climate change, tribal rights and other pertinent issues.

Innovator: Shweta Bhattad
Occupation: Artiste
Location: Nagpur

Art from heart

ART IS A MEDIUM THROUGH WHICH WE CAN SHARE OUR EXPERIENCES WITH THE WORLD IN A CREATIVE MANNER.

It is a medium through which an artiste can show the world something that they would have otherwise not been able to see. Art is a medium through which a suppressed thought is given a shape. Art is a form of magic, a dream – for change, for a new world. Our history of thousands of years stands as witness to how art and artistes have played an integral role in bringing about a change at every stage in the world.

An artiste is a master of free thinking, and the artiste makes others experience

this freedom through his/her work. This freedom, which an artiste talks about, is not in terms of the physical state of freedom but about the mental freedom that each one of us needs. For an artiste, killing a person's thoughts is a bigger crime than killing a man because once a man's freedom to think is murdered, the man becomes a tamed animal with no thoughts or opinions of his own. And even if he has some thoughts, he becomes unable to express them. Every artiste is, thus, fighting a battle for the freedom of expression. And when the artiste is able to involve the society in this battle, that's the beginning of a change.

Our next 'parinda' has a similar story to share. Over the years, she has used her art and expression to raise awareness about various issues in the society, especially farmers' rights.

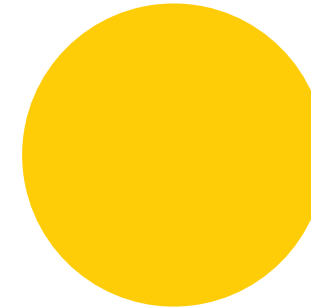
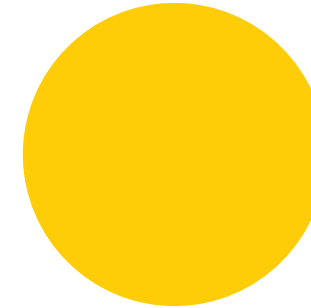
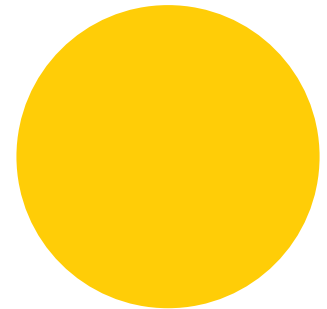
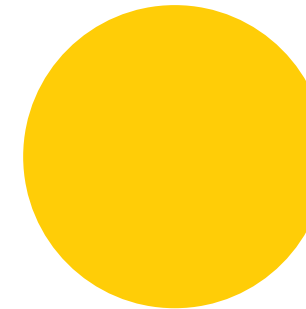
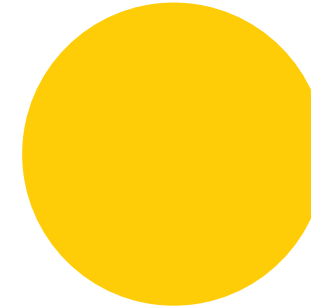
In an effort to ensure better education for

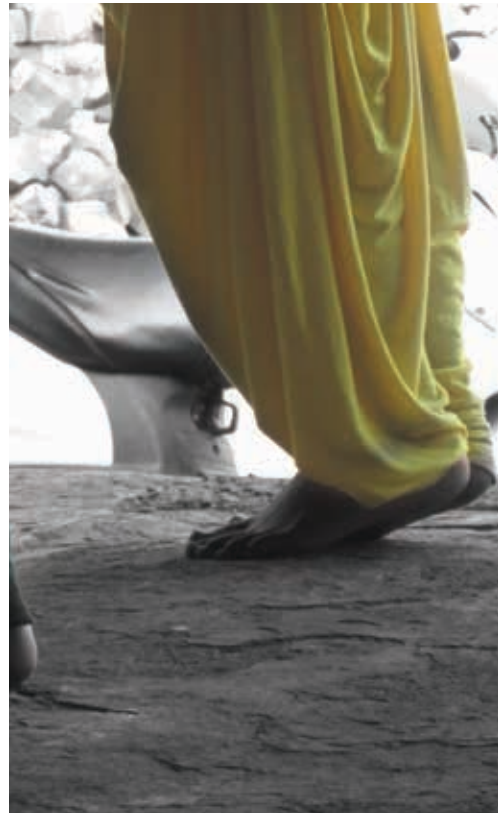
his children, Shweta Bhattad's father left his land behind and moved to Nagpur. Though he had left farming, he couldn't get the love for farming out of him, which also kept him close to his village. As a child when Shweta would accompany her father to their family village, she would notice the difference in her upbringing and that of her village friends. She would also notice that there wasn't ever enough food in her friends' homes, and wondered, "Why?"

"A famer is somebody who grows food and feeds others, then how can he not have enough food at his home?" she would wonder as a child, and conclude that maybe farmers don't know how to manage their resources.

Time went by, she remained busy in her studies even though she didn't enjoy it. "After my father would drop me off at my school, I would often run back home or hide at a neighbour's house," Shweta remembers, adding that maybe that was the reason I failed in Class XII.

However, Shweta has no regrets because that was the time when the seeds of art, which had been sown in her childhood, began to be nurtured by her and she realised her true calling. She finished her school, and went on to pursue Fine Art at graduation and post-graduation levels. However, she





came across the same reasons, which had her running from studies, even in college.

During this period, she met some girls who had been victims of sexual harassment in their childhood. Their stories revived the memories of some incidents of her own childhood. That's when Shweta decided to tackle such problems through her art. She designed some performances and presented them at different places. After college, she took up various art residency programmes in various villages of India, and realised that art can play a key role in involving the community for bringing about a holistic change.

All this while, Shweta continued to make occasional visits to her village. During these visits, she would think about doing something for the village but she didn't know how or what. But it was the art residency programme that showed her a path, and she organised one in her own village to raise awareness about hygiene and cleanliness.

During one of these visits, Shweta realised that the youth is not interested in agriculture, just like she isn't either. She

remembered her father and his decision to move to a city, leaving his agricultural land behind. Shweta then started understanding the problems surrounding farmers and agriculture in depth, and in the effort she started farming too. She also designed a few performances to raise awareness about it.

Meanwhile, Shweta had gotten the opportunity to be part of the Climate Change Conference in Paris where she met farmers from various countries and learnt that farmers around the world are facing the same problems. Land mafia is a threat to farmers in India and abroad, the Indian government doesn't do much for the farmers nor do the foreign governments, farmers are committing suicide in India and they're committing suicide in Europe as well.

"You can imagine the extent of farmers' problems by the fact that about 2,500 farmers are leaving the occupation every day in India or that more than 124 farmers have already committed suicide this year in Maharashtra alone. If the situation continues as it is, then there would be no farmer left in this agricultural country.



Maybe that's when we will truly understand the value of farmers because even we, like them, won't have food to eat then," she says.

"I believe food is a political, social and fundamental right. We've started a land art project in my village through which we are sowing seeds in a manner that they a particular shape. At the time of harvest, there would be different crops in different colours, together they will represent a shape or an image. I believe this is an interesting and attractive way of re-building a relation between the farmers and their land," she adds.

A lot of people ask Shweta why her work focuses on land. She tells that that there are several dimensions to our tradition and culture, but if we go to the roots of it, we'll see the farmers. And farmers are not just associated with food but are, in fact, extremely integral to sustain our ecosystem.

We must, therefore, give our farmers due respect and understand their importance in our lives, only then will we be able to save our farmers.

14

SUNIL

He was in Class VII when he decided to fund his own education, and started making small idols and bamboo kites to support his school fee. It wasn't much later that he realised that mainstream education is not really meaningful. Today, he works with rural communities and encourages utilisation of traditional education for livelihood.

Innovator: Sunil Deshpande
Occupation: Educator
Location: Amravati district, Maharashtra

Conserving for sharing

ALL FOREST DWELLERS
AROUND THE WORLD HAVE
LEARNT TO LIVE WITH NATURE,
WITH ALL ITS HETEROGENOUS
AND COMPLEX SITUATIONS.

They live in those areas which are rich in biodiversity. In India alone, 68 lakh families are associated with at least 227 tribes. Most of them live in or around their local forests, and have been involved for centuries in the protection and conservation of these forests. Thus, naturally, tribals have extensive knowledge about the biodiversity around them. Tribals have a close bond with natural resources. This relationship is spiritual, cultural, practical and supportive. Till the time the villages were under the control of tribes, the latter faced no difficulty in fulfilling their needs. In fact, the complexities of the forest life had become a part of their life-saving system. However, in the last 60 years, especially during the

“development” phase — when mining activities and industries were growing exponentially, besides the increasing use of power and forest resources — their cultural and age-old traditional knowledge has been facing a coordinated attack. This is the reason, they’re going through an inferiority complex and have lost faith in themselves. Buzzing city life and the urban style of living is pulling the tribals away from their roots.

When our next ‘parinda’ explained this to me, he also told me about his efforts in saving the traditional forest-based knowledge of tribals and their culture.

Sunil Deshpande, at a very young age, was told that his father would only be able to support his education till Class X. And if Sunil wanted to pursue further education, he would have to find a way on his own. When Sunil was in Class VII, he decided to fund his own education. He started making idols and bamboo kites to support his education. Soon after Sunil finished school, the mill where his father worked

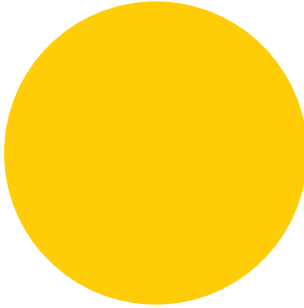
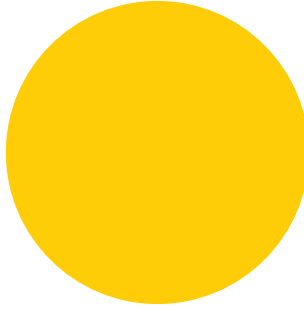
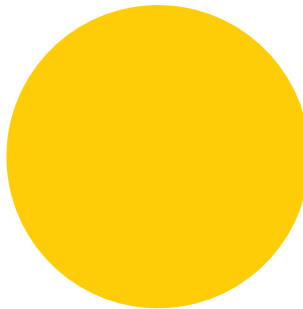
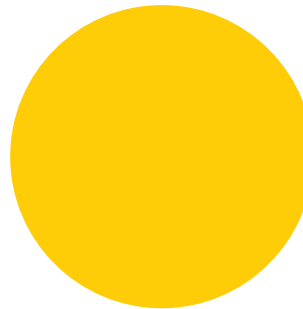
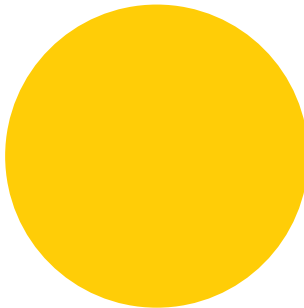
was shut down. Their family’s financial condition become worse. Now Sunil did not only have to support his education but also contribute towards the household expenses. Fortunately for him, a scholarship supported his college education while his job at a furniture store helped him look after his family needs.

However, after finishing college, Sunil realised there wasn’t much use of the textual knowledge he had gained in the last few years. Most of what he had learnt in school and college seemed like a waste to him, and he started wondering what really was education.

“If a students spends 20 precious years of his/her life in gaining knowledge and yet has to struggle later to support his/her living, then what is the significance of such an education?” Sunil would often wonder.

It was in college days that Sunil had become involved in student politics. He would often be part of student groups advocating for “adequate education” but he soon realised such campaigns would not really be helpful.

“Campaigns should be aimed at bringing about a change in the nature of education and not to improve the education system,” he realised, and started a Sunday School with some of his friends to impart practical





and alternative knowledge to village children and poor city kids.

It was during this period that that an educator asked Sunil to meet a Venu Kale. “He is working on something, and you might be able to help him,” the teacher told Sunil.

When Sunil reached Venu’s house, he saw that a group of tribals were sitting and working with bamboo. After spending a day there, when Venu asked him if he wanted to work with him, Sunil immediately said yes. Sunil first learnt bamboo craftwork, and then got the opportunity to travel the country because of his work. Later, he started a bamboo department in a university in Chitrakoot. However, when the university came under the UGC, it became like any other government institution, forcing Sunil to quit. By then, Sunil had understood the nature of government education and its little value in a student’s life. That’s when he quit his job at the government-recognised university and moved to Nagpur.

In Nagpur, he once again met his childhood friend Nirupama. Time passed, and the two of them decided to work together. Some more time passed, and they decided to become life partners as well. By then they knew that they wanted to live in a village

and work for the people of the village.

Sunil and Nirupama got married on May 2, and they moved to Lawada village, in Amravati district of Maharashtra, on June 16 that year. In Lawada, they began to teach the locals bamboo craft and art. During this period, Sunil saw some incidents that made him realise that he did not want to work “for the villagers but with them”. He also realised that though urban dwellers think of tribals as uneducated and uncivilised people, they actually hold vast amount of knowledge and judgement.

“Once, in the month of March, an old tribal man came to me to sell mangoes. When I asked where did he get mangoes from (considering it was an off season for the fruit), the man said that the mangoes had fallen from a tree the previous day after a strong wind. I asked him why he wasn’t eating the mangoes himself, and the man told me that he eats the fruit only after ‘akha teej (or Akshaya Tritiya – a holy day for Hindus and Jains)’. ‘But you city dwellers eat anything at any time!’ the man had said,” Sunil recalls. “I had heard of Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Christianity and Buddhism. But I wondered what faith did these people follow,” Sunil adds.



With this curiosity, Sunil approached his guru who told him that there is science behind what the old tribal man had said. The guru explained that the seeds of a mango only mature after akha teej. And the tribals believe that if you eat a mango before its seed is mature, you’re killing a tree even before its birth.

Sunil realised that this kind of knowledge was extremely important and practical, yet city dwellers had not clue about it. Instead, it were the villagers and tribals – or the so-called uneducated and uncivilised population – who held this knowledge.

“We can debate about environment issues and write research or academic papers about it but it’s the indigenous population that lives (with) the environment. If their knowledge is not preserved, it will become extinct,” Sunil believes.

And so, he and his wife established a village knowledge centre where students are taught traditional and cultural knowledge to ensure that they live a successful practical life in co-existence with the environment. No student is awarded a degree or a certificate in this institution, they are only imparted knowledge and for free – our culture doesn’t believe in the tradition of selling knowledge.

15

MADHUKAR

A water conservationist, he has worked in more than 1,200 villages of Maharashtra to develop or employ various innovative techniques to collect rainwater and increase the ground water level. He also advocates growing multiple crops rather than one cash crop to ensure round - the - year sustenance for farmers.



Innovator : Madhukar Dhas
Occupation : Water conservationist
Location : Yavatmal, Maharashtra

Eyes, right!

IF YAVATMAL DISTRICT IN MAHARASHTRA IS KNOWN FOR ANYTHING IN INDIA, IT IS FOR FARMER SUICIDES.

This region has a forest cover of 2,24,000 hectares with sufficient amount of rainfall, then what is the reason that so many farmers kill themselves every day here?

Our next ‘parinda’ tells me about some of the reasons that have forced farmers to take such a drastic step. He says, a lot of farmers are trapped in the clutches of moneylenders. The interest on such loans is extremely high. Despite the rainfall, there isn’t enough water for irrigation because there is no water left underground as a result of excessive digging for bore-wells. The situation of water is so bad in the region that it is distributed to people through a tanker under police supervision. Arguments

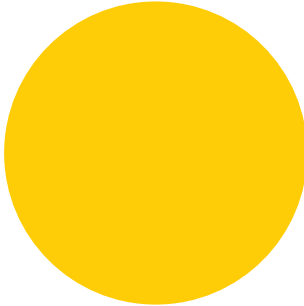
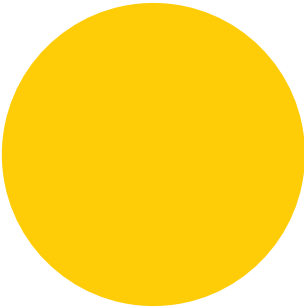
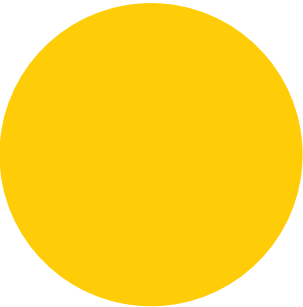
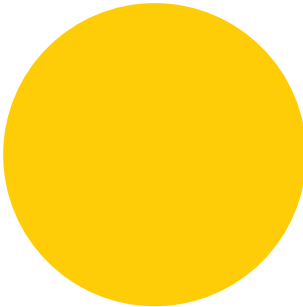
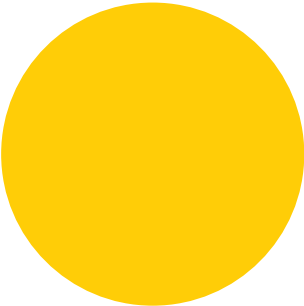
and fights over water are common here. The water level in the well has gone so low that a number of women have lost their lives while trying to pull water out of it. Our next ‘parinda’ grew up under such circumstances. Like many others, he saw his maternal aunt fall into the well while trying to retrieve water.

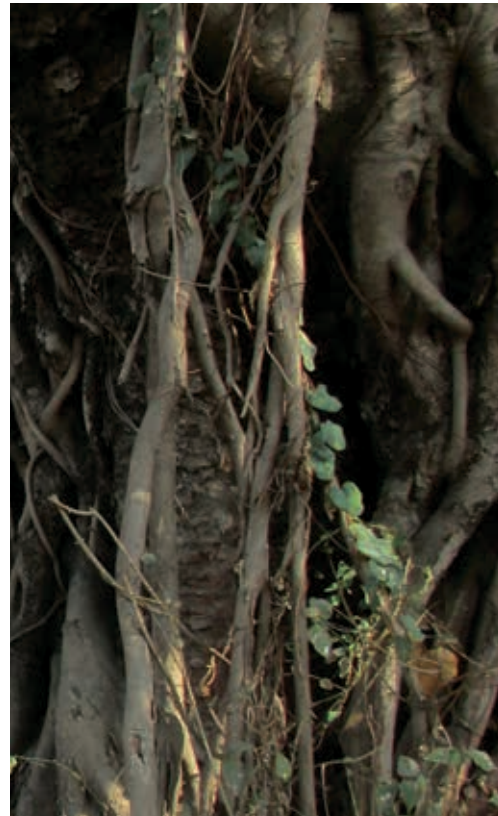
Born in a cattle rearing family, Madhukar Dhas grew up helping his parents rear the cattle. When he was a little older, he moved to Pune. To support the fee for his education, he used to clean toilets in people’s houses. For this job, he used to earn Rs. 16 per day. This money helped him support his stay and his education in Pune. Previous to that, he used to work at a construction site where he earned Rs. 8 every day. Years passed, and he managed to finish schooling. After he passed out of Class XII, he joined a local organisation which helped raised public issues through demonstrations, protests and marches. Simultaneously, he continued to pursue higher education and graduated with an MA degree and excellent grades.

One of his professors noticed his hardworking nature and recommended his name for a teaching job. When Madhukar went for an interview, he was asked to cough up two lakh rupees as a bribe to get the post. At that time, Madhukar didn’t even have Rs. 200 to go back to his village let alone Rs. 2,00,000. Disappointed with what had happened at the interview, Madhukar decided that he didn’t want to do a job but wanted to do something through which he could help people like him live a sustainable life.

With this thought in mind, Madhukar registered an organisation called ‘Dilasa’ (meaning encouragement or comfort) in Yavatmal. In his initial days, he was supported by a Fellowship that was granted to him by activist Medha Patkar and actor-cum-activist Nana Patekar. This helped him lead demonstrations on various public issues. However, he was soon tired of this work, especially since he could not see any change among people or in situations. It was during this period that he got the opportunity to work with Vilas Rao Salunkhe, who was popularly known as ‘Pani Baba’.

When Madhukar started working with Pani Baba in 1998, the death of his aunt was still fresh in his mind. Around that time, he met Mansoor Khorasi who was a civil engineer





by profession. Mansoor was looking for a partner with whom he could work in the region to solve the water crisis.

Today, with their efforts, the crisis hasn't completely been resolved but the situation is much better than it was earlier. Together, they developed or employed various innovative techniques to collect rainwater and increase the ground water level. Additionally, they used a number of traditional water conservation techniques that had been long lost or forgotten. These techniques were implemented in around 1,200 villages across nine districts of Maharashtra.

Madhukar also advocated growing multiple crops rather than cash crops to ensure round the year sustenance. Besides this, he formed 9,000 self-help groups through which loans — for small industries and farmers — amounting up to Rs. 50 crore have been distributed, reducing their dependence on private moneylenders.

Through his efforts, Madhukar has been able to facilitate direct employment to 200 youth. This youth power has consequently led to positive changes in the lives of at least one lakh other families.

Madhukar says that he has done a lot of work in the sector in the last 20 years

but the situation is still quite scary. “We’ve prevented a number of farmers from committing suicide but we still lose thousands of farmers every year. Every government turns a blind eye towards the agriculture sector. However, now that the water level is finally rising here once again and a so-called rebirth of rivers is taking place, the government has all of a sudden become interested in ‘developing’ the region. Soon, several industries will be set up here; and they will snatch away the rightful water of the farmers. The farmers who’ve just begun to enter a better place, will be left in a worse situation.”

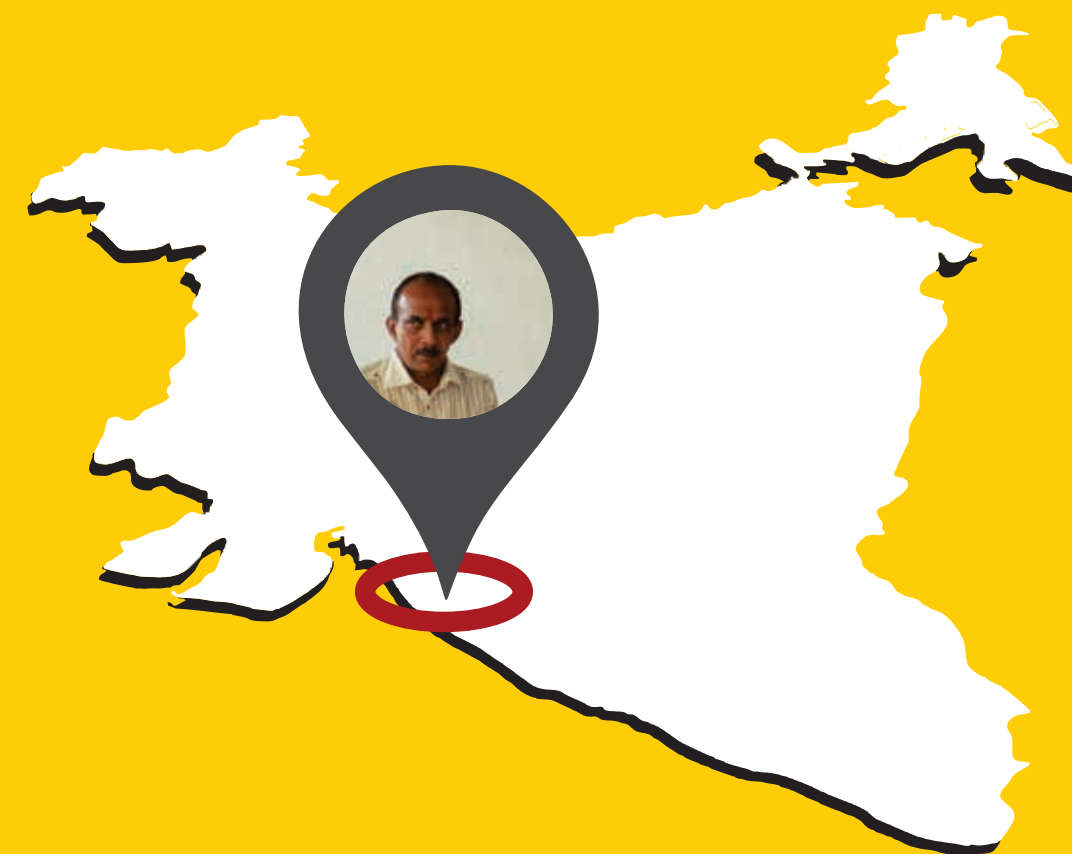
Unfortunately, Madhukar ji passed away in Dec 2016.



16

RAJESH

A passionate man, he is like a warrior who has dedicated his life to bringing humans closer to nature and reinstate the respect that our rivers deserve by encouraging people to revive the rivers around them. An environmentalist, he has fought several legal battles to take a stand against the indiscriminate felling of trees.



Innovator: Rajesh Pandit
Occupation: Environmentalist
Location: Nashik

Veins of the nation

INDIA IS LUCKY THAT IT IS HOME TO SEVEN MAJOR RIVERS AND THEIR THOUSANDS OF TRIBUTARIES THAT PERFORM THEIR ROLE IN THE SAME MANNERS AS THE NUMEROUS VEINS IN A HUMAN BODY THAT ASSIST IN BLOOD CIRCULATION.

Spread across India's geographical area of 329 million hectares, the rivers in India are an integral part of the country's natural richness.

Carrying the weight of India's cultural, economic, geographic, religious and spiritual development, these rivers have been flowing uninterrupted on earth for thousands of years. These rivers are not just the source of water but are an important part of our ecosystem that protects the environment and the biodiversity. This is the reason that human civilisations have come up one after another on the banks of these rivers, with the civilisations' existence depending on these rivers.

Rivers have always held a lot of importance in the Indian culture. However, as humans slowly started moving away from nature, our ancestors began to associate rivers with religious, just to ensure its protection and force some kind of a bond between humans and nature. Unfortunately, in the last few years, especially since the rise of the "modern civilization", the situation has become such that the water in some rivers has not only become unsuitable for drinking and bathing but even farmers can't use it for the purpose of irrigation. Most of the Indian rivers have either already been sacrificed in the name of development or are on the verge of being sacrificed.

We often hear that if one takes a dip in the river, one is cleansed of his/her sins or any filth that exists in the human body. However, rivers, these days, are only carrying the scum of modern civilisation. On the banks of which we built the pillars of growth, the rivers are writing the stories of their death.

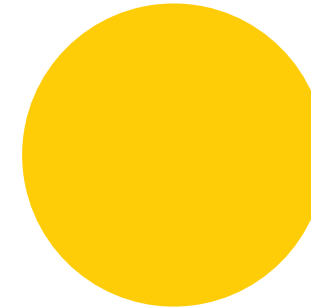
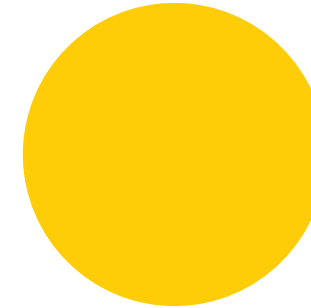
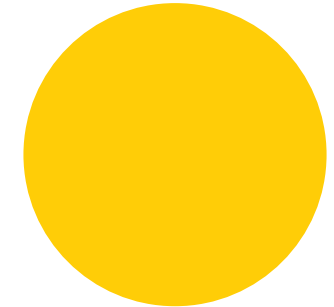
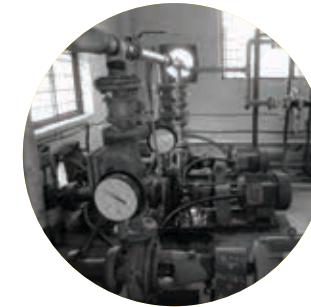
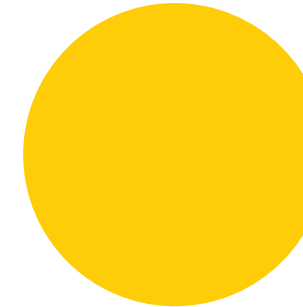
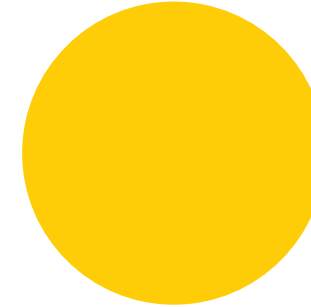
The reason we're hearing so much about global warming these days is because

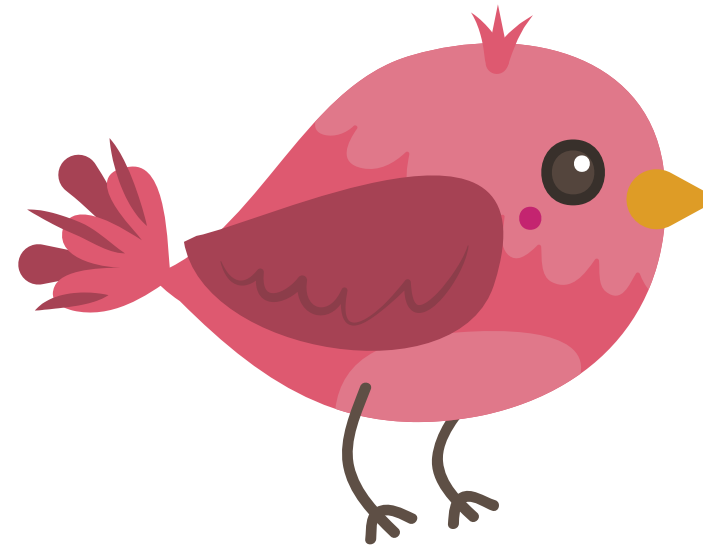
we've killed our rivers. Consequently, the biodiversity and the ecosystem that these rivers were protecting around them, have also been destroyed. So many jungles have been razed to ground, thousands of species of flora and fauna are extinct, and soon even we may become extinct because now the nature has waged a war against humans.

When my next parinda got the impression of this terrible war, he became a warrior dedicated to bringing humans closer to nature once again and reinstating the respect that our rivers deserve by encouraging people to revive the rivers around them.

Rajesh Pandit is a common man. He has a family and a job to sustain his family. On account of his work, he often has to travel to different parts of the country. During these trips, he was able to carefully notice modern development, and understand its impact across different parts of India. Every time he would come across a disastrous impact, he'd feel extremely disappointed. However, as he had a lot of family responsibilities, he shied away from taking any step.

Things changed for Rajesh a few years ago when the government ordered indiscriminate felling of thousand-year-old trees for the construction of a Mumbai





to Agra highway just outside Nashik. This was unbearable for him and he launched an agitation against the same. He filed a petition against the Maharashtra state government in the Mumbai High Court. Eventually, he was successful in protecting the trees in the disputed region.

Around the same time, his attention was grabbed by the pollution in river Godavari. He realised that the river, that once formed the basis of existence for the city of Nashik was now struggling to save its own existence. Rajesh decided to involve youth and children, and launched a movement. However, as usually happens in this nation, things were not moving forward beyond mere assurances from authorities. He realised that, once again, he was not left with any option but to approach the judiciary. He filed a petition against Nashik city's municipal corporation, the state government and the Centre. When the judges reprimanded the administration,

some work finally started for the restoration of the Godavari.

It was a time when the citizens of Nashik had become reckless towards its river. So, besides asking the government to take some necessary steps, it was equally important to create awareness about the importance of a clean and healthy river, and involve the local community in the protection of the Godavari. For this purpose, he launched a mass awareness campaign through which 12 lakh children, in a day, pledged to protect the river. On another day, 6,28,000 trees were planted. Some years later, on a World Environment Day ahead of the Kumbh Mela, Rajesh motivated 22,000 individuals from various sections of the society to come together to launch a community cleaning operation.

Rajesh didn't stop at these successes, he went on to request the government to

build a close relation between the Kumbh Mela and the nature in an effort towards bringing people closer to the needs of their environment. He also began to call the festival the Green Kumbh. However, things could not move as smoothly as he had wished. The powerful people of the city and administration put a lot of pressure on him. Rajesh was labeled a Green Terrorist and an 'enemy of development' but he could not be stopped.

Today, the Godavari has managed to earn back its due respect and healthy existence in some parts of Nashik but there's a long road ahead.

Rajesh believes, "An enemy of the Godavari is an enemy of ours."

Unfortunately,the meaning of this wonderful feeling has been changed completely in today's time. Love is growingly equated with lust, but one doesn't understand that the highest form of love is the spiritual kind. The spiritual value of love heals and renews. It brings us closer. Love is also the beginning of knowledge.

Our true nature is love and our purpose is to search for something worthy of our affection. This quest awakens us to the fulfillment of our real self. We must never forget that spiritual experience is nothing more than a practical experience of love. Love is boundless and nourishes the soul of the world. It can heal the soul for better, and that's where the power of love comes in. Because when we love, we always strive to become better.

I have fortunately been at the receiving end of immense love and kindness. I remember when I was cycling from Udaipur to Chittorgarh, I met many kind souls along the way that offered me food and shelter. Ishwar was one such soul who offered shelter, even when I had no money to give. This was a night in Salem, where I shared my idea of 52 Parindey and in the morning as Ishwar left for work, I woke up to find Rs.2000 under my pillow.

I had a similar experience in Darjeeling as well. As festivities were in full swing, banks were closed and unfortunately I wasn't able to reach out to Digital Empowerment Foundation, my financial supporters as they were unable to transfer money. I was hopeless and confused, which is when I met Siddharth Pradhan, an adventure enthusiast. He not only sponsored my accommodation but also food for three days.

These experiences cannot sometimes be recreated or shared, for the feeling of their happening cannot be fathomed into words. Unknown people opened their houses and hearts to me and knowingly or unknowingly became friends and family.

Coming to abundance, I suppose it can be interpreted in numerable ways. But in its true essence, it means that a person is living a satisfied life and has everything that they require.

When you live in abundance it means that you are happy, peaceful and confident. A person who tries to rise above the restrictions imposed by the various institutions of the society and decides to live life on their own terms achieves an abundant life.



17

DEEPIKA

As a young girl, she moved away from the city life of Pune to make a home in a quiet town. Here, she laid the foundation of Serene Eco, a place for people who are seeking a fresh environment and want a break from their busy city lives. She has also established a micro-enterprise to curb migration of villagers.

Innovator: Deepika Chordiya
Occupation: Alternate living facilitator
Location: Welhe

Homecoming

TODAY,INDIAISSTRUGGLINGWITHITS PROBLEM OF POPULATION DENSITY. ON ONE HAND, RURAL POPULATION IS MIGRATING TO URBAN CITIES AT A SCARY PACE; ON THE OTHER, SLUMS IN CITIES ARE GETTING WORSE WITH THE INCREASING POPULATION.

Apart from children and senior citizens, you'll hardly see anybody else in villages. The slums and their filth have become an almost integral part of all cities today, so much so that it's hard to imagine the life of these cities depend on the slum localities in more than one ways.

However, has anyone paused for a minute and thought about the people who reside in these slums and help run the cities – what forces them to live in such pathetic conditions? Why do they leave the peaceful and clean environment of their villages to struggle to survive every day in cities? They know what they have sacrificed for their city lives,yet they don't return to their

home because the city gives them what helps them feed their families. And that's money. It's what makes a man rich or poor. The more pieces of paper a person has,the richer the person is,the more respect the person earns.

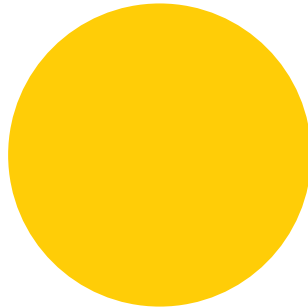
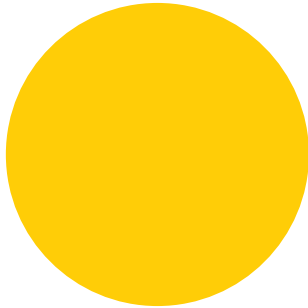
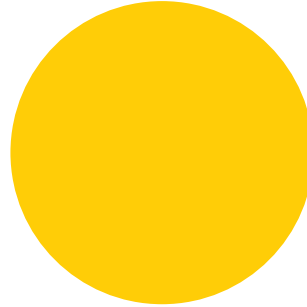
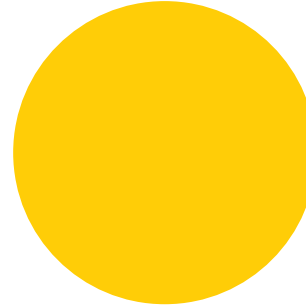
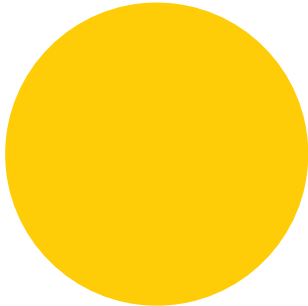
However, is that how a person's value should be measured? Isn't there a need to change the unit of measuring wealth? If this is changed,we might be able to solve the problem of migration to a considerable extent.We won't need to spend our valuable resources on creating Smart Cities.

