

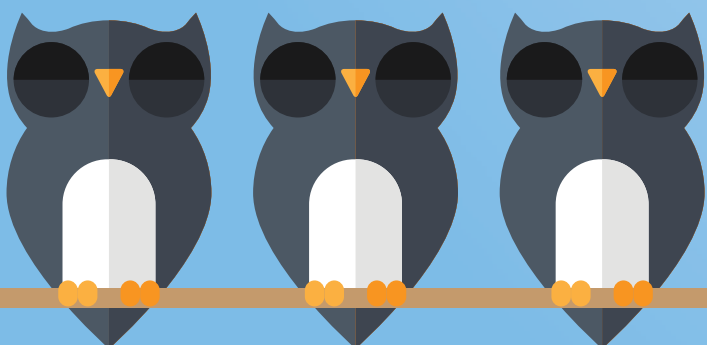
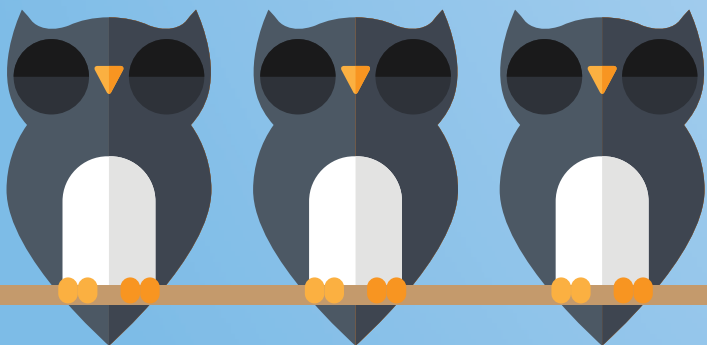
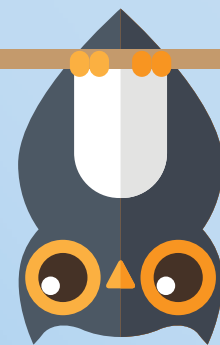
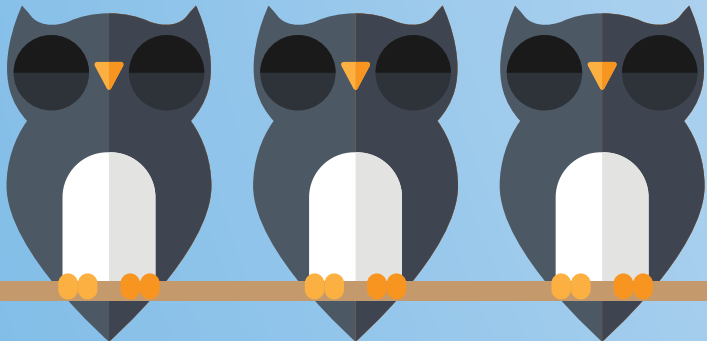
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BusinessLine

CHANGEMAKER AWARDS

32 PAGES | MARCH 2019

Special Issue



Different strokes

Celebrating those who take the lead and make a difference

Changemaker of the Year | The GST Council

Consensual politics by another name

The GST Council is an example of how to work together despite differences



Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley flanked by MoS for Finance Shiv Pratap Shukla and Revenue Secretary Ajay Bhushan Pandey at the 31st meeting of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council AP

BY SHISHIR SINHA

At an industry event in November 2018, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley claimed that “the federal institution experiment of GST having succeeded, there are two other sectors which eminently require federal institutions of this kind. The GST was constitutionally provided for. Those areas are not constitutionally provided for, but political maturity can impose on governments to try that experiment. One is healthcare and one is agriculture.”

The Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council is the first institution that has seen both the Centre and States pooling their sovereignty in terms of tax policies. It comprises representatives of various political parties such as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Congress, the All India Trinamool Congress (TMC), the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), the Telangana Rashtra Samiti (TRS), the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) and the Left parties. Yet, not one of the over 950 decisions taken so far at 33 meetings (the first held over September 22-23, 2016, and the 33rd over February 20-24, 2019) by the Council has necessitated voting. Every decision has been based on consensus.

This is not to say the decisions have been unanimous. However, the Council has worked its way out of the differences by referring the matter concerned to the Group of States’ Finance Ministers (GoFMs), after which a mutually acceptable decision is arrived at. So far, nine such GoFMs have been constituted. Even when the GoFMs has recommended against going ahead with a decision, the Council has abided by the suggestion. A case in point is the cess to provide relief to the sugar industry, a politically sensitive issue likely to benefit many States. But, when the considered opinion of the GoFMs was that it was not the right time for such a move, the GST Council agreed.

