UNSETTLED BY RAIN
A State on the edge.
Agenda for Survival: a course on Policies, Politics & Practices of Environmental Management in the Developing World

Objective
Interdisciplinary month-long summer certificate course on environment/development issues allows Indian participants to understand and critically evaluate issues that lie at the interface of environment & development; poverty; democracy, equity & justice.

Programme design
Classroom lectures, seminars, several local field excursions, a week-long field visit to rural India, together with innovative, challenging project individual and/or group work. Participants are given an intense briefing on issues that are of concern to India and other developing countries. Field trips and meetings with communities serve to illustrate innovations and eco-restoration efforts that communities make to enable them to face the challenges of managing their natural resources base.

Agenda for Survival 2013 Participants
On the brink...

Agenda for Survival ’13 was adamant on making us realise the true essence of survival. Being on the ground where the disaster is shaping up gives you a unique perspective. We encountered rain, landslides, long treks and a prolonged wait to be rescued on the week-long field trip to Kinnaur in Himachal Pradesh, bang in the middle of the heaviest rainfall event in Kinnaur’s memory. In this adventure, we also met people who encounter such situations routinely.

Many people made our journey memorable, be it Capt. J. M. Pathania (DC, Kinnaur), the folks at the Karcham army base, Vidya Karan, Ashok, Raju, the *chai wala* at Baspa II hydro electric project, Pyarelal and Narayanji, our fellow travellers, ferrying us uphill. The locals who gave us water, showed us the way when we were lost, chatted with us and made our uphill trudge easy. People distributing fruits and hope to trudging trekkers in Tapri and those serving *sharbat* to weary travellers and survivors all along the devastated Sutlej valley.

Sure, government will send help. Policy wonks will argue on news TV. Soon well knitted communities of these young mountains will get back to its feet. Soon tourists too will trudge up and pitch their tents under the clear blue sky beneath the pristine deodars. Life will need to be up and going.

For now at least, the rubble that surrounded us and the angry, swollen rivers has halted all ‘developmental’ activities. A few questions still haunt us. Is hydro really ‘green’ as some say? What is the cost of the green? Is this the development that we need for future India? What if this is a beginning to a chain of such debacles? What if the impending disasters get worse? What if they are aggravated by our attempts towards mindlessly developing such fragile ecosystems? Do we really need such development? Should those whose needs are few bear the brunt of our needs – more electricity, more food, more land...

The stories in this magazine are based on our encounters in Kinnaur. They reflect our collective determination to question the kind of development good for this fragile landscape and its people.

*Sagar Joukanti
Amirtharaj Stephen*
Although women are a rare sight in a labour chowk, Sumati, from Jhansi (left) and her friend wait for a day’s work at the Okhla labour chowk in New Delhi. They typically get cleaning chores and earn Rs 200 to Rs 300 each day.

Gabbar Singh, from Farrukhabad District in Uttar Pradesh, has been living in Delhi for the last eight years. Another Indian farmer to whom leaving his land fallow was far more profitable than cultivating it, he was approached by two land dealers, Abdul Salam and Kaushal who promised him land worth Rs.60,000 in Prahladpuri in Delhi in return for his village farmland. He handed over his land to them and came to Delhi. Once in Delhi he realized there was no land for him in Prahladpuri. He handed over his land to them and came to Delhi. Upon returning to his village he realized his farmland had also changed hands. He tried finding employment with NREGA but found that the muster rolls were manipulated and the middlemen appropriated the number of working days. Having lost his land and exhausted alternative means of employment, Gabbar Singh came to Delhi as a labourer. “We are sometimes made to work for nine to 10 hours in a day and beaten when we ask for our wages. Some labourers are given no food, but may get water if they are lucky,” he says.

Sonu, 22 years is a resident of Sangam Vihar. He came to Delhi from Pailabar in UP. He has studied till the intermediate level and has worked as a supervisor in the NREGA projects in his village. Sonu came to the city to look for some form of gainful employment. Sonu called one of the umpteen phone numbers that abound the walls of Delhi’s public spaces advertising for employees. These posters announce opportunities, lucrative salaries and also other living amenities. Upon getting in touch with one of those numbers, he was asked to come to an office. There he was asked to deposit Rs.1000 as a security and another Rs.50 as the form fees. He was then called for an interview at Okhla and was told he will have to
work as a medical representative. The terms of employment stated that for the first three months he wouldn’t be paid any salary. Thereafter, he will be paid Rs.4,000 every month and three-fourth of his earnings would go to the company. After 10 months, he will start getting paid Rs.14,000 per month and may also get all the other promised amenities. Sonu had no means to survive till then and could not take a chance with the offer. He lost his security deposit. Sonu also said, “There were 20 other people for the interview. They had all come in a similar manner and were similarly exasperated”. Pankaj is another young man who had come to Delhi and faced similar exploitation. He went to the Kapashera Border near Gurgaon and was asked to pay Rs.850 which he had to borrow. He doesn’t go back home anymore as he had borrowed further to survive in the city and cannot afford the luxury of missing work.

We met Sunil on the banks of the Yamuna near Kashmere Gate, ISBT. He lives with nearly five thousand others like him in this area extending to Majnu ka Tila. Sunil came to Delhi from Bengal following a land dispute with his brother. He has received primary education and can drive. He is recovering from an accident and has been in one of the shelters in this area for the last five months. He too came to Delhi looking for a job, stayed on, got disheartened and today is an abandoned, homeless human being with no relations with anyone from his village.

The public spaces in Delhi abound with these kind of advertisements and while contacted on the guise of a migrant one such advertiser responded and introduced himself as Hakim. He advised us to go to an office in the Badarpur area with Rs.1050. He told us that the work involved sorting, packing and transporting medicines for a pharmaceutical company which goes by the name of G.M. Ltd. Interestingly, he also warned us of possible pitfalls in these kind of job offers.

Harsh Mander, an ex-bureaucrat and prominent labour activist, said close to 200 labour laws have been introduced in the country. But few, if any, pertain to the protection of migrant labour. “Labour reforms anywhere in the world have always meant lesser and lesser protection for labour”, he said.

People come to this city seeking a better life, some survive, some struggle and some lose. The migrant population and the exploitation that they face in this city has assumed alarming invisibility. The public spaces in Delhi thrive on the invisible walls of affluence and privileges. Our cities have stopped taking notice of the migrant population that waits for employers in the discreet bylanes of this city or on the road dividers of the south extension market. The advertisements that place the lucrative bets for these labourers still abound the walls of Delhi. Neither our aesthetics nor our regulatory mechanisms seem to be noticing.
The offroaders

ARISTO MENDIS & JESSICA LUIS

If you ever thought that careers in environment were only about wearing lab coats, clockwork routines and ‘petri dish’ jobs, then consider to reconsider. Meet three dynamic personalities, who have taken up seemingly usual fields and turned them on upside down to prove that green jobs can also be a fun-filled enthralling experience.