I'm not saying Smart Cities are not important but a person from a village should not believe that clean air, water and food can only be bought. Unfortunately, money does provide people all of these today. But can money buy us peace of mind? Can it buy us happiness? Can money get us love and affinity? Yet, we believe money can get us anything. Doesn't that prove that we need to question ourselves once? The money with which we buy treatment for a disease or disorder is the same with which we first bought the ailment.

Dr. Praveen Chordiya of Pune realised this a few years ago. As soon as Chordiya understood this, he bought a piece of land just outside the city of Pune, in Welhe, and dedicated himself in greening it. However, he hadn't realised at that time that it wasn't a one-man task. So,after some time, he lost hope.

In 2008, when his youngest daughter, Deepika, completed her education and returned to Pune, she decided to take forward her father's dream.Deepika,even as a young girl,wasn't too pleased with Pune's fast pace life. So, she turned that land in Welhe into an establishment where people, who were seeking a fresh environment wanted a change from the busy city life, could come and stay. That's how the foundation of Serene Eco Village was laid.

Initially, when Deepika was trying to plant trees in the area, it seemed even nature was trying to test her promise. Maybe that's why several of her efforts were destroyed by forest fires,the rest of her efforts failed when people from nearby villages stole the trees she had planted. But she didn't lose hope,and she was constantly supported by her husband who quit his job and dedicated himself in establishing Serene.It was during this phase that the couple had a beautiful daughter who they named Meera.





“After the birth of Meera, Nikhil and I were even surer that we didn’t want to return to the city. We knew of the problems of living in a city. We had grown up there and drank the unclean water of the city. And so, we didn’t want our daughter growing up in a similar unhealthy environment,” said Deepika.

Today, Serene is spread across a land of 35 acres with a dense forest surrounding it. Deepika’s efforts have brought back around 10 families to village life. She is continuously working towards ensuring that the villagers don’t need to leave the village to earn a livelihood. For this purpose, she has even established a micro enterprise. She wants more and more people to understand the importance of a clean environment and of living a healthy and happy life in rural India.

18

AMIT

Albert Einstein had once said, “If the bees disappeared off the surface of the globe, then mankind would only have four years of life left. No more bees, no more pollination, no more plants, no more animals, no more man.” With this realisation, he quit his job at a private company and decided to become a beekeeper.

Innovator: Amit Godse
Occupation: Beekeeper
Location: Pune, Maharashtra

Can it bee any better?

MANY A TIMES, WE ARE FACED WITH SUCH INCIDENTS THAT GIVE RISE TO THE FEELING OF UNCERTAINTY IN OUR LIVES. WELL, HUMAN LIFE IS ANYWAY FULL OF UNCERTAINTIES. SUCH INCIDENTS OR SITUATIONS OFTEN CHANGE THE COURSE OF OUR LIFE BUT THEY ALSO LEAVE BEHIND A LOT OF LEARNING AND EXPERIENCE FOR US.

It is, therefore, important to take careful notes of these incidents or situations and then reflect upon oneself. But this can only happen if one leads his/her life in such a way that they truly experience every moment, going beyond the conventional “right” and “wrong”.

Who knows what experience may change the course of our life or give a new meaning to our life. Something similar happened with our next ‘parinda’ a few years ago, thus, changing the course of his life’s journey and giving a new meaning and mission to it.

Amit Godse, like most youngsters, had completed engineering and joined a big

company. He was earning well and had bought a place for his family in Pune. However, there was a big beehive in the building, and scared residents had called pest control personnel who set fire to the hive, killing thousands of bees at once.

This disturbed Godse to quite an extent and he began to think about how he could change the situation. Soon, he got a chance to visit an organic farm where he was introduced to beekeeping. Once again, his curiosity and interest in safeguarding the bees grew. When he returned to Pune, he carried out extensive research on beekeeping. Godse even quit his job so that he could focus more on his research, and decided to go for professional training in Mahabaleshwar and Pune to become a beekeeper. Protecting the bees had become his mission. And as he continued to work in the field, he realised the close bond that human life shares with bees.

Godse tells me, “Various research studies carried out by scientists are enough proof to tell that the use of insecticides on farms is posing a major threat to the species of bees.

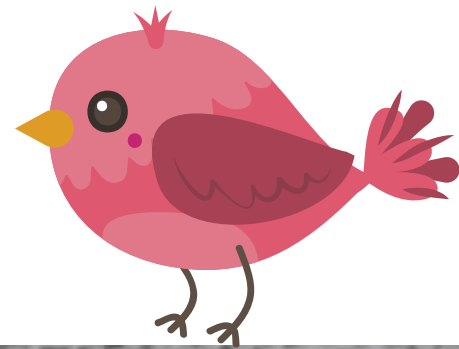
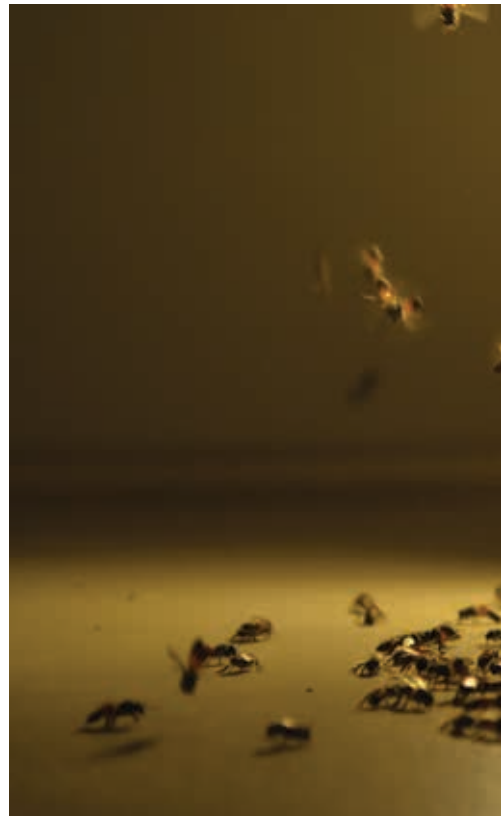
Bees feed on pollen and nectar produced by plants. Female bees collect pollen to feed their larvae, storing it in pollen baskets on their hind legs or on branched hairs on their body. As they go from flower to flower, bees inevitably lose some of the pollen they have collected, which may land on the female parts of other flowers of the same species, resulting in cross-pollination. Just as much as bees have a role in ensuring the survival of humanity, we also have a role in ensuring their survival. This way, we can ensure that the symbiotic relationship we have with bees will endure for many more generations. All elements of an ecosystem are important for the functioning of that ecosystem. The elements may be positive or negative from a human perspective, but we cannot look at nature from a human standpoint alone.”

“Why?” I ask.

“Well, ecosystems are complex, possibly too complex for us to be able to understand all the connections, actions and interactions that take place within them. If we do not know what will happen if we change something, it makes no sense to rush and make those changes,” he explains.

Albert Einstein had once said, “If the bees disappeared off the surface of the globe, then mankind would only have four years of





life left. No more bees, no more pollination, no more plants, no more animals, no more man.”

I had several questions for Ghodse: How many bee hives does he breed? What costs him the most as a bee keeper? How does he sustain himself?

“The question is not how many hives but the proper management of honeybee. You need a suitable location for honey production and consequent pollination. After these steps are taken care of, you have to rely on Mother Nature to work in your favour. After all of these stages are accomplished, you must the hope that the bees are not poisoned by the crop farmers, who trying to make a living for themselves. But, there are a lot of people who’re making a sustainable living from beekeeping, and are making enough to hire an entire team to work for them. And yes, I am able to sustain myself as well,” he says.

For those who’re interested in becoming beekeepers, Godse suggests that they should first learn and work under an established beekeeper before going independent.

19

HASMUKH

He returned to India from America with a dream in his eyes. He wanted to set up a place in India where orphans could be provided humble upbringing and quality education. Hence, he replaced the human-centric education with all-inclusive knowledge that promotes the co-existence of humans, nature and the universe.

Innovator: Hasmukh Bhai
Occupation: Educationist
Location: Mandangad, Maharashtra

Dreamcatcher

WHEN I MET MY LATEST ‘PARINDA’ AND UNDERSTOOD HIS WORK, I BECAME NOSTALGIC ABOUT MY CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH.

It was the phase I was the happiest in life. It was the time when we wanted to go out with our parents to a park and not a mall. It was the time I would spend hours outside, playing with my friends. We would climb the hills outside the city, take a stroll in the nearby forests and take a dip in the rivers and ponds. However, our life could not always be like this. Soon, the wind in the air changed and the pressure of books and exams increased. With modern development changing the look of our surroundings every day, soon there wasn’t much natural space left where we could learn and play.

Today, we’re stuck and our lives seem

wasted in the web of television and Internet. I believe it is a misconception that the Internet enables communication. In fact, the Internet kills any room of personal communication.

In the 1980s, Harvard biologist Edward O Wilson proposed a theory called Biophilia. Wilson had said that humans are instinctively attracted to their natural surroundings, and try to learn from it. However, looking at the children of the 21st century, several things come to my mind that question Wilson’s theory. Today, children spend so much time glued to their television or computer screens that it has become a matter of serious concern. Psychologists have termed this tendency of staying indoors, which is resulting in wide range of behavioural problems, of the children Nature Deficit Disorder. It cannot be denied that a child spends much more time inside the house today than outside. Adding to that, according to a research, an average Indian kid spends about seven hours a day in front of the television.

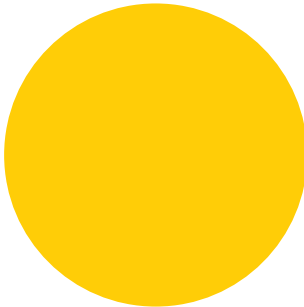
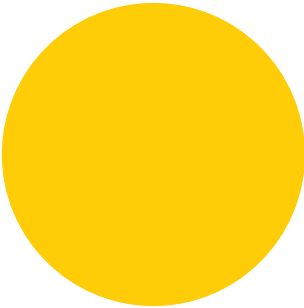
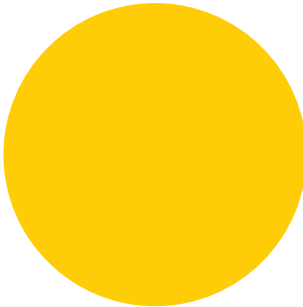
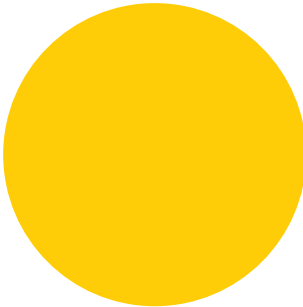
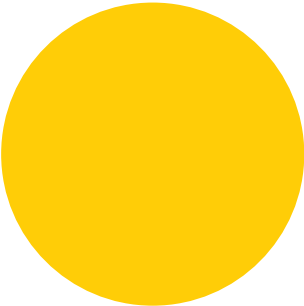
Hasmukh Bhai returned to India from America with a dream in his eyes. He wanted to set up a place in India where orphans could be provided good upbringing and better education. Being an orphan himself, he understood very well what difficulties an orphan had to face while growing up. The struggle for a daily meal was an everyday challenge for him as a child. In a situation like this, sound education seemed like a distant dream. However, he struggled hard and put in all his effort to finally reach a stage where he had every comfort of life. Throughout, he didn’t lose focus on his dream to set up a place for orphans in India.

In 2008 when recession hit the United States, Hasmukh Bhai lost 90 per cent of his savings after a friend of his cheated him but the remaining savings were enough to start work on his dream. Instead of working towards covering his financial loss, Hasmukh Bhai returned to India.

“I realised that if there was something I really wanted to do, it had to be now,” he said.

This was six years ago.

Initially, he had thought he would live with the orphans and enroll them at a government school but then he decided to understand the education system better





first. For this, he took up a teaching job at a school near Mandangarh in Maharashtra. There, he realised that education that was supposed to help children build a better future was actually ruining their lives. Children were merely reading from a book in a closed room and not experiencing any of it. Nothing that they were “learning” could be used in their lives.

“Our education system is human-centric but what we need is an all-inclusive system that involves humans, nature and the universe. Only then can our education system be called complete and holistic. Until we step outside our four walls, take a look at things around us and feel our surroundings, we will neither develop curiosity nor will we question anything,” Hasmukh Bhai said. “If we don’t question, we won’t get answers.

We’ll just be running like everybody else in a race, not knowing where our finish line is.”

We want our children to step out of their homes, climb the hills, swim in the river, run in the field. We want them to sit on the floor instead of the couch. We want them to observe the world around them, understand it, love it and learn from it. Unfortunately, we’re living in a time when a lot of children are going through depression and despair. They don’t care about the trees that are being felled for their books or the damage that is being caused deep underground to extract fuel to run their school buses. They don’t care where their food comes from, who grows it or how it is grown.

To change this attitude of the children, Hasmukh Bhai has led several initiatives.



He often takes children to the forests, on top of hills and into the fields. He works with children and youth of all age groups, inculcating in them habits that promote conscious living.

“While working with the children when we see satisfaction in their eyes or a smile on their lips, it gives me immense joy. When I see children, who had been living in fear within the four walls until now, playing in the mud with confidence, I understand the significance of my work. Efforts like these have been helping me fulfill a dream that I brought with me six years ago,” he adds.

In June this year, Hasmukh Bhai will start a learning centre for the children.

20

MALHAR

Even as a child, he loved the river and those residing in the river more than he loved anything else. Today, he is an otter conservationist, as he feels these aquatic mammals are key for maintaining the health of a river which affects not just other aquatic organisms but also the livelihood of thousands of humans.

Innovator: Malhar Indulkar
Occupation: Otter conservationist
Location: Chiplun, Maharashtra

Like no otter

I HAVE ALWAYS SAID THAT STUDENTS SHOULD TAKE A YEAR-LONG BREAK AFTER CLASS XII. FROM CHILDHOOD TO YOUTH, WE ARE CONTINUOUSLY RUNNING WITHOUT EVEN ASKING OURSELVES HOW WE WANT TO LIVE OUR LIFE.

Whatever everyone else is doing or saying, we follow them as if they're our personal dreams and wishes. We live our lives following this route until we reach a stage where we regret and think, "What if...?"

The time immediately after Class XII is the time which helps us view the road ahead of us. Before somebody else decides for us what road we should take or how we should lead our lives – or even before we start applying to pursue a particular degree or course – we should give ourselves some time, take a pause, and think about where we want to head. We need to hunt for what we want to do and it should be justified with personal reasons and not reasons that somebody else has fed into our minds.

For this, we need to step outside the four walls of our classroom and see the real world, not just superficially but with perception. We should travel a lot, meet new people, work with them, live with them and learn from them. We need to tell ourselves what we want to do and why do we like it. We should also experiment with ourselves, challenge ourselves and push ourselves into difficult conditions to best judge our capabilities and our temperament.

When I usually say all of this to people, they tell me that these things sound better when heard; implementing them in reality is actually much tougher. They ask me how many people in the world actually follow what I'm preaching. "And those who are following this ideology, what are they getting out of it?" they ask me.

So, as an example for them, here's the story of our next parinda who found his own road.

Even as a child, Malhar Indulkar loved the river and those residing in the river. His house was situated on the banks of the

river Vashisti; as soon as Malhar would return from school, he would rush to the river with his friends to take a dip in the water and catch fish. But he never thought of the river as a part of his future career. Like most other children, he went to school and studied whatever everyone else was being taught. Till Class X, he had no clue what he wanted to pursue so when somebody suggested him to take up Commerce, he opted for the stream and went on to finish school. However, he wasn't happy with what he had studied. He had simply followed the path that somebody else had led him on.

After finishing Class XII, he heard of Udaipur's Swaraj University. When he read up more about it, he realised that this establishment could help him find his own way, and he can know what he really wants to do. At Swaraj University, the power was in Malhar's hands to decide what he wanted to study. There was no pressure of examinations and he had the freedom to make mistakes and learn from them. And so, he decided to take a break from formal education and enrolled at Swaraj University to find answers to what he wanted to do in life, and what subject did he want to pursue a degree in.

During this break at Swaraj Univeristy, Malhar understood that he wanted to live a life that was closely associated with nature, and work for the river and the lives





that depend on the river. In pursuing this road, Malhar started with understanding the lifestyle of fishermen who lived near his house, and learnt what they thought of the river. He learnt from them what had changed under the surface of the river over the years and why. Who resides in the river and where? How can different species of fishes be differentiated from each other? What human activities help the creatures of the river and what cause damage to them?

It was through these conversations that Malhar learnt that 90 per cent of the species had become extinct in the river in the last 20 years. Industrial waste – and chemicals in it – entering the river was one of the major reasons that were killing the fishes.

An old man told Malhar, “When industrial waste was allowed into the river for the first time, thousands of fish were found dead in river the next day. And since then the situation has continued.” The damage hasn’t been restricted to this; the shrinking number of fishes has affected the count of other aquatic animals as well. One of these aquatic animals is the otter.

“I first heard about otters about two and a half years ago when Swaraj University gave

me a chance to work on the conservation of these animals in Kaveri river. While working on the project, I realised that the conservation of otters is highly important for the health of a river because these creatures eat up all the sick fishes in the water body, restricting the spread of diseases to other fishes. After I worked in the Kaveri, I thought I should do the same in Vashishti, the river that flows near my house, where, too, the number of otters had been declining over the years,” Malhar shared.

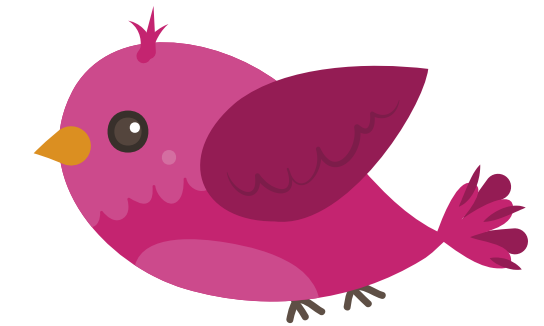
Otters that were could earlier be seen almost every day could only be spotted once a month. This was also leading to the death of sick fishes, and those infected by the sick fishes. However, the damage was not just restricted to the rivers and the organisms living in the river but the fishermen as well. This is the reason that the river is heading towards its death. With the declining number of fishes in the river, the source of livelihood had reduced for fishermen who began to migrate to cities and were forced to live in filthy and cramped localities.

The situation is such today that about 90 per cent of the houses near the river are abandoned or are only inhabited by the senior citizens of a family. When it comes

to nature, everybody is dependent on somebody/something or the other. Even if one creature goes extinct, the result can be seen on several others, including humans. And so, working for the conservation of otters meant preserving the entire river and the organisms living in it and dependent on it.

It’s actually the need of the time that everybody tries to understand their surrounding environments and work towards the conservation of life dependent on it. However, this is only possible when people get out of their rooms and take shelter in the lap of nature and live in sync with the nature. And this doesn’t require any degree or qualification. It only requires willpower, love, compassion, perception and the ability to question one self and others. Ironically, none of these are really focused upon in schools today. In schools, all we’re thought is how we can grow up to become money minting machines.

Malhar tells me, “And so I decided that I have to learn as much as I can. And I don’t need a degree to follow the profession I want to pursue. The more I work, the more I live amid people and nature, the more experience I will gain and, thus, learn.”



21

JILL FERGUSON

An American - born adventure sports enthusiast and environmentalist, she is the co-founder of Vaayu. Vaayu is a water sports-based eco-friendly resort that uses the medium of adventure sports to build a relationship between people and the sea.



Innovator: Jill Ferguson
Vocation: Adventure sports enthusiast & environmentalist
Location: Mandrem, Goa

Riding on air waves

THROUGHOUT THE HISTORY OF MANKIND, THE SEA HAS ALWAYS HAD AN INFLUENCE OVER IT, DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY, BUT IT HAS. FOR THE MANKIND, IT'S THE SOURCE OF WATER AND PRECIOUS MINERAL; IT'S ALSO THE HIGHWAY FOR INTERNATIONAL TRADE AND THE REASON WE HAVE DIFFERENT SEASONS.

According to a study, 70 per cent of the oxygen found on Earth comes from the sea. Not only that, the sea is also the source for 10 per cent of the entire world's protein, which is required for a balanced diet. With the changing times, the sea has now even become a source of entertainment and tourism. Every year, lakhs of people are attracted to the ocean for recreational fishing, boating, cruise and a bunch of other adventure water sports. However, it seems the mankind has taken the services of the seas and oceans for granted. Maybe that's the reason the oceans are struggling to sustain amid pollution.

If you don't believe me, question yourselves. Every time you've go on a vacation to a natural site, how much trash do you generate? Where do you throw the plastic packaging you get with your food? Where do our sorbet straws go? Now some people will say that they don't litter and they only throw the trash in the bin. But have they ever wondered where the trash from the dustbin is dumped? But then there will be some other people who would not even want to think about these questions. Fair enough, why should they be questioned? We, humans, are selfish by birth.

Anyway, my intention is not to point fingers at anyone but to bring their attention to our acts, and where are they leading us. My next'parinda' thinks similarly. She believes that instead of playing the blame game, one should invest energy in finding a solution to the problem. "And your positive efforts will automatically encourage other people to join you," she says.

Born and raised in America, Jill Ferguson first came to India for her educational

project and worked with a group of human rights activists in a village in Gujarat. Here, she realised that pollution was a serious concern for everybody, but especially for people whose livelihood depends on land.

She shares, "While working in Gujarat, I saw once that thousands of dead fishes were floating on water because industrial chemical waste had entered the water body. And its impact could be felt across the nearby village. After a lot of efforts, the villagers convinced some government workers to help them remove the dead fishes. Even though the dead fishes were out of the water body, I couldn't help but think if the water was actually 'clean' now. This is the water that villagers drink, use for bathing and for various other everyday purposes. Does it not affect their health? Do the villagers raise their voice against this unclean water? There were so many such questions. And to find answers to these questions and more, I worked with my organisation to gather some facts. Later, I filed a petition in the court, hoping that the court would find a solution for us. Meanwhile, I had to return to the US to complete my education. I don't know what happened of that petition but I couldn't help but wonder if a court or a petition was the permanent solution to such a problem."

This question stayed with Jill for a very





long time. As she had already lived in India for two years, she decided to come back to India to work full-time. She discussed the idea with a college friend, Rahul Malani, and together they came up with the idea of Vaayu.

“Vaayu is not just a resort or a water sports centre. It is medium through which we tell people that you can establish a business and take care of your surrounding environment simultaneously,” Jill adds.

And so, the two decided to use naturally available material for the construction of Vaayu to ensure there was no negative impact on the environment. Even for the

café menu, they made sure to get as much of organically grown vegetables and grains as possible to reduce carbon footprint.

“Through water sports, we try to build a relationship between people and the sea. In this culture of consumption, we have almost forgotten about our bond with nature. However, we need is to understand nature, nurture love for it, and live a sustainable life in sync with it. What we also need is spiritual development, but we cannot achieve that unless we build a relationship with nature,” she adds.

So, twice a month, Jill and her friends carry out cleanliness drives in areas around

the sea. And they try to include as many locals as they can. They believe that the locals and their families have been living here for years, it's their land. It's just that they've forgotten the importance of their environment because of some shiny prospects. And so they attention must be brought back to nature and its importance for humans.

Jill says that simply talking about a change cannot happen unless you do something to bring about the change. “If we become the solution, more and more people will begin to join our endeavor, and then change will happen,” she says.



22

SULOCHANA

A woman's health activist, she works with Video Volunteers, addresses people on various issues surrounding solid waste management and hygiene. One of her key areas of work is to promote the use of cloth-made sanitary napkins to reduce the damaging impact of synthetic sanitary napkins on environment.



Innovator: Sulochana Pendekar
Vocation: Women's health activist
Location: Siolim, Goa

Boo the taboo

ONCE A MONTH, ALMOST HALF THE POPULATION OF THE WORLD GOES THROUGH A WEEK-LONG PROBLEM IN WHICH BLOOD IS DISCHARGED FROM THEIR BODIES. THIS PHASE IS CALLED PERIOD OR MENSTRUATION.

In fact, 'problem' is not the right word to use for menstruation, it is a natural process and an integral part of every woman's physique. When we term it a "problem", we try to cover it up or suppress it. And that's when the real problem starts. This is the reason we don't openly discuss or talk about menstruation. And when we don't talk about it, misconceptions and misunderstanding are formed.

Think of this: If nobody is openly and freely talking about a topic that is directly related to the existence of human beings for thousands of years, there must be so many misunderstandings and paradoxes surrounding it across the world!

Even I have been a part of this society.

Until I met my latest 'parinda', I had very limited knowledge on the topic of menstruation. And whatever little knowledge I had, it was mostly based on assumptions because there was nobody to tell me about it.

Our next 'parinda' is not only determine to remove misconceptions, misunderstandings and paradoxical views about menstruation but she's also making people aware about its impact on the environment.

Sulochana Pendekar was raised in a small village in Goa. Ever since she was a young girl, she wanted to be a teacher. She believes the society has had a major role to play in her education, and so she has a responsibility of giving it back to the society as well.

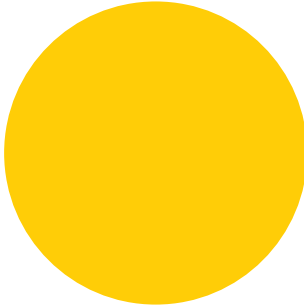
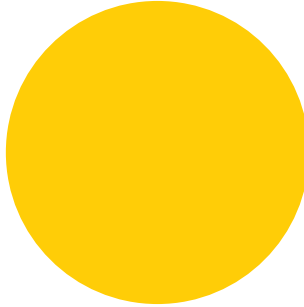
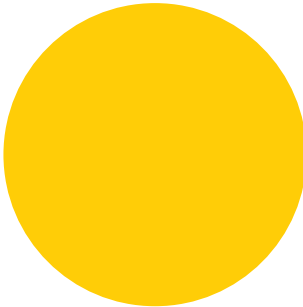
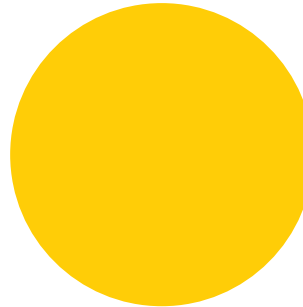
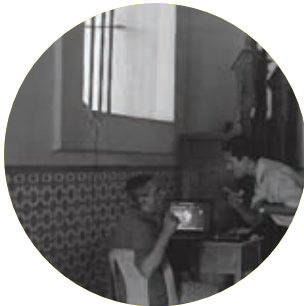
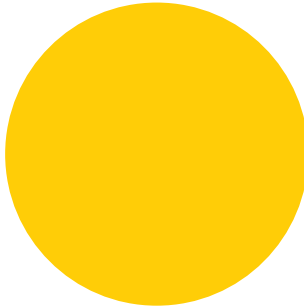
While pursuing a career in teaching,

Sulochana realised that in order to bag a teaching job, it is more important to have a rich and powerful source than a degree or knowledge. And so she decided to pursue smoother profession, any profession but it should be for the betterment of the society.

Initially, she worked with an organisation that conducted surveys on people's problems. It was during this period that she developed an interest in photography, and wanted to work in the field of camera work. Sulochana enrolled herself for a film-making workshop, following which she joined Video Volunteers, an international media organisation that empowers the unheard voices of the community.

While conducting surveys, Sulochana had the opportunity to directly connect with the people at the grassroots level and so she was able to understand the problems on ground and in depth.

She says, "Due to massive tourism, waste management was a common problem across Goa. And I really wanted to do something about it. Then it occurred to me that we can use the medium of videos to show people the monstrosity of this problem and find possible solutions. I figured that unless people actually 'see' the problem, they will not 'feel' the problem. And if they won't feel its effect, they will not become a part



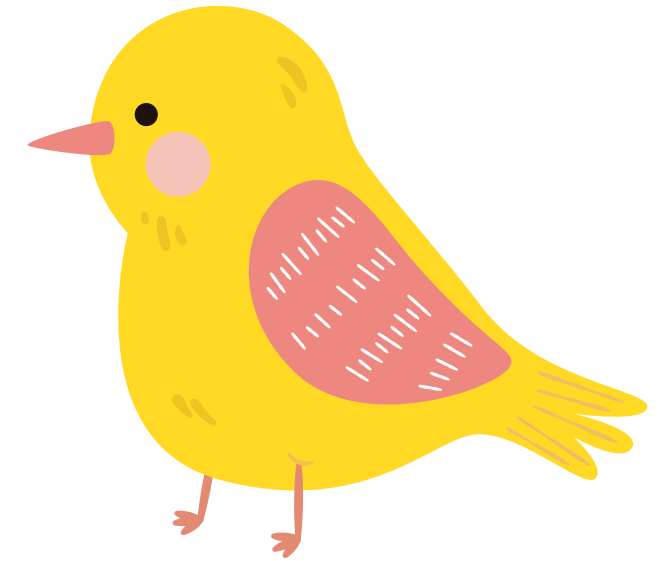


of the solution. So we made several videos around the problem of waste generation, and screened the films in various villages of Goa. We even showed those films to government officers and encouraged them to work on this problem.”

While studying about waste, Sulochana learnt about the negative impact of sanitary napkins on the environment and women’s health. The topic of menstruation had always intrigued her. Even during her film-making workshop, she had researched on this topic and made a video. During her research, she found out that it takes at least 800 years for a sanitary napkin to decompose. And, on an average, a woman uses 800 kilograms of sanitary napkins in

her lifetime.

“You can now imagine how half the population of the world is among the contributors to the world’s environmental problems. And so I took the challenge of finding an alternative for sanitary napkins, and making them reach women. During this search, I also learnt that sanitary napkins are often the cause of infertility and uterus cancer in women. This made me even more sure about the challenge I had taken up, and I decided that no matter what profession I am into at any point of time in my life, I will not stop talking to women about this issue. However, the obstacle in front of me was that I did not have any alternative of sanitary napkins for women. And I also



could not ignore the fact that these sanitary napkins were actually helping women step out of their houses for work or education. It was a fact that I could change. Until I had a better alternative of sanitary napkins, I could not even ask the women to not use them. But then I heard about sanitary napkins that were made from cotton cloth. They were not only environment friendly but also friendly towards women’s health.”

Today, Sulochana not only advocates the use of cotton cloth-made sanitary napkins but also tries to remove the taboo surrounding talking about menstruation in a free environment.

23

PARAG

A Green Card holder with a degree in engineering from the US, he returned to India with the aim to bring about some changes in the society. In Goa, he has set up an enterprise through which he collects trash from the market and converts it into biogas to supply it to restaurants for consumption. His enterprise naturally treats greywater and produces organic manure.



Innovator: Parag Mody
Vocation: Organic waste management
Location: Margao, Goa

Cash the trash

LIKE MY LAST TWO STORIES ABOUT SULOCHANA PENDEKAR AND JILL FERGUSON, MY LATEST PARINDA TOO BROUGHT ME CLOSE TO A MAJOR ENVIRONMENT PROBLEM OF WASTE CAUSED BY THE MODERN-DAY SOCIETY.

While our last two parindey are trying to create more awareness around this problem of waste and its mismanagement, Parag Mody is working on turning waste into something that is useful for the planet and something that becomes a source of livelihood for people.

According to a report, India dumped 47 million tonne of organic waste in 2011, and every year, it contributes 11.3 per cent to this pile of dump.

While we are continuously told that plastic waste is one of the most harmful kinds of (non-degradable) waste, we aren't told that if organic waste or food waste is not

managed in a proper manner, it too can prove to be dangerous, as dangerous as plastic waste if not more. When organic waste comes in contact with earth, several chemical reactions take place due to which methane gas is released. So when such waste is dumped at an open site, the methane gas released becomes part of the atmosphere, thereby contributing to global warming.

After spending a week with Parag in Margao, Goa, I learnt how we can convert organic waste into something even more valuable than gold, and fulfill the many daily needs of mankind.

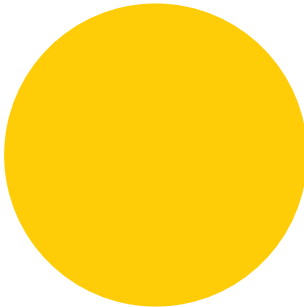
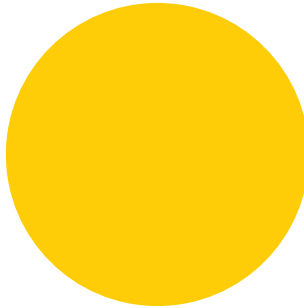
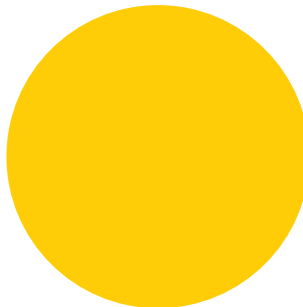
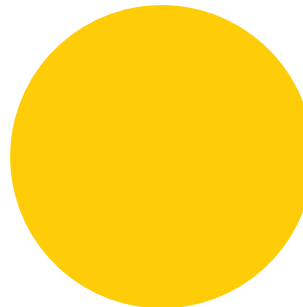
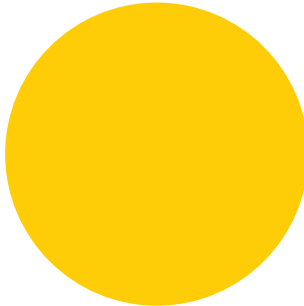
Actually speaking, Parag doesn't "need" to do what he's doing. He studied engineering in the US, and then established a business there. Being a Green Card holder, he could have spent the rest of his life with all the physical comfort in the US but he wasn't satisfied. He felt that his education was not contributing to the welfare of society. So he shut down his business and started working with an NGO in California. While

working with the NGO, Parag realised that he could do the same work in India. There were similar problems in India but different challenges. And so, Parag returned to India with his family and started working in Ahmedabad with unorganised labour and underage rag pickers.

"I was helping people but it wasn't solving the bigger problem," Parag said. There was no concrete solution coming out through his work, and there was no scope of innovation in what he was doing. However, his engineering mind was continuously encouraging him to do something new, to find solutions to people's problems.

It was during this phase that he met a friend named Claude Alveres. Claude, for several years, had been working on mining-related problems in Goa, and invited Parag to stay in Goa for a while to understand the problems here. After arriving in Goa, Parag spent time understanding Goa's ecosystem and the implications of modern development on it. Here, he understood the true extent of the problem of waste. And so he dedicated the next few months to find solutions to this problem.

"Our modern-day society only understands the value of money. Unless the people see monetary value in managing waste, they will continue to throw trash anywhere





and dump garbage everywhere,” Parag had realised.

And so Parag started his work from the Margao market area where he set up a biogas plant. He would collect garbage from the market area and convert it into biogas, then supply the same to restaurants nearby. In this market, Parag also found out that several kilogrammes of fishes were being thrown at a dumpsite at the end of every day. Additionally, due to excessive deforestation in the state, the land was losing its carbon content, and so the soil was becoming less and less productive. Parag knew that fishes were a major source of carbon, so he started making compost

out of dumped fishes to produce manure, leading to increase in carbon content in the soil. Today, the manure produced by Parag is used by many farmers across the state.

However, this overwhelming response has not stopped Parag from making new efforts.

Despite sufficient rainfall, there was a considerable water crisis in Goa. The reason was rampant deforestation. So Parag used natural and traditional methods to treat greywater to be used for household chores and drinking. Today, this technique is employed by several houses and restaurants in Goa.

“Finding a solution to problems is as important as creating awareness about the problems. While creating awareness is extremely important for our newer generations, it is also their responsibility to find solutions for the future generations. And so my focus is on finding livelihood through finding solutions to environmental problems. This way, I hope to show people new models of employments to bust the myth that if you’re working for the society or the environment, there is no (or very little) source of income,” says Parag.

24

VARSHA

A Green Card holder with a degree in engineering from the US, he returned to India with the aim to bring about some changes in the society. In Goa, he has set up an enterprise through which he collects trash from the market and converts it into biogas to supply it to restaurants for consumption. His enterprise naturally treats greywater and produces organic manure.

Innovator: Varsha Samuel Rajkumar
Vocation: Organic gardener
Location: Dharwad, Karnataka

An organic bond

MOST OF US, AT SOME POINT OF TIME IN LIFE, HAVE FELT A STRONG DESIRE TO GET OUT OF THE HOUSE AND SPEND TIME AMID NATURE. THIS DESIRE NEED NOT ALWAYS INVOLVE TRAVEL BUT IT COULD BE TO SIT IN OUR BALCONY AND STARE AT THE SKY OR LIE DOWN ON THE GRASS IN THE PARK OR TAKE AN EARLY MORNING STROLL.

But I wonder what is it that makes us feel calm and at peace when we're close to nature? Does proximity to nature distances us from negative thoughts? What is the reason that we find ourselves happy when we surrounded by nature? My personal experiences have taught me to believe that nature is home to some special healing energy which is as holy as a newborn child and as pure as a mother's love.

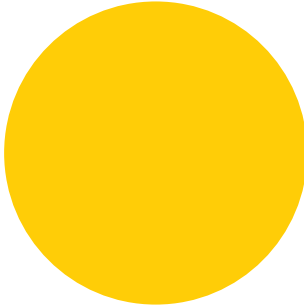
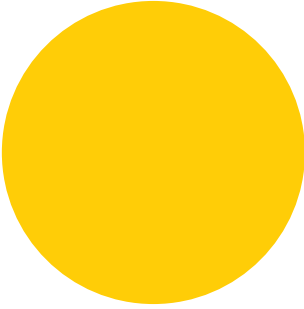
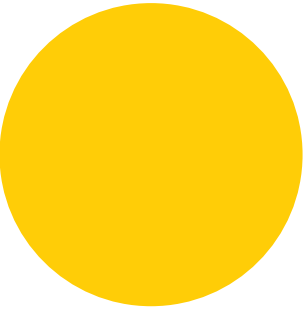
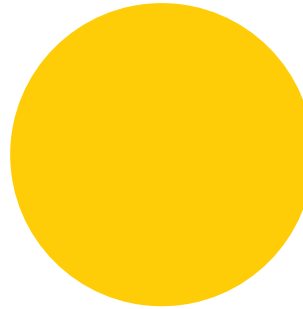
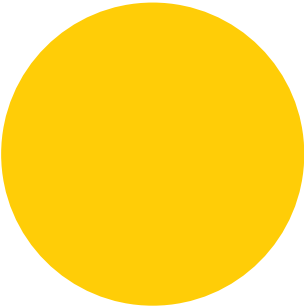
According to a recent research, spending time amid nature strengthens an individual's immune system, which is responsible for our mental and physical health. In the last few years, several researchers have proved this connection, and their research

is startling. While spending time amid trees and greenery helps improve our mental and physical well-being, staying away from a green environment increases our susceptibility to diseases. And this could be proved by the fact that more often than not mental depression, anxiety, lack of attention span, cancer, diabetes and several other physical and mental diseases are more prevalent in urban areas. For a long time, the effect of a relationship between good health and nature had remained a mystery but, in more recent times, researchers have used modern technologies to discover facts that throw scientific light on this connection or the ill effects of a broken link between the two. Researchers at the University of Illinois have, in fact, found 21 possible reasons that link nature with human health, and have a direct relation with our immunity system. They insist that people who regularly play sports or live amid nature, gain a special kind of education which moulds their physical and mental happiness.

The story of our next parinda has direct connections with what I've said above. As

a child, Varsha Samuel Rajkumar was unlike most children. She was a premature baby, and so her body was not as strong as that of other children her age. This is the reason she would spend most of her time indoors. She could not play or be involved in physical activities as much as she wanted, and this affected her mental health. She had started considering herself a weak person, and her self-respect had dropped to its lowest point. This was the time she began to develop a bond with nature.

Varsha would spend long hours among trees and bushes. This gave her the time and opportunity to reflect on herself. She found her hobbies, discovered her skills and used the same to restore her self-respect. In college, she pursued a course in Applied Art and then briefly worked in the field of advertising. However, due to certain unavoidable circumstances, she had to leave her job and get married. Unfortunately, this marriage could never be more than an agreement for her, and she went through a lot of mental trauma in this relationship. Once again, she lost her individuality and her self-respect was at its lowest. At one point of time, the situation got so worse that she had to choose between living a meaningful life or sticking to a bad marital situation. And she decided to break it off. However, there was a big question in front of her. She neither knew what her next step in life would be nor did she know how to restore her self-respect.





The mental pressure had started affecting her physical health too.

It was during this phase that Varsha found a source of healing in kitchen gardening. Soon, this hobby turned into her passion and today, apart from being in a meaningful and encouraging relationship, she is also a well-known and much respected individual among the organic kitchen gardening fraternity. Once again, nature had helped restore her self-esteem and begun to lead her towards good health.

Through the medium of blogs and photography, Varsha now not only shares

her knowledge about organic gardening but also encourages people to grow their own food. To express her gratitude towards nature, Varsha is now trying to connect more and more youngsters with nature, thereby allowing them to learn from nature. In an effort towards the same, Varsha has associated herself with an alternate educational institute where she facilitates students in soft skills. The USP of her “class” is that the children spend more time outdoors than within the four walls of a classroom. For Varsha, anything under the sky is a classroom. So by encouraging the children to spend time amid nature, she is teaching children the art of living.

This is the story of Varsha who values the gifts of nature and is, therefore, expressing her gratitude towards it.

As I conclude this story, I would want to leave behind a few questions. How many of us are even trying to look at these natural gifts, let alone learn from them? How many of us are grateful for nature’s love? How many of us are ensuring that our children have the opportunity to build a bond with nature and feel it? These are just some random questions I have in my mind. You need not give me an answer. But you should find the answers for yourself. That’s the hope I have for all of you.

But once you move beyond your fear, and go on despite it, is a success in itself.

My failures have taught me to never give up. When I was growing up, I was taught to shun any talk on failure to avoid being considered a cause of disappointment for those around me. On the contrary, as I grew up I realized that accepting and proudly acknowledging our failures is the key to inner happiness and success. This realization has led me to where I am today.

Growing up with siblings and cousins who were effortlessly good at academics wasn't easy. I was pressurized to also focus on marks; failure was not an option, ever. I went through massive emotional turmoil and pressure, accompanied by timely reminders that failure is the worst possible thing that could happen to you and nobody respects a loser. I envied those gifted children who always managed to secure top ranks in class, with relative ease. And this pressure was harmful. No matter how hard I tried, I never made it to the class-honors list. The fact that I was good at sports, extra-curricular activities and also an aspiring poet didn't matter; I was a bad student and never received any appreciation from my teachers. The constant criticism hampered

my self-esteem and I ended up failing examinations several times. This resulted in settled feeling of loss and dejection.

I tried my hand at several things but could never shatter the glass ceilings. The word failure described me perfectly for the larger part of my life so far. My confidence had taken a massive hit and the unrealistic expectations and a severe lack of understanding pushed me further into misery and darkness.

But the worst part was that I was never prepared to deal with the aftermath of fall. But after many years of soul-searching, I eventually began to understand that life lies above and beyond these failures. I wouldn't be where I am today if not for the times I've failed. I wouldn't have developed the resilience I have now. I wouldn't have learned how to take rejection in my stride and how to channel disappointment into motivation, in order to improve myself. I am a more confident person today and have learned to abide by the words, "You win some, and you lose some."

I learned the hard way to not to fear making mistakes or be ashamed of my failures. After all, our mistakes are our greatest teachers.



25

RAGHAVA

The day he understood that farming is the root cause of a happy life, he dropped his dream of becoming a top businessman and adopted farming as his profession. However, he wanted to deploy natural farming techniques; and no, it's not the same as organic farming. Today, he has created an ecosystem around him where birds, animals, insects, plants and humans live in harmony.

Innovator: Raghava
Vocation: Natural farmer
Location: Davangere, Karnataka

Minimum interference

“NATURAL SYSTEMS HAVE A REMARKABLE TENDENCY TO RENEW AND TRANSFORM IN CONTINUOUS CYCLES. AS FARMERS, WE GET TO WORK ALONG WITH THESE CYCLES AND LEAVE NATURE TO FLOURISH ON ITS OWN. IT WILL SLOW DOWN OR SPEED UP, ACCORDING TO ITS OWN NEEDS

”

- says Raghava

Natural farming is based on human intervention-and-interference-free agricultural practices. It is a process which tries to heal the destruction caused by human knowledge and human activities.

When Raghava was a young man, some incidents changed the course of his life. Ahead of him was a deserted road on which he walked alone to eventually land in nature’s lap. Initially, Raghava walked on this road as a sad youth because it was not the path he had chosen but the path on which he had been thrown.

When Raghava was in college, he would enjoy reading biographies of entrepreneurs. He was inspired by them and wanted to be one of them. However, destiny had other plans for him. Or it would be better to say that his path was right under his feet but he was wasting his energy looking for it elsewhere. It was during his college years that family pressure and responsibilities put the burden of the family’s agricultural fields on his shoulders. Though Raghava took this responsibility, especially since he had little choice, he also continued with his education and went on to get a degree in MBA.

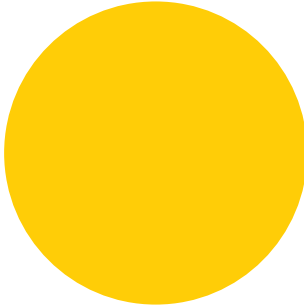
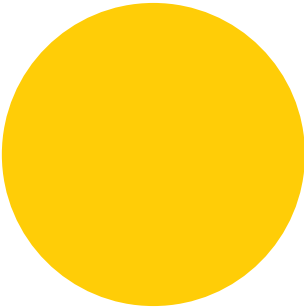
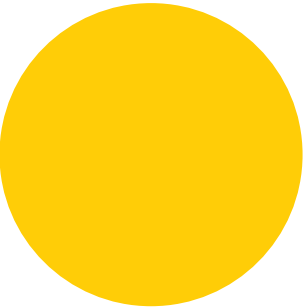
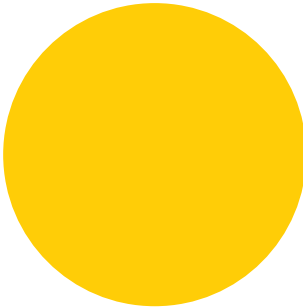
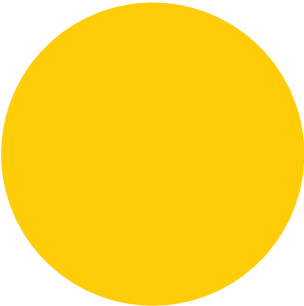
Incidentally, he happened to attend a seminar on natural farming. Impressed by the process, he adopted the same in his field.

“In a coconut orchard, one has to wait for three years to see the desired results. I adopted natural farming in 1996, but the harvest in 1999 was a big failure. All the trees had turned yellow, the crops were

completely ruined. I didn’t know where I had gone wrong. To understand my mistake, I read several books on natural farming, participated in various workshops and met many farmers. And that’s when I understood that natural farming was not all about farming alone but it was also a way of living your life that leads to a healthy and happy lifestyle. It is a way of living that takes one in nature’s refuge and teaches one to live in harmony with nature,” Raghava tells me.

When Raghava met some farmers who had prestigious degrees to prove their modern education and were yet involved in agriculture, he realised that he, too, was quite satisfied with his life and was living a happy life with his family. As soon as Raghava realised that farming is the reason for a happy life, he dropped his initial idea of becoming a top businessman and adopted farming as his profession.

“People often say that natural farming is a ‘do-nothing farming technique’ but it’s not true. The objective of natural farming is to minimise human interference and use one’s time and effort for the betterment of oneself, one’s family and one’s society,” adds Raghava, who is heavily inspired by Masanobu Fukuoka, more popularly known as the ‘father of natural farming’ and author of The One-Straw Revolution.





Unlike conventional farming, there is no cultivation, fertiliser, pesticide or weeding involved in natural farming. But one has to invest time and effort — before beginning with natural farming — to create an environment for nature where these techniques are not required. If one manages to create an environment like this, then the only task that requires attention is harvesting.

“When I first adopted natural farming, that was the mistake I made. I had not created a natural farming-friendly environment where my crops could flourish. Even I had assumed it to be ‘do-nothing-farming’ initially. Ultimately, I ended up doing absolutely nothing. Now, over the years, I am learning more and more about this style of farming,” recalls Raghava.

Natural farming teaches to first feed the family without any intention of greed; if nature gives you more than you need, then you must share it with your community; and if something still remains, you should sell it. On the other hand, conventional farming is about selling whatever you grow. This leads to greed. To fulfill this greed, we

want more and more harvest, which in turn requires use of poisonous chemicals. These poisonous chemicals not only harm humans but also have a negative impact on nature.

“This is the reason many of us are now looking for options that bring us and our families closer to nature and provide us with a better lifestyle. In an effort to achieve the same, we are continuously bringing changes in our lives. We don’t send our children to schools; they are home-schooled (swashikshan), and are learning at their own natural speed. As far as possible, we use home remedies for any sort of illness or injury. If home remedies are not enough, we turn to Naturopathy, Ayurveda or Homeopathy. We try and use old, indigenous grains and vegetables in our food as much as possible. And now our family is exploring the idea of building a habitat with eco-friendly materials,” he says.

Leading a lifestyle like this is not always easy but Raghava’s family is always by his side, supporting him and assisting him. After all, whatever he is doing is for the wellbeing and happiness of his family.

“If they won’t be happy, I won’t be happy,” he says.

Raghava adds that if one compares his fields with that of others, one will find that his farm produces better yield. “And that’s not all, now I am also able to produce various rare fruits and vegetables that I could never grow earlier. Today, I’ve created a new ecosystem around me where birds, animals, insects, plants and humans live in harmony. And that is what we must all do. When I had set out on this journey of farming, I was alone and sad. But when I began to truly see things around me, I understood that I was never alone. Nature, naturally present flora and fauna, and my family were always by my side. And the real happiness lies in living together in harmony,” he tells me.

Raghava says that had he not adopted natural farming or understood the different perspectives of life, he would have never understood this truth of life. To continue on this path, his philosophical enlightenment experience was the base.



26

SHANTI NAYAK

Most people ignore folklore as merely stories for the purpose of entertainment when, in reality, they are much more. And she realised this much early in life. A folklore conservationist, she has now been documenting and preserving folklore for the last 50 years in Karnataka as, she believes, they hold solutions to many of our contemporary problems.

Innovator: Shanti Nayak
Vocation: Folklore conservationist
Location: Honavar, Karnataka

Documenting richness

JUST AS WILD ORGANIC FOOD AND NATURAL RESOURCES ARE DEPLETING OR BECOMING EXTINCT, SO ARE OUR CULTURAL PRACTICES. WITH EVERY PASSING YEAR, LESS AND LESS PEOPLE ARE PRACTICING TRADITIONAL ACTIVITIES.

If you look back at our history, our ancestors used to use the resources while keeping in mind the ecology. While they used the resources, they made sure it did not harm the environment around them. And they used their traditional knowledge for this purpose. For thousands of years, our ancestors stored this knowledge in their hearts like a treasure. However, in the last 150 years, on account of the industrial revolution in various parts of the world, this knowledge has reduced to a drastic low.

Additionally, in our education system, textbooks have no space for this kind of knowledge. We are told that people who follow traditional practices are backward, conservative, poor or deprived.

What people often don't realise is that we've been facing environment problems ever since this traditional knowledge began to disappear from our lifestyle. For the last several decades, we have been taking one step away from nature every day. The situation has come to such a level now that we are being "forced" to protect the environment. I doubt any of our ancestors had thought about reaching this stage 150 years ago.

To turn around the table, and preserve our planet, we now need to retrieve that long-lost traditional knowledge and protect it in the form of folklore.

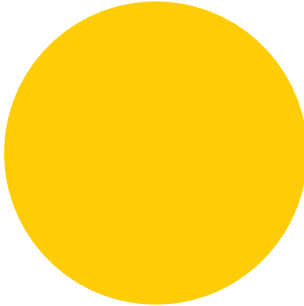
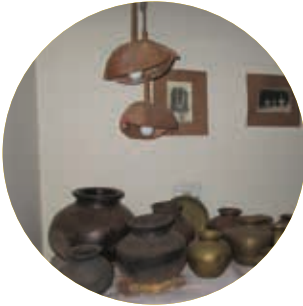
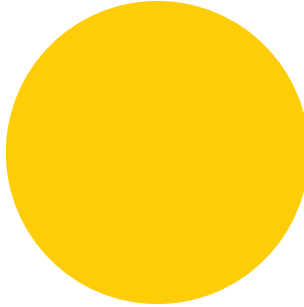
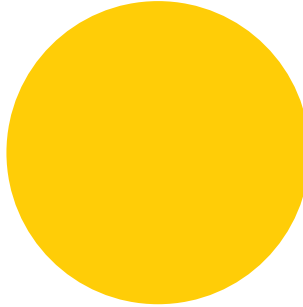
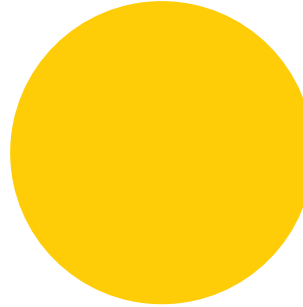
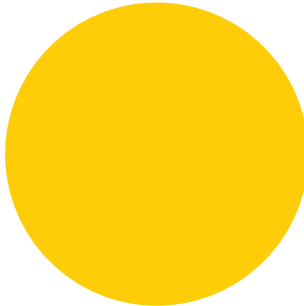
Most people ignore folklore as merely stories for the purpose of entertainment. When, in reality, they are much more. Communities for centuries have preserved their style of living through folk tales, folk songs, proverbs, riddles, images, dance, music, tradition and faith (read religion). These folk tales and folk songs define life values for thousands and thousands of communities and civilisations.

At a time when people are trying to find solutions to problems like global warming and environment pollution, it is important to turn to – and protect – our traditional knowledge that has been passed down as heritage to us, use it in our lifestyle, and include it in our education.

Our next 'parinda' has been preserving such knowledge for the last 50 years in Karnataka. Born in a small village in Karnataka, Shanti Nayak, from a very young age, was attracted towards folk songs that were sung in the village temples. She would often sit with her maternal or paternal grandmother and ask them to narrate folk tales. When women would be working in the field, she used to find a place to camp near them so that she could listen to their songs of harvest. At a very young age, she had memorised most folk songs from her community and could often be found humming them.

As she grew older, her interest in folk songs and folk tales only grew. However, she had never imagined back then that she would work towards preserving these.

When she went to college, one of her professors – who had a keen interest in folklore and worked on their documentation – noticed Shanti's interest in folklore and assigned her a task to document a particular folk theatre format called Yakshgana. It can





be said that at an official level, this was her first step towards the preservation of folklore. After that, whenever she found time between her studies, she would take up the documentation of folklore as a hobby. Yet, she never thought of making a career in this.

Soon after she finished college, Shanti got married and moved to Honavar in Karnataka with her husband. There, she worked as a teacher in a government school and frequently used folk songs and folk tales to increase the children's interest during lessons. In fact, she learnt about several folk tales, cultural games and traditional dishes through her students.

“On one hand, I was teaching these children. On the other, they were my gurus,” she says.

During this phase of her life, her husband, who too had an interest in folk songs, completed his PhD in this field. The couple was now in the possession of thousands of papers of documented work and a plethora of knowledge on folk songs. They realised that these papers would be worth nothing unless they were shared

with people. And so, Shanti quit her job and, along with her husband, opened an organisation called Janpada Publishing. Through this organisation, the couple has so far published more than 100 books that focus on folklores.

Not only this but after Shanti realised that a lot of women – who were the source of information for her documentation – didn't know how to read or write, making them incapable of documenting their folklore on their own, she took the responsibility of getting these women enrolled under a national-level empowerment programme. To empower them further, she also came up with the idea of opening a co-operative for them so that each of these women could be financially independent. As a result of this, women in the village did not only become independent but they even became proud of their culture and heritage.

“While my husband's interests lied in folk songs, mine lay in primitive culture, lifestyles, traditional recipes, cultural games and local herbs. Today, it seems imperative to preserve this primitive culture and knowledge and propagate it

because the solutions to our environmental problems lie hidden in this folklores. These aren't just stories of songs, they tell us how to live life in harmony with our environment. More than stories, they tell us about spirituality and values. They are the source of information for the conservation of our environment and to reduce the destruction being caused to our planet every day,” the 72-year-old humble lady tells me.

“My husband and I have working towards the preservation of folklores for years. Now, our daughter has also chosen this path, and she will take forward our work in her own way,” she adds.

Folklores aren't merely to be narrated and recited but are meant to be adopted in our lifestyle and learn from them. But this is only possible if we include folklore and traditional knowledge into our education and involve more and more youth. We need to change the way we think. We need to let go of our ego and understand that people who follow traditional practices are not backward or uneducated. They are, in fact, the ones who hold the knowledge that can save our planet from destruction.



27

PRIYA

A former news anchor, she now uses the medium of storytelling for of out-of-class education of children. She organises regular storytelling sessions and workshops to make children aware about their conscious responsibilities towards their society and their environment; and make them more thoughtful of their actions and its impact.

Innovator: Priya Mukthukumar
Vocation: Storyteller
Location: Bengaluru, Karnataka

The storyteller

FROM TIME IMMEMORIAL, MAN HAS HAD A UNIQUE RELATIONSHIP WITH STORIES. IF WE TURN THE PAGES OF HISTORY, OUR ANCESTORS USED THE MEDIUM OF CAVE DRAWINGS TO LEAVE BEHIND STORIES FOR US.

On one hand, this art of storytelling gave impetus to gradual development in the world, on the other, man developed and innovated the method of storytelling. Therefore, one can say that the development of humans and the art of storytelling are complementary to each other. One cannot evolve without the evolution of the other.

Overtime stories or the method of storytelling changed, we saw some changes in our lives as well. For example, we if take a look at stories being created today, most of them reach us through the mediums of television, cinema and advertisements – with almost no spiritual value. These stories make us aware of our materialistic

aspirations, promote the culture of consumerism, give birth to inferiority complexes, and take us away from our roots. We also worship the stories that we hear, and try to become like the characters in them. In fact, the knowledge and value hidden in the stories are often lost in the shadow of the so-called characters or avatars.

The plight of stories is not a recent phenomenon of the modern era. It was actually started when the term ‘mythology’ was coined, and the act of “ideal worship” began.

Technically, stories should be the mirror to the world, and a storyteller should be one who can shows the world this mirror without any bias or fear. Our latest story is about one such storyteller who is trying to show the society a mirror through the medium of stories, thereby, instilling spiritual values in children.

Priya Muthukumar was born in a middle-class family in Chennai. Her grandfather

wanted to see her as a doctor but her father always encouraged her to participate in all kinds of extra-curricular activities in school.

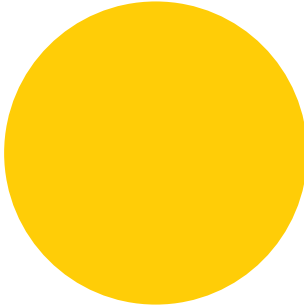
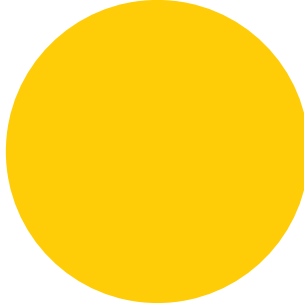
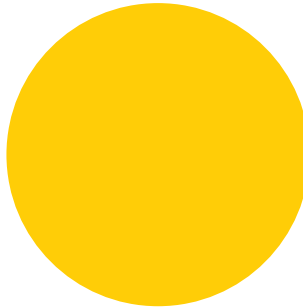
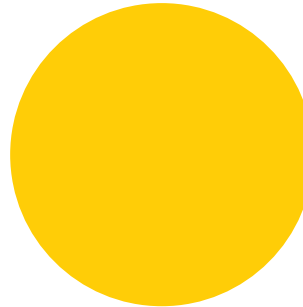
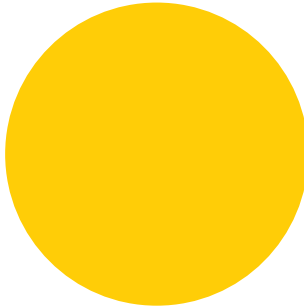
“My father always said, ‘Whatever you do, do it with all your heart. Do whatever you heart says, and don’t be afraid of failures.’ This lesson has always stuck with me, even till today. Whatever I am doing today, is because of this mantra of life,” Priya tells me.

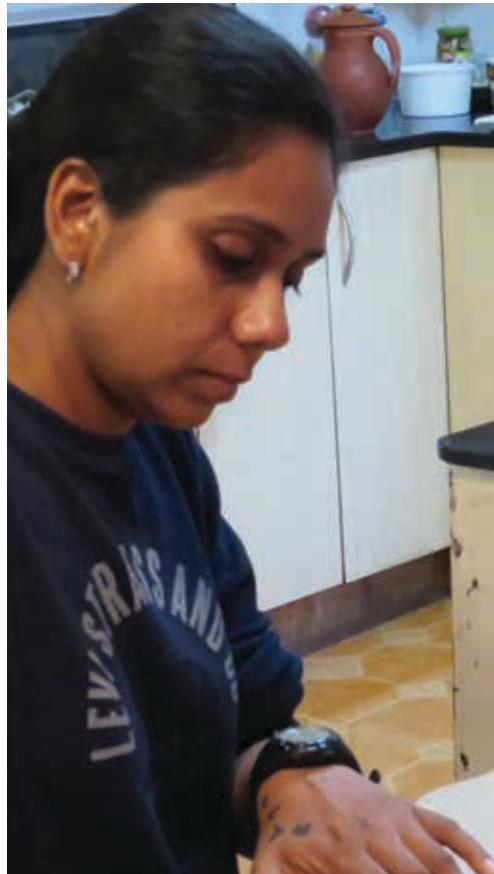
Having said that, Priya did try to fulfil her grandfather’s dream but she couldn’t secure enough marks to get into a medical college to pursue MBBS, so she graduated with a degree in pharmacy. However, while studying in college, Priya realised that there aren’t enough jobs in this field. And so, after finishing college, Priya worked for a while with an airlines.

Once she had finished college and secured a job, our society did what it does best.

“The girls is all grown up. She should get married now.” And so, she was married.

Post her marriage, she worked as an anchor for a national news channel. In a couple of years, she gave birth to a beautiful daughter who soon started going to school. That was the time Priya’s life came to an important





turning point. She had received an offer to work as a teacher in the same school where her daughter was studying. Initially, she had a doubt about this offer but she eventually accepted it. Once she started teaching, she also dived deeper to understand education and the path is leads us on. She started reading a lot about 'education'. Though she worked at that school for seven long years, Priya had realised that the motive of education lies in making children and individuals responsible towards their society and their environment.

During this period, Priya was also keeping a track of environment pollution in Bengaluru

(then Bangalore). She developed several workshops for children on topics around environment. However, she was extremely disappointed that she was not able to grab children's attention and enthusiasm. She returned home with a heavy heart, and thought of including stories in her next workshop.

While working with stories, Priya realised that stories are an extremely powerful medium for transferring and transmitting ideas.

"Stories have been an integral and natural part of almost all cultures. They help make

people aware about the experiences of life. Stories give our memories and our experiences a character or perspective through which we are able to communicate about new thoughts, cultures and a better society. Stories help us reflect on ourselves, which, in turn, encourage us to reflect on our experiences and develop a better attitude towards our surroundings – society and environment," says Priya.

Therefore, narrating stories and good stories is important for the preservation of our society. After all, it is the medium of stories that makes us understand life.

28

SAMMILAN

It was in 2011 that he laid the foundation of the Butterfly Park, which was opened to the public in 2013. The purpose of park was to create a space where local species of butterflies could live, breed and grow in a natural environment. It also aims to encourage people to carry out research on butterflies and motivate youngsters to conserve and protect them.

Innovator: Sammilan Shetty
Vocation: Butterfly conservationist
Location: Mangalore, Karnataka

Painting the future

FOR CENTURIES, BUTTERFLIES HAVE CHARMED HUMANS. THE BEAUTIFUL AND VARIED COLOURS OF A BUTTERFLY ARE LIKE A REFLECTION OF THE BEAUTIFUL NATURE THAT IS AROUND US.

While children like to chase butterflies, poets like to write about their enamouring beauty. Their migration cycle is still a mystery for many researchers and scientists. For nature lovers, butterflies are the basis of life; butterflies are those natural beings that contribute immensely to the environment. Butterflies are grateful to nature, and probably it's time that we, too, should be grateful for the existence of the colourful beings, and make efforts to protect them from becoming extinct.

Our latest 'parinda' is doing exactly that in a small village called Belvai on the outskirts

of Mangalore in Karnataka. He has made the conservation of butterflies both, his responsibility and his passion.

"Do you know there are 18,000 species of butterflies and moths in the world? Do you know that 1,500 of these are found in India, and 340 of them are found on the Western Ghats alone?" Sammilan asks.

These butterflies are extremely crucial for our ecosystem. They are an integral part of the natural food system, they are the carriers of pollen, and their count is directly in relation to the ecosystem. The more butterflies around us, the better and stronger are ecosystem is.

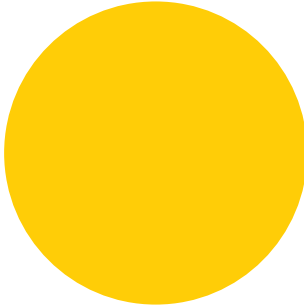
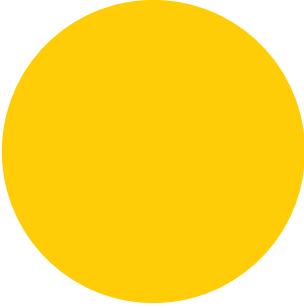
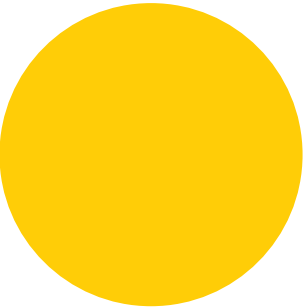
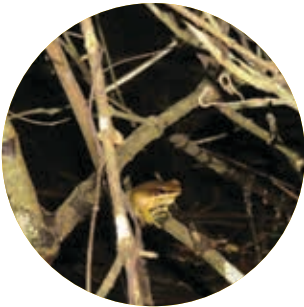
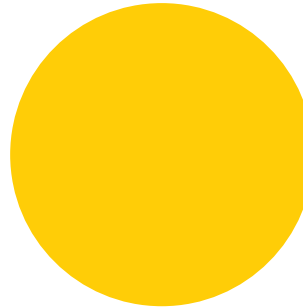
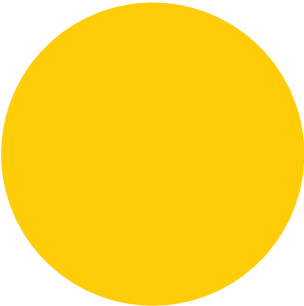
Sammilan grew in the vicinity of deep, green jungles; his playground was the river banks. From a very young age, he was interested in the life of living organisms found in and around his house. Fishing in the nearby river, climbing trees in the jungle and playing with animals and insects were his hobbies. However, the special love for butterflies only grew in him in college when one of

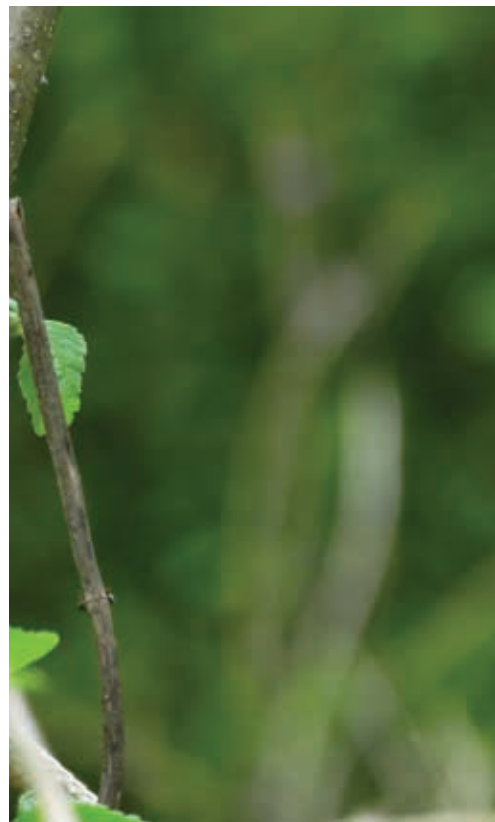
his professors asked him to do a research on the local species of butterflies. For this assignment, in his free time, Sammilan would often look for butterflies in his vicinity and read up about them.

However, after college, like most youngsters, Sammilan neither knew what he wanted to do in life nor did he know why he wanted to do whatever he thought he wanted to do. Anyhow, he decided to pursue a Master's degree in hotel management and later found a job in Bengaluru. A few years later, he was offered a teaching job at a hotel management institute in Mangalore.

When he moved to Mangalore, Sammilan's love for butterflies was rekindled. Once again, he began to read up about them in his free time.

The turning point in his life came when he came across a book by Isaac Kehimkar, which explained how people can attract butterflies found around their house and protect them. Inspired by this book, Sammilan started doing some experiments on his farm and laid the foundation of a Butterfly Park in 2011. Happy with the success of his experiments, he officially opened the gates of the SS Butterfly Park for the public in 2013.





The purpose of this park was to create such a space where local species of butterflies can live, breed and grow in a safe and natural environment. The purpose was also to encourage people to carry out research on butterflies, create awareness among the youth about their importance, and motivate youngsters to make efforts for their conservation and protection.

“We are now making a documentary on the lifecycle of butterflies so that we can create awareness about them,” Sammilan tells me.

“We are the reason that the number of butterflies around us are reducing. For our selfish gains, and in the name of modern development, we have destroyed forests and cut down trees in cities. We have taken away their habitats from them. Even in villages, where some greenery is still intact, we have begun to use chemical fertilisers and pesticides, making the natural habitats of butterflies poisonous. Butterfly eggs are

not able to flourish due to the excessive use of insecticides despite being laid in a ‘suitable environment’. Among the few that manage to free themselves from the egg shells, many die before the caterpillars can evolve into butterflies. With the common use of genetically modified seeds, the dangers for butterflies have increased even more now,” he adds.

However, the danger is not just of butterflies becoming extinct, but even our lives depend on the existence of butterflies. If there won’t be any butterflies, there won’t be pollination, and this will affect our natural food system and our lives.

Unfortunately, while the world frequently talks about the conservation of environment or animals, it only talks about the protection of big animals – like lions, tigers, elephants, rhinoceros – or a few birds. Bees, butterflies and other smaller insects are hardly spoken about or cared about. Even in schools, we

were hardly told about the extent of their importance in our ecosystem. In most schools, butterflies and their protection is not even a topic of discussion. Therefore, it is important that we take a step towards their conservation on our own. If we all take baby steps in that direction, we can create a movement and help in the protection of butterflies.