“The satisfaction you get from working in smaller areas and seeing the change is far more greater than working for the sole reason of money.”

ARTI GUPTA

English Scholar turned Wilderness Explorer

I work in a venture called Mountain Cruize. For the last sixteen years I’ve also been into environmental education and was a resource person for organizations like TERI and WWF. I quit my job with UNDP in Delhi and returned to Himachal Pradesh. Initially after graduating in English literature I was going to be a teacher, but my love for adventure and wilderness led me to do this and I never looked back ever since.

What activities are included in your camps?

We organize various types of camps. We also do something called ‘Leave No Trace’ activities in our camps, which run on the principle of leaving minimum impact behind on the environment. We give teams rations of food and other camping essentials which they have to make do with till they trek to the destination. These camps give a firsthand kind of learning experience, and teach team-building over even simple exercises like building a campfire.

What’s been the highest point of your career so far?

I’ve been able to give my son and the rest of the family time and also focus on my work. Gradually we dream of making this venture into an adventure institute in the future. That, in my opinion will be a high point for sure.

What’s your advice to other budding aspirants?

Firstly, choose the specific area of interest and then learn more about it. Another thing that helps is to explore the place where you finally want to be based in future.

GAURAV SHOREY

The Sustainability Guru

I work with an NGO called Swaraj (Swaraj) whose aim is passing on traditional knowledge and sustainable living in the Indian context. The five components that we absolutely need for sustainability that we work on are Bhasha (Dialect), Vesh (Dress), Bhajan (Dance & Music), Bhojan (Diet) and Bhavan (Dwellings).

What were you doing before you came up with this project?

I am by qualification, an architect. I was working as a green buildings consultant in an organization called The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI). The idea for Swaraj came up when I was doing my research in Delhi on national level policies on how to make buildings green in India. It lead me to realize that the answer is not only in addressing only water, or only buildings independently; the answer lies in addressing all these five components simultaneously. We needed to look within instead of outside, we want to blindly ape developed nations to catch up with them, but is it logically possible? It’s important that we don’t disconnect with our traditional knowledge in the process.

What are the activities that you carry out?

For now, we do workshops in schools and colleges and even for working professionals in cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai and Bangalore. Our aim is to make people realize that the language that they have been brought up speaking, the clothes that they wear, and the food that they have been brought up eating is what makes them what they are. One fun activity we do in our workshops for instance, is giving participants a three meter long cloth and telling them to design attire for another climate zone of the country without cutting the cloth but using knots and pleats. In the long run, Swaraj can
only thrive by us going into the heartland of rural India and collecting information from them. Our long term aim is to reverse the trend of people leaving their villages and coming to cities by making them realize that what they are sitting on is a goldmine.

How do you link these goldmines of traditional knowledge to the urban crowd?
The key lies in languages. For instance, the Khasi dialect of Shillong has thirty words for rain alone, for different forms of rain like sleet, hail, and drizzle, flood level rain and so on. The problem is that in most states in India, what’s being forwarded is either English or Hindi, which is entirely killing off dialects. Now what’s interesting to note over here is that if you look at any developed country, they are very proud of speaking their mother tongue. And countries like France and Germany want us to learn their language. Why don’t we have a similar mindset? One of our intentions is to open a school on languages, so if instead of say, French, someone wants to learn Khasi, or even Rajasthani or Haryani bolvis, they can just hop in and take a summer school lesson. We’re looking at something that doesn’t require heavy infrastructure or libraries. I only need one local person who speaks that language and can teach it to others.

You advice to people who want to strike out and do something like this?
You should be in love with what you’re doing, not in love with why you’re doing it. A lot of people are in love with the reason why they’re doing something, “I’ll get a lot of money”, or “I’ll get to go abroad”, or “My parents will be impressed”, is what one usually hears.

So you can get that kind of insight when you fall in love with what you do. It allows you to give a rat’s ass about what the world thinks you’re doing.

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“What we are born with and brought up with, we are not familiar with.”
Gaurav Shorey

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Dr. VANEET JISHTU

Adrenaline Junkie Botanist

I am a scientist working with the Himalayan Forest Research Institute, Shimla. I work as a field botanist and taxonomist in the cold deserts and forests of Himalayas. I am also currently working on the viability of an arboretum that’s to be based near Shimla which will include about 150 native species from the region which will help the public get a look at the rich biodiversity of the Himalayan landscape.

How did you get into this field?
I had always loved the wilderness; trekking and photographing wild flowers. At a crucial point in my career came along Dr. G.S. Goraya who observed my interest towards plants and encouraged me to do more towards the taxonomy and identification of plants. I started going for field trips with him and other reputed botanists, which included scribbling down notes about plants and their descriptions and coming back to study the flora in depth. Now we can identify almost ninety-five percent of plants just by looking at them, all thanks to the extensive field visits.

What’s been the high point of your career so far?
The high point of my career came around 15 years ago when I was nominated as a member of the “Multidisciplinary Committee to Monitor Environmental Safeguards” of the Baspa HEP – II dam of JP Industries.

What’s your advice to other budding aspirants?
These days, parents lead their children in the well-towed line of civil services, doctors, engineers and so on. However, my advice to the younger lot would be to venture into unorthodox careers, which are more challenging and personally satisfying. If in any case you want to work in the environmental field, I personally recommend “Taxonomy”. This is one field where there is hardly any competition, and off late there is a great demand for good taxonomists; because this subject is the basis of any environmental activity, both faunal and floral.

“The field is the best teacher. I wouldn’t have learnt from books all that I got from hands-on experience.”
Dr. VANEET JISHTU

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Dark Knights of the Ruins

Vigilantes, not vermin...

Jessica Luis and Aristo Mendis stumble upon the real life bat caves of an urban landscape...

It was a typical sweltering Delhi noon and the class was walking through the lanes of Mehrauli on a field trip. We were being run through how the town looked once upon a time, where lakes and orchards once stood, and weaving in and out of forts and ruins left behind from a bygone era. By the time we came to Jahaz Mahal, everyone was looking up at the domes and admiring the architecture of the now abandoned building, and furiously scribbling notes and diagrams of corbelled arches and true arches.

Suddenly, out of the blue we saw a tiny bat hanging stealthily on the darker side of a wall. The Lesser Mouse Tailed Bat, had been there, unnoticed, while we were looking up at the ornate decorations of the impressive structure.

This got us wondering. How many of these elusive winged mammals do we unknowingly share our space with in this city? Where do we find them? What do they actually do? Do they just hang around monuments, hidden from sight during the day and then fly around to hunt at night?

But most importantly, does anyone give a damn about them? So many questions and so few answers...

So we decided we’d do a little research of our own, in and around Delhi. Turned out Jahaz Mahal was not the only monument these creatures inhabited.

Bats are nocturnal, so we humans tend to interact minimally with them since we share different spaces and time frames, which is why we cloak them with a shroud of myth and mystery. They also live in abandoned areas, places that we humans tend to fear and neglect. There are many places in this city where these winged mammals congregate, which may be known or unknown to us. Apparently on hot summer days, bats prefer to roost in the cool darkness of forts and ruins to escape the heat, before they go out to hunt at night.

The first was Khirki mosque in the heart of bustling Saket, New Delhi. It took us a while to find the now abandoned building amidst the winding lanes. When we finally got there, we asked some kids where the “Chamkadar” were. The pungent smell of guano and the rustling of wings was a giveaway. As we entered the cave, we had to duck as a hundred Lesser Mouse Tailed Bats whooshed over our heads.

For the next few hours we covered other historical
monuments in Delhi that these bats may call home, like Agrasen ki Baoli and Humayun’s tomb. Armed with torches, we looked in damp dark places listening to high-pitched squeaking and the rustling of wings, surrounded, by the scent of guano. The number of bats we found that day was astounding. From hordes of lesser Mouse Tailed bats, to tiny shy Pipestrelles. They were hard to identify, which made us realize how little we know about these impressive creatures.

Bats happen to be the most species rich order of mammals in India. For instance, the felid order that includes the tiger and leopard has only fifteen species. In comparison, the order of bats or ‘Chiroptera’ in India sum up to more than 114 representative species. But surprisingly, there have been almost no studies done on them in our country.

A daunting fact that we came across is that, all bats in India except for Wroughton’s Free-tailed Bat and Salim Ali’s Fruit Bat are considered ‘vermin’ under Schedule V of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. This has been criticised by a lot of naturalists.

We interviewed one of the very few people working on the bat fauna of Delhi, Sumit Dookia who teaches at the M.Sc. Biodiversity & Conservation course at GGS Indraprastha University, New Delhi. He is at present working on the status and taxonomy of bats in Delhi region.

He thinks public opinion is very much against bats. And many a times, this is due to mythological grounds. “Some feel that bats can attack people and suck blood, but this too is not the apparent case. One of our motives is clear out these myths among the general populace”, he says.

When we asked him about his opinion regarding the bats that share the urban landscape with humans in Delhi, he quotes, “So far bat fauna of Delhi has not yet been explored as such. I feel that the security of all major monuments is with ASI (Archaeological Survey of India) and bats belong under the purview of the forest department. One of the reasons no extensive studies have been done as of yet maybe due to the over-interference of ASI (Archeological Survey of India) and Forest Department in this matter. The coordination between these two organizations also seems to be completely lacking.”

While we may be far away from adapting trends in other places where people are exploring the likes of cave tourism and tolerance towards bats, we can probably try to co-exist with these creatures that share our urban space.

So next time you look up at the night sky, do try to notice these nocturnal vigilantes who live amongst you.

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If the vermin status is considered to be a hardbound fact, then what about the ecological importance that bats serve?

Bats in general are divided into two basic and generic groups - the first being comparatively large fruit-eating bats (Megachiroptera) and the second ones include all small insectivorous bats (Microchiroptera) with unique nose features. The large ones inhabit trees and open canopies. And these are the ones that usually aid in seed dispersal. The remaining bats are the ones that inhabit caves and old monumental structures. These ones are predominantly the ones who aid in pest control.

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So next time you look up at the night sky, do try to notice these nocturnal vigilantes who live amongst you.
When the roadside thela can serve your meal hot but not fresh

SAYLEE SALVI

Ek Mutter Parantha please, I said to the vendor. Kitna time lagega? Madam, 15 minutes.

What? Why? Are you going to the fields to pluck muttar? The man looked at me and smiled.

Yes, this is Nehru Place, an important financial, trade, commercial and business hub of South Delhi – large four storey buildings with underground parking and an expanse of free pedestrian plaza in the centre. This pedestrian space is busy and alive with hawking stalls selling all kinds of wares – clothes, cheap electronics, shoes, books and most importantly, Food. Many stalls dot the pedestrian space, which includes the Chaat stalls, Chinese, Indian, Tibetan food, fruit juices and more.

My mutter parantha finally arrives in a silver packet. Here, madam is your paratha says, Lato Yadav the food stall wala where I have been waiting to grab a bite for the last quarter of an hour. But aren’t food hawkers supposed to be conjuring food at the stall hot, fresh and sumptuous?

So why an aluminium foil wrapped parantha instead? “Madam, all food thela (hawking stall) owners at Nehru Place, but no one cooks their food on the thela. We are not allowed to use gas or cook directly on our thelas. The authorities do not allow us.”

I think I know why. It’s the Supreme Court Order February 2007, which prohibits cooking of food at the stalls, but has provision for the food to be pre-cooked at the home of the food vendor and packed and sold at the stall. But isn’t that ridiculous? Thela food is suppose to be fresh and hot so why this stricture?

The neighbouring restaurants, and permanent food stalls attached to the complex that have a permanent structure and kitchen attached to them are able to keep cooking fresh food through the day as per the demands and orders by the consumers.

“But how many can afford to eat at the restaurant everyday? This is an office area and in an office there are people that earn 5000, 10000, or even 50000. Can everyone eat at the restaurants,” wonders Omprakash, who is a regular at one of the thelas.

When the Supreme Court had ordered a ban on cooking at the food stalls, it had raised issues of the unhygienic conditions around food stalls that could be harmful to the people eating at the stalls. But how can cleanliness be monitored especially, when food is cooked, packed, transported from far off and sold.

Ram Prasad, who owns a food thela nearby says, “We do not cook what we sell at home. We have a small house. At home we have our wives and children. We pool in together and have a place about a kilometre away, behind the parking
lot where we cook till about 11am, just before the office lunch hours, so that the food is warm when the customers arrive”. Every thela owner begins his business about the same time and wraps by late evening, selling an average of 50-70 plates per day. There is a regular stream of clients that are catered to.

The food vendors say the authorities also point to risks of combustion and blast, if cooking is permitted on food stalls. However, some like Karim khan, a book stall vendor on the street refutes, “I believe that these food thelas are still in the centre in the pedestrian plaza. The hotels and permanent stalls, fast food joints that are within the complex are more a risk to the complex and its offices.”