It is because of this one man’s effort that, today, one can find more than 135 species of butterflies and many other species of insects in this park. Imagine what we can do if we all make an effort!

All one has to do is think, learn, understand and apply in our lives. We are all capable of conserving the environment, all we need is to take that one step forward and join hands. If we don’t do this now, we might never get a chance again.



29

MEENAKSHI UMESH

Born in Uttar Pradesh and raised in Maharashtra, she is now settled in Tamil Nadu. It was while working in Mumbai that she realised modern education was negatively impacting our environment and our society. To undo the effects of modern education and modern development, she focused on becoming an alternate educationist and creating an environment for children where they learn to live self-sustainable lives.

Innovator: Meenakshi Umesh
Vocation: Alternate educationist
Location: Dharmapuri, Tamil Nadu

Take a left

TODAY, A MAJOR PART OF THE WORLD IS REELING UNDER THE CONSEQUENCES OF CLIMATE CHANGE THAT HAVE BEEN CAUSED BY MANKIND OVER THE YEARS.

The degrading quality of water, soil erosion, floods, rising temperatures, unexpected changes in the pattern of rainfall, loss of biodiversity and rising water levels in the sea are some of the disastrous challenges that are hanging over our heads and mocking us.

While a large population of the world contributes to pollution, it affects those the most whose livelihood depends on nature. These are people who consider nature their god. Farmers, fishermen and potters, among others, are losing out on their earnings because of the unquenchable greed of urban dwellers, forcing the nature-dependent livelihood workers to leave their

peaceful rural lives behind to migrate to a life of hardships in a city – and live in a filthy, congested slum areas – in an effort to meet their daily needs.

To a considerable extent, the ‘modern’ city dwellers are to be blamed for this – and most of the time they are not even aware of it. It would not be wrong to say that for the selfish reasons of a fistful of people, we’re being taught a definition of ‘development’ that speaks of nothing but destruction.

When our latest ‘parinda’ came across this ugly truth, she saw no solution to the problem other than disconnecting himself from the endless race that she had become part of in this age of “development”.

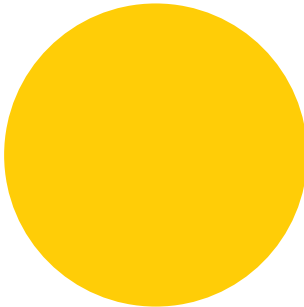
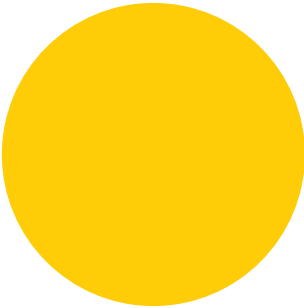
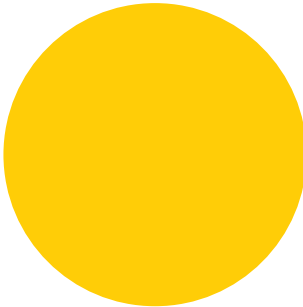
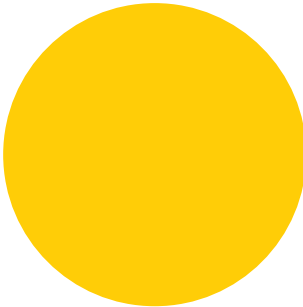
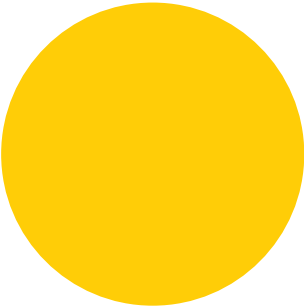
Meenakshi Umesh was born in Uttar Pradesh and raised in Maharashtra. As she grew older, she came face to face with the glittering life of Andheri in Mumbai and realised that two cities exist within Mumbai. On one hand, there is a city full of eye-blinding glare. On the other hand, there is a city full of people who have come from

villages to capture this glare. Meenakshi would often feel disappointed looking at the lives of people in the latter city.

Meenakshi’s life saw a major change when, during the course of her architectural studies, she got the opportunity to work in the world’s largest slum area – Dharavi. While working in Dharavi, she realised that the reason behind the plight of these people are the lives of those who live in that first glittering city of Mumbai. They people are so involved in their greed and modern facilities that they don’t even realise the repercussions of their actions on others around them.

Meenakshi came face to face with her own mistakes, too, while working in Dharavi, and this began to bother her immensely. Eventually, she decided to quit her work and move to Tamil Nadu to live an alternate life in Puducherry’s Auroville Ashram. At the ashram, Meenakshi realised that the force behind the manmade mistakes is our understanding of “development”, which is deep-rooted in our education system.

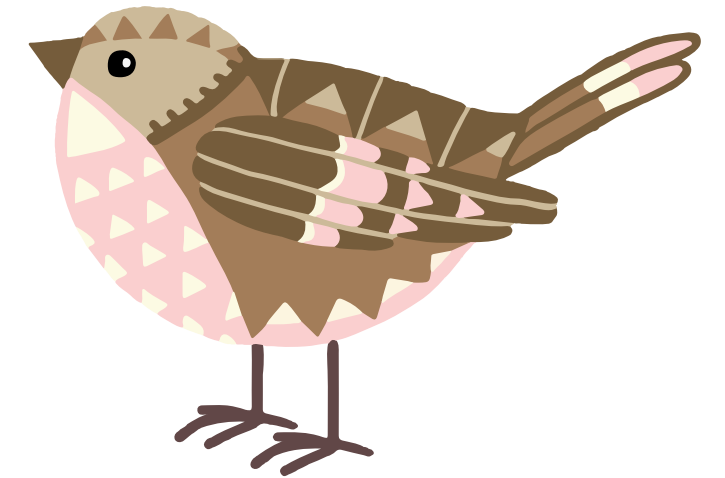
“In fact, starting from the environment to our personal lives, the root cause of all our problems is deep engraved in our modern education system,” believes Meenakshi.





Our modern education has created a gap between us and our roots, and made us selfish individuals. Our education system has created a system of competition around us, and conditioned us to think only about ourselves. People have begun to live with a sense of fear, and therefore they try to gather as many tools and gadgets as they can to make their lives easier.

However, education is supposed to free us of our fears and make us individuals who dream and work towards a better world. Nature and humans should be able to co-exist in such a way that a cordial environment can be created for other beings as well.



“I didn’t want this kind of an education for my children, and so I opened a school for them. That’s how the foundation for Puvudham was laid. Today, about 80 children come to Puvudham from nearby villages. We don’t study here, instead, we learn to live. We do everything here that we need to do to live our lives. We grow our own food, we weave our own clothes, we stitch our own apparels and we clean our surroundings. Even the school building has been built with the help of the children. The basis of all our work here is nature. We laugh and play with each other, and we learn the important of nature and the methods to conserve it,” Meenakshi adds.

Puvudham is not a school; it’s a small community of people, a family of sorts. If children fight among each other, they also share a bond of love and friendship with each other. And this is an important lesson for all of us. We need to keep humanity alive within us, we need to understand ourselves and we need to feel grateful towards nature – this way, we can be lifted from our problems.

30

SNEHAL

A graphic designer-turned-permaculturist, he is more popularly known as Seed Snehal because of the success of his Heal the Soil project. It all started when his techniques almost miraculously transformed a barren piece of land into a lush green forest. The rest is history.

Innovator: Snehal Trivedi
Vocation: Permaculturist
Location: Auroville, Tamil Nadu

World's a classroom

WHEN SNEHAL TRIVEDI, A GRAPHIC DESIGNER BY PROFESSION, GOT THE CHANCE TO SPEND TWO YEARS IN THE UK, HE SOON FOUND HIMSELF TIRED OF THE WESTERN CULTURE AND THE FAST-PACED CITY LIFE.

So he returned to India and decided to settle down in a small village near Auroville in Puducherry. That was the start of a new chapter in life for Snehal.

In 2007, he bought a one-acre land near Auroville to build a house entirely of naturally available resources. He also wanted to use the land for farming and to improve the quality of soil.

Born in a village in Saurashtra region, Snehal was raised in an environment where they only ate fresh food from the field and where there was no dearth of pure ghee or rich milk. When he grew a little older, he used to even help his grandmother in the kitchen garden.

“We enjoyed the pleasures of fresh fruits round the year. We used to play in the mud, climb trees and enjoy our time,” Snehal recalls, adding that these are some memories that have made a special corner for themselves in his heart. Maybe that’s the reason he could never find himself in harmony with city life.

Snehal had saved some money by the time he was 33 and living in the UK. And so he decided it was time to say goodbye to the 9 to 5 life and return to his country. He traveled to various parts of the country to meet people who were working in the field of agriculture, and heard about permaculture. He was so impressed and influenced by it, that he began to read up and study more about it. During this time, Snehal learnt that permaculture is not just a method of growing food on a small piece of land; instead, it is a technique by which one can even grow a forest on a piece of land.

Snehal then went on to design ‘Heal the Soil’ project, which was first implemented as a pilot on his land.

When Snehal had first bought the land near Auroville, it was a barren piece of land. A lot of people had, in fact, warned him against buying the land and told him it was nothing more than a bad investment. However, over the course of a few years, by utilising the knowledge he had gained from other permaculturists – and by putting in determination to his passion – the surface of the land changed almost miraculously. The land which was once under tremendous heat from the sun – so much so that almost anything one tried to grow would end up burnt – was now home to such dense greenery that one had to step away from the canopies to even spot the sun. The land where nothing had grown successfully for over 300 years and the land where there was no top-soil, could now boast of a variety of over 150 trees and plants growing on it, besides various species of fauna.

Heal the Soil proved to be so successful that he was invited by various countries and communities to share his knowledge with them. Today, he is fondly known as Seed Snehal.

“It was only after I returned to my roots and started living in close harmony with nature that I was able to take a close look at the cycle of life. And I understood that every piece of grain, every seed, every plant, every animal understands its importance in





nature's cycle. Unfortunately, some of us humans have designed our lives in such a way that we have not only distanced ourselves from nature but also distanced ourselves from ourselves. At a time like this, every individual needs to reflect on his/her life and find himself/herself. We need to create our own paths, which restore ecological balance, connect with our soil and encourage others to do the same," he said.

Today, some of our lives have become puppets in the hands of centralised forces. To get out of these clutches, we need to leave behind centralised forces and follow decentralised forces. We need to move away from global economy to local economy. We need to create small communities of people where alike people and live alike, and share the knowledge of learning and living with each other.

"I have learnt a lot of things about living from my life, things that I was never taught in a school or college. This is the kind of knowledge one can only receive if one has practical training. Studying from a textbook in an enclosed space cannot give you this knowledge. We need to make the world our classroom and nature our teacher. Only then will we learn to live in harmony," says Seed Snehal.



31

Biju

An architect extremely aware of the environment, he is the founder of Thannal (meaning 'shade'). Thannal is not an architectural firm but it aims to create awareness about natural building methods and promote the knowledge of traditional techniques and ancient architecture.

Innovator: Biju Bhaskar
Vocation: Natural builder and architect
Location: Perumbakam, Tamil Nadu

Learning on the go

“TRAVEL IS FATAL TO PREJUDICE, BIGOTRY AND NARROW-MINDEDNESS, AND MANY OF OUR PEOPLE NEED IT SORELY ON THESE ACCOUNTS. BROAD, WHOLESOME, CHARITABLE VIEWS OF MEN AND THINGS CANNOT BE ACQUIRED BY VEGETATING IN ONE LITTLE CORNER OF THE EARTH ALL ONE'S LIFETIME.”

– Mark Twain

Education, indeed, has an integral role to play in the journey of a person from childhood to youth-hood to adulthood. And to achieve this education, it is important to gain new experiences. However, these experiences cannot be gained while sitting within the boundaries of four walls. I have always believed that “travel is our best teacher”. When one steps outside the four walls of a classroom, one gets to meet new people, see new places, learn new traditions and gain different experiences. When we travel, we experience or become part of a lot of things that we would have otherwise not been able to do. Travelling forces us to

drop stereotypes, exit narrow-mindedness and leave superstitions behind to widen our perspective and horizon of the world and people around us.

Travel and education cannot be separated from each other. In another words, education is incomplete without travel. From Kashmir to Kanyakumari and from Kuchh to Kalimpong, there is such extreme and varied diversity in India, that there is no end to learning. There is history, architecture, agriculture, environment, folk music & dance, traditional art and so much more to learn that we never get to read about in our text books.

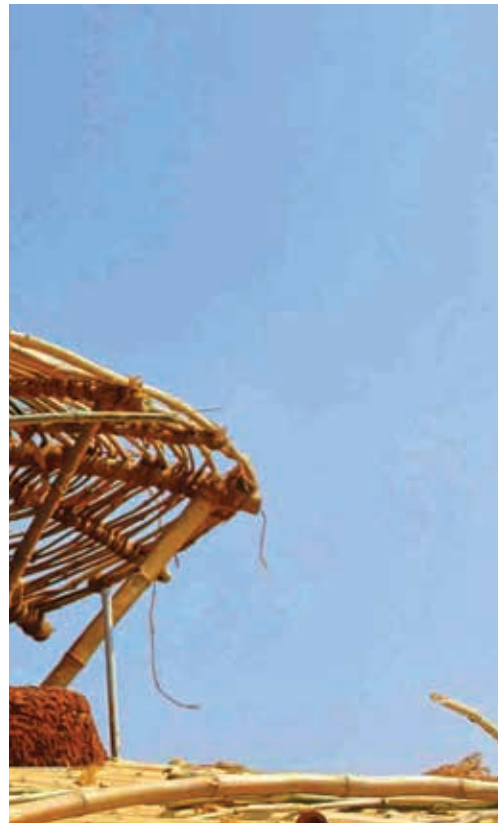
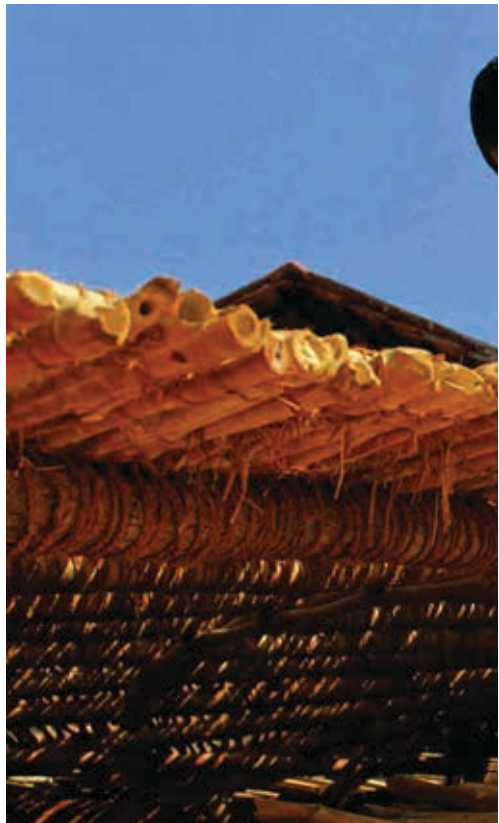
Our latest ‘parinda’, Biju Bhaskar, too, realised that real education cannot be confined to the four walls of a classroom. Biju was studying architecture at that time but he left midterm and decided to take a tour of the country. He was still interested in art, but he wanted to experience out-of-classroom learning. He didn't know where his journey would take him but he knew it was in the interest of his passion for

architecture. And so this journey brought him to Khajuraho in Madhya Pradesh. Here, he met somebody who became his guru and master in sculpture art.

Biju then decided to take a break and spend time with his guru, learning the art of living from him. It was during this phase of his life that Biju learnt about the importance of the five elements of nature – earth, water, fire, wind and ether – and how humans can live a peaceful and relaxed life if they live in harmony with these elements. With this understanding came the realisation of a bitter truth – modern development has distanced humans from their roots and forced man to forget that he, too, is a creation and amalgamation of these five elements of nature. By destroying these elements, mankind is destroying its very existence.

While experiencing the art of living, Biju saw villagers building their own houses using naturally available resources. It was a new experience for Biju. Being a student of architecture, his interest in it was immediately rekindled. He began to help the villagers and realised that building a house is not just about creating a framework of the house. It's an art, a spiritual journey that transforms a house into a home. That is the reason that, traditionally, for thousands of years, people have been making their own houses.





Unfortunately, Biju could not stay for long. His father called him back to complete his architecture studies, following which Biju worked on some projects in a few big cities. However, all along, he knew it wasn't his piece of the cake. He wanted to learn the art of building homes, and take it to as many people as possible. And so, finally, in 2011, he established Thannal (meaning 'shade') in Tiruvannamalai, Tamil Nadu, to promote building homes as an art.

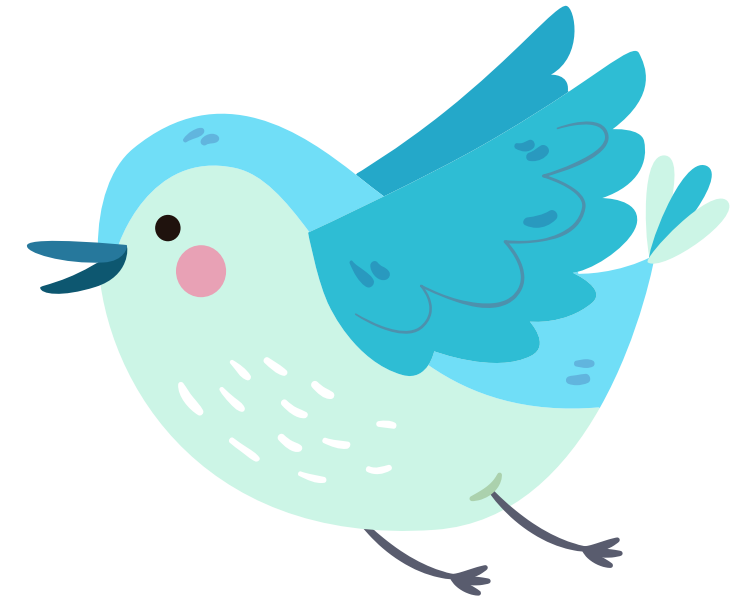
"Thannal is not an architectural firm that simply builds a structure. Our aim is to create awareness about natural building and promote the knowledge of traditional techniques and ancient architecture. For

this purpose, we organise workshops for architecture students who are interested in this field. We also travel around the country, meet old and new artistes, document their knowledge. Now, we are involving various art forms like music and dance to release a music album to create awareness about natural building," says Biju.

"Even today, one-fourth of the world lives in houses that have been built with naturally available resources. These homes aren't only closely associated with nature, but can sustain for much longer. Yet, modern development terms people living in such houses as 'backward'. Under a planned conspiracy, some powerful people have

forced others to suffer from inferiority complex and then distanced them from their ancestral knowledge," he adds.

However, it's not too late. We can still learn from our mistakes. A generation older to us still holds large amounts of traditional knowledge which we can use to build houses that will not harm our environment. So our time to act is now. We must preserve this knowledge and ensure that it is inherited by the newer generations.



32

SANGEETHA

She is a peaceful warrior who has held many feathers in her cap, including that of a writer and environment activist, but her efforts for ReStore have been extremely impressive. ReStore was started not just as a retail outlet for organic products but also, as a platform to create awareness about grassroots issues.

Innovator: Sangeetha Shriram
Vocation: Activist and organic food trader
Location: Thiruvannamalai, Tamil Nadu

Shero

SHE IS A WRITER, ACTIVIST, ENTREPRENEUR, EDUCATIONIST, FACILITATOR, GARDENER, SINGER AND ARTIST. SHE IS ALSO A MOTHER. BUT SHE LIKES TO CALL HERSELF A TRAVELLER.

A traveller who is constantly learning from her experiences and looking for answers to the questions that emerge from her journey; thereby walking on a path which may not have any clear destination but has a number of milestones, one after another.

The person I am talking about is my latest parinda, Sangeetha Sriram I call her a Peaceful Warrior.

Having spent half her life in Chennai, Sangeetha is now on a journey to search for ways in which she can add colour to her life and maintain its sanctity and simplicity. Writing her story has been the most difficult task for me in this journey so far; and I don't

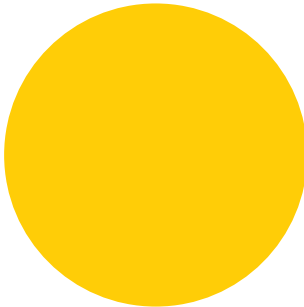
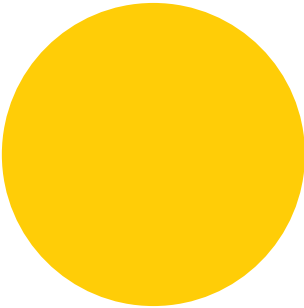
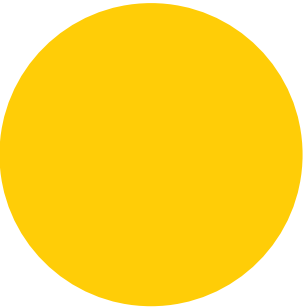
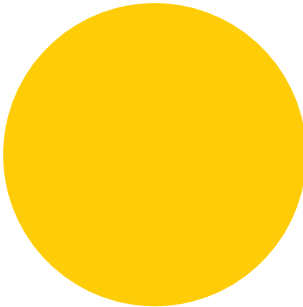
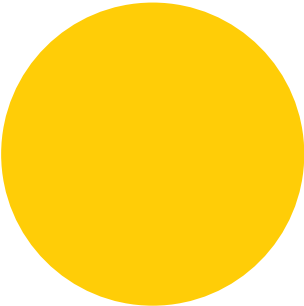
know if I will be able to do justice to her story.

At a first glance, it seems as if her life is divided into two parts which though seem to be walking hand-in-hand, actually are reflections of each other. Her story or her struggle – whatever you want to call it – started as soon as she was born into this patriarchal world. When she was a little older, Sangeetha had realised that a girl is given only limited freedom, a freedom which is already chained. In the name of a 'free society, people "allow" education for women but then impose several restrictions and the burdens of expectations. As part of a conservative society, women are made to believe that they need to excel at all the household chores and be home before sunset. This seems to be the underlining learning of all the education that men allow girls and women. These and hundred other conservative beliefs restrict the development of women. These restrictions are burdened on the shoulders of young women who begin to feel suffocated in our society. Consequently, they start becoming rebellious. Actually, that rebellious nature is the start of finding themselves.

During her rebellious phase, Sangeetha joined the National Service Scheme (NSS) in college and worked on various social issues and tasks. She thought that NSS was something nobody would object to, even if not encouraged or celebrated. Through her association with the NSS, Sangeetha learnt about environment problems that the people are facing in urban areas. To understand these issues in depth, she read several books. After her graduation, she even worked for three years with an organisation on urban issues like waste management, children's awareness towards environment and water pollution, among others. Following this period of three years, Sangeetha got an opportunity to go to the US for a six-month youth programme. There, she studied and worked on ecosystem restoration. It was during this time that she fully realised the consequences of globalisation on the environment, and participated in several protests against the same.

"Participating in these protests and the struggle for them was a reflection of my internal struggle from all the restrictions and expectations my culture had on me," recalls Sangeetha.

After returning from the US, she traveled for six months to various rural and tribal areas across India to understand the ground





realities. For a while, she closely worked with a Gandhian panchayat leader to implement Gram Swaraj in the villages of Tamil Nadu. Faced with disappointments within the movement, she started volunteering for the organic farming movement in Tamil Nadu. During the next few years, she took part in various environment struggles and movements. She also continued to work as a writer and editor for a few publications and as an NSS Convenor at IIT Chennai. Through her latter role, Sangeetha made youth aware about the grassroots-level problems. However, due to politics inherent in large government institutions, she had to soon resign from her post.

In 2006, Sangeetha's life brought her at such a turn that she began to question the answers to various questions of life. After 10 long years of dedicated work in the areas of societal and environmental issues, Sangeetha fell ill, both mentally and physically. A severe clinical depression that completely shut her down physically and mentally.

“It had been a long, tiring journey rebelling my way out of a patriarchal society. Along with this, I had also tried to work in a lot of different organisations whose value system

I didn't resonate with. The consequence of both these was my deteriorating mental and physical health. This brought a turning point in my life. I began to take care and look after myself, I began to focus on the teachings of life, and I began to take baby steps forward. To form a close association with nature, I started gardening, which has now become my passion. A few years later, when I became a mother, I started to imbibe the natural methods of nurturing children. I now look at life with a closer perspective. It helps me stay in touch with my inner self. A year ago, when I moved from Chennai to Thiruvannamalai, I started dreaming of a nurturing community of co-journeymen who want to look at spirituality and sustainability together and took some baby steps towards co-creating it. It is now slowly and steadily growing in beauty and size. says Sangeetha.

This spirituality Sangeetha here refers to is a place where people connect with their inner selves relentlessly to find out the truth embedded in them – a place where people are not afraid to learn or question.

“My life is full of questions. It is because of these questions that I have reached where I am today. These questions have taught me

a lot. Their answers leave a new question for me every time, and push me towards a new search each time,” she adds.

It was in this journey of 'search' that, before moving to Thiruvannamalai, she established a community place called ReStore in Chennai where people wishing to live a humble life can come together to share stories of their life. ReStore was actually started as a retail store for organic products but its objective was to create as much awareness as possible about grassroots issues. It was during this phase of her life that Sangeetha published her first book, a compilation of some of her articles.

In an effort to simplify her life, Sangeetha is still travelling; she's still on a journey where she is working on ground issues but her nature of work or rather the method of work has changed. She now aspires to be a Sacred Activist (spiritual activist).

This is the story of a common woman who, in search of her existence, has come close to nature. Nature, too, is a woman and mother who gives birth, nurtures her children and loves her children.



33

PARTHASARATHY

&

REKHA

When someone in the family was struck by a grave illness, the couple realised how it was spending their hard-earned money on items that advertisements told them to buy but not what they actually required. That was the start of a new journey for them. They quit their jobs at MNCs to become organic farmers; and its success led to the establishment of Organic Farmers' Market.

Innovators: Parthasarathy and Rekha
Vocation: Organic farmers and traders
Location: Chennai, Tamil Nadu

Farms to arms

PRIOR TO THE GREEN REVOLUTION, THERE WAS NO SUCH THING AS ORGANIC OR INORGANIC FOOD. THAT DIVIDE ONLY CAME AFTER THE GREEN REVOLUTION WAS INTRODUCED AND PESTICIDES WERE GIVEN TO OUR FARMERS WITH THE MESSAGE THAT IT WILL PREVENT THE DECAY OF CROPS AND PROMOTE FASTER AND BETTER HARVEST — THEREFORE MORE MONEY FOR THE FARMERS.

On the other hand, the common man in cities was told that if India wants to become self-dependent in the area of food production, the use of chemicals is important. It's been more than 50 years since the Green Revolution now, yet our pulses are being grown in Africa. Farmer suicides which used to be rare back then are what fill newspaper columns. We could not become self-dependent on food, and we could not even stop the shocking growth in the number of people who sleep empty stomach every night. However, industrial households have only become richer and richer.

Unfortunately, the common man is hardly affected by questions like: Why are farmers committing suicides? How did Ambanis and Adanis become so rich? Why do you we import pulses and other grains? What is the effect of all these things on animals and plants? However, when they learn about the consequences of these pesticides on their health, they start thinking about it. So now, for the first time in 50 years, the common

man has become a part of the dialogue on this issue.

Our parindey from Chennai started their journey with this realisation. Parthasarathy and Rekha, as our society would demand, were living a happily married life. Both were holding respectable positions in multi-national companies.

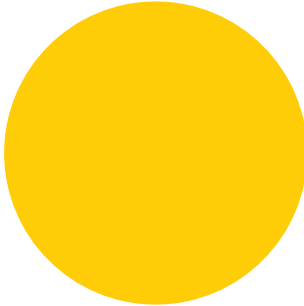
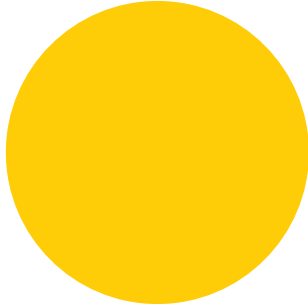
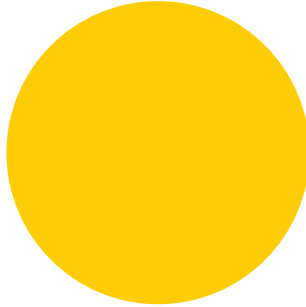
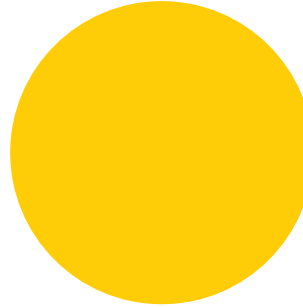
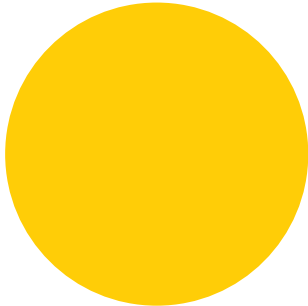
Along with their high-paying jobs, they had all modern facilities around them. After working hard for 10-12 hours every day, they had begun to spend money on those items that advertisements on their television sets told them to buy, irrespective of whether or not they actually had a requirement for those products.

Their life took a new course when one of their family members fell prey to several diseases. The couple started questioning the meaning of having all such modern facilities — that an average Indian household wants — yet being pushed towards health-related hardships. This thought added a temporary

pause to their lives; and the couple began to read several books on the issue. During their research, they learnt that most of the diseases have a direct or indirect link to the pesticide-sprayed food people eat. The rest of the diseases are a consequence of the modern lifestyle. Parthasarathy and Rekha realised that they needed to change their lifestyle. Slowly but steadily, they began to take baby steps in a new direction. But their life finally reached a milestone when they read a report by the World Health Organisation (WHO) which stated that, in Chennai, poisonous content had been found in mother's milk (due to pesticides used on the food that the mother consumes). That's when the couple understood that if they don't do anything about it right away, it might be too late.

Parthasarathy says, "From our research, we found that most of us are completely unaware of how pesticides are affecting our body. The following information was issued by the government of Canada, which informed its citizens how pesticides were affecting their health."

"When we read this table, we made it a point to consume only organic food. Rekha and my families come from agriculture backgrounds. When we were young, most of our food came from our own fields. And so we decided to visit our families and





encourage them to grow organic food but they weren't ready to believe that organic farming can be carried out in a sustainable manner. We understood the impact of the Green Revolution on our farming community. Our traditional farmers had forgotten their traditional knowledge and its advantages. We, however, did not lose hope. When we refused to back down, our families gave us a small piece of land and asked us to show them what we can do with it. We took the land as a challenge and opportunity to prove ourselves right. We used the traditional Indian methods of farming and innovated a multi-cropping technique to replace the mono crop system," he adds.

During that phase, many people from nearby villages came to tell Parthasarathy and Rekha that their attempt would not be successful. It will only cost them money and time. However, the harvest surprised everyone. When the old women in the village ate the vegetables that the couple had grown organically, the former exclaimed that they had not tasted such vegetables in over 20 years.

"That comment was enough to encourage us even more. However, when we asked the villagers if they would now want to adopt

organic farming, their answer was still no. The reason for this was — in today's age, farmers are more concerned about selling food than eating food. They were scared that organic farming techniques would reduce the output. And so we took it as a yet another challenge. This time, we decided to grow the same seeds the farmers were growing, but used only organic methods of farming. The village was once again shocked with the results," Parthasarathy added.

While the entire village was able to produce 28 sacks of grains in a one-acre land, Parthasarathy and Rekha had grown 36 sacks of grains on just one small piece of land. That was the day and today, when 100 acres of land is used for producing organic crops in and around the village.

The couple's journey, however, did not end there. There was a new challenge facing them — to sell their produce at a reasonable price in the market. This mission took them to ReStore in Chennai, our last parinda Sangeetha Sriram's organic store, which had been set up with a similar vision. During a discussion on this topic, the idea of OFM (Organic Farmers' Market) was conceptualised. Through this platform, a group of individuals collected some money,

and used it to buy grains and vegetables directly from the farmers and sell it to consumers in Chennai. The success of this initiative can be gauged from the fact that OFM has 16 retail outlets in Chennai. Further, almost every day, Parthasarathy and Rekha meet young individuals who want to leave their corporate life and associate themselves with OFM.

The beauty of this entire project is that it is a collective, community-driven and democratic initiative. The community understood its problems and then found solutions on its own to overcome the challenges instead of being dependent on a government, a politician or a "savior" for change. OFM is an initiative of the people, for the people and by the people. A model like this hits our pseudo democracy real hard, and it's visible when people in big cities try to start initiatives like these. I hope that in near future, people in smaller cities, too, will come out to support and work with farmers to find sustainable solutions for them.



34

GOWRI & KRISHNAN

The couple provides people with a practical alternative to plastic bags through their social enterprise, The Yellow Bag. At the same time, they provide a new or parallel source of income to local underprivileged societies that are engaged in the production of these bags.

Innovator: Gowri and Krishnan
Vocation: Social entrepreneurs
Location: Madurai, Tamil Nadu

Carrying happiness

“POLYTHENE BAGS WERE FIRST INTRODUCED INTO OUR LIVES IN 1977 WHEN NEW YORK-BASED SUPERMARKETS REPLACED PAPER BAGS WITH PLASTIC BAGS.”

Since then, plastic bags have become part and parcel of our daily lives. On an average, every individual in the world uses about 200 polythene bags in a year before disposing them in trash. We use one trillion plastic bags every year or 20 lakh every minute. And each plastic bag takes 1,000 years to decompose. Thus, one can imagine the grave situation that has been created in the world due to our indiscriminate consumption of plastic bags.

According to a research, scientists have found that 46,000 pieces of plastic float on each square mile of sea. In the Northern

Pacific Ocean, there is an entire island of trash, and this island is bigger than the size of France. This “trashy island” is known as the Great Pacific Garbage Patch.

In India, 99 per cent of retailers use plastic bags and 80 per cent of consumers prefer plastic bags over any other biodegradable bags. Eighty per cent of plastic bag consumers say that they once use the plastic bag just once before disposing it in trash. In such a situation, it has become imperative to find an alternative of plastic bags.

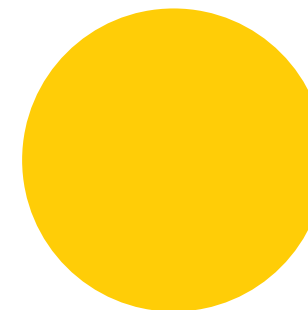
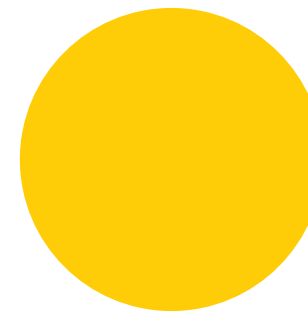
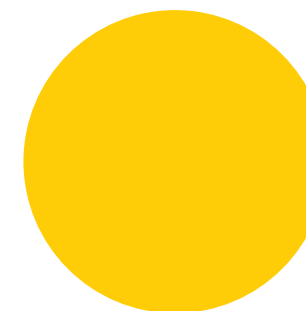
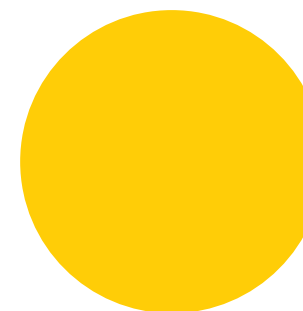
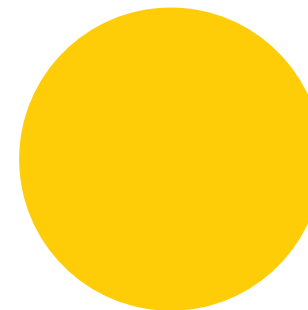
Our latest parindey from Madurai in Tamil Nadu, Gowri and Krishnan provide people with a practical alternative to plastic bags through their social enterprise called The Yellow Bag. The social enterprise serves two purposes: It provides an environment friendly alternative to polythene bags and provides a new source of income for the local underprivileged societies.

Krishnan says, “My wife Gowri and I were working with two big MNCs in Chennai.

We were leading simple but happy lives together. From the modern world's perspective, we had everything to live a happy and prosperous life. In 2010, we were gifted with a beautiful daughter; and that's when our perspective of the world changed.

When our daughter Charmy was two years old, she used to fall ill very frequently. She was suffering from some breathing problems. We went from one hospital to another but found little relief. We were trying to understand the reasons behind Charmy's problems but nobody was able to pinpoint a definite reason. After almost a year, we decided to move away from allopathic medicines to alternate treatment under the guidance of a traditional physician (vaidya) in Tamil Nadu. And we were surprised that an ailment, which had been causing physical discomfort to our little daughter for a year and mental discomfort to us, was cured in mere two months."

This forced the young couple to think whether what they had been taught and told about life was all that there was to living. They began to wonder if there were alternate ways of living that they had never been told about. They began to think about the implications of their actions on the world. They began to question how





they were contributing to the society. They began to analyse what they were leaving behind for the future generations.

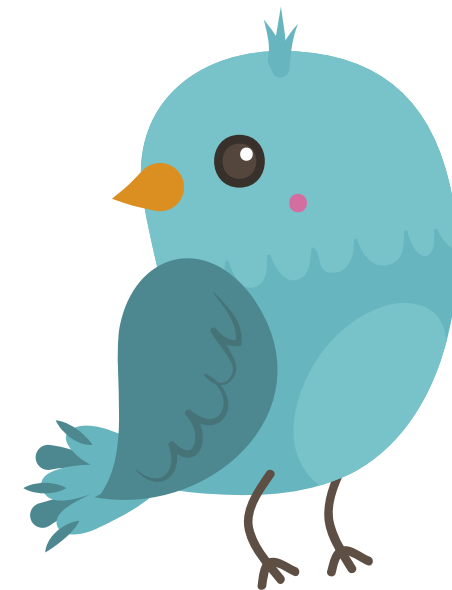
“That’s when we started to slowly change our habits and our lifestyle. We began to look for alternatives for things that we were using on a daily basis in an effort to move towards a zero (or minimum) wastage lifestyle,” Krishnan added.

One of the decisions that Krishnan and Gowri took was to completely replace the consumption of polythene bags with cloth bags. However, when they looked for one in their house, they found none. And that pushed them into a serious thinking mode.

Gowri says, “We were both born in Madurai, a town where families had a tradition of making cloth bags and using them for various purposes – from shopping to gift

bags. In an effort to revive this tradition, we got some cloth bags from Madurai and gifted them to our friends in Chennai. Little did we know then that it will turn into a vocation for the two of us. When we received positive reactions from our friends and family for these bags, we began to expand our efforts. Eventually, we reached a point where we thought that if we wanted to take this initiative forward, we must give it our complete attention and time. And so I resigned from my job. A few months later, Krishnan quit too; and the two of us completely immersed ourselves into this initiative.”

After quitting their corporate jobs, the two of them moved back to Madurai from Chennai because Madurai was where the bags were being produced. Today, at least 30 women from Madurai and nearby areas are associated with The Yellow Bag for their livelihood. About 10 women, who are



mentally challenged, help the couple in packing and packaging. On a daily basis, these women make more than 1,000 bags; and the Yellow Bag has a minimum of 150 regular monthly customer base.

Gowri and Krishnan’s vision is to produce one lakh bags a month by the end of this year and to encourage more and more people to leave plastic bags for alternative choices. The couple says that if a cloth bag is used with care, it can curb the consumption of 1,000 plastic bags a year.

The Yellow Bags are not just environment friendly but they are also a means of challenging the global economy by providing employment to indigenous communities and making them self-dependent.

35

ANAND & GIRIJA

He was an interior designer and she was a banker but they wanted to merge their talent with their passion for nature. Hence, they established the Kavin Art Gallery. For the last few years, the couple has been working towards taking their handicraft to more and more people in an effort to increase conscious dependence on naturally available resources.

Innovator: Anand and Girija
Vocation: Coconut jewellers and craftsmen
Location: Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu

My precious

LIKE MOST PEOPLE FROM MIDDLE-CLASS FAMILIES, GIRIJA AND ANAND HAD SIMPLE AND COMMON DREAMS. ANAND ENJOYED TRAVELLING, SPENDING TIME AMID NATURE AND LEARNING NEW THINGS. AND THESE WERE INTERESTS STAYED WITH HIM EVEN AFTER HE GOT MARRIED TO GIRIJA. HE WAS LUCKY THAT HIS LIFE PARTNER WAS SOMEBODY WHO UNDERSTOOD AND SHARED THE SAME VIEWS AND INTERESTS.

Anand was an interior designer and Girija worked as a bank manager. Soon after their marriage, Girija was transferred from Madurai to Tirunelveli. During this period, every time Anand travelled to Tirunelveli to meet his wife, he would find himself engrossed in the natural beauty of the town. He was so mesmerised by the beauty of Tirunelveli that he decided to settle there; and soon started working on handcrafted gold. In between, whenever he found time, he would take a short excursion to somewhere nearby.

During one such excursion, Anand met an organic scientist and natural farmer; and got a chance to visit a farm. This opportunity gave his life a new course. He

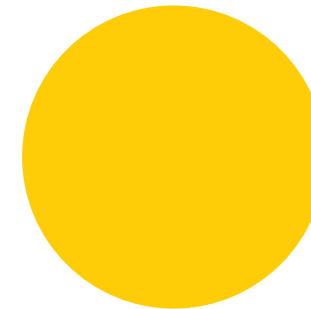
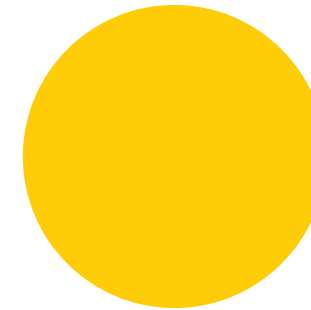
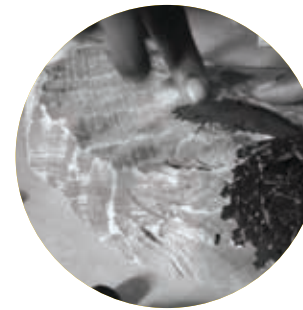
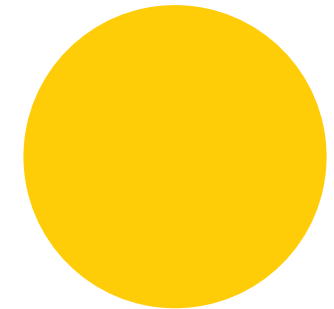
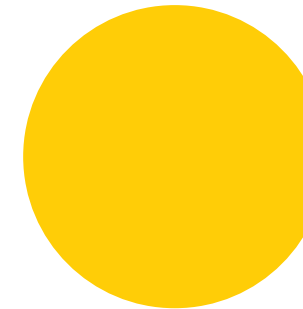
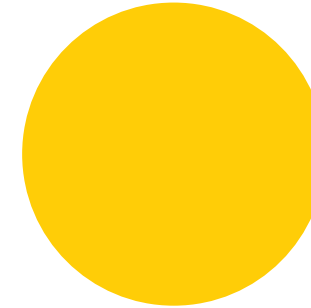
was so inspired by his new friend, that he decided to live his life in close association with nature; and took his first step in the direction. Anand decided to merge his craft talent with his love for nature and Girija decided to leave her job and look after her family. Together, the couple established an art gallery in the name of their son, the Kavin Art Gallery.

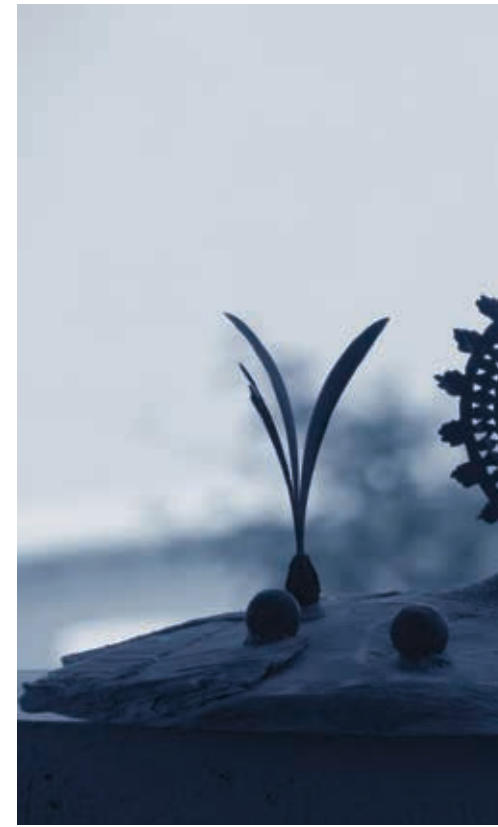
Anand tells me, “In this part of South India, families use at least two coconuts a day in their house for cooking or another purpose. We use them and then mostly just discard the shell. So I thought why not use these for something interesting? The first few things I made with coconut shells were jewellery pieces like earrings and lockets. Then slowly, I introduced more handcraft into it. Today, we make a variety of things such as lamp shades, decorative pieces, paintings and toys, among others. Our work has been recognised and we have been invited on various occasions to design the stage for cultural events in Tamil Nadu. For

such events, we only use naturally available resources and try to get all the raw material from within a vicinity of 5-km radius of the venue to strengthen the local economy. Additionally, as these are naturally available resources, their disposal at the end of the event has no negative implications on nature.”

For the last few years now, Anand and Girija have been working with the motive of taking their art to more and more people across the region. The intention behind this is to increase conscious dependence on naturally available resources so that people do not harm the environment in pursuit of their demands. By producing jewellery, utensils and various other products using coconut and wood, the couple feels that they are also, if only nominally, reducing the need for mining for metal (and destruction of the earth’s surface, followed by its consequences).

“We are now thinking of ways to involve the local community in our work. A lot of people in the region migrate to bigger cities in search of a better livelihood and end up working as a construction labour or in beedi factories. In the process, they have to leave their clean villages for filthy slums in cities and face the health hazards of working with tobacco and dust,” adds Girija.





By involving these people in Kavin Art Gallery, the couple can considerably help the families who would require no investment in producing handcrafted products as all the raw material would be readily available in their houses.

“By putting in efforts for four to five hours a day, a person can easily produce two handcrafted items which can then be sold in the market for upto Rs. 500. Therefore, Kavin Art Gallery is soon going to start a training programme through which it will be able to provide local communities with sustainable livelihood options without the need to travel to far away places,” she adds.

36

MANSOOR

The critically acclaimed director of Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak and Jo Jeeta Wohi Sikandar has spent his last few years researching about the role of energy and oil in modern development and came out with his first book; The Third Curve: The End of Growth As We Know It. He also runs a homestay in Coonoor and produces cheese for commercial consumption in the local market!

Innovator: Mansoor Khan
Vocation: Film-maker and writer
Location: Coonoor, Tamil Nadu

Saving grace

BOLLYWOOD’S WELL-KNOWN DIRECTOR MANSOOR KHAN, WHO HAS MADE SUCCESSFUL FILMS LIKE QAYAMAT SE QAYAMAT TAK AND JO JEETA WOHI SIKANDAR, IS THESE DAYS SETTLED IN THE SMALL BUT BEAUTIFUL TOWN OF COONOR AMID THE MESMERIZING NILGIRIS.

When I met, my first question to him was, “What made you leave the glistening world of Bollywood and settle in these hills?”

He replied, “I never wanted to be ‘a part’ of the filmy world. I always knew I wanted to spend my life away from the fast pace of cities and amid natural surroundings. However, I had spent a lot of my parents’ money on my education, and somewhere I felt guilty about it. I wanted to prove to them that I can take responsibilities and make a decent living. So I reflected on myself and thought what would I be good at. I realised that I could be a good storyteller and that’s how I decided to try my luck in the world of cinema. However, even at that time, I was very sure that it would

only be a temporary phase. Eventually, I had to go and settle amid nature. I had even bought a piece of land in Alibag.”

When Khan was taking his first few steps in this direction, he came across a new perspective of looking at life. Through this view of the world, he realised that in this age of industrial development, there is no room for traditional education. It was during this time in his life that Khan was thinking of settling down in Alibag. However, the government had other plans. In a massive project to build an airport in the region, the government acquired the land of 30,000 farmers. “This incident forced me to question the idea of ‘development’.

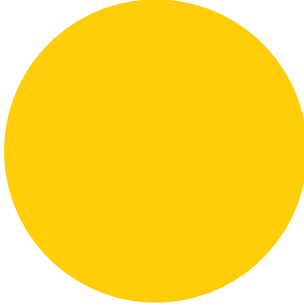
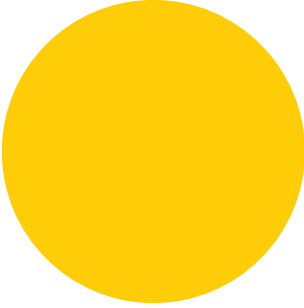
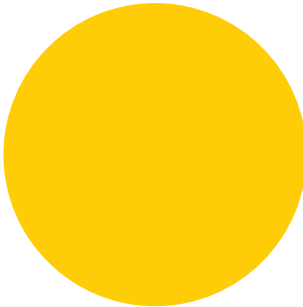
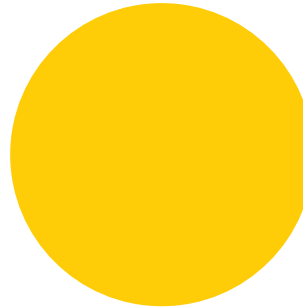
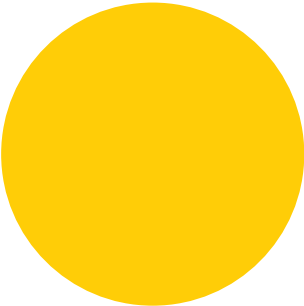
In this period of development that has happened so far and which we should expect in the future, what are the effects and side-effects of it? I started to do deep research on it, and I learnt that the ‘development’ that everyone was talking

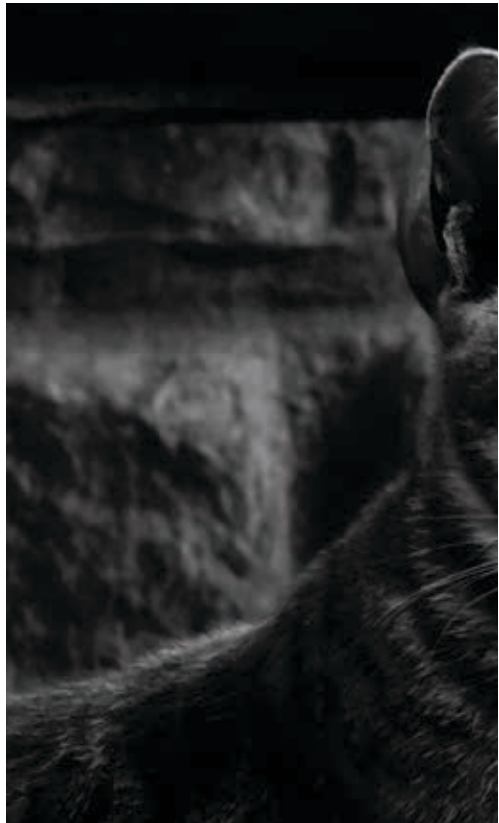
about was very different from reality.

This changed my way of thinking, and I moved with my wife and children to Coonoor in 2003. Even in Coonoor, I continued my research. One research study took me to another and so and so forth as I understood the role of energy and oil in modern development. A result of this research was my first book titled ‘The Third Curve: The End of Growth As We Know It,’ he added.

Khan’s book throws light on ground realities of modern development, and how we are being made to believe in the ‘unlimited opportunities’ of our limited natural resources. The book also challenges the foundation of modern economics, its dependence on energy and how a handful of people are pushing this fake ‘developed’ economy by banking on the limited energy resources, and consequently destroying the planet.

“We are merely puppets in this kind of an economy and we are not even aware of who is controlling us,” says Khan who spends most of his time looking after his farm estate, taking care of his guests,





making cheese, travelling the country and addressing youth about the game between modern development, energy and oil.

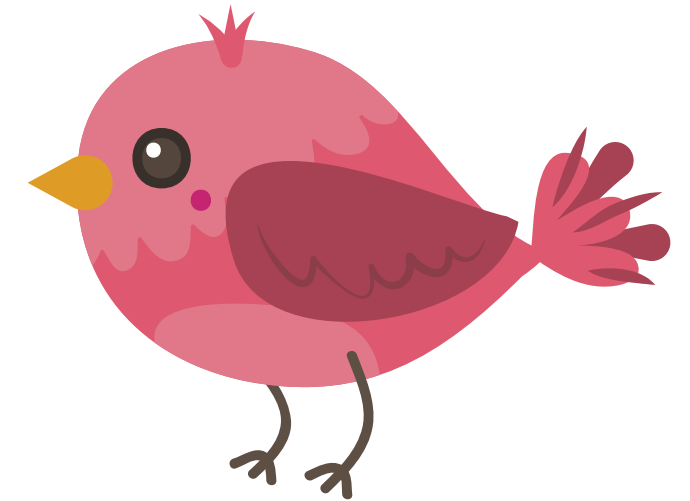
People often ask Khan how he has been able to leave a developed and modern city like Mumbai and live in a forest. To this, Khan always laughs and replies, “I live in this small town because it given me happiness.”

Khan’s aim is to strengthen the local economy in an effort to step out of the web of global economy.

“Here, we are able to make our lives natural and easy through our small initiatives. I have 10 cows here that give us milk to produce cheese. To produce cheese, we convert cow dung into biogas. We even utilise our waste

as manure for fields where we grow our vegetables. We use solar energy as much as possible and we’ve even used local soil to make bricks for our house,” he says, adding that all our simple efforts are merely stemming out of common sense. However, it would be wrong to say that we’re living a sustainable life.

Sustainability is a distance goal but it’s a word that is being commonly used today by people who are not really giving it a thought. In the world we’re living in, nothing can be sustainable. In 150 years, we’ve exhausted resources that took 15 crore years to form. Then how can we be sustainable? Thus, it’s important that we stop fooling ourselves and accept the fact that the unrestricted and perennial development that we dream of will never be a reality.



“Until we accept this truth, a change seems distant. Imagine we’re onboard the Titanic, and I’m using my book and my experiences to point out that we’re very close to hitting the iceberg,” Khan points.

“Luckily, there’s still hope for improvement in our country because majority of our population is dependent on frugal means of living. They preserve resources, utilise them efficiently and earn their livelihood from land. India is still a long distance away from the state of being affluent and ‘developed’ unlike many western countries. All we need is to understand this illusion of development and economy – which the world is trying to make us believe in – to preserve our resources.”

children was unaffected by the miserable conditions they were living in? Where do they get the strength to go on with their lives every day? These are I questions which kept me occupied.

Since I embarked on this journey, I began to see the world from a whole new perspective. It seemed as if somebody has removed my blindfold or waken me up from my sleep and now there is a whole new world in front of me now. Now, I cannot tolerate the never-ending rat-race every person is a part of or the distractions around me or feeling anxious and unsure. It will not be wrong to say I am leading the simple life (well, almost). However, there is still a long way to go.

This does not mean I am leading a monotonous or boring life. I am satisfied with the fact that I only have things which I really need. I don't have anything more than a few sets of clothes and a pair of shoes. Things which I brought earlier but do not use anymore, I am give them away to those who need them. Luckily, I don't feel that I don't have enough.

Consumerism has gone up tremendously in today's time. Shopping has now become an addiction. Wherever you look, you will find buyers investing their money in

something or the other. Television, mobile phones, internet, malls, schools, everybody is trying to persuade us to buy something or the other. We are been attacked by advertisements from all sides and we don't seem to mind it at all.

The companies behind these advertisements have a well-planned way to control our minds. They lure us into thinking that we should buy whatever they are selling without even considering whether we really need it or not. This is why I ask myself the following questions before I buying something-

Do I already have anything similar to this product ? If yes, I do not buy that thing.

Is this object something which I will keep safely use regularly? If the answer if no, I decide not to invest in that object.

Do I really need this thing? Here, you need to be honest with ourselves or else we will fall back in the same trap we are trying to free ourselves from. If the answer to this question is yes, I go ahead and buy that thing.

What I mean is, we should buy only what we really need. If we are able to control our greed and only care about our needs,

people who are living in these unfavorable, harsh conditions may have a chance at a better life. This will also help us prevent putting too much pressure on the resources available to us and resolve a number of environmental issues.



37

TIRUMURUGAN & SHIVA RAJ

The two had been working in a textile factory for several years when the effects of toxic chemicals used in the dyeing process began to affect their health. That was the start of a conscious thinking, which eventually led them to establish Wrukshatone, a small enterprise engaged in natural dyeing of textiles.

Innovator: Tirumurugan and Shiva Raj
Vocation: Natural dyers
Location: Erode, Tamil Nadu

Colours of love

SINCE ANCIENT TIME, NATURAL ELEMENTS LIKE MINERALS, PLANTS AND FLOWERS HAVE BEEN USED TO COLOUR (READ DYE) OUR CLOTHES. IN FACT, DYEING IS A BEAUTIFUL ART IF WE LOOK AT IT FROM A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE.

However, this art began to lose its essence when scientists discovered methods to create artificial colours in 1856. Using various chemicals, scientists created a variety of new colours, which were successful in attracting people. At the same time, these artificial colours considerably reduced the cost of production for textiles and clothes. This completely changed the textile industry, and natural colours began to be excluded more and more from the market.

However, with the continuous use of chemical-based colours over the years, we can now see various negative impacts of

the same on our environment. If we talk about health hazards alone, the people who are most affected by these chemical colours are those who are involved in the dyeing process. Labour that work in textile factories earn very little and risk too much while dyeing clothes in a poisonous environment.

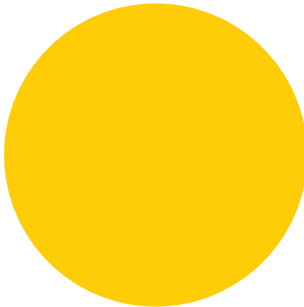
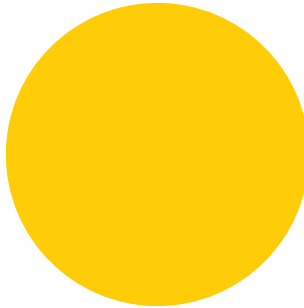
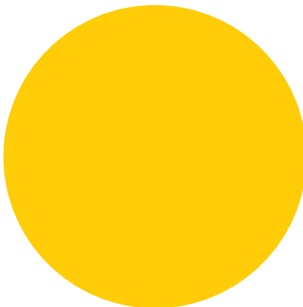
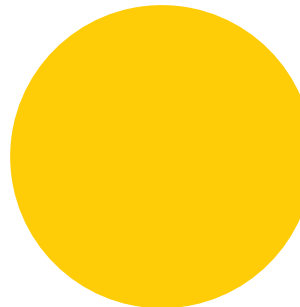
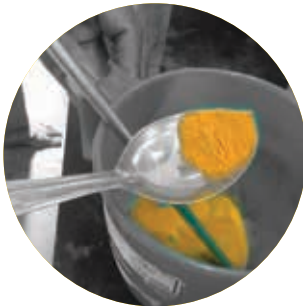
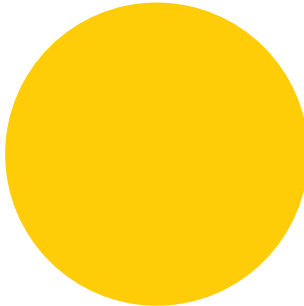
I know all of this not only because I've read about it or heard about it but I've experienced it too. During my college years, I had briefly worked in a textile manufacturing company. Every time I had to visit their dyeing unit, all I could think of was getting out of the unit. It seemed difficult for me to even spend five minutes in that environment because of the strong, toxic odour of chemicals. And there are people who spend eight to 10 hours in this environment every day.

It was much later that I came across a research that informed me that people who

work with chemical colours are susceptible to tumours. In the highly developed United States of America, there are 40 times more cases of factory employees dying of cancer, cerebrovascular diseases and various lung diseases.

Our next parindey, Tirumurugan and Shiva Raj, used to work in a textile factory, too, in Erode, Tamil Nadu, for many years when they started to develop various ailments and the harmful effects of the toxic environment could be seen on their health. When they went for a check-up, the doctor suggested them to change their field of work.

It was during this phase of their lives that they came across some social organisations that were fighting against the impacts of chemical colours on local water bodies. This made the two realise that the negative effects of artificial colours was not restricted to human health but could also be seen on the environment. That's when they decided to read more on the issue, and started looking for alternatives – and their research introduced them to natural colouring and brought them to Dindigul's Gandhigram where they studied in depth about natural dyeing. It was then that they established a small enterprise by the name





of Wrukshatone in Erode for natural dyeing of textiles.

Tirumurugan tells me, “When we were studying in Dindigul, we learnt that artificial colours were not only harming those who were working in dyeing factories but also those who were wearing these clothes. I can bet on this that most people would have never even thought about how clothes can be poisonous for them. No matter how much organic food one consumes at home, people are still living in a bubble if they believe chemically-coloured clothes are protecting them. Unfortunately, the truth is that our clothes are home to a variety of poisonous and invisible chemicals. Our textile industry, which is worth more than \$7 trillion, uses about 8,000 different kinds of poisonous chemicals. These chemicals come in direct contact with our skin, and

often cause lung diseases, cancer, infertility and various other life-threatening diseases. The more chemically-dyed clothes we wear, the more susceptible our bodies become to risks and diseases.”

Shiva adds, “Almost every industrial dyeing process involves mixing of chemicals in water. When the textiles are dyed, this toxic water is then directly released into a river or a canal because the cost of water treatment is too high for these enterprises. Every year, the global textile industry releases about 40,000-50,000 tonne toxic water into water bodies. On the other hand, natural colouring requires 80 per cent less water for production. Additionally, even the water that has been used in the process of dyeing comes as a boon for farmers due to its high potassium content, which acts as a fertiliser.”



Due to awareness and government diktats, several factories have started separating chemicals from the water to be discharged but they are not aware of how to deal with this extracted chemical waste. Further, the discharged water is not fit for drinking anymore. In a town like Erode where the Cauvery river is a boon, people are forced to buy drinking water because water from the ground has been found with various poisonous elements. In fact, on the shore, the water is often visibly coloured as if someone has just played Holi.

Our natural surroundings are full of beautiful colours. If we understand our nature well, and respect it, then we’ll know that there are various methods to extract natural colours from our environment.

38

SARASWATI

A student of media studies, she made documentaries on various social issues. Later, she joined the National Alliance of People's Movement and actively worked for various causes. Today, she is engaged in organic farming and runs the Handloom Weavers' Market that links the weavers to end customers.

Innovator: Saraswati Kavula
Vocation:
Location: Hyderabad, Telangana

Finding joy

WHEN ONE LIVES AMID NATURE, THEN ONE DOESN'T NEED TO MAKE TOO MUCH OF AN EFFORT TO BUILD A RELATIONSHIP WITH NATURE. LUSH GREEN TREES, A VARIETY OF COLOURFUL FLOWERS, THE SWEET VOICE OF BIRDS, FRESH AIR, PURE WATER AND SO MUCH MORE — THINGS THAT ARE SO BEAUTIFUL THAT IT'S HARD TO FIND WORDS TO DESCRIBE THEM — ATTRACT US TOWARDS THEM. IT IS BECAUSE OF THIS NATURAL ATTRACTION THAT WE OFTEN DEVELOP A BOND WITH NATURE AND REALISE THAT WE'RE NOT VERY DIFFERENT FROM IT. WE'RE, IN FACT, A PART OF IT, AND OUR EXISTENCE IS INCOMPLETE WITHOUT IT.

Our latest parinda, Saraswati Kavula, didn't have to do much to establish a close relationship with nature either. As a child, Saraswati grew up around nature's wonder and beauty in a small town called Nalgonda in Telangana (then Andhra Pradesh). Maybe that's the reason her interests started leaning towards spirituality and philosophy. At a very young age, Saraswati had pertinent questions about the purpose of life and its objectives. She would often ask if there was more to life beyond schooling, marriage, job and kids.

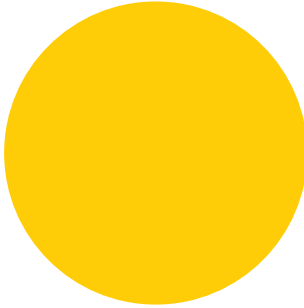
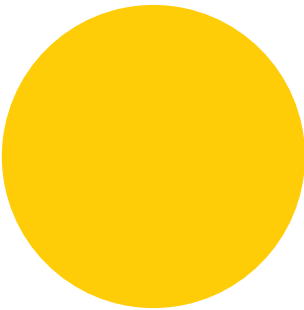
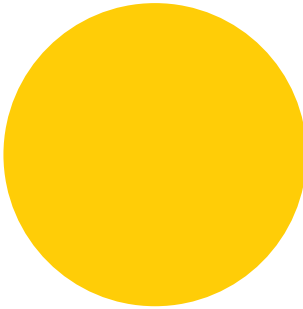
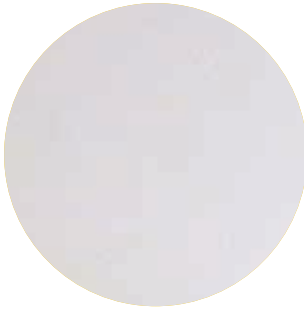
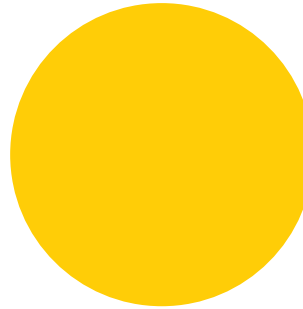
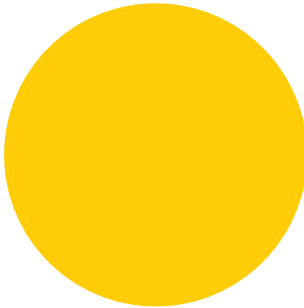
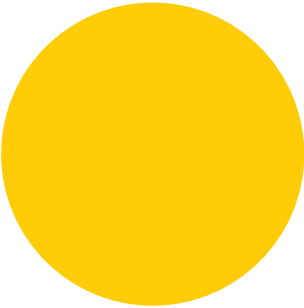
"I was frequently scolded or even hit in school for not completing my homework. As punishment, most of my time was spent outside the classroom. On the other hand, there were a lot of Left-winged people in the area I lived in. So, at a very young age, I had become aware of the difficulties and atrocities that people from backward, disadvantaged or poor backgrounds faced," Saraswati tells me. "When I moved to Hyderabad later, I got a chance to read Vivekanand. After reading about his vision, I began to lose interest in school education but gained a lot of inspiration in doing something for the country and its people. I thought I would become a doctor and help people in need. However, I was never good at studies and so I couldn't make it to a medical college. Or maybe it was that time of my life where I wasn't sure what I wanted to do in life. I was completely lost; and I couldn't see the road ahead. For the sake of my maa and papa's happiness, I enrolled myself for a hotel management course. Though it was not what I wanted

to do, I ended up finishing my course and landed myself in a job. That job showed a new direction to my life."

As part of her job, Saraswati had to clean toilets, wash the bathroom and do all kinds of chores. This gave her an opportunity to understand the work that is usually assigned for the lower sections of our society; and she began to appreciate their efforts. That's how Saraswati began to tread on the path to self-realisation.

After stepping out of the hotel industry, Saraswati went to England to pursue media studies. There, she faced a lot of problems related to food, which put her into a research mode. During her research, Saraswati learnt how fruits and vegetables are injected/ sprayed with poisonous chemicals in India to ensure their preservation, following which they are exported to developed countries such as the UK where they are sold in supermarkets. This realisation made her question 'development' and its effects. However, despite this realisation, she couldn't do much about it at the time because she had to return to India and pay back her education loan.

When she returned to India, she worked in the sector of commercial cinema for a while but how could a rebellious spirit like her's last in such a space. And so, she once again





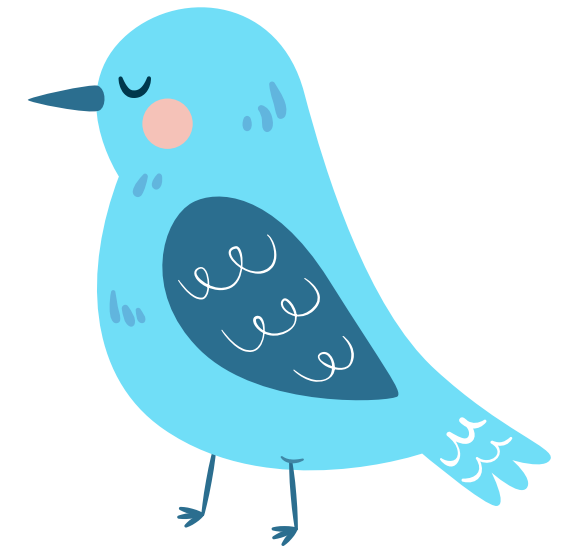
stepped out of that profession and ventured into documentary film-making. She made several documentaries on various social issues. During the making of these films, Saraswati got the chance to visit several Indian states and came face to face with many ground realities that changed her way of looking at the world.

Following this, Saraswati associated herself with the National Alliance of People's Movement and actively worked for various social movements. Through these movements, her belief in alternate social systems began to grow. She was able to understand the strength of/in decentralisation, local economy, labour, farming and small scale industries.

At that point of her life, Saraswati also wanted to buy a piece of land, too, for farming. And she did began to do that. During the same phase, Saraswati worked with some weaver communities in Andhra Pradesh as well. She wanted to bridge the gap between the weavers and the end customers, she tried various things but they weren't really successful. After another one of her efforts failed, she came up with the idea of establishing the Handloom Weavers' Market, which has been successfully helping the weavers of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana for the last two years now. The Handloom Weavers' Market facilitates the transfer of handloom produce directly from the weavers to the end customers. This not only helps create a much needed identity

for the weavers' products but also enables them to get the right price for it.

"After trying my hand at various professions, I think my search has finally ended here. However, my journey will continue. When I look back at my life, I feel that I've done various jobs which I either did not like or I wasn't meant for. But all of them — and my experiences in life — have helped me become who I am today. I have learnt a lot from my experiences and I continue to learn even today. And this journey of learning will continue. What is of utmost importance is the fact that I am happy with what I'm doing, and that is what I was searching for — happiness and satisfaction," says Saraswati.



39

JAGANNATH

A forest food conservationist and preservation expert, he believes modern education has distanced communities, including tribals, from their food and culture. Hence, he works with tribal communities to preserve locally available seeds and food to safeguard the jungles, protect the land and conserve the dignity of tribes.

Innovator: Jagannath Manjhi
Vocation: Forest food preservation expert
Location: Muniguda, Odisha

The stomach knows

OUR LATEST PARINDA, JAGANNATH MANJHI, IS A TRIBAL WHO LIVES IN ODISHA'S BEAUTIFUL NIYAMGIRI HILLS. THESE ARE THE SAME NIYAMGIRI HILLS WHICH WERE GOING TO BE DUG UP FOR BAUXITE AFTER THE GOVERNMENT DECIDED TO GIVE A CONTRACT FOR THE SAME TO A MULTI-NATIONAL CORPORATION CALLED VEDANTA LIMITED.

If this plan had gone ahead, it would have endangered and displaced tribals from at least 400 villages on the hills. So far, the tribals of Niyamgiris have been successful in their struggle to save the hills, the forests and the rivers in the region.

However, after the corporate giants had to bow down in front of the tribals, the former devised a plan to launch an indirect attack on the tribes. The agenda of this plan was to create a distance between the tribals from their culture, their land and their forests to weaken the community and their ideologies in an effort to push them out of their forests. When Manjhi sensed this danger, he became determined to find a solution to safeguard his community's identity and

its culture. He recalls that the government first approached their land six years ago, and since then Manjhi has been tensed and uncomfortable about the government interference in their region.