The Nehru Place commercial zone is a pilot project, in collaboration between DDA and Manushi Sanghthan an NGO since the year 2006. As a model pilot project, the Nehru Place could set an example in designed planning, by incorporating facilities for safe, hygienic, clean cooking for the street food vendors. The Supreme Court which had issued a ban on the street side cooking, itself later has stressed the need on the part of the MCD (Municipal Corporation of Delhi) to provide for infrastructure for hygienic cooking conditions. The BIS (Bureau of Indian Standards) has prepared and finalized norms that pertain to the quality of street food. These norms stipulate the practices for safe cooking and the location of food stalls that can ensure food quality standards.

In the recent years there have been a few policies and laws that have been created around the hawking community. Almost all of these policies and laws make an effort to regularise and facilitate the hawking community. The National Policy on Urban Street Vendors, 2009, prepared by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation, states its overarching objective “...to promote a supportive environment for the vast mass of Urban street vendors to carry out their vocation while at the same time ensuring that their vending activities do not lead to overcrowding and unsanitary conditions in public spaces and streets.” It also tries to create for organisation and civic facilities for the hawking community. The policy that covers all kinds of urban street vendors, suggests facilities of cold storage for meat, fish vendors, electricity, clean drinking water, public toilets, protective covers to protect the hawkers and their wares from dust, sunlight and rains. However, the list of civic amenities fails to cover facilities for food stall owners to help them cook safe and hygienically without too much hindrance to their daily business. The different spatial planning norms mentioned in the policy also have no provisions in this regard. The Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006, that makes provision for registration and licensing of all food businesses, including food hawkers. With inadequate facilities to supply fresh food, it seems unlikely that the Act will meet its objectives, within the hawking community.

In the Nehru Place commercial complex alone, there are 70-80 odd food hawkers. The number of food stalls across Delhi are estimated by some studies to be around 60,000-80,000. Considering the large population that might be dependent on the street food vendors for their daily meals, it is imperative, that policy makers formulate policies and provide facilities that would cater to the large street food dependent section of population.
UNSETTLED BY RAIN

INCESSANT RAIN FOR 60 HOURS, SIX FEET OF THICK SNOW ON THE MOUNTAINS WITHIN THREE DAYS, COUNTLESS LANDSLIDES, HOMES WASHED AWAY AND PEOPLE STRANDED...KINNAUR, JUNE 2013.

The rain had followed us all the way from Kalka to Sangla. Treacherous roads carved into the mountains were flanked by the Baspa. We were told, that the waterfalls that once flowed into the river had disappeared and dams had sprung all over. The tents at Azad Kashmir kept us cozy, till the rain started seeping in. At the break of dawn the next day, we trekked up to Wonderland in Sangla town, our abode for the next few days. The rain was still sharp. The power failed the next day. Our batteries and the solar torches died. Water was scarce and firewood was over...we were stranded! Each time the sky cleared, the mountains looked whiter – six feet of snow fell within three days, we were told. After sixty hours, on the third day, the sky cleared and we ran off to the helipad at the Baspa-II hydropower plant. We had to trek, cross gushing water, wade through puddles of muddy sludge...the roads were all gone. We waited for nine hours before we were airlifted to an Army base at Karcham from Sangla. From the Army base, fifteen of us were flown to Shimla. The remaining 11 had to stay back for two nights at the army barracks. Here they waited a day for the rescue helicopter that failed to turn up. Then after a 14 km trek and twenty six hours of travel they reached Delhi.

Himachal Pradesh has seen rains and cloudbursts before, but the damage was never so invasive. "At least, not in the last fifty years has there been rain this devastating", says Vidyakaran Negi, 65.

The unregulated blasting of the mountains loosens the soil and the piped rivers revolt when nature strikes back. Perhaps the disaster wasn’t due to the incessant rain, but the mindless development. There are more than 18 dams that are in different stages of construction in the 6401 sq. kms of the Kinnaur district alone. They are mostly small and micro run-of-the-river projects. The same rivers are dammed and piped at short intervals reducing them to a mere trickle. The development debate rages on, but the disaster warns us to not take too many chances with nature. With great power comes great responsibility.
During this epic trip, many of us experienced things that we never faced before. From staying in tents and high altitude army bases to trekking 15 km on a road completely destroyed by multiple landslides and unrelenting rain. Here are some of the things we experienced along the way:

**STRANDED!**

Rescue rush hour: The stress of being stranded finally takes its toll, resulting in a mad rush of people trying to barge into the rescue helicopters.

**ARISTO MENDES**

We spent an entire day on a dam, waiting to be evacuated from Sangla. We gave up all hope of getting out. At last, an IAF chopper started flying overhead after hours of waiting, but they didn't know our exact location. Frustrating! The guards didn't even have a flag or a cloth with them to signal, so they borrowed my dupatta. Finally, our turn came to board the chopper. We thought our journey was over. Little did we know that, this chopper ride, would be the most interesting moment of our trip.

**NIKITA PAWAR**

This was the first time I ever stayed in a tent and it was an extremely memorable experience! As the rain entered our tents, all of our bags and sleeping bags got drenched and we struggled to sleep. While this was happening, water was collecting on top of our tents, and we feared that they would collapse sooner or later. Because of this, I couldn't manage to sleep. The next morning, we trekked 2km in the rain, to a local hotel, where we were stranded for three days.

**POOJA KULKARNI**

Relief- Stops: Long tiring journeys can be relatively easy when the entire community supports you unconditionally! Food packets, fruits, vegetables and refreshments were given to all with love!

**SHUBHAM BOHRA**

It was constantly pouring and the snow was slowly descending into the valley. The bonfire was our only shield against the freezing cold. It helped us dry our wet clothes and it also brought everyone together.

**SAYLEE SALVI**

During our trek to Wangtoo, we came across a section of the road that was completely destroyed by a recent landslide. Due to this, the Army base we were staying at was completely cut off from their supply convoy. The same landslide also destroyed one of their water pipes, cutting off their fresh water supply.

**ZAEEEN DE SOUZA**
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Relief- Stops: Long tiring journeys can be relatively easy when the entire community supports you unconditionally! Food packets, fruits, vegetables and refreshments were given to all with love!