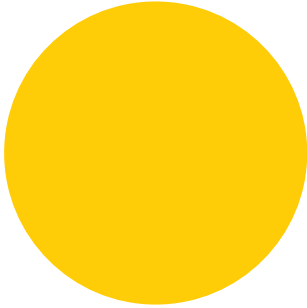
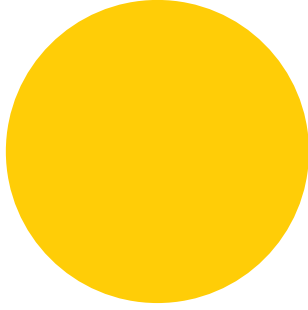
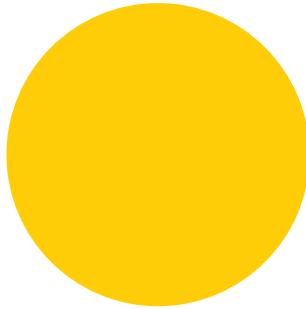
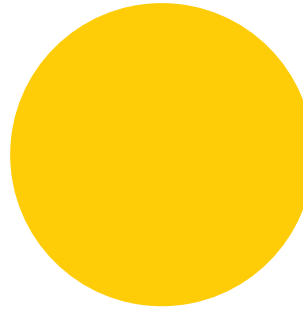
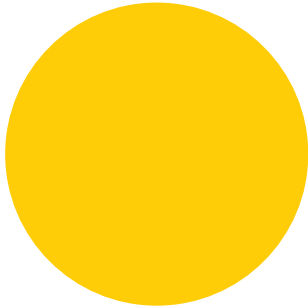
"A few years ago, I met Debajit Sarangi through an organisation called Living Farm that works towards protecting forest food. He offered me an opportunity to work with him. While working with him, I realised that the tribal land situation is so huge and ghastly that I cannot do anything alone. I understood that I couldn't do anything to protect our land without the support of the community. And that's when I officially associated myself with Living Farm, and started visiting villages to inform the local communities about this looming danger. We created awareness about the importance of locally available food, the diversity of our jungles and the need to protect them. By discussions on how we should protect our locally available food, we learnt how we can preserve the dignity of our society, and

save our jungles and our land from danger. We also frequently organised training workshops for tribals to educate them about how they could conserve various seeds," Manjhi says.

Tribals in the area have been successful once in protecting their jungles from urban hunters (corporates), however they remain unaware of the many other dangers that were looming over their heads. The start of this danger was with the establishment of formal schools in villages.

"I'm not saying that education is a bad thing," Manjhi says. "But education should be such that a person is able to learn about his immediate surroundings and is able to mould oneself into the environment and earn a livelihood from it. What the point for an education that distances you from your own culture and land – which is revered as your mother. Modern schools are like arms factory that can only destroy things."

"Formal education has started to turn tribals into slaves, at least mentally. The establishment wants to make us 'educated' but there is not even a mention about our culture or our knowledge that has been collected over thousands of years. Modern education has been trying to tell us that we're 'backward' and 'poor' because we don't have money. I want to ask people, who





agree with this, what is the definition of being poor?” he asks.

On one hand are people who spend their lives as servants of somebody to earn money to buy their daily needs. On the other hand are people who fulfill their needs with resources naturally available in their surroundings, without even harming the environment.

“You tell me, who’s more educated? Those who don’t know how to grow their own food, build their own houses, weave their own clothes or provide natural treatment? Or those who have the talent and knowledge

to live their lives on their own? Are those who study and talk about adding poison to food more educated or those who grow food in their surroundings using traditional methods and no chemicals? If you’ll speak to our elders, you’ll know that there are no traces of malnutrition, cancer or diabetes in our tribes. These are all modern diseases. This is because all the nutrition that our body needs to keep us healthy is easily available in our immediate surroundings,” he adds.

Further, Majhi stresses, that through these “temples of education”, the establishment is only trying to take away our talent and our knowledge. If, and when, this talent and

knowledge is erased from our community, we will turn into slaves. And that is why we’re working towards protecting our forest produce. If we can save our forest food from the web of modern development, then we won’t be forced to become anyone’s slaves.

In the end, Manjhi just had a message for city dwellers: You need to erase the perception that we’re backward or poor. Your existence depends on our existence and our knowledge. If there won’t be any tribal, then even the urban folks will not be able to survive for too long because one needs real talent and authentic knowledge to stay alive — and these are something that tribes hold.

40

ISHTIYAQUE

He is a Greenpeace India campaigner who has been working for the preservation and protection of local seeds to bring back farmers to traditional methods of agriculture and improve the soil quality. He is credited with showcasing a replicable model method of farming using 'Elixir Water', setting up biogas plants and building compost toilets.

Innovator: Ishtiyaque Ahmad
Vocation: Sustainable Agriculture Expert
Location: Patna, Bihar

Soil Searching

MOST OF US UNDERSTAND THE IMPORTANCE OF SOIL FOR LIFE ON EARTH. HOWEVER, IN THE LAST FEW DECADES, WE HAVE ADOPTED SEVERAL MODERN TECHNIQUES THAT HAD NEGATIVELY AFFECTED OUR SOIL AND REDUCED THE CONTENT OF NECESSARY MINERALS AND ELEMENTS.

This is the reason famine and starvation has become so common in the world. But people who do not have a direct relationship or contact with land will probably not understand this. People whose food comes from big grocery stores run by corporate houses or those who are used to eating out in fancy restaurants will not understand this either. However, those who have done even a little bit of gardening in their lives or worked in an agricultural field can easily understand how a good quality of soil can change the results of such catastrophic situations. These are the people who also understand that the purpose of soil is not only to grow food but it also plays an integral role in protecting the diverse flora and fauna found in forests,

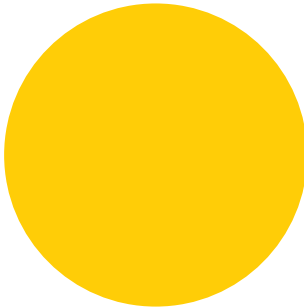
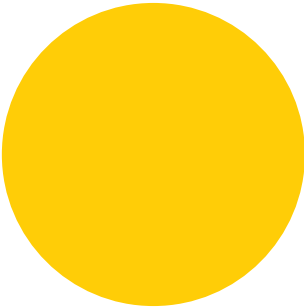
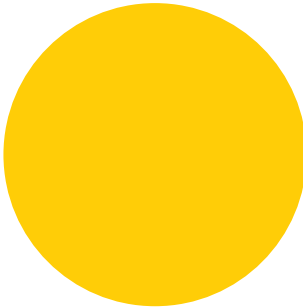
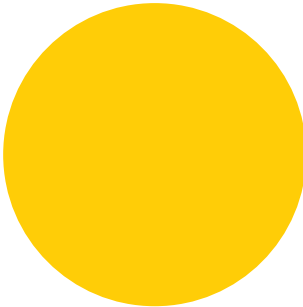
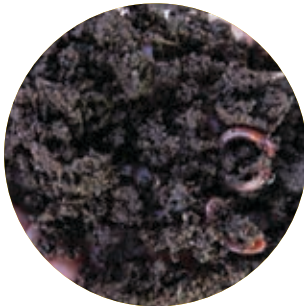
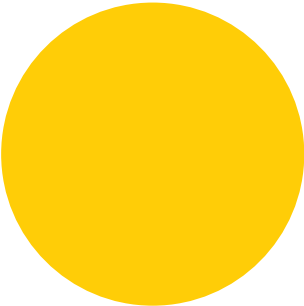
lakes, rivers and fields; while maintaining the quality of groundwater and river water. As the soil-dependent vegetation around the area grows, the flora even prevents the soil from being washed out in the rain.

Our soil holds the history of our planet. The natural minerals that have taken years to form are stored in our soil. Similarly, even for the future of the Earth, the existence of soil is extremely crucial because it holds various organic substances and micro & macro bacteria that are the source of carbon, which supports life. Till the time the soil holds these important elements, we can hold the hope for fighting climate change.

Unfortunately, ever since we started adopting modern methods of farming and poisonous chemicals, we've been slowing killing the soil every day. What we don't realise is that by killing the soil, we're

killing ourselves. It's like we're smiling at the invitation of our destruction.

Our latest parinda, Ishtiyaque Ahmad, has been working on the preservation and protection of local seeds for a long time now. When he first understood the grievousness of the use of modern farming techniques and its consequences on the soil, he joined Greenpeace to work towards improving the quality of soil. He tells me that when he was working with Greenpeace, he spent hours speaking to thousands of villagers in the state of Bihar to understand the issues of land. And everywhere the response was the same – the soil's quality is deteriorating and the farmers have no solution to fix this problem. The farmers were aware that the poor quality of soil had erased the presence of earthworms from the soil. Various insects and bugs and birds that fed on them, too, had vanished from villages. Chemical compost had polluted their wells. Yet, farmers didn't want to return to their traditional methods of farming because they were scared organic farming will not be able to give them enough yield. Further, the count of cattle has considerably reduced in villages in the last few years. Because of this reason, farmers don't have access to enough cow dung for natural manure. The little cow dung that is available to them on a daily basis is largely consumed for the purpose of cooking.





And so Ishtiyaque decided to work with Greenpeace to identify a location and create a model village where farmers would rely on traditional methods of farming. The aim of the project was to create a successful model that would inspire farmers from other villages to return to traditional farming techniques. After several interactions with community members, Kedia village in Jamui district of Bihar was selected as the pilot project site.

Ishtiyaque says that it's not easy to work with farmers because we can't tell them or expect them to wait for results. For farmers, their next harvest is their sole source of income and saving.

"So we started our efforts by using 'Elixir Water' (a combination of cow dung, cow urine, gram flour and neem, among other ingredients) on a small piece of land. When the local farmers saw its results, they slowly began to reduce the use of pesticides on their farms too. It's been 20 months since the initiated was piloted in Kedia and not a single farmer uses pesticides today," he says.

The next step was to talk to the farmers and work with them to improve the health of the soil in the region. "For this, we prepared vermicompost fertilizers," he says. "Since

earthworms had completely vanished from the region and the farmers could not have borne the cost of a vermi bed, we sought help from government schemes. With the help of government schemes, we were able to build a few small cow shelters in the village too."

Next on the agenda were biogas plants and compost toilets for villagers. This has been helpful in meeting the fuel needs of the villagers, and the waste from the plant is used as manure for the farms. Further, human excreta from compost toilets is used for manure. Meanwhile, the problem of water, too, has been met with the carving of a few ponds.

With the help of various initiatives, efforts and support from government schemes, Kedia village can now proudly boast of 282 vermi compost beds, 11 biogas plants, five ponds, five cow shelters, one cold-storage unit and several compost toilets. The farmers of Kedia village are now self-dependent; and their input cost has considerably reduced. They no longer have to buy manure or seeds from the market or pay for irrigation; and their yield is better than ever before.

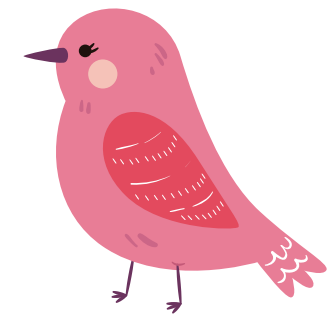
When the farmers of this village returned to their traditional and natural methods of

living, even the nature was on their side.

The farms are alive with earthworms once again. Various species of birds and butterflies that had left the village have returned to their original habitat in Kedia.

Farmers have toiled hard for these results and they have fully utilised the benefits of government schemes in this village. However, lack of adequate information about government schemes and the presence of corruption in government offices is often the reason that farmers are unable to enjoy the benefits of government schemes and entitlements. The central and state governments come up with new schemes every now and then but they have been largely unsuccessful in making the people, who matter and who need information about such schemes, feel aware about the presence of these.

"This is where the role of the country's literate and educated comes into focus. How can they bridge the gap between the availability of government schemes and access to the benefits under them? That's exactly what we've done in Kedia, and the results are in front of you. Even the government is citing examples of this village," says Ishtiyaque.



52 PARINDEY – THE JOURNEY WITHIN.....

#CONDITIONING

People often ask me, “What is the most important lesson you learnt during your journey?” I tell them, 52 Parindey made me realise that all of us are conditioned in a particular way right from our childhood. This was a real eye opener for me.

Some of the most significant lessons came from rather unexpected sources. Kids like Meera (Deepika’s daughter), Charmi (Krishnan’s daughter) and Shana (Amit’s daughter) inspired me to stop and think about a few very essential things in life and one of them was ‘conditioning.’

Whenever I sat and observed these children, they seemed genuinely happy. They played, danced about and indulged in various other activities for fun.

When I was their age, this exactly what I did. However my fun and freedom did not last long. Institutions like family, society ad school began to change me, condition me. They gave me a set of values and beliefs which they thought I should follow, they taught me right from wrong and they told me how I was suppose to lead my life.

My school kept reminding me that I needed good marks in order to succeed.

A religion was given to me (without my consent) right from the day I was born. I

had no right to choose my religion. It was simply handed down to me by my family. Similarly, I got certain notions about gender, sexuality, life and identity at a very tender age. These notions weren’t based on my perception and observation. They were drilled into my mind by others. There was a whole system (television, media, religion, school) around me that filled my mind with baseless beliefs and concepts. They created an entire world view which was not mine. Before I could grow up and learn to see things through my own eyes, my mind had been corrupted. It was hard for me to come out of my restricted and vague viewpoint.

Now that I am aware of how the system and society work towards influencing people, I consciously try to free myself from the shackles of these beliefs and assumptions. I have begun to question things around me. Joy, life, money, success, failure-I try to figure out what all this really means to me. I am seeing the world through my own eyes and allowing my viewpoint to be shaped by my experience and observation. I have decided not to depend on anyone when it comes to learning about the world around me. I have decided to live my life the way I want. The journey is a long and tiring one. However, I know it has begun.



41

ANKUR & VARTIKA

Partners, playwright and actors, the two use their talent and art to discuss issues of social injustice. In the last few years, through their theatre group Swabhav Natak Dal, they have performed street plays in various parts of the country to raise awareness about displaced communities, rural-urban migration and the victimisation of the labour class.

Innovators: Ankur Roy Choudhary and Vartika Poddar
Vocation: Playwright and actors
Location: Kolkata, West Bengal

All the world's a stage

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
CANNOT BE DISCUSSED UNLESS
YOU DISCUSS THE ISSUE OF
SOCIAL INJUSTICE.

India's social structure is extremely complex; but our talks about environment protection are incomplete unless we understand this complexity. Even 52 Parindey's efforts of last 10 months are incomplete unless we discuss the issue of social injustices.

At every step of this society, one can witness discrimination and struggle of the underprivileged section. This discrimination can be seen between Brahmins and Dalits, between traders and labourers, and even between men and women. There are several layers to every struggle, and without understanding all these layers or without including all the sections of the society in this campaign for environment protection, our struggle for environment protection is incomplete.

Trying to complete this incomplete struggle are our next parindey from Kolkata, Ankur Roy Choudhary and Vartika Poddar, who are using the medium of theatre to achieve their goal.

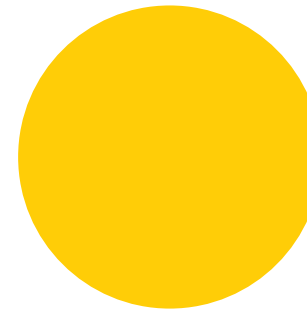
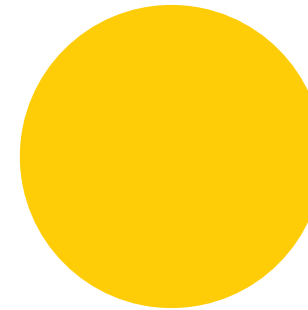
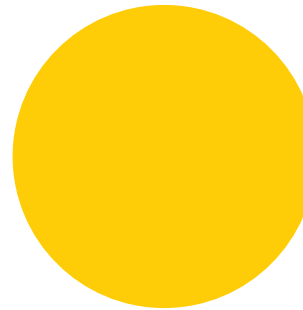
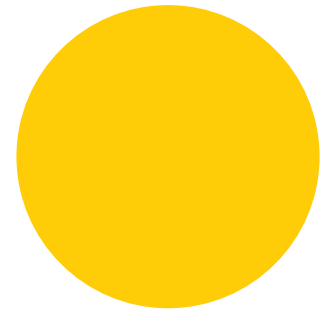
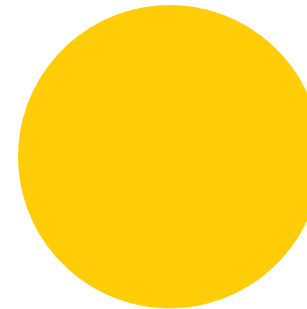
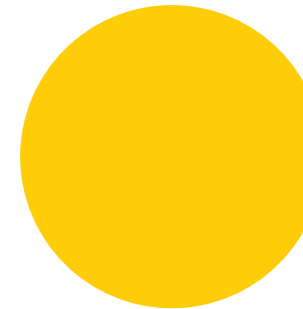
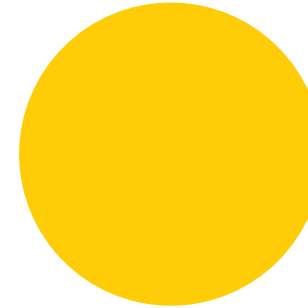
"My paternal uncle and brother are professional theatre artistes," Ankur tells me. "I've grown up watching them perform; and that's how even I developed an interest in the art. I had started participating in plays when I was in school, and I pursued that interest even when I was in college. It was in college that I even joined the Leftist political wing of the university. Though, over the years, I've had some differences with this school of thought, whatever I am doing today has a base in the Leftist ideology."

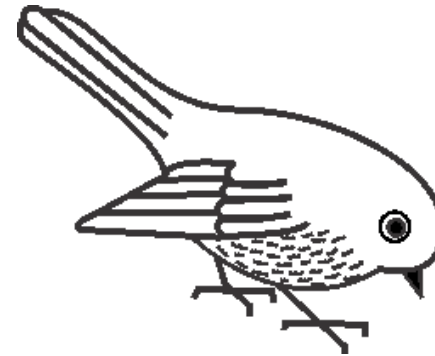
It is through the Leftist ideology that Ankur has been able to understand the extent of social discrimination and exploitation in our society. When he was actively participating

in Leftist politics and was using the medium of theatre to raise awareness about the various injustices happening in our society, Ankur realised that their discussions on the topic were limited to an auditorium. But he wanted to raise these issues in front of those people who were facing these issues.

It was during this phase that Ankur met Vartika. Though she comes from a wealthy family, she could never truly associate herself with that wealth or find satisfaction in that life. She wanted to view the city in a different light. She wanted to find out how city labourers saw the city and how their children could receive better education. She wanted to carve a place in slums for children where they could learn through various art forms. It was through this place that she also wished to understand the lives of these people, experience with them and learn with them. And so she established 'Swabhav'.

"I joined her, too, and my task was to train children in theatrics. We were a big group initially but slowly a lot of people started going in different directions, owing to their priorities. Eventually, drama became the main activity of Swabhav. Today, we're known as the Swabhav Natak Dal, which travels across the country to understand from and perform amid groups of labour class, farmers, youth and other underprivileged





sections of the society to highlight the social injustices being committed towards them,” adds Ankur.

In the last few years, through the medium of Swabhav Natak Dal, Ankur and Vartika have performed street plays in various parts of the country to raise the issues of displacement of local communities, rural to urban migration, cheap labour and the victimisation of the labour class, among other social injustices.

In 2013, the group wrote a play titled ‘Mr. India’ that was performed at least 30 times across five different states of India. This play dissected the entire process of displacement of communities, and highlighted the plight of the displaced communities. At present, Swabhav Natak Dal is working with Maruti labours who have been struggling under various atrocities in Gurgaon; and with the youth of Jaipur on the issue of urbanisation.

Ankur says, “These days, serious discussions are taking place over the dangers hovering over the environment. People are becoming more aware, and many of them are even taking steps to find solutions. But I want to ask these people, do these solutions include the people who live in the slums or those who sleep on the footpaths? People are raising their voices for the cause of farmers, which should be the case, but we must also

think about those people who are living in slums and doing cheap labour to somehow survive each day. These people, too, were once farmers, fishermen, blacksmiths, potters or had other skills. Even those who live in villages, though are amid cleaner surrounding, are often exploited. On the other hand, our government policies, too, are directed towards ensuring better profits for businessmen and traders. It’s nothing new, but it’s been the practice of the government since the time of Independence to find ways to grab their lands, their water and their food. The government first gives permission to big business houses to establish their factories on this land, and then forces its original residents to work as labourers for meagre wages. In such a situation, how can you talk about sustainability with these people?”

“Those who live in slums are eating food that they have to buy in plastic packaging. Tea leaves for Rs. 2, sugar for Rs. 5, oil for Rs. 10 – everything comes sealed in plastic packets. It’s like their own lives are sealed in a plastic pouches. So how can we talk about sustainability without solving their existential problems? All I have to say is this: until we include them in the fight and unless we find solutions for their problems, we will not be able to protect our environment. We can only achieve our goals for the environment when we all truly



understand the extent of their problems, which is not limited to poverty but extends to their entire social structure,” he adds.

To take forward their struggle for such communities, Ankur and Vartika now want to start a school for the children of labourers. At this school, drama would be the medium of teaching and learning.

Ankur says, “These are kids who are deprived of even two square meals a day because their parents are unable to afford any. Their parents, who are labouring in tea gardens, are working under such difficult conditions and meagre wages that they are often forced to sell their children. So we want to start a school, for at least 10 children to start with, where they can be educated through the medium of theatre. We hope that when these children grow up, they will use the same medium to raise awareness about the social issues of tea garden workers. And if anybody wants to help us in this endeavour, please feel free to contact us.”

Parts of the footage in the film have been shared by People’s Film Collective. We are thankful to them for their help.

42

ARUP

&

RUBY

The couple works with muslin weavers to help improve their livelihood through access to timely market information and exhibitions or fairs across the country. At the same time, the two work tirelessly to make urban consumers more conscious of what they buy, especially when it comes handloom products.

Innovator: Arup and Ruby Rakshit
Vocation: Promoters of muslin weavers
Location: Bardhaman, West Bengal

Going glocal

OUR LATEST PARINDA, ARUP RAKSHIT, WAS TEACHING STUDENTS AT A GOVERNMENT SCHOOL IN HOWRAH, WEST BENGAL, AFTER HE COMPLETED HIS POST-GRADUATION IN BOTANY.

As he had a keen interest in this field, Arup was also simultaneously working on a research project on Indian medicinal plants. It was during this research phase that he came across a bitter truth – our precious plants are not being utilised well due to the implications of modern development. The knowledge of using this traditional and medicinal flora seems to be disappearing from communities.

If you're wondering why, it is because modern education focuses on city life while such knowledge is actually embedded in the villages of India. This knowledge has no value in the city-based education system.

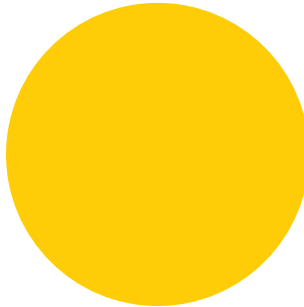
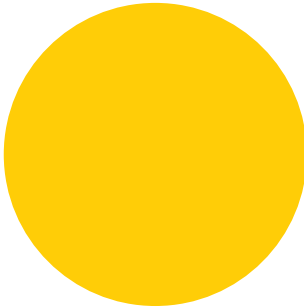
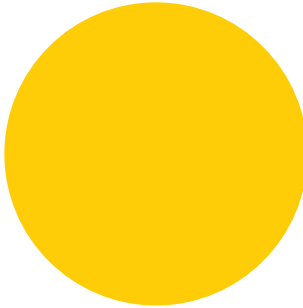
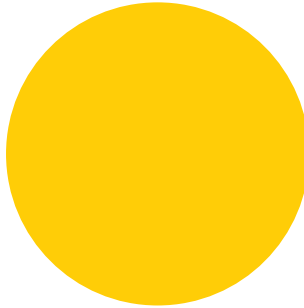
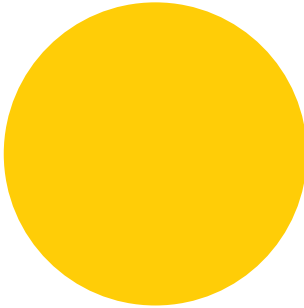
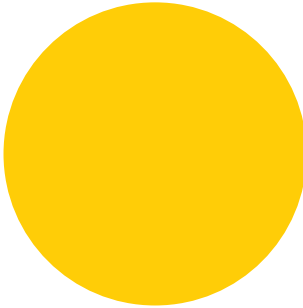
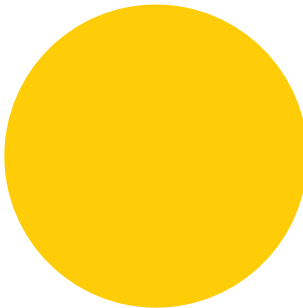
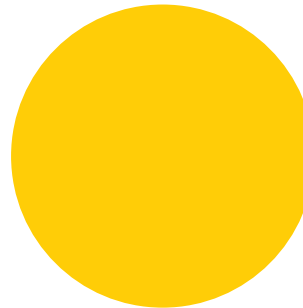
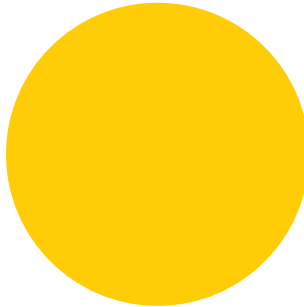
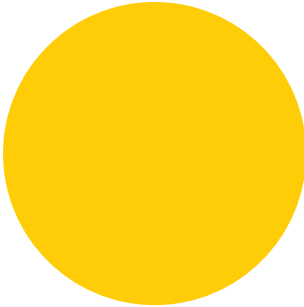
To uncover this valuable hidden knowledge, Arup, his wife Ruby and their daughter travelled to several Indian villages, attended many fairs and spoke to many learned men for his research. During one of their visits to a fair, Arup came across a muslin weaver. When they saw his work, a dying art in India, the couple was extremely impressed. However, a brief conversation with the weaver was enough to tell them that this art is not appreciated in the market. There is not much market for muslin weaving, and it's the same story for most handloom products. It amazed Arup that there were so few takers for this beautiful handloom art; and so he decided to work with the weavers and for the weavers.

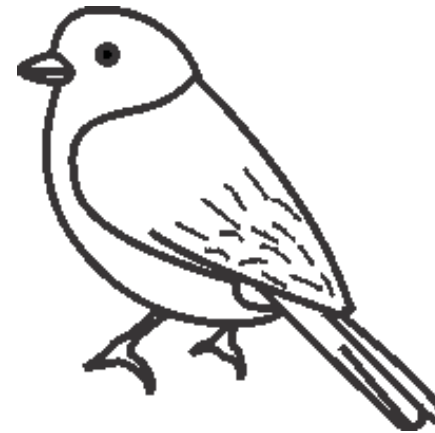
Arup tells me, when he was trying to understand the industry and the market for khadi and other handloom products, he learnt that these are only available at

big shops, and that too at expensive rates. Therefore, very few people can afford handloom. On the other hand, there is the role of middlemen who pay meagre wages to weavers and then end up selling their hard work to retailers at 10 times the wages of the weavers, pocketing large margins of profit. Often the weavers are given orders in bulk and paid only at the time of Pujo, Eid or Diwali.

In a situation like this, and with no savings, how can weavers weave cloth round the year unless they fall prey to moneylenders? This is the reasons many weavers have moved from their traditional skilled occupation to become unskilled labour in the hope of earning a regular income.

This isn't the problem of weavers alone. If we delve deeper into this issue, we will understand how it supports the structure of an entire village and various small enterprises. Farmers, yarn spinning women, dyers and tailors, among others, are victims of this problem. Only 10 per cent of the market value of handloom reaches these people. Now imagine a scenario where all this money remains within the village; villagers will not have to migrate to cities for labour.





Modern technology and powerlooms have considerably reduced the income of handloom weavers. However, we must understand the game between cost and output; we must understand the market system; and we must understand the entire cash driven economy – only then will we know why powerloom products are cheaper.

Not only cloth, the cost of almost every product consumed/used by an urban resident can only be truly gauged when we understand the roots of its economy. If we take a look at the investments made in factories, the figures are always running in crores. Machines have increased the productivity several folds; much more cloth can be woven in a day on a powerloom as compared to a handloom. Those running these factories are people who have been giving their weavers meagre wages and then selling the produce in the market for much higher prices. They, of course, pocket 80 per cent of the profits for themselves.

With more and more machines entering the industry, there is less and less need of weavers or human resource. If there will be no weavers, there will be no yarn spinners; if there will be no yarn spinners, farmers will be forced to sell cotton to

factories. With only one level of buyers (that too the kind that only cares about profit), the latter will try to buy maximum raw material in minimum cost. And, in the absence of weavers as buyers, the farmers have no choice but to sell it to factories at throwaway prices as that is their only source of income. So, of course, the cost of cloth goes down, and this is beneficial for only two people – capitalists (those who are producing the cloth) and the urban end consumer (who only thinks about himself).

Ruby says, “Urban population, which is paying a low cost for products that they are buying, is unaware that the burden of its actual cost is being borne by somebody else today. But the urban population will bear the brunt eventually tomorrow. The way clothes are being manufactured today, the process involves an intensive use of chemicals which is slowly, and unknown to most people, transforming our bodies into a house of diseases. Today, rare diseases like breast cancer among women and impotency among men have become so common. One of the reasons for these is chemically-produced/dyed clothes. If you include the cost of treatment for these diseases with the low cost of clothes available in the market, you’ll realise how expensive it actually is. If we talk about its implications on the

environment, then it’s almost impossible to add the cost of environment degradation to the cost of the cloth.”

“Handloom does not only have a link with nature and our natural surroundings, it is a source of income for a large section of the society,” she adds.

This is the reason Arup and Ruby travel around the country to make urban consumers more conscious of what they are buying, especially handloom products. They encourage people to buy more and more handloom; and try to bridge the gap between the weavers and the end consumers. For this purpose, the weavers associated with them exhibit their work at various fairs and events. This not only gives them a chance to directly interact with their customers but also provides them with knowledge about market prices and the profits earned by middlemen. The weavers, tailors, cloth cutters and farmers with whom Arup and Ruby work get 80 per cent of the profits that are earned by the collective efforts of all of them. They’re not only helping them earn a better livelihood but they’ve also been successful in trying to keep them away from the web of moneylenders.

43

BAKUL

Be it a moment of rejoice or festival, he ensures that the village family celebrates the occasion by planting a few saplings as a living and growing memory of the day. He also requests grieving families to plant a tree in the memory of their loved ones. His efforts have earned him the name of Vriksh Manav.

Innovator: Bakul Gogoi
Vocation: Plantation enthusiast
Location: Bishwanath, Assam

Because I'm happy

ABOUT TWO DECADES AGO, THERE LIVED A YOUNG MAN IN A SMALL VILLAGE OF BISHWANATH DISTRICT OF ASSAM WHO HAD BEGUN TO STAY VERY UNHAPPY BECAUSE OF RAMPANT DEFORESTATION IN HIS REGION.

He was so disturbed that he was even seeing trees, forests and rivers crying in his dreams. It was one such nightmare that woke him in the middle of the night one day. That day, he decided to dedicate his life to nature and its conservation.

Our latest parinda, Bakul Gogoi, has a craze for planting trees. I don't know how else to describe his love for plantation. Bakul started his journey of planting trees 20 years ago. He was studying in Guwahati at the time. As a student, it was very difficult for Bakul to be able to afford a plant from a nursery. So he used to save money from his food budget to buy one when he could and then plant it wherever he could find space in the city. But he knew this couldn't

be a long-term plan. He was about to finish college soon, and that would put an end to the money that his parents were sending him for his expenses. Bakul wanted to find a way to take this forward in a more sustainable manner; so he decided to start his own little nursery.

"We don't need money to plant trees. A plant can produce seeds on its own; all we need to do is plant a few in the right places and nurture their growth so that pollination can take place. After that, it's a natural cycle — a plant will give birth to another and so on and so forth. That's exactly what I'm doing. We've received a lot much from nature, which has looked after our needs as a mother. Today, when it's in a state of suffering, it's our duty to help nature," says Bakul.

To engage more people in this initiative of his, Bakul came up with an innovative idea. Whenever there a moment of joy and celebration at a house (such as weddings, birthdays or festivals) in his region, he

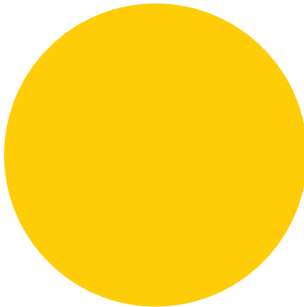
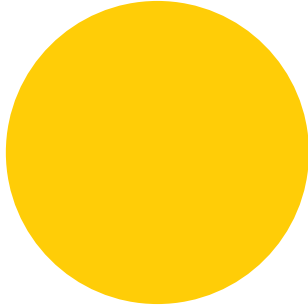
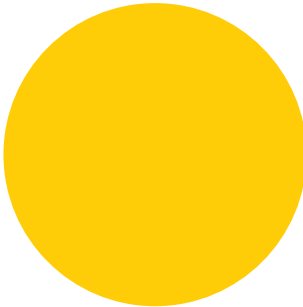
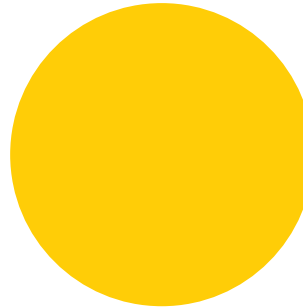
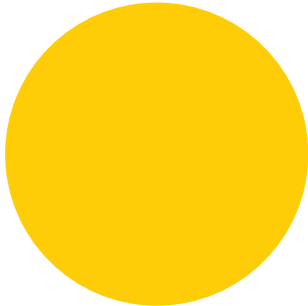
would to that house with a few saplings and asks the family to plant it as a mark of good luck. Bakul says that when a sapling is planted on an auspicious or joyful occasion, it becomes almost like a living and growing memory of the day.

Speaking of memories, Bakul also requests grieving families who have lost a loved one to plant a tree in the memory of the person.

It's because of efforts like these that locals call him 'Ped Wale Baba'. Many seniors in the community have even given him the name of 'Vriksh Manav'.

In the last 20 years, Bakul has planted more than 10 lakh trees. He now wants to take this initiative to an even larger scale. For this purpose, he is seeking help from the Assam state government to give clearance to two of his ideas.

His first request to the government is that at the time of school admission, the student must plant at least two trees, and the responsibility of looking after this plant should be with the same student till he/she graduates. Bakul says that if people spend time amid plants and trees at a young age, they develop an automatic bond with nature, which makes them more aware and conscious of their natural surroundings even as grown-ups.





His second request to the government is to officially declare the day of Bihu Mahotsav as 'Tree Plantation Day'. Bakul says that Bihu culture and festivities have deep roots in nature but we've largely forgotten about this relationship today. In fact, in the name of festivals and celebrations, we're doing some activities that are actually harming the nature.

This makes it all the more important to keep alive our dying traditions and culture; and to rebuild the bond between humans and nature. Otherwise, it won't just be the end of traditional culture but of humans too.

44

BHAGWAN

He uses his talent and art as a craftsman to make artifacts in bamboo, wood and other natural resources, which are then sold at fairs and exhibitions. He is also an installation artist who uses the platform of the annual Bihu festival to display life-size installations to bring people's attention to the correlation between humans and wildlife.

Innovator: Bhagwan Senapati
Vocation: Installation artist and wildlife conservationist
Location: Nagaon, Assam

Inspiring nature

IN A RECENT STUDY, RESEARCHERS FROM THE WORLD WILDLIFE FUND AND THE ZOOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF LONDON HAVE STATED THAT TWO-THIRDS OF EARTH'S WILDLIFE WILL BE LOST BY 2020.

Our mountains, forests, rivers, oceans, elephants, rhinoceroses, whales and thousands of other flora and fauna are in danger today. The research further states that this extinction of species and damage to the natural surroundings will gravely affect the balance of nature, which will eventually lead to the end of mankind too.

Humans of this life-sustaining planet must understand that the world population is not the same as it was some decades ago. We're so many today that the Earth has become small for us. As the world is getting smaller for us, we're getting more and more selfish – we want more and more. It seems like we all live in our own worlds (read bubbles); and this world has no place for

wildlife. Even if there is a scope or space for wildlife, it's only for our selfish reasons, for the purpose of our entertainment or for our own benefit.

However, mankind wasn't always like this. Our ancestors respected nature and wildlife; and lived in harmony with them. Our ancestors knew their boundaries and respected them. They were also aware of the boundaries of wildlife. For centuries, they lived together without interfering in each other's lives.

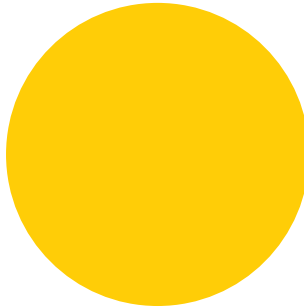
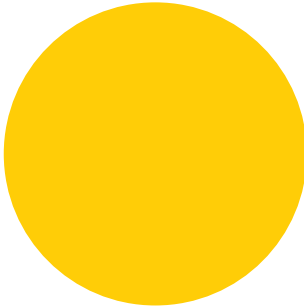
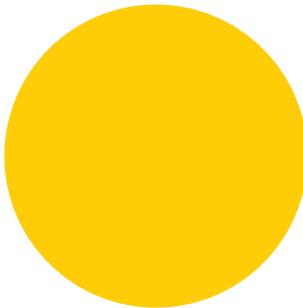
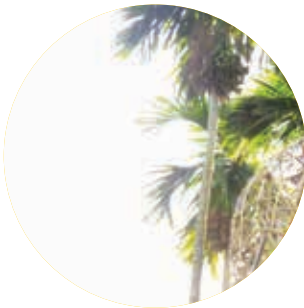
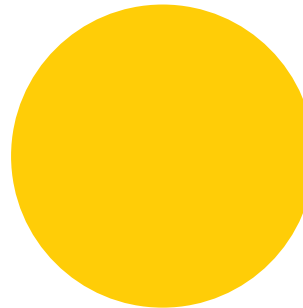
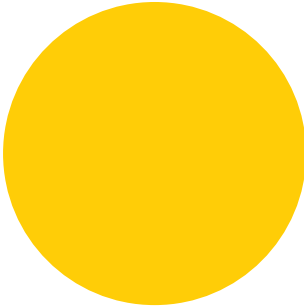
Unfortunately, people – because of our growing population and selfish reasons – are now crossing their boundaries. And this is the reason our love and respect for wildlife is diminishing.

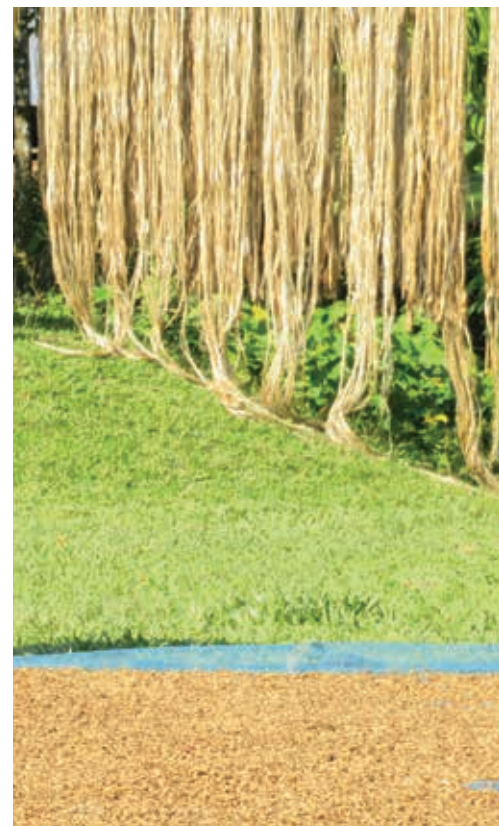
Our next parinda, Bhagwan Senapati, has initiated a unique campaign to revive the love and respect that communities held

for wildlife. By profession, Senapati is a craftsman who works with bamboo, wood and other natural resources to produce beautiful artifacts, which are then sold at various fairs and exhibitions.

Senapati says, "I find the inspiration for my art in nature. I have spent my life around forests, amid nature and watching birds and animals in their natural habitats. However, in the last few years, I have seen a rapid decline in the numbers of these birds and animals. Conflicts between man and wildlife, too, have become extremely common. Often, elephants and rhinoceros stray into farmers' fields and destroy their crops. Incidents like these, which used to be rare in the past, have become an everyday affair today."

When Senapati sat down to think about this a couple of years ago, he understood that the reasons for this were simple. Humans had not only taken over the homes of wildlife but their sources of food as well. Forests (habitats for wildlife) are shrinking by the day while our colonies are getting bigger and bigger. This is the reason these animals are forced to enter the fields and villages in search of food. Subsequently, we end up labeling them as our enemies, thus widening the gap between humans and wildlife even more. Our love and respect for wildlife has almost vanished; and





now humans are just pushing the wildlife towards death. Worried about the situation and the consequences that human life would face eventually, Senapati decided he had to do something to conserve wildlife. And so he came up with a unique initiative.

Assam is known world over for its annual Bihu festival. During this festival of harvest season, several artists display life-size installations made in bamboo and rice — known as bhelaghar. For the last two years, Senapati has been putting up installations, at these festivals, through which he presents the link between humans and wildlife.

Senapati actually starts working a month before the Bihu festival of harvest. He travels across the state, raising awareness among the crowds about the need to conserve wildlife, and the coexistence

between humans and wildlife. For his efforts like these, the Assam government even felicitated him last year. This year, Senapati plans to set up an installation of a 30-feet rhinoceros and a girl.

“This is not my fight alone. I’m just an artist who creates artifacts and installations. But I am able to do this only because of the massive support I receive from my fellow villagers who share the cost of the installation. Every household contributes Rs. 50-100. Even village children actively participate in this campaign. And this is the kind of effort that we must see across all villages in the country, with people coming together for the cause of nature,” says Senapati.

“I am focusing on villages rather than cities because the latter have no direct contact

with wildlife. The real struggle is for us villagers. For city dwellers, wildlife is just a source of entertainment during their occasional visits to a zoo or a forest reserve. They don’t have to live ‘with’ wildlife. They are already too distanced from nature. Yet, when they are looking for ‘calmness’ and ‘peace’, they come running towards nature for a ‘holiday’. It is us, who live in villages, who have a direct contact and connection with nature. If we won’t love and respect nature, the struggle will be inevitable,” he adds.

Today, mankind has access to various modern tools and techniques to destroy nature. This makes people think they are more powerful than nature. But what they don’t realise is that the death of villages and forests actually means the death of mankind too.

45

NISHA & MAHESH

The father-daughter duo run a social enterprise called Elrhino that produces eco-friendly paper and paper-based products made from rhinoceros and elephant poop. The enterprise aims at protecting the dwindling population of rhinoceros in the state, by linking its presence with local communities' livelihood.

Innovators: Nisha Bora & Mahesh Chandra Bora
Vocation: Eco-friendly paper producers
Location: Guwahati, Assam

The elrhino effect

OUR LATEST PARINDEY IS A DAUGHTER-FATHER DUO, NISHA BORA AND MAHESH CHANDRA BORA, WHO MAKE PAPER.

The USP of this paper is that it is made from the poop of rhinoceroses and elephants – so yes, eco-friendly.

So what motivated them to start this enterprise? The vision to preserve one-horned Asian rhinos!

Eighty per cent of the world’s one-horned rhinos are found in the north-eastern Indian state of Assam, where unfortunately the numbers of rhinos are dropping drastically. Besides the environmental reasons of changes to their original habitat, there are several other reasons for their diminishing numbers. For instance, farmers, to protect their crops from being destroyed by stray rhinos, kill this large mammal. Then there is

a big black market for rhino horns; and so they are illegally hunted and killed for their horns which are sold for anywhere between Rs. 40 lakh to 70 lakh per kilogramme. Then, there are.

Mahesh is a retired coal mining engineer. This paper producing journey for Mahesh started in 2009. He was returning to Guwahati from Delhi when he read an article about a Rajasthan-based woman who was using elephant’s poop to make paper.

“I thought why not do something like this in Assam? When this lady can start this initiative in Rajasthan, a region which is not known for elephants’ presence, why not Assam where there are plenty of elephants. Maybe we could also include rhinos’ excreta and, eventually, help save them,” recalls Mahesh.

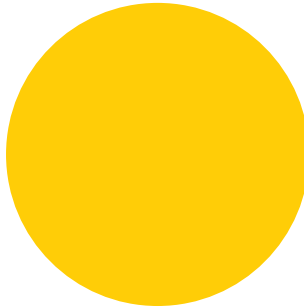
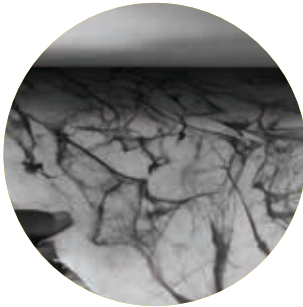
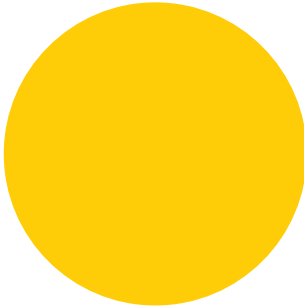
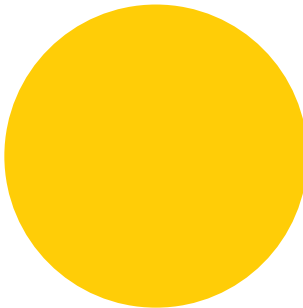
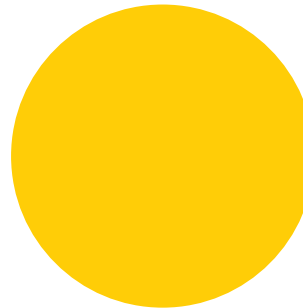
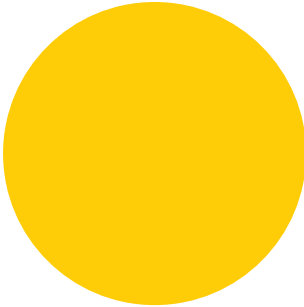
And so Mahesh decided to go to Rajasthan to learn how to paper from poop. When he returned to Guwahati, he established an enterprise called Elrhino. Today, this enterprise provides employment to at least

15 people directly and another 150 people indirectly in and around the villages of Guwahati.

For having achieved this (livelihood of hundreds of people and protection of rhinoceroses), Mahesh gives the credit to his daughter Nisha. Nisha stood by him as a pillar of support when Mahesh was struggling to start Elrhino. Over the years, Nisha has taken over the business and is leading its success story.

“When my father was laying the foundation of Elrhino, almost all our well-wishers were discouraging us from starting this enterprise. They were all of the view that it’ll be nothing more than a waste of time and money. But papa had faith in his plan,” says Nisha. “I was working in Mumbai, Maharashtra, at that time. That was also a time when I was trying to figure out what I wanted to do in life. I wanted to do something different, something new, something interesting and something challenging. Whenever I came home, I used to be inspired by my father’s dedication and his initiative; and so I decided to join him in his enterprise.”

After Nisha quit her corporate career in Mumbai and took the reins of Elrhino in her hands in Guwahati, she didn’t know that Elrhino would end up becoming a





successful and popular brand name. It wasn't her intention to make it a big brand name either. She just wanted to preserve the rhinos in the region by involving the local community; and subsequently providing the latter with better livelihood options.

Nisha says, "Today, Elrhino has become a brand name which is being recognised world over. So many people are inspired by us every day and want to be associated with us. They encourage us to continue our initiative. But let me tell you, it hasn't been an easy journey. We started producing paper with the thought that we'll be able to sell them and make our voice (call for saving rhinos) reach more and more people through our products. However, we soon realised there was no market for our paper. So we had to come up with a new strategy; and we decided to make paper-based products rather than just paper."

Elrhino products now range from lampshades and pen stands to diaries and even playing cards. They made their products reach a wider customer base through stalls at trade fairs, exhibitions and other such events or venues. Additionally, their outreach programme focused a lot on social media to reach out to the young population spread not just across India but around the world. The result was – not just did their work reach a global customer base but they also received appreciation for their efforts from various parts of the world. Elrhino has also been awarded with the 2015-2016 National Award for Best PMEGP Export-Oriented Unit under the Khadi & Village Industries Commission of the Indian government.

Elrhino doesn't depend on the national parks for its raw material. Instead, it sources it through villagers and farmers. This way, it is able to contribute to a rural household's

income, educate them about the need to preserve forest life and directly involve the community in the efforts of saving the rhinos.

By sticking to the core values of Elrhino, Mahesh and Nisha don't want to enter a zone of competition with other paper producers. Their priority is to provide employment to the local community, save the rhinos, create awareness among customers and ensure that their customers know how their money is being utilised by the enterprise. And the results have been encouraging; more and more local people want to join their initiative in some way or the other while people from different parts of the world want to buy Elrhino products. Nisha and Mahesh's vision now is to involve more and more villages in and around the region to come together for the preservation of rhinos.

46

VIVEK

He is a farmer with zero-carbon footprint. He utilises local seeds to set up a seed pool of the next year. He rears cows to produce manure and oxen for plowing. He uses the cattle excreta for biogas. He has even set up oxen-powered water pump, threshers and mowers that eliminate the use of machinery and increase the potential of farmers.

Innovator: Vivek Chaturvedi
Vocation: Zero-carbon footprint farmer
Location: Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh

Let's hit undo

THERE WAS A TIME WHEN MONEY WAS EVERYTHING FOR OUR LATEST PARINDA, VIVEK CHATURVEDI. IN FACT, HE SPENT A MAJOR CHUNK OF LIFE JUST TRYING TO EARN MORE AND MORE MONEY. TO EARN MORE RETURNS, VIVEK EVEN INVESTED IN A PIECE OF LAND A FEW YEARS AGO.

Sometimes after buying the plot of land, he got a chance to participate in a workshop on Jeevan Vidya (Life Lessons). At this workshop, Vivek saw new perspectives of looking at life — and that was a new start for him. Instead of focusing on money, he started focusing on the value of real thing, basic needs and non-materialistic things.

“When I was reflecting on these life lessons, I realised that all that money that I had earned, after which the entire mankind is running, is a mere figment of imagination,” says Vivek. “It’s just a medium through which we fulfill our wishes and needs. However, the real value is not in these currencies but in the things that we buy from these notes. Our basic needs are still the same —

food, clothing and shelter — as they were centuries ago. The only difference is that we’ve associated these needs with money today.”

Vivek adds that in this race for materialistic things, we’re causing the death of non-materialistic things — the things that actually matter for our existence and basic needs.

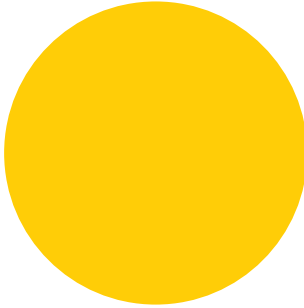
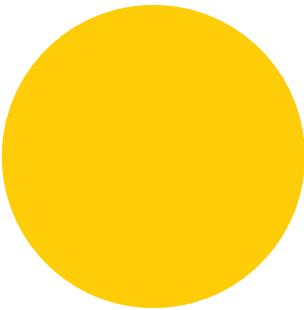
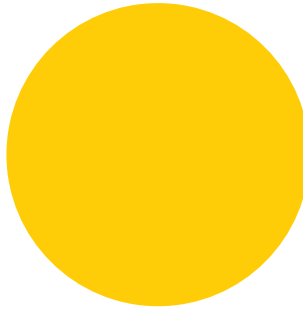
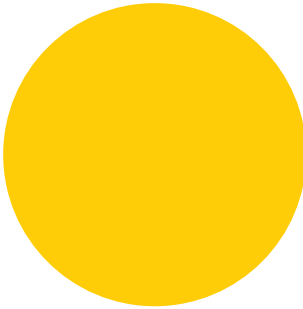
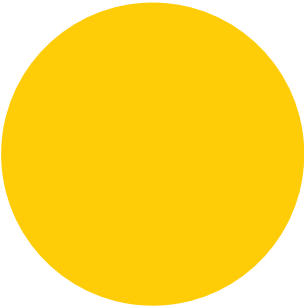
“We’ve made our food poisonous and our water polluted. The air that was the source of our existence has today become the source of our destruction. And the reason for this is that we’ve made wealth and money the reality of our lives while the real needs have become mere objects to be used in our daily lives,” he adds.

When Vivek realised this hard truth, he started looking for solutions to undo what he had been doing until then. And he saw

a solution in reconnecting and recreating a bond with the land. He started leaning towards agriculture; and understood that agriculture is no longer the same as it used to be some decades ago. Farmers, themselves, are so caught in the web of money today that they find it impossible to work without it.

The issue that caused most stress to him was that farmers were suffering losses despite working with seeds, which have the amazing power and potential to multiple into thousands. When Vivek was diving deeper into the issues of agriculture he learnt that farmers are dependent on markets for almost everything today. He has to spend money at almost every step of agriculture yet he doesn’t receive a reasonable price for his produce. In a situation like this, farmers are not even able to recover their input cost.

With this realisation, Vivek started looking for simple and intelligible options for farming. He began with increasing his self-reliance on seeds and compost. By utilising local seeds, he set up a pool of seeds for next year. For making compost, he started rearing cows and oxen. He used the excreta of the cattle for biogas; and its waste for manure. When he could no longer manage plowing, irrigation and harvesting on his own, he deployed the oxen in plowing.





“Do you know two rounds of oxen plowing is equal to five rounds of tractor plowing?”, Vivek says, adding that tractor often even kills the worms and microbes that live in soil, thus affecting the crop harvest.

For the process of irrigation, Vivek set up an oxen-powered water pump. Next, he used oxen-powered threshers and mowers that eliminated the use of any external machinery and yet increased the potential of farmers by at least two times.

“After taking all these initiatives, I wanted to introduce a measure and process by which farmers could become self-reliant in

the areas of electricity and fuel too. I tried a few experiments for this. We innovated a gasifier that utilised straw in a village to produce electricity. To become self-reliant and self-dependent for petrol and diesel, we utilised the liquid waste from jaggery machines, which is frequently used for making alcohol as well. You can even use this fuel in vehicles if you make minor modifications to them,” says Vivek.

Right now, the experiment is in its preliminary stage but Vivek is confident he’ll soon achieve success in it. He is also working on an innovation that will allow farmers to get the maximum harvest by

using minimum seeds.

Vivek believes that the day is not far when everyone will be forced to return to their roots and adopt farming because “we can’t eat, wear or drink money”.

“We have very limited resources left. Therefore, by returning to innovative techniques and traditional knowledge, we will not only increase the self-reliance of villages and farmers but also lead to optimal utilisation of available resources,” he says.



47

VIPIN

He is a natural healer and co-founder of Diabetes Trust. Through an establishment called Sehatvan, he brings small changes in people's lifestyle to prevent big diseases. He organises regular camps to make people aware on how they can tackle diabetes, blood pressure and heart diseases without medicines.

Innovator: Vipin Gupta
Vocation: Natural healer
Location: Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh

Heal the world

IF A HEALTHY PERSON IS MADE TO BELIEVE THAT HE/SHE IS UNWELL, THE HEALTH CARE INDUSTRY CAN EARN A LOT OF MONEY. PHARMACEUTICAL COMPANIES, FOR YEARS, HAVE BEEN PLAYING THIS GAME AND ENJOYING.

Due to the various chemicals consumed by a human, through various preservatives and products, fever, cold and cough are common. Usually, these “ailments” make our body stronger. Fever, for example, pushes a lot of toxins out of our body. When we pop pills into our body, it restricts these toxins from being released. Pharmaceutical companies, however, have been instilling fear into our minds and have termed this natural process as an “illness”. This way, they grow their businesses but play with the health of humans.

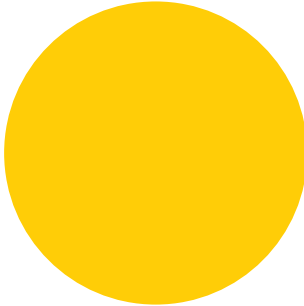
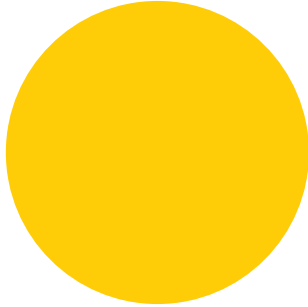
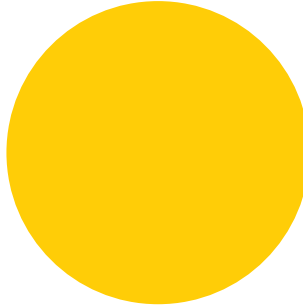
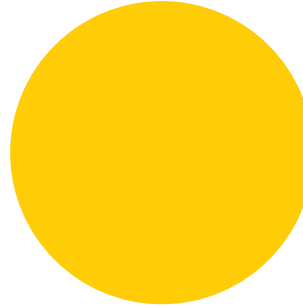
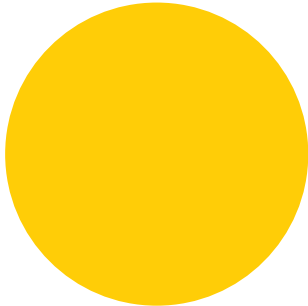
If we try to read up a little about this issue, we’ll know how these pharmaceutical

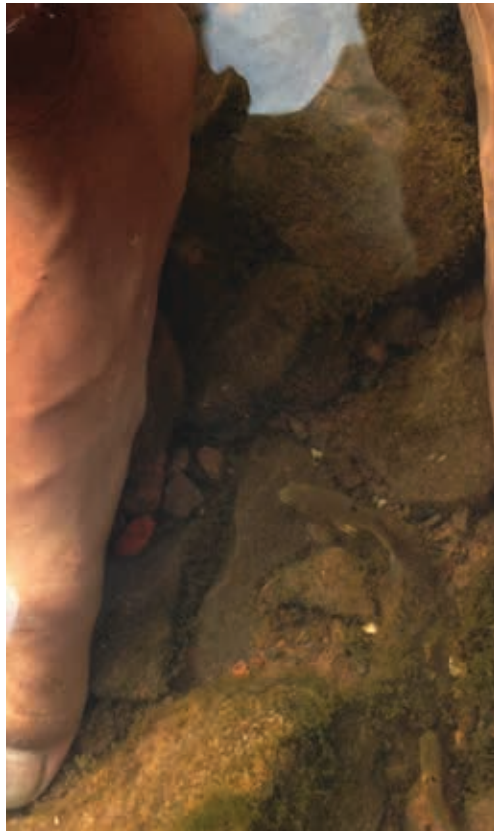
companies are promoting this immoral and inhumane act. By instilling fear into our minds, they are forcing us to take medicines, which actually give birth to more diseases in our bodies. To cure these diseases, more medicines are produced. It’s a viscous cycle. Their objective today is merely to earn more and more profit. Some decades ago, the pharmaceutical industry was seen as a social service group. Supporting these pharmaceutical companies are often those doctors who are regarded as God by many patients and their families. So how does this work? Well, doctors take a certain commission from, let’s say, X Pharmaceutical Company and then prescribe a medicine of the same company to his/her patients. You might be thinking that Rahul has a habit of writing against almost every other institution, and that’s why he is dissing this honourable profession too. But let me tell you, whatever I am saying is from my personal experience. I have taken no medicine in the last five

years, and I’m perfectly healthy. In fact, I have been finding myself better ever since I stopped taking medicines.

Our latest parinda, Vipin Gupta, used to have complete faith in medicines. In fact, he was a researcher for various pharmaceutical companies. Many reputed universities have Vipin’s research papers in their syllabus. He has also worked with a few Nobel Prize winning scientists. A few years ago, however, he started developing doubts about the methods of some of these pharmaceutical companies. Several questions were being raised in his mind about the procedures being followed by them. When he translated these questions into his research, he came across several truths.

He knew that the human body is capable of two key things — reproduction and repairment. For both, our body needs the right environment and the right lifestyle. When he understood the importance of these two elements for the good health of a human body, he started doing several experiments with his life. He quit his job and took initiatives to bring his life closer to nature. His initiatives focused on two things: the first was to ensure he was living in the right environment; and the other was to change his lifestyle in such a way that he would not longer be a slave to medicines.





To further his efforts, Vipin organised several camps across different parts of the country. Through these camps, he was able to interact with people directly and make them aware about how they can tackle diabetes, blood pressure and heart diseases without medicines. To make his efforts reach more people, he even set up an establishment called Sehatvan.

Through Sehatvan, he brings small changes in the lifestyle of people to prevent and cure big diseases.

“While working in this area, one thing became very clear to me – there are two kinds of environments around us.

One is the external environment, which encompasses flora, fauna, water and air; and the other is the internal environment that exists within our bodies. In this second environment, there exists microbiome inside our bodies – we commonly call them “germs”. These microbiome strengthen our immunity system and are as important for us as our external environment. Ironically though, we’re adamant on destroying these environments. In the last 15-20 years, advertisements have played with our minds and our thinking capacities and made us believe that these microbiome are harmful for us,” says Vipin.

He adds, “To kill these human microbiome,

we use sanitisers, soaps and medicines. By using these products, we’re reducing the immunity of our body and making it hollow by the day.”

At Sehatvan, Vipin tries to raise awareness about these issues. He explains to people how, by living in a healthy external environment, we can improve our internal environment. And in this journey, Vipin has seen some dramatic results in the lives of people who suffer from diabetes, blood pressure issues and other lifestyle diseases. Vipin says that if the right lifestyle is adopted, we can even prevent major diseases like cancer.



48

NAVIN

He is a graphic designer, writer and farmstay owner who decided to move away from the city life of Gurgaon to liberate his children from the shackles of mental slavery that the modern education system pushes kids into. As for himself, he wanted to get in touch with his roots. Today, Navin and his family own a farm land and also work with the local community' to improve their livelihood and lifestyle.

Innovator: Navin Pangti
Vocation: Designer, writer & farmstay owner
Location: Almora, Uttarakhand

The insiders

OUR LATEST PARINDEY ARE MEMBERS OF A FAMILY THAT HAS DECIDED TO STAY AWAY FROM THE FAST-MOVING CITY LIFE AND SETTLE DOWN IN A VILLAGE. IN THIS VILLAGE, THEY ARE NOT ONLY RECONNECTING WITH THEIR ROOTS BUT THEY ARE ALSO WORKING WITH THE LOCAL ARTISANS TO HELP CREATE AN IDENTITY FOR THEIR ART AND IMPROVE THEIR LIVELIHOOD.

Navin Pangti hails from Munsiyari region of Uttarakhand. It wasn't long after Navin entered an engineering school that he realised something was amiss. But he wasn't sure; and he couldn't see a clear road ahead of him either. So he graduated as an engineer and then went ahead to study visual communications. He even worked in the areas of graphic designing and video production. Through this route, he was trying to give a new direction to his life.

It was during this phase that Navin started his own company. Though the company was doing well, he wasn't enjoying what he was doing. So he exited from his company after a while and decided to take up freelance projects. Around the same time, his wife

Deepti quit her job with the armed forces and decided to dedicate her time to her children.

For Navin and Deepti, it was pre-decided that they would not send their children to school. Instead, they wanted to homeschool their children and liberate them from the shackles of mental slavery that the modern education system pushes kids into.

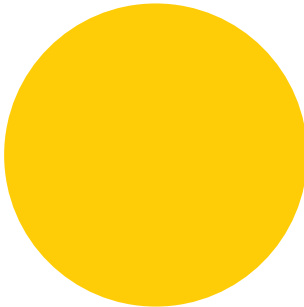
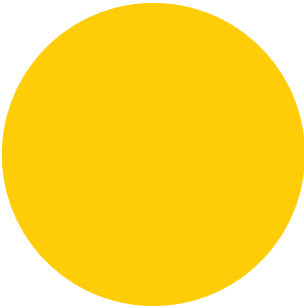
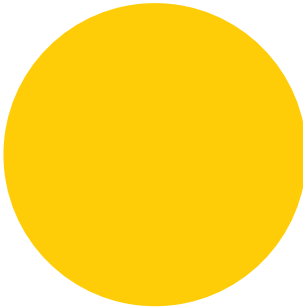
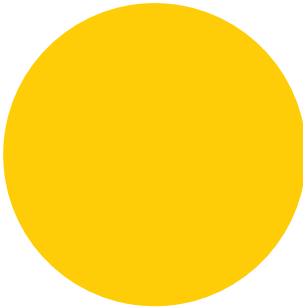
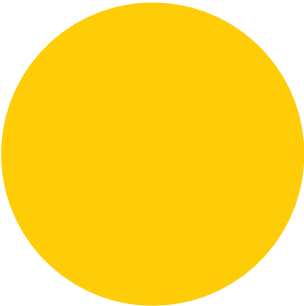
The couple was very sure that it wanted their children to stay as far as possible from the pressure and follow-the-crowd attitude of modern education system. Interestingly, when Navin was working on his freelance projects, he felt the same sort of freedom and liberation that he wanted to give his children. Taking advantage of his free time, he decided to set out on a journey of self-discovery. And soon, he realised that his destination was a village. He wanted to settle down in a village, work in an agricultural field and get in touch with

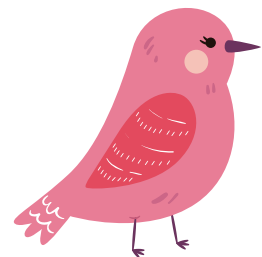
his roots. This vision of his was shared by Deepti but she did not want to force the decision upon her children.

They discussed the matter with their children; and decided to first move from Gurgaon (Haryana) to Haldwani (Uttarakhand). The next step was moving from Haldwani to Almora (Uttarakhand). The idea of this phased-shift was to slowly and gradually accustom their children to lives away from the hustle and bustle of a busy urban life. It was only when the children felt comfortable in Almora that Navin sold his property in Gurgaon and moved to Haldwani so that there was no looking back. Today, they've made a home on that land, where they also manage a small farm.

Navin now wants to start a farm-stay in this region to enable people to really understand the importance and joy of living a life; and to allow them to reconnect with their roots. Navin's efforts also include initiatives through which, at a cooperative level, he can start small enterprises with the village community.

"We first want to build a relationship with the villagers. We don't want the local community to think of us as the 'outsiders'. Until we build an honest relationship with





them, they will not trust us. They will think of us as outsiders with money who can do whatever they want and say whatever they want. To some extent, this is true, too. When a person travels from a city to a village, he/she has these fancy and big things to talk about and flaunt his/her bookish knowledge. However, these are the things that distant a city dweller from a village dweller. Therefore, it is extremely important to mould ourselves into their lives and to become a part of their happiness and sorrow. It is only then that the villagers will be able to build a relation with us and begin to trust us. If we don't do this, we create a hierarchy of sorts that stays with us from the start till the end; and no matter how much we try, this gap will not reduce and a bond of trust will never develop," says Navin.

He adds that in the time to come, the family hopes to earn the villagers' trust. It is only after that that they will start talking to them about the importance of the village, the need to preserve the environment; and opportunity to give an identity to their knowledge. Till then, Navin and his family will continue to work on the community's primary problems such as income, employment and health, among others.

49

NEKRAM

He is credited with solving the fodder crisis in the region by encouraging village to plant trees. Over the years, he has worked with local farmers to reduce their dependence on chemicals and replace cash crops with traditional, indigenous crops and with handloom weavers to increase their self-sustainability.

Innovator: Nekram Sharma
Vocation: Sustainable farmer and handloom promoter
Location: Karsog, Himachal Pradesh

Back to the future

OUR LATEST PARINDA, NEKRAM SHARMA, HAILS FROM A FAMILY OF FARMERS IN KARSOG, HIMACHAL PRADESH. AFTER HE COMPLETED HIS EDUCATION, HE, TOO, JOINED HIS FAMILY IN FARMING ACTIVITIES.

In early 1990s, the Himachal government had launched a literacy campaign; and – always one to help others – Nekram ji associated himself with this initiative. While he continued farming, he also visited various villages to educate people. It was during this period that he came across some academicians and social workers from the state who opened his eyes towards, and gave him a deeper understanding of, the plight of people who live in rural Himachal. And so Nekram ji decided to compliment his literacy initiatives with discussions on pertinent issues in an effort to raise awareness about them among the community members.

One of the major issues he came across in the state was lack of sufficient fodder. When he went deeper into the problem, he understood that excessive felling of trees in the jungles was the reason behind this shortage. And so, Nekram ji decided to start some initiatives for the protection and conservation of forests. His first step was to make people aware about the importance of forests.

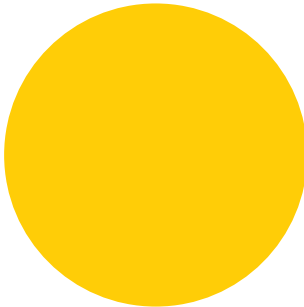
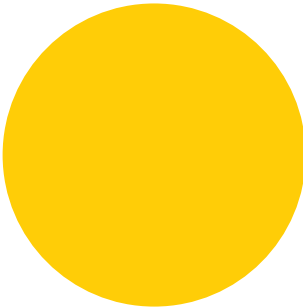
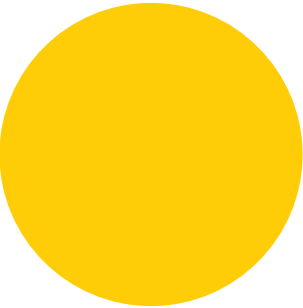
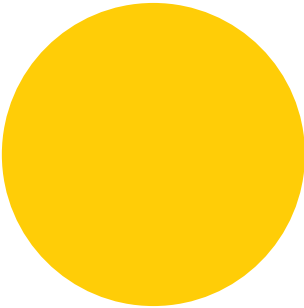
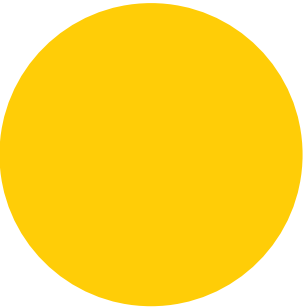
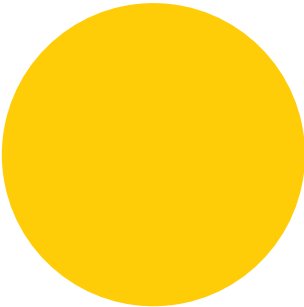
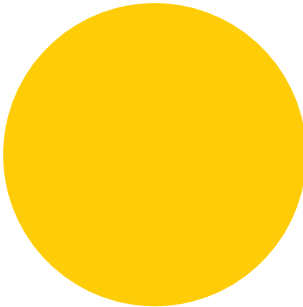
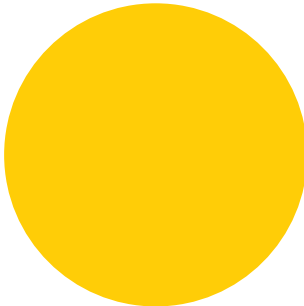
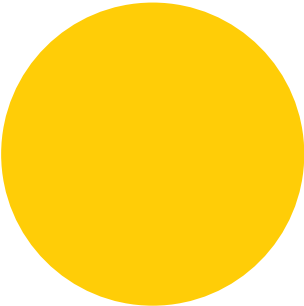
Eventually, Nekram ji and his fellow villagers were successful in planting trees in a hilly area spread across 200 hectares. This solved their fodder crisis to a great extent. In fact, the village no longer felt short of fodder for cattle.