**SAILEE SALVI**

During our trek to Wangtoo, we came across a section of the road that was completely destroyed by a recent landslide. Due to this, the Army base we were staying at was completely cut off from their supply convoy. The same landslide also destroyed one of their water pipes, cutting off their fresh water supply.
Yamuna overflows its banks in New Delhi, leaving hundreds of homeless and slumdwellers out in the open

ABHISHEK RATNAM & NAFEEL AHAMED

It happened in Delhi too, but earlier than usual. On the 19th of June, the roads near the Inter State Bus Terminal at Kashmere Gate were inundated by water. Every year the Yamuna floods its banks. This year too, the Yamuna ravaged its banks, but much earlier than expected. The water level in the river rose to 207.12 metres which is 2.29 metres above the danger mark of 204.83 metres. In addition to that, Haryana released over 81,000 cusecs of water into the Yamuna from the Hathnikund barrage on the 19th of June. The neighbouring state had released 8 lakhs and 1.5 lakhs cusecs of water each on the 17th and 18th of June, respectively. The official sources claim that 5000 people have been evacuated and 900 tents have been put all over the city.

The Yamuna Bank area, is surrounded by stagnant flood water now. There, we spotted a large number of people in tents on the stretch extending from the Yamuna Bank Metro Station to the Metro Official Quarters. These people had moved to safer places near the Yamuna Bank Metro Station on the 19th of June. The residents pitched the tents themselves. Jagdeesh Saini, a senior citizen told us that they had been living in the Yamuna Bank area since 1999. Before the Yamuna claimed her banks recently, these families earned upto Rs. 8000 every month from their farms and nurseries. In the Yamuna Bank relief camp, in the absence of government assistance, an NGO, the Janhith Kisaan Samiti, had been supplying food to the affected people every morning and evening. The Delhi Jal Board provides water in tankers, but the plastic cans, bottles and utensils in which the people store their water are filthy.

At Majnu Ka Tila, which is very near to the Delhi Vidhan Sabha, Kishan Lal’s kabadi shop was washed away in the flood. Rajendra Kumar, a farmer stays in a camp just outside the DDA Park along with his family. “We know this happens every year and so does the Government. Why can’t they take actions on time? This will keep on happening every year with us” he said. Half of the DDA Park is still submerged in flood waters. Garbage floats around in the park and people are cleaning it themselves. The homes of the Tibetan refugees are also filled with garbage. Relief camps have come up across GT road but can’t be used since crossing the roads can be risky. Mishaps are common and recently a child got injured.

Inefficient management and unawareness about relief schemes add to the flood misery of Delhi. The water released from the dams on the upper reaches of the river Yamuna makes life along the banks more vulnerable. Proactive disaster response mechanisms are non-existent in our country and so are the post disaster relief measures. It’s high time our response mechanisms become more centralised and change the focus from post disaster relief and rehabilitation to disaster mitigation and management.
The sun blazed down at us as we made our way to Sangla. Sangla is a town in the Baspa Valley, in the Kinnaur District of Himachal Pradesh, India, close to the Tibetan border.

In Sangla, we were greeted by a drizzle which later turned into a continuous, heavy downpour that went on for nearly 70 hours. Rain during this time of the year is unheard of and is least expected. Sangla usually receives rainfall from mid-July to October. The rainfall is restricted to the lower parts of Kinnaur and the higher areas receive only small amount of rainfall.

The rain came as a surprise because none of us, locals included, were expecting it. The loose soil let the water flow in, creating streams all around us and our tents were inundated. Due to the fact that our campsite was flooded, we had to trek up to Sangla town, and stay in a hotel. The 2 km trek seemed endless. Enter Wonderland (The place we were stranded for next few days) – Alice’s hole for escape and comfort.

With the rain, came extremely low temperatures of about 4 degrees Celsius and the nights were even cooler than usual. The average temperature observed in Sangla, in the month of June is 8 degrees Celsius at night and 30 degrees Celsius during the day.

Due to the heavy rainfall in the upper areas of Kinnaur, the country’s largest hydropower plants, the Nathpa Jhakri Project and the Karcham Wangtoo Project, were closed since the 16th of June due to the sudden rise in the level of silt in the Sutlej.

We could see a highly unusual amount of snow falling on the mountains from our hotel. We were told that it was around 5-6 feet, which was unheard of at this time of the year. Due to the landslides, most roads were shut.

What could possibly be the reason for such a sudden change in the weather this year?

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**MYTH OR FACT**

**VIDYA KARAN NEGI - Everester / Guide**


A theft in the Rakcham temple, where the face of the deity alongwith the jewels were stolen, could have been the cause of the bad weather, Vidya Karan believes.

**ANKIT DHINGRA - Participant, AFS 2012**

“Mornings used to be bearable as far as cold is concerned. From 9-10 in the morning in the morning till 4-5 in the evening, we could roam around in a single layer of clothing. Very good and pleasant, light breeze, sun out, all green. Nights would be the colder. Another layer of clothes was needed. The temperature difference between days and nights I guess was about 10-12 degrees.”

He shared his experience with us as he went to same place and date last year.

**SHANTAKUMAR NEGI - Anti dam activist**

“Man himself has led this devastation over mankind. The building of so many dams over the Sutlej has not even given 5 km of range for it to flow. This leads to floods even during less, but continuous rainfall. Excessive dynamite blasts of mountains are done in order to construct dams. This has also increased the risk of Earthquake, since these are young fold mountains.”

For 3 years he has been organising people to stop dam construction in semi arid and arid zones of Himachal Pradesh.

**ASHOK JI - Everester / Guide**


He is hired by The National Disaster Management Authority to rescue those trapped in high altitudes.
Survived the bumpy roads to Azad Kashmir! Greeted by constant drizzling. Water leaked in our tents. Night went sleeplesss!!!

Shelter relief at Hotel WONDERLAND after 2 kms walk in freezing cold weather, where we were stranded for three days, no water, no electricity!

Rescue program at BASPA 2 dam. Long day wait with empty stomach. The listed were stranded and the unlisted flew off!!!
Boarded a bus to Shimla and later reached Delhi!

The boys trekked for 15 kms, witnessed landslides and the resulting destructions. They risked their lives and walked on mucky broken roads!

At Karcham Army base camp, the group was separated. Some were lucky enough to fly off to Shimla and the rest stayed back for 2 days awaiting for the chopper.
They were promised development, but dams have extracted too high a price from the people of Kinnaur.

The recent catastrophic flashfloods in Uttarakhand and landslides in Himachal Pradesh have brought centrestage the debate on water management and development in fragile zones. Having had to deal with the negative effects of this dam construction spree – deforestation, increased siltation, landslides and increased pollution – project affected communities have benefitted little from such ‘development’. Dissenting voices have been termed ‘anti-development’.

The total hydel potential of Himachal Pradesh is just over 20,000 MW. Many experts however point out that a majority of the power plants only generate 20-30 per cent of their potential power. While the sheer inefficiency of these power plants is shocking, the even bigger problem is the environmental cost of these projects and the risk involved in building so many of these projects in an ecologically fragile zone.

In Kinnaur, dam builders have routinely ignored the conditions and promises they made under environment clearance mechanisms to local communities under which they have been permitted to build dams. According Shanta Kumar Negi, a local activist, project affected communities are promised facilities like colleges and hospitals by the builders, so that they don’t oppose the construction of the dams. The problem with this is that once the NOC is given, the builders don’t fulfil their promises. He says “They’re just businessmen. They’re here to make money. That’s it.” There is no one to ensure that these promises are fulfilled, and that seems to be troubling the locals the most. Even if there is electricity in the district, where are the schools, hospitals and colleges that were promised to them? The other important problem, is that how can one compensate for the environmental loss? Once all of the dams are constructed, the entire river will be diverted and channelled underground, and will disappear completely. R S Negi, a former bureaucrat, asks “Who will come to Kinnaur to see a ditch? There’ll be no river left.”

When it comes to power generation, one can’t help but notice that the social and environmental cost of these dams is too high. According to R S Negi, Kinnaur only requires around 7 MW, although the region has the potential to generate between 12,000-15,000 MW. The actual amount of electricity produced is only about 3,000 MW. Of this, Himachal retains only 13 per cent, of which the monetary value of 1 per cent of this electricity is routed to the Local Area Development Fund (LADF). This fund is used to develop the project affected area by building schools, colleges and hospitals, etc. The remaining 87 per cent is sold by the developer to the national grid.

Despite these somewhat generous terms of energy trade, said Shanta Kumar, some of the towns
near the north west of Kinnaur, still don't have constant electricity. He points out that that there are people still waiting for the monetary compensation, as well as the facilities they were promised. As of 2011, the power companies still owe the Himachal Government Rs.264 cr, as part of the LADF.

Deforestation remains a major concern. A 2011 study on five project affected villages in Kinnaur by Renuka Thapliyal and Manoj Jreat, show that 35,046 trees were damaged and felled, during the construction of dams in the district. Amongst these felled and damaged trees are endangered Chilgoza pine, prized by local communities for their pine nuts. A total of 7,89479 hectares of forest land was ‘diverted’ to enable the construction of these dams.

This is the cost that the people of Kinnaur are paying for their electricity. They give up their land, their forests and their water, and all they get in return, are false promises and in many cases, electricity problems. Is this “development” really worth it?

Q 1. What do think about the instalment of hydro power projects in your state?
I understand the concern of the government towards the increase in the energy requirement but I think we should also focus on the cost at which we are installing these dams. The negative effect of hydro projects to environment, loss of people’s rights and livelihoods, danger to national security and gross violation of tribal, environment and forest laws cannot be compensated. Moreover energy requirement is a never ending greed; I don’t think we should run after it blindly.

Q 2. What are the problems people face due to these projects? What kind of rehabilitation and compensation is missing according to you, because we are told that proper compensation is provided, in fact one hospital was also built which functions quite well?
There is not a single problem, from resettlement and rehabilitation to employment and damage to the environment. There are a lot of problems. We go to the govt. and the concerned company to ask for proper compensation but we don’t get anything. They don’t even reply properly. Yes they speak very confidently about the hospital. Go to the site and you will know the reality. The hospital worked quite well till the construction was going on; as the construction got completed the hospital’s condition became worse than any government hospital.

Q 3. How are the villagers/localites involved in the decision of building a dam?
People were totally unaware earlier. They have been fooled all the time, but gradually things started changing. With the command of NOC coming to the gram Sabah a lot of flip in power play has taken place. No project can start till the time the gram Sabah gives No Objection Certificate.

Q 4. What do you have to say about the rumours that suggest that Gram Sabhas accepts undue favours for handing out NOCs?
They are only rumours. These people have been putting such accusations but there hasn’t been any such case. It is all a game of NOCs now. They have tried to bribe people but it didn’t work out for them. People in Kinnaur just don’t want these dams anymore, what they only want is to preserve their resources. We always give them Total Objection Certificate (TOC).

Q 5. According to official sources, skilled labour cannot be provided to the locals because they are not technically equipped. Most of them have just completed their intermediate education. What do you have to say about it?
He is right to say that, but the question that arises is, in an isolated district like Kinnaur how do you think these poor people will get the required technical knowledge. I think if the government is really keen to employ the locals, they should conduct a 6 month or a years’ technical training programme.

Q 6. Looking at the present situation, what do you think about the future of Kinnaur?
The future is unpredictable but if we keep in mind today’s pace of ‘development’ then I don’t see any bright future. Although people of Kinnaur are more aware now and they will surely find a way out of this mishapenning but I think even the authority should also show real concern towards the deteriorating environment. Such development is unsustainable.
Baldev Singh Verma was elected pradhan, unopposed, of Nauni gram panchayat in 2006 when this ‘model village’ was carved out from the Ojghat panchayat.

In a village of 300 households, 150 have toilets in their homes. And they are all soak pit and toilets with bio remediation methods, 90 per cent of the households harvest their own rainwater.

From a village where open defecation was the norm, and water borne diseases were rampant, Verma led this village’s transformation into one of India’s finest, self-sustaining model village. The transformation started with discussion, debate and final acceptance by the Gram Sabha, or village council. To use government schemes for transformation ensured speedy, effective and long-term solutions to the issues faced by all.

Community Led Total Sanitation (CLTS)
The transformation started when the Gram Pradhan was trained in a program called CLTS by Dr. Kamal Kar. Community Led Total Sanitation is an innovative approach that involves community participation to eliminate open defecation. Making Nauni an open defecation free (ODF) zone was the top priority, one that was shared by the state, which had schemes to support community led efforts to rid villages of this debilitating ‘habit’. Through the Gram Panchayat, the villagers learnt about the problems caused by open defecation and as a community, agreed to be a part of the program. It was important to include the socially excluded. For instance, Budhram and Devi Lal, members of the Scheduled Caste community, innovatively used their ginger pits to make a bio-friendly toilet, which was essentially a pit where human excreta was decomposed by bacteria and converted into bio gas and water. Nauni soon was an open defecation free village.