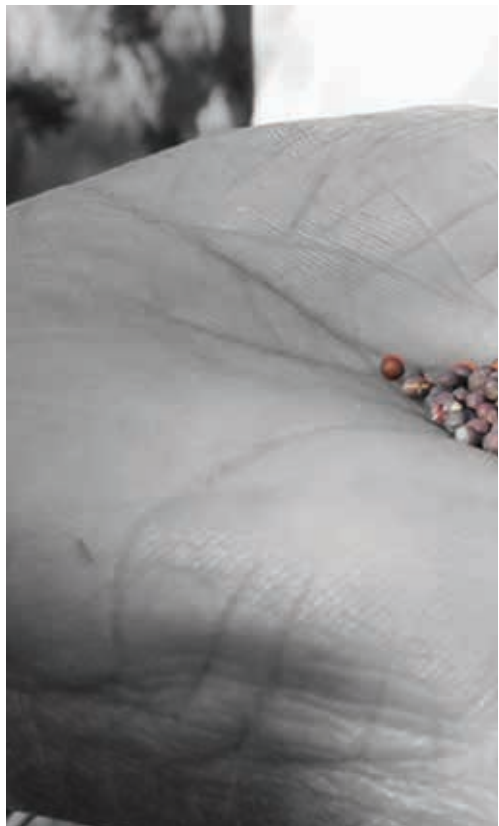
As time passed, Nekram ji became more and more aware of the community and its problems. He noticed that farmers’ dependence on chemical fertilisers had

increased a lot. This was affecting the crop and the farmers’ livelihood. He noticed that people were no longer growing crops to feed their family but to sell it in the market. Indigenous and traditional crops had been replaced with cash crops. The result of these was nutritious food on the plates of those who were growing these crops had reduced. Diseases, which people had never heard of, had started making homes in the bodies of villagers. These realisations were enough to encourage Nekram ji to practice agriculture in a way that protected the seeds. He then distributed the seeds in neighbouring villages to encourage others to grow similar crops.

“Local environment compliments indigenous and traditional crops. These crops hold all the nutritious elements that are necessary for people of that region. They even protect a person from diseases like diabetes, cancer and other heart ailments. At the same time, these crops increase the digestive power and ensure continuous detoxification of bodies, thereby strengthening our muscles, respiratory system and nervous system,” he tells me.

He adds that though farmers have largely quit the practice of growing indigenous





and traditional crops today, these crops had been the key source of their meals for thousands of years. If you look back at our history, malnutrition never existed back then. The crops did not even require fertilisers.

“These crops have been taken off our plates through a well-planned conspiracy. When these crops were staple food for lakhs of Indians, companies that made seeds, chemical fertilisers and medicines were not flourishing. However today, when these crops have gone missing from the fields and the plates, the same companies are expanding by leaps and making four times the profit,” say Nekram ji.

Nekram ji recalls the time when several hydroelectric power projects were commissioned in Himachal Pradesh. The

commissioning of these projects meant threat to rivers and villages. One such project was commissioned near his village, too. This meant that thousands of people from his village and nearby villages would be displaced; rivers would be destroyed; and the entire local ecosystem would be disrupted. But Nekram ji was sure that he would not let this happen; and so he approached the Supreme Court and the National Green Tribunal to stop the execution of this massive project.

Today, Nekram ji is happily settled in Karsog where he works with the local community towards their self-employment and self-sustainability. There are a number of weavers in his region but a market-driven competitive approach has considerably hampered the economy of this sector. However, there are a few elderly men and



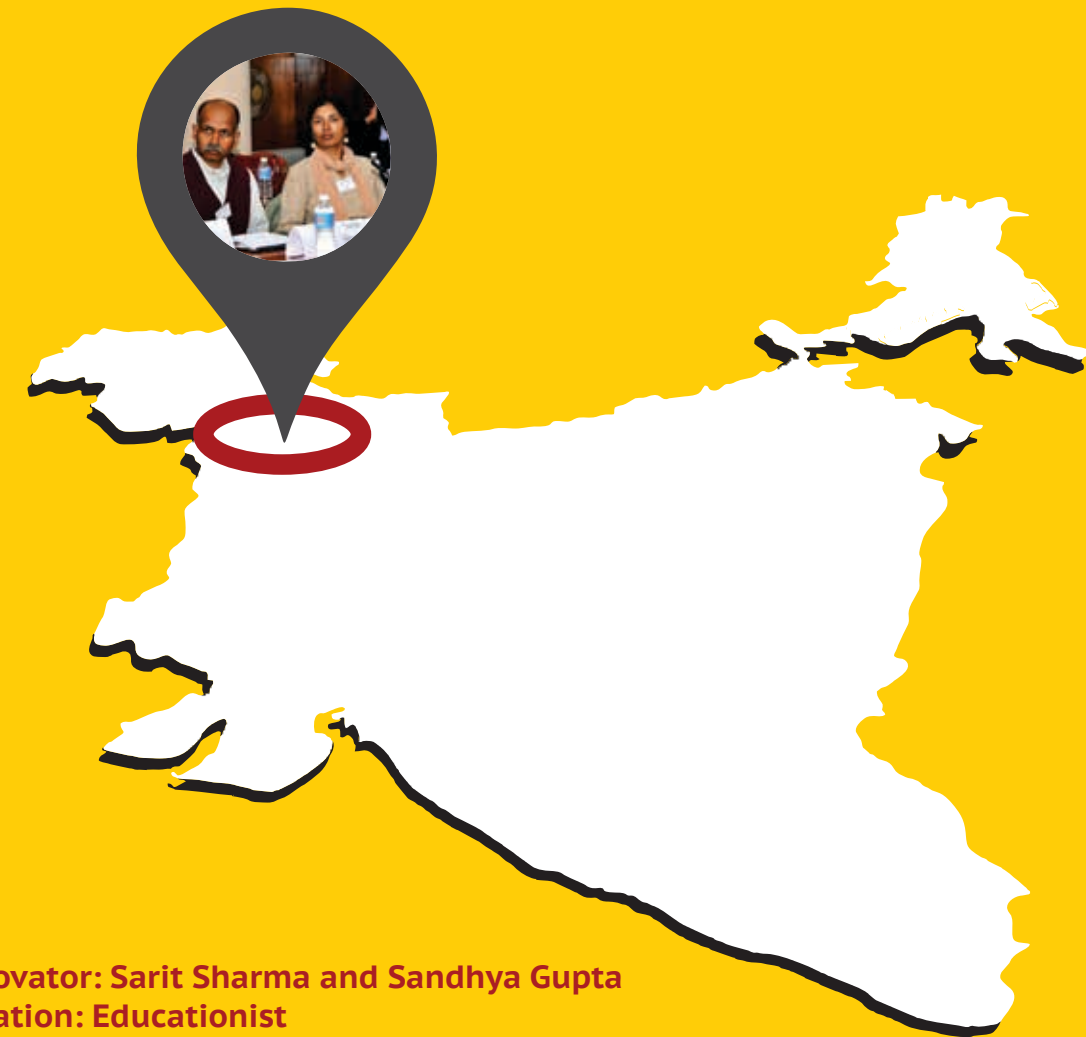
women who still hold the knowledge of this specialised skill and art. Nekram ji is working with this group to reignite the art in the community. He regularly takes the beautiful handloom clothes made in the village to a wider customer base through various fairs and exhibitions in an effort to improve the weavers' livelihood.

Nekram Ji has been involved in such initiatives for the last 25 years. None of this is work for him anymore. In fact, it's his passion and habit. He goes around visiting villages to discuss their issues, raise awareness among them about the solution. I don't think he'll be able to get any sleep if he doesn't do this. He has dedicated his life for the betterment of his community; and whatever time is left, he wants to use that, too, for this purpose.

50

SARIT & SANDHYA

Engineers by profession, the couple use science and mathematics to hone the thinking of the younger generations. Through their alternate education school Aavishkaar, they want to prepare the future of India to build the ability to identify between right and wrong, to stand in society without fear, to raise questions; and find answers on their own.



Innovator: Sarit Sharma and Sandhya Gupta
Vocation: Educationist
Location: Palampur, Himachal Pradesh

Reinventing education

THE JOURNEY OF 52 PARINDEY HAS SO FAR REVOLVED AROUND VOCATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS THAT PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT. HOWEVER, THIS STORY HAS NO DIRECT RELATION TO ENVIRONMENT. IN FACT, THERE IS A SPECIAL REASON FOR SELECTING THIS STORY AS ONE OF THE 52 STORIES.

No matter how much we discuss an issue, we can't find a solution for a problem unless we completely understand it or experience it. To find a solution for any problem, it is important to first find answers to questions surrounding the problem and understand its various aspects in depth. Each of these questions and understanding must be seen as a piece of a larger puzzle. Once you are able to connect all the pieces of the puzzle, only then will you be able to reach to the root cause of the problem and, eventually, solve it. That is what science is all about too.

Our latest parindey from Palampur, Sarit Sharma and Sandhya Gupta, use science and mathematics to gradually develop the

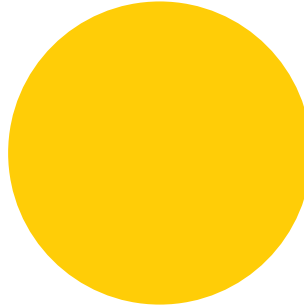
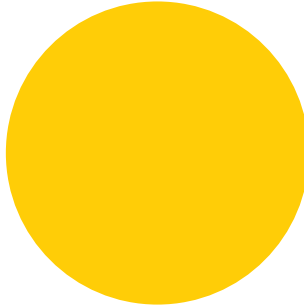
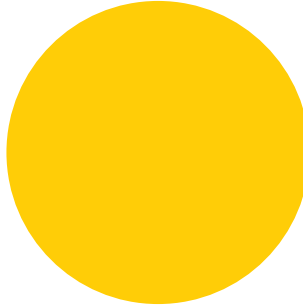
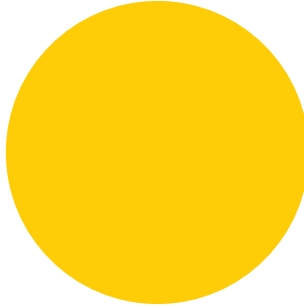
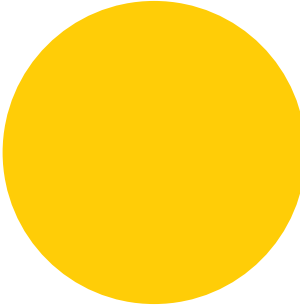
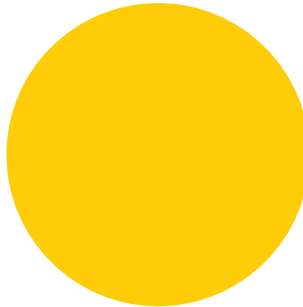
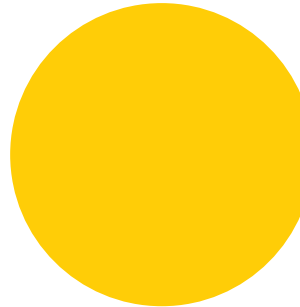
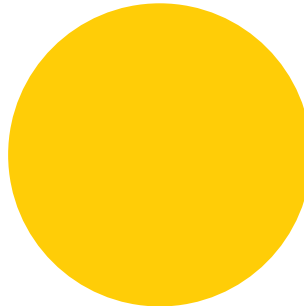
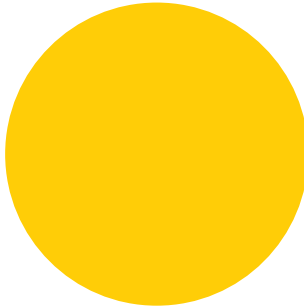
thinking of posterity. Through this, they want to prepare the future generation to have the ability to identify between right and wrong; to stand in the society without fear; to be able to raise questions; and find answers on their own. Sarit and Sandhya are engineers by profession and soul. They enjoy using science and maths for their experiments. After the two completed their education in India, they worked in the country for a few years. When they had earned enough money, they went to the US for their further studies and continued to work there for a decade. Though they had decided that they would not work in the US for more than 10 years, they were not sure what they would do post that. By that time, their daughter was also a little older; and the couple wanted their daughter to know more about her country of origin and its culture. And so, the family decided to return to India. They didn't know what they would do in India, but they had simply picked a location on the map of India and decided to move to that town – Palampur. Their reason

to choose this town was that its weather was nice and it was away from the fast-paced life of a city.

When the couple arrived in Palampur, they too were concerned about their daughter's education just like any other parents. However, Sarit believed that a school wasn't necessary to receive education; one could gain knowledge anywhere. Sandhya, on the other hand, wanted to send her daughter to a school. So she visited and surveyed a lot of schools in the region and finally reached the conclusion that government schools cause the least damage to a student's life. So, Sarit and Sandhya enrolled their daughter in a nearby government school; and took up teaching jobs there as well.

Now that the two were directly connected to an institution, they found several gaps in the education system. So tackle these barriers, the two devised several innovative techniques and incorporated them in their teaching methods. This way, they engaged the students more enthusiastically in topics of science and maths.

Soon after, they established Avishkaar, a platform through which they engaged with students from various parts of the country; and used the medium of science and maths to help youngsters build the power to think, understand and question.





Sarit and Sandhya wanted to make these children independent and capable of doing something good for their society.

“Besides giving lessons, we also organise science fairs in various parts of the country. Though we interact with any and every student, we try to focus on those who come from disadvantaged backgrounds. The reason for this is that we want them to become so capable and independent that they are able to create their own strong individual identities. We want them to be able to represent their society, questions their problems, find solutions for them, and eventually erase the words ‘backward’



or ‘disadvantaged’ from their dictionaries,” says Sarit.

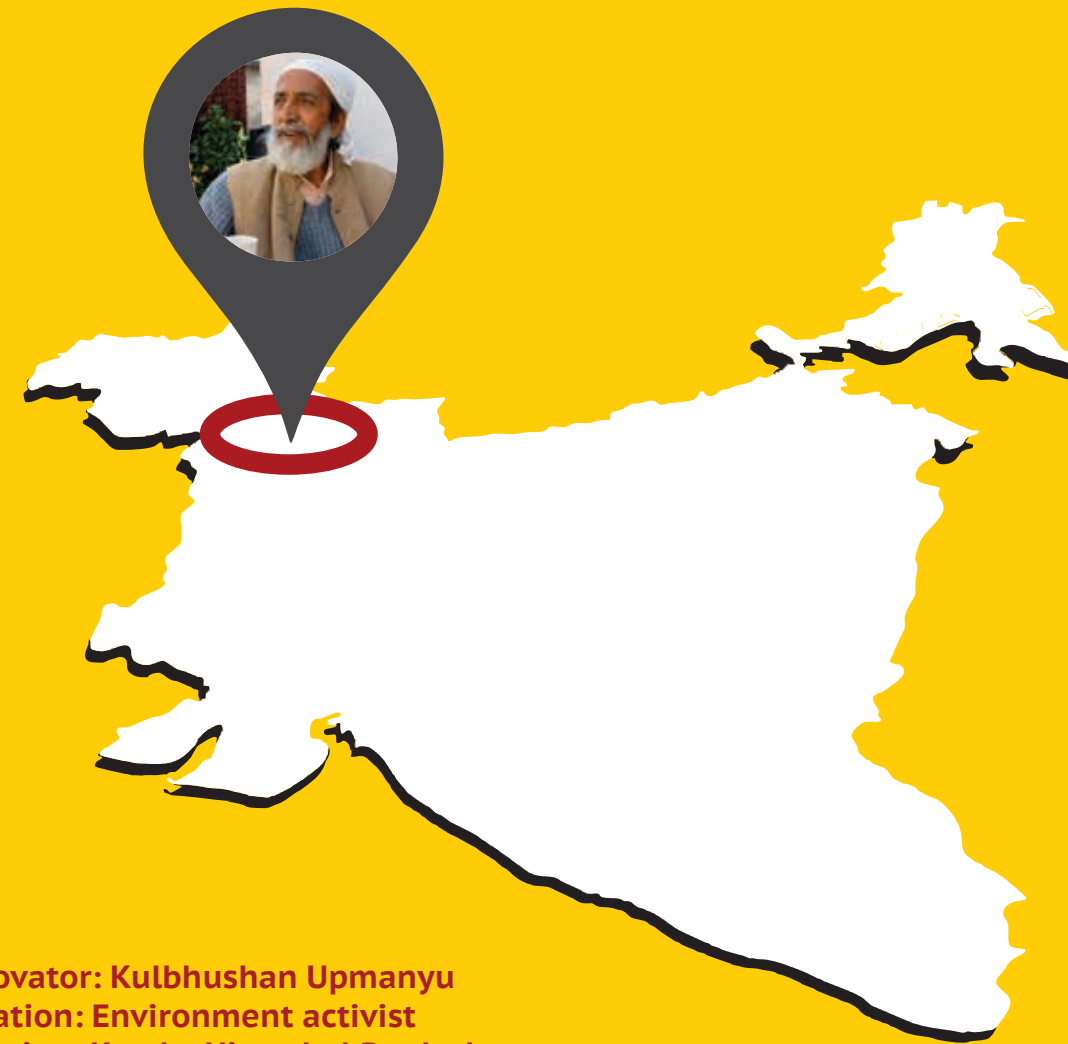
“Maths and science teach us to question things. They force us to think. And when a person is forced to think, he/she begins to raise questions. You can’t find an answer unless you question. And you can only find the right answers if you’ve asked the right questions at every stage,” he adds.

That’s how science works. It makes children observe and question so that they are capable to find the right and wrong on their own. And Sarit and Sandhya enable the children to make this informed decision.

51

KULBHUSHAN UPMANYU

An environment activist who has been involved with the Chipko Movement, he believes he was born to protect the Himalayan and the Himachali environment. He's been a frontline campaigner in raising awareness about forest conservation; and is known for his fights against the government's move of trying to replace indigenous plants with pine and eucalyptus.



Innovator: Kulbhushan Upmanyu
Vocation: Environment activist
Location: Kamla, Himachal Pradesh

Clearing the lungs

OUR LATEST PARINDA IS FROM A VILLAGE CALLED KAMLA IN HIMACHAL PRADESH. FOR THE LAST 40 YEARS, KULBHUSHAN UPMANYU HAS BEEN WORKING TIRELESSLY TOWARDS CONSERVING AND PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT IN THE STATE.

Even during his college days, Upmanyu never liked the word 'job'. To him, a job seemed like just another form of slavery. So when he graduated from school, he decided to look after a piece of agricultural land. At that point of time in his life, Upmanyu saw farming as the only occupation where he didn't have to bow down to any person or institution. Even though, at that time, a Class XII degree meant a guaranteed government job, he decided to stick to farming.

While managing the crops on his land, Upmanyu started an enterprise of processing the harvest, followed by setting up a small grocery shop. However, he soon lost interest in the shop because he realised it's almost impossible to do a good

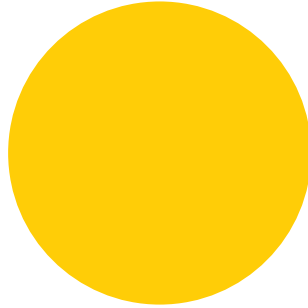
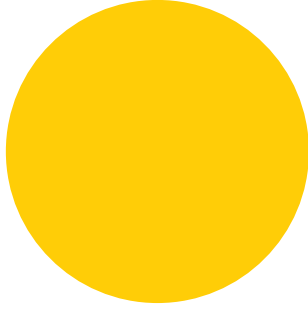
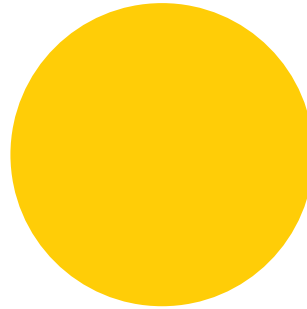
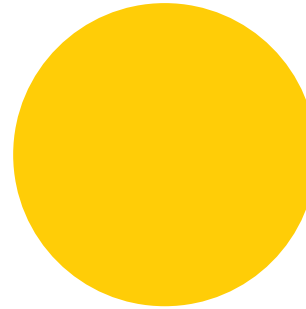
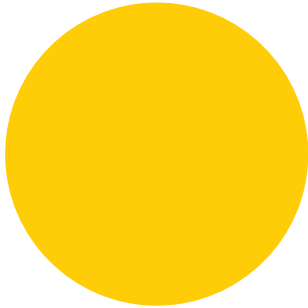
business without lying. He had even begun to question the economic benefits for which had established this small business. He felt even business had become a form of slavery of the modern world; and so he even closed shop soon. However, he felt a strong urge to do something for his village. So he got together with some village men and women; and started a village redevelopment group in 1973. Through this group, Upmanyu started finding solutions to the village's various small problems by solving them at the village and community level. He believed if every problem of the village could be solved within the village, without the need to beg in front of a government official, the village will be able to become self-sustainable. His efforts gave birth to a strong sense and feeling of community-hood in the village. Happy with his efforts, he then replicated this initiative in 10-12 nearby villages.

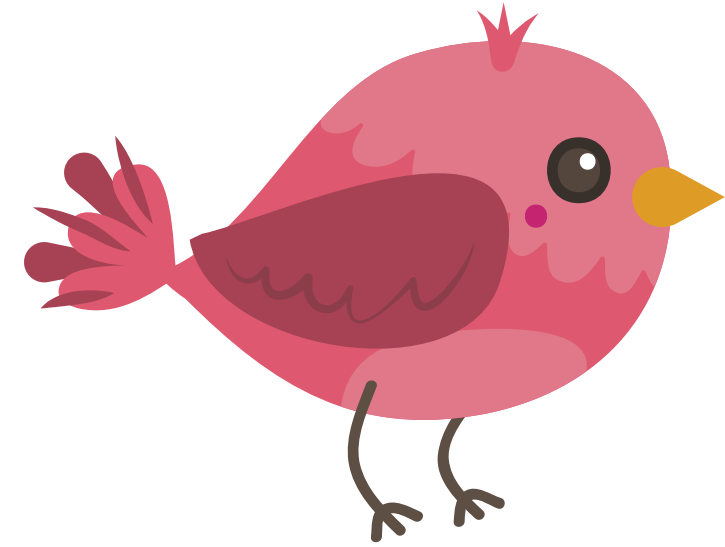
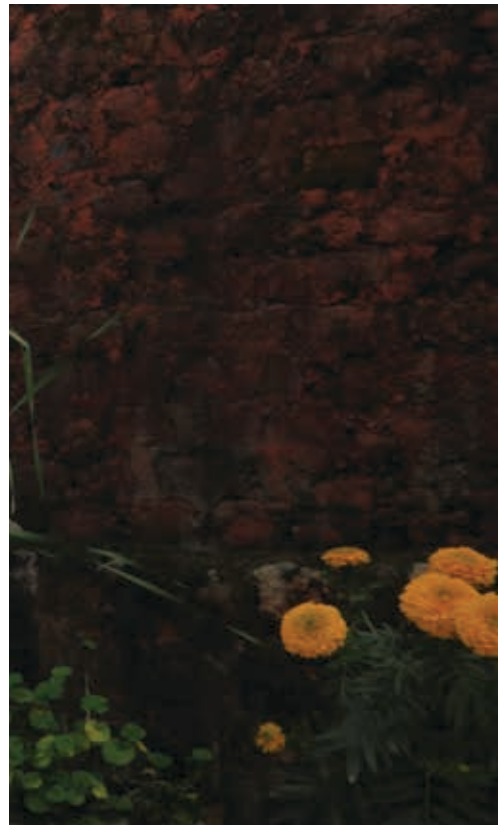
One of the greatest achievements of his efforts has been the complete eradication

of caste-based discrimination in these villages. On the other hand, he continued to make efforts at strengthening the cottage industry-based local economy. However, he soon realised that the problems he was working on were actually much bigger. He was unable to gather enough strength to fight these challenges; and so he decided to focus all his attention and concentrate all his power on one problem rather than on multiple issues.

Around that time, he came across an article on Sundarlal Bahuguna of the Chipko Movement. After reading that article, Upmanyu felt like he had found a reason and aim for his life – to protect the Himalayan and Himachali environment. He could see that the reasons and ideas of safeguarding a jungle were applicable for safeguarding a village too. A village is dependent on the forest for a lot of its needs. And so Upmanyu got in touch with Bahuguna.

In 1981, Upmanyu set out on a journey with the Chipko Movement in various parts of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, where they addressed village men and women. He's been a frontline campaigner in raising awareness about forest and forest conservation. The Himachal government was at that time adamant to destroy the natural forests and replace them with pine and eucalyptus trees, which were not





ideal for the nearby flora and fauna or the ecosystem of the region. Despite threats to the local environment, the government wanted to grab the economic benefits from the region and so it was planting these trees at a mass scale. This led to a major fodder crisis in villages, which were dependent on these forests for food for their cattle.

Upmanyu then came up with a slogan against the government move: “Cheed, safeda band karo; chaare ka prabandh karo.” (Put an end to pine and eucalyptus; bring fodder back). Along with the slogan, he started taking out several processions and participated in many demonstrations. During this struggle, he even had to spend two months in a prison.

The sheer strength of this movement can be gauged by the fact that the slogan is still on people’s lips, 30 years later. Their collective efforts have reaped amazing results. No eucalyptus tree can be planted

anywhere in Himachal now; and even pine can only be planted in areas that are away from populated areas.

Ever since then, Upmanyu has continued his efforts. He has even joined hands with various organisations in the state and created a common platform for them under the banner of Navrachna. Through this platform, the consortium of individuals and organisations voices its opinions about the unfair policies of the government; and helps the government frame new policies.

It is said that the current Himachal Pradesh forest policy is extremely complex, which makes deforestation acts quite difficult in the state. This is one of Upmanyu’s achievements that the government was forced to rework on its forest policy and come up with a stronger one.

“Despite so many efforts and achievements,

the government often finds some way or the other to fell tress. This is the reason our fight is still on, 40 years after we started it. Today, the fight incorporates many other environmental issues such as water, air and development. We are now pressuring the government to come up with a holistic Himalayan Policy. While our fight is to primarily protect Himachal Pradesh, we must understand that more than half the country’s weather and ecosystem is dependent on the Himalayas. If the Himalayas are destroyed, it won’t take long for the country to be destroyed. The Himalayas are the lungs of this country; if the lungs stop functioning, the country will not be able to breathe,” says Upmanyu.

52

AMARJEET

He is a farmer who has been a victim of the Green Revolution for 30 long years. Every harvest turned out to be a failure until he joined the Kheti Virasat Misson, a movement that promotes organic farming. His association with this movement helped him return to his roots and revive the soil quality. Today, he grows more than 70 traditional crops in his field.



Innovator: Amarjeet Sharma
Vocation: Traditional farmer
Location: Faridkot, Punjab

Trade for traditions

THE TIME WHEN FARMERS WERE THE BOON FOR PUNJAB IS A THING OF THE PAST NOW. REALITY IS THAT A FARMER IS CURSE FOR PUNJAB TODAY. THE ENTIRE STATE, IN FACT, IS SUFFERING FROM THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE GREEN REVOLUTION.

The same farmer, who was the provider for the nation until a few decades ago, is now being forced to kill himself due to the lack of grains to even feed his family. During the Green Revolution, the farmers added so much poison into the ground that the poison has now entered our bodies through the food they've grown and we've eaten. The health situation has gone so bad in the state that a train has been named 'Cancer Train' as 60 per cent of its passengers are cancer patients.

In the last 50 years, the farmers of Punjab have broken all ties with nature; and in doing so they have cut the same branch of the tree that they were sitting on. The state through which five rivers flow is today a thirsty state.

The initial results of the Green Revolution were quite surprising. By banking on this initial success, the government and the corporate-agriculture sector fooled farmers across the state.

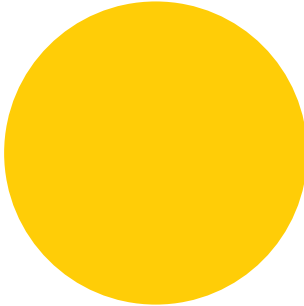
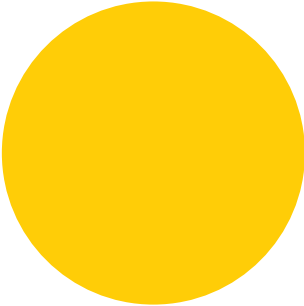
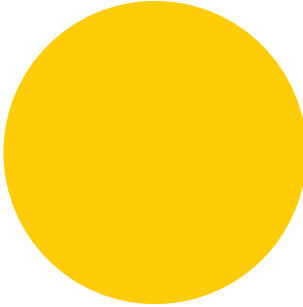
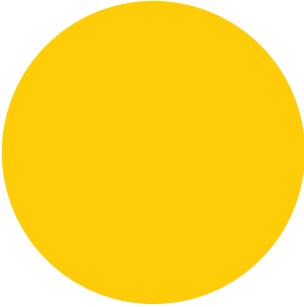
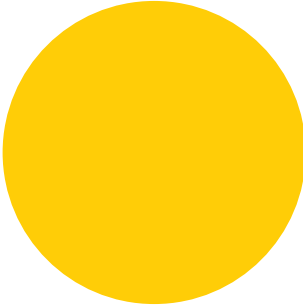
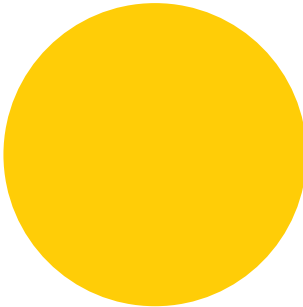
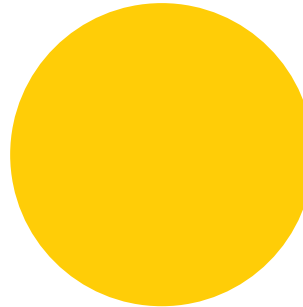
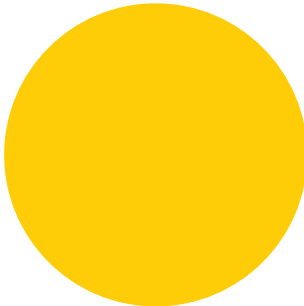
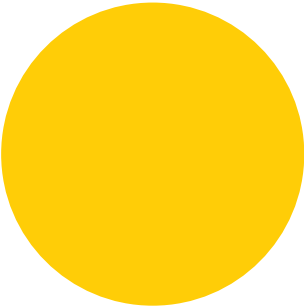
And now, when Punjab is facing the brunt of the movement, the same government and the corporate sector has turned a blind eye towards the problem and those affected by it. Why? Because if the government and the big companies accept their mistake and let the word spread to other farmers of the country, it will have direct consequences on their profit. It will give farmers an upper hand over the government and the companies. And the corporate sector won't let that happen.

The last story in this 52 Parindey series is about a farmer who, too, has been a victim of the Green Revolution. Amarjeet Sharma is a farmer who hails from Faridkot district in Punjab. When Sharma took up farming as a vocation 40 years ago, he started with

adding poison to the soil. For 30 years, he continued to spray chemical fertilisers and pesticides on his land. In the greed for more output and more profit, Sharma even turned to cash crops. However, the profits did not continue to come in for long. In 2005, his entire lot of cotton failed; and he fell into a big debt.

Sometime later, when the government was carrying out field trials for BT cotton, he put faith in the government's initiative and decided to grow BT cotton in his field. He had been told that this crop would not be infected by insects. He did as he was told, added the medicines he was asked to add to the soil, deployed the same techniques that he was told about. He followed step-by-step instructions that were given to him. Yet, his entire lot failed him again. When he ran around for help, no government department or seed/medicine-making company offered him compensation or help of any kind. One of the consequences of this major loss was the suicide of Sharma's son – a loss he still can't get over even today.

"Chemicals have destroyed our lives. Everything from our soil and air to our water and food is polluted today. The more the government has promoted modern techniques of farming in the state, the more our state has gone down the drain. There are hardly any farmers who grow





indigenous crops or use traditional seeds,” says Sharma.

It was a little after this realisation that Sharma joined the Kheti Virasat Mission, a movement that is working to promote organic farming in Punjab. His association with this movement helped him return to his roots and his soil through traditional and organic methods of farming.

“Paddy requires high irrigation, if you add the cost of water to the total input cost of farming, an acre of yield will earn you three to four crore rupees. But this water has no economic value for us, and so we have destroyed the water bodies too. The situation has become such today that people in Punjab, home of five rivers, are being forced to buy bottled water. What could be more shameful for us?” asks Sharma.

Today, Sharma grows more than 70 traditional different crops in his field, which has helped revive the quality of soil in his field. He even conserves indigenous seeds and promotes their use among other farmers. He addresses different groups of farmers to talk to them about the importance of retuning to organic farming.

“If a farmer adopts the traditional model of agriculture, he will be able to meet all the needs of his family from grains and vegetables to spices and clothes,” Sharma tells other farmers.

It’s not just the greed of the farmers but the greed of the state government as well that is responsible for the destruction of Punjab. It is necessary for both parties to accept responsibility for this. If Punjab has to be saved, farmers will have to return to their traditional practices of agriculture.



Farmers will have to create a new crop cycle. Farmers will have to reestablish their bonds with nature. And none of this is possible until the farmers step out of the Green Revolution chain. On the other hand, the government will have to establish research centres across the state and the country to promote traditional farming; and ensure that the farmers are involved in the state-level dialogues and policy-making.

A farmer understands the nitty gritty of farming. Those who wear ties to work, sit in fancy offices and live in big bungalows cannot understand the realities of agriculture.

us. However, there is a very valid reason behind it. The people we care about are often the reason why we hesitate to change ourselves. When that happens, we become so dissatisfied that we feel lost. But it does not mean we are not on the right track. It simply means that we are learning to deal with some new experiences, emotions, realities and expectations. It isn't easy to deal with all these things and so when the change comes it becomes pleasure.

Hence, there is no need to be afraid. We just have to come out of our comfort zone, listen to our inner self and stay with these feelings. We need to take them for what they really are, accept and acknowledge them and enjoy the process. Because all the learning we need to be happy in life comes from the process and not from its outcome. Change is just a milestone in the journey called life.

..



ABOUT DIGITAL EMPOWERMENT FOUNDATION:

Established in 2002, New Delhi-based non-profit Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF) aims to connect unreached and underserved communities of India in an effort to bring them out of digital darkness and equip them with access to information. With the belief 'Inform, Communicate and Empower,' DEF finds sustainable digital interventions to overcome information poverty in rural and remote locations of India, and empower communities with digital literacy, digital tools and last mile connectivity. In the last 16 years, DEF has digitally enabled more than 50,00,000 lives through its footprints in more than 500 locations across 125 districts of 23 Indian states.

ABOUT SWARAJ UNIVERSITY:

Swaraj University was designed and birthed in 2010 as a two-year learning programme for youth. The vision of this programme is to nurture the heart's calling of young people with an understanding of how their actions or choices are interconnected and impacting all our communities and nature. The two-year programme initiates the process of being self designed learners and engages youth in developing the skills and practices they need to manifest their vision. Each person's learning programme and curriculum is individualized according to his/her specific talents, questions and dreams. There is no prior degree or diploma required to join Swaraj University, nor does it award one at the end of two years.

ABOUT SHIKSHANTAR:

Shikshantar, a Jeevan Andolan (life movement), was founded to challenge the culture of schooling and institutions of thought-control. Today, factory schooling and literacy programmes are suppressing many diverse forms of human learning, intelligence and expression, as well as much needed organic processes towards just and harmonious social regeneration. Schooling is the crisis. In the spirit of Vimukt Shiksha, Udaipur-based Shikshantar is committed to creating spaces and processes where individual and communities can together engage in dialogues to meaningfully critique transform existing models of education, development and progress.





52

PARINDEY

52 Parindey brings to you stories of 52 innovators who are making a conscious and sustainable living for themselves and the planet through alternate careers in Indian towns and villages.

Supported by



Institutional Partners

SHIKSHANTAR

Swaraj University