Enhancing Livelihoods
In Nauni, high value vegetables like bell peppers were always grown by the villagers. But the yield was low. The villagers were afraid of the concept and cost of polyhouses. Through training, the villagers were made aware of the merits of a polyhouse and how, with the joint financial support of the community, they could effectively purchase one. Verma explains, “The entire village agreed to adopt a model where government intervention will be at a minimum and all the resources are ultimately owned by the people collectively”. Three hundred families contributed one lakh rupees each to buy polyhouses that increased the yield of the vegetables. With the help of the Pradhan, the villagers were informed of their cost-benefit ratio. The soil was also tested to know the nutrient content so that the right amount of manure could be added.

Women participation was encouraged in all spheres. They were empowered to share their views, feedback and even encouraged to take initiatives. Value addition in the dairy sector was women centric. ‘Teach the people’, a supplementary to CLTS was implemented to educate the community (especially among the vulnerable, the elderly and children) about various problems faced and their solutions. This initiative has been successful in Nauni.

Connecting the Dots
For a layman ‘government schemes’ and ‘banks’ are intimidating. But the villagers in Nauni were educated on the various schemes available, and its effects. Verma explains, “A competitive spirit can act as the biggest driver of action, but for it to be really effective, the process has to be transparent for all”. Therefore the villagers were more confident when a particular scheme was implemented and were in full support of the changes that followed.

The Pradhan, with the help of the gram sabha, helped in construction of roads within and beyond the village. The terrain being hilly, roads...
within the village helped in the easy commute of the villagers as well as easy transport of the produce. The highway built outside the village made connectivity easier to the main city. The government scheme used for this was the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana.

With the help of the State and central government schemes, renewable energy sources were installed. Biogas plants and solar lanterns are set up across the village. Rain water harvesting is practiced consciously and substantially. Many water storage structures are constructed all over the village and there are many pipes connecting these to the houses.

The biggest question one can ask is ‘what is the future of this model village?’ The Pradhan and his team seem to be answering this consequential question by their work and not words.

When you understand the way this village is evolving and growing, one is reminded of Gandhiji’s dream of Gram Swaraj or ex-president A.P.J Abdul Kalam’s PURA (Providing Urban Amenities to Rural Areas) initiative and how finally it is being practiced.
A sour undertaking

Factory-like dairy farms planned for India will challenge traditional dairy farms that are not merely business ventures but a way of life across much of the country.

JOSEPH THARAYIL VARGHESE

The dairy project in the Kisan SEZ by Indian Farmers Fertilizer Co-operative Limited (IFFCO) in Nellore district in Andhra Pradesh will allow international dairies to muscle into the country. The proposal, has hit a roadblock, given serious concerns over possible violation of rules of the Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI).

Opposition to such factory-like excessive stomach cramping in milch animals.

Many fear that the government’s relaxed policies on Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and the rush to sign Free Trade Agreements (FTA) will attract global companies seeking a ‘cash cow’ to invest in India, which has perhaps the world’s largest livestock population.

IFFCO’s Kisan SEZ dairy project will be run like a corporate farm, with imported animals coming under serious stress at being kept at high stocking densities in close proximity with minimal hygienic conditions, and regularly dosed with drugs which might result in them contracting diseases or developing drug resistant variants of existing diseases a.k.a. super bugs.

Animals kept within an intensive cramped system have a higher likelihood of injuries, reduced productivity and complications resulting from climatic shock. Mega dairy projects have been banned in many countries due to its potential hazards. Lincolnshire in UK for example recently refused permission to a cattle farm similar to the one proposed at IKSEZ.

Federation of Indian Animal Protection Organisations (FIAPO) is a collective of animal protection organisations in India that is campaigning against this proposed project in Nellore. “Industrial dairies are extremely harmful for animals, local environment, as well as small farmers. The only party that benefits is the industrialist”, says Arpan Sharma, FIAPO CEO.

The genetically manipulated Jersey and Holstein Friesian cows that are to be imported at a high
dairy operations in many parts of the world stems from the inhumane conditions imposed by the dairy industry on cattle. In India, undercover investigations by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) exposed the inhumane treatment of cattle, e.g. Oxytocin abuse to induce unusually high quantities of milk, which caused extreme stress at being kept at high stocking densities in close proximity with minimal hygienic conditions, and regularly dosed with drugs which might result in them contracting diseases or developing drug resistant variants of existing diseases a.k.a. super bugs.

Animals kept within an intensive cramped system have a higher
price from New Zealand, have shortened life span, reduced fertility, greater propensity for diseases, physiological and development problems. Animal slaughter, management of waste and transportation of animals result in additional problems.

Moreover, they plan to feed the cattle corn as opposed to traditional fodder. This would push up their milk production costs, but will not affect their economic viability. So while we struggle to feed people below the poverty line, a fertilizer co-operative with foreign collaboration will be feeding their cows corn to produce more milk for the markets at a higher cost of production and higher price.

Indian dairy farmers already are in crisis with increased cost of production and non-remunerative prices. The scarcity of natural resources and crop residue for fodder has defined the death of traditional grazing practices. The productivity of cattle is based on its care and management; however farmers will be forced to switch over to efficient food, and care intensive breeds to compete. This spells a bleak future for the conservation of endemic bovine with lower yield but higher tolerance to environmental stressors.

We are the largest producer and consumer of milk, producing around 130 million tons and the total world production estimates 730 million tons, with approximately 115 million bovine at present. Yet EU does not permit import of dairy products from India in the name of SPS (Sanitary and Phyto Sanitary) measures saying that Indian milch animals are not maintained as per EU standard. Even the Food and Safety Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has announced 68% of the bulk milk supplies are found to be unsafe and substandard quality. So why is this consortium interested in India?

The continued 3% approximate growth of milk production, bundled with a low production cost, the per capita consumption growing at 1.5% annually, and improved incomes causing a surge in consumption makes India attractive to investments. Once the economics and the production facilities are put into place, and the ‘pilot’ project is found ‘acceptable’, this consortium plans at least 10 other such dairy farms in other locations in India.

Towards bovine care standards, cattle require shelter for protection from environmental and parasitic elements, as they perform better under favourable conditions. The comfortable temperature range for dairy breeds of cattle is 15 degrees C to 27 degrees C. Climatic stress occurs when the temperature goes 5 degrees C below or above this range. High humidity combined with high temperature could cause greater stress. So, the meagre space requirements of dairy animals as per Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) raise the question: Have they considered the dimensions of all breeds of cattle?

In the legal context, The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960 is ineffective in controlling cases of animal abuse, and deaths resulting thereof due to the non-cognisable nature of offences, which in legal terms endows minor punishments. Our aged laws need amendment especially relating to dairy. There are concerns of violation of provisions of Andhra Pradesh Cow Protection Act.

Even countries like New Zealand, from where we plan to import impregnated cattle, embryos and semen, have Animal Welfare codes for Dairy Cattle, Commercial Slaughter and Painful Husbandry Procedures. Lack of stringent Indian standards would encourage foreign and local adventurism because India is outside the legal jurisdiction of international standards and therefore open to cowboy tactics.

Maj. Gen. (Retd.) Dr. R.M. Kharb, AVSM AWBI Chairman added, “I do hope good sense prevails and Andhra Pradesh Govt does not approve the mega dairy project.”

### POSSIBLE SAFEGUARDS – PRIOR TO PROJECTS

- Micro chips on animals kept for commercial purposes can be made mandatory
- BIS specifications for livestock enclosures be reviewed
- Paddocks and open land must be made mandatory for corporate projects
- Cattle nutrition and health must be closely monitored
- Quarterly assessments along with the assessors knowledge should be evaluated regularly
- Animal protection laws should be revised.

The list is endless and thinking about it is the first step, what do you think?
ONE VILLAGE AT A TIME

“Poverty can be sustainably conquered by empowering women.”

MUKESH CHOUDHARI & GARGI BARKAKATI

Born and brought up in the remote village Dhora, located in Kullu district, Begma Devi comes from a socio-economically backward family, consisting of 15 members. She finished her schooling at a local government school in Gadsa village.

Begma Devi is a very passionate woman and works towards the social and economic empowerment of women. According to her, women are still much more likely to be poor and illiterate than men. When we spoke to Begma Devi, she told us about her life, her father and the role she first played at Jagriti, without any hesitation.

When we asked her how she came to know about Jagriti she said, “Ek Jagriti ki field worker ai thi aur unhone Jagriti ke bare main bataya aur mujhe bahaut acha laga aur maine socha ki apni kausalta ka istemal karu aur mahilao ki madad karu” (A field worker belonging to Jagriti came to our village and spoke to us about the organization and I thought of joining the organization so that I can also help the women in the village).

She now works as a group organizer with Jagriti, one of the NGOs in Kullu. Jagriti is a non-profit organization working towards the empowerment of poor, rural hill women. Her work basically consists of educating, forming self-help groups and enhancing livelihood activities. The women in her villages earn about 12-25 thousand rupees a year, by selling locally made food products and organic manure. She is involved with the procurement, packing, marketing and sale of organic produce. Through her work, she has made it possible for the women in the villages of Kullu to smash the societal barriers and become entrepreneurs. These women are selling their products through their shop, Mountain Bounties, which is located in Kullu. Some of their products are:

- G Bitter apricot oil, wild peach oil.
- G Oregano and Mint.
- G Herbal Tea.
- G Mountain honey, buckwheat and hazel nuts

Her initial stint with Jagriti was tough because she belongs to the Dalit community and just like Dalits in other parts of the country, she was neglected and marginalized by people. Since she belongs to a Koli Dalit family, she was hesitant to come out and utilize her skills. Initially, she was not allowed to interact with the people belonging to the upper castes and faced trouble while interacting with women in the villages.

Now, she sees herself as a changed, confident and independent woman who is empowering women and trying to create a green economy. In Jagriti, she has worked on the following projects:

- Energy conservation.
- Conserving threatened medicinal plants and trees.
- Livelihood enhancement.
- Education and nutrition.

She now leads the women belonging to 25 villages in Gadsa and has sensitized them about their rights. When we asked her how the community perceives her, she said, “Mujhe par mahilaye bahaut garv karti hain aur meri ek hi call par meeting main aa jaati hai” (The village women are proud of me and come for meeting as soon as I call them).

Begma Devi was given the award for Best Community Work by the United Nations Development Programme and was also awarded for Facilitating Green Economy by the Earth Day Network. She ended the interview by saying that “Poverty can be sustainably conquered by empowering women.”
VOICING HOPE

80 percent of the total oral cancer cases of the world happen in India.

ALTAF A SOFI & PRAVESH

With a soaring number of oral cancer cases in India, the country is fighting hard against this menace, making the masses conscious about the hazardous effects of smoking and chewing tobacco. It is believed that India accounts for 80% of all oral cancer cases in the world.

“There are around twenty eight lakh cancer patients in India. The highest number of cases in India is that of oral cancer. It accounts for nearly one third of all cancers in the country,” says Dr. Tapaswini Pradhan Sharma, Consultant Surgical Oncology, Rajiv Gandhi Cancer Institute and Research Center.

“The main problem is that youngsters and adolescents because of peer pressure and fascination with macho advertisements of these products start using tobacco. It becomes a habit because of the nicotine content in tobacco which later, is hard to give it up. Most of the victims of oral cancer are aged 35 years and above because of the continuous use of tobacco for long period” says, Dr. Aggarwal.

As per a medical study, it is said that there are more than 300 carcinogens (cancer inducing agents) that have been identified in tobacco smoke.

Dr. Sharma says that there is dire need for an increase in awareness about cancer amongst the general population. “People should be made to realize the potential carcinogenic effect of smoking, tobacco chewing and alcohol. There should be strict laws to ban the companies from promoting products which are potentially hazardous,” she said.

Even though the government has ordered manufacturers to put a pictorial warning on every tobacco product, this plan has not provided the desired result, as there is an increase in tobacco users, rather than a decline.

RAN SINGH DABBAS
Age – 66
Occupation- Retired Government Employee
Lives in Rohini, Delhi
Suffering from throat cancer

He has lost his voice and not a single sound made by him, can be heard. He has a full time assistant with him, who understands his lip movements and helps people to understand what he is trying to convey.

SATISH SAHNI
Laryngectomy Speech Therapist
Age- 54

He was diagnosed with throat cancer 12 years ago and was then operated on. He had his vocal cords removed and subsequently, lost his voice. But, his desire to live and speak again, made him try everything possible to get his voice back. He traveled to Japan to get speech therapy. Satish Sahni is now able to communicate by speaking softly to people. He takes speech therapy classes for those who have lost their voice due to oral cancer.

“85 percent of oral cancer in India happens due to consumption of tobacco in any form. Most of the oral cancer patients come from the states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The reason for this is lack of knowledge, low literacy rate and poverty. I request people to help the government to eradicate this evil from our society. Our teachers, parents and doctors can play a vital role in eradicating this life threatening disease. I request youngsters that you will one day grow old, so you need to start taking care of your health and wealth and stop taking tobacco and alcohol,” he further added.

NARESH PRASAD SINGH
Age – 67
Occupation – Retired Government Employee
Lives in Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh
Suffering from mouth cancer

“He has undergone three operations till date. Our whole family is suffering because of the cancer. It’s not only my father’s cancer, but it has left an impact on everybody’s life in the family,” says his son Amar Kumar Singh (18).