As Revenue Secretary Ajay Bhushan Pandey says, “...they rise above varied interests and collectively take decisions keeping in mind what is good for the country and what is good for the State, and how the balance can be maintained.” Requests come from various stakeholders to lower rates, but these requests have to be viewed in terms of how they will impact revenue and whether they are fair to all parties. “A similar product or item can be used by different classes of people or, let’s say, is for mass consumption,” explains Pandey. “So, there has to be some principle or equity in the rate structure. Not

The Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council is the first institution that has seen both the Centre and States pooling their sovereignty in terms of tax policies



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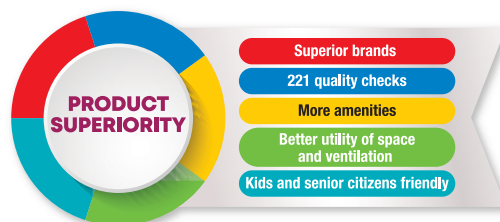
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only does benefit have to be given, the Centre and States should also get revenue to run their programmes.”

How it works

Some 17 different types of taxes and 26 types of cess have been subsumed under the GST, although the assessee has to file returns only on one portal. “It is one of the biggest examples of federal cooperation,” points out Pandey, with the Centre and States coming together after an appropriate constitutional amendment was passed in Parliament to take decisions on GST through a mechanism called GST Council. “The Centre and States along with two Union Territories (Delhi and Puducherry which have assemblies and the power to make tax policies) pooled their sovereignty in terms of tax policies,” he says. He should know, being the ex officio secretary to the GST Council and chairman of the GSTN, the IT backbone of the new tax regime. He has been attending Council meetings since October 2017, first as GSTN chief and then as secretary to the Council.

The GST Council makes recommendations to the Union and State governments on issues related to GST. The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Second Amendment) Bill 2016 for GST was introduced in Parliament and passed by the Rajya Sabha on August 3, 2016, and by the Lok Sabha on August 8, 2016. Presidential assent came on September 8 the same year after which it was notified.

The GST Council is a three-tier structure comprising the Office of the Revenue Secretary, a GST Implementation Committee (GIC), and eight Standing Committees. They work on preparing the agenda and approving it. However, the main committees that operate to ensure effective implementation are the Law Committee, the Fitment Committee, the IT Committee and the Single Interface Committee. Sometimes, a committee can be constituted to study specific issues; this is apart from GoFMs. All these committees discuss the topics in detail and suggest the pros and cons of an issue which are later deliberated upon by the GST Council before a final decision is taken.

Abhishek Jain, tax partner at EY India, feels that the GST Council is a one-of-its-kind body, certainly in the Indian scheme of things pertaining to taxation law. He reiterates the fact that it is the epitome of cooperative federalism, the evidence being that all its decisions are taken with ‘absolute’ consensus. He even goes so far as to say, “It would not be incorrect to say that GST would not have been such a success in a country like ours, without this body.”

Praveen Khandelwal, national secretary-general of the Confederation of All India Traders, feels the system would benefit from a simplification of procedures, and urges the Council to deliberate on this aspect.

“There are about seven crore small businesses in the country, and approximately half of them can be brought under GST if it is a trader-friendly tax regime,” he points out.

Echoing Jain’s sentiments, Prashant Deshpande, partner at Deloitte India, says that in a federal structure where each State has the power to legislate and administer the GST laws, the GST Council performs a critical role in ensuring uniformity in tax rates, regulations and procedures. “While the role of the Council is recommendatory, the decisions of the Council have to be taken with a three-fourth majority. The Council’s power to decide the modalities to resolve disputes arising out of its recommendations make the decisions of the Council more or less binding on all the States,” he points out. This is a key aspect of the functioning of this unique body.

What lies ahead

The well-known American economist and political theorist Walt Whitman Rostow propounded five stages of economic growth: traditional society, pre-conditions of take-off, take-off, drive to technological maturity, and high mass consumption. Some 20 months after it was introduced, GST appears to be completing the second stage and could well be ready for take-off in the next two or three financial years. However, this advancement has not been without challenges, with more challenges waiting in the wings.

The biggest problem is that too many changes have been made far too frequently, such as lowering rates on many items over a short span of time, and constantly extending the last date for filing of returns. Suresh Nandlal Rohira, partner at Grant Thornton India, says that while the effort and the construct need to be appreciated given the level of awareness businesses have gained, the frequency and number of changes have set it back. This includes changes in the IT systems to meet compliance requirements. “Going forward, the frequency of changes should be minimised and the Council should consolidate and announce changes at one time,” he says.

Deshpande says that armed with this power, it is incumbent upon the GST Council to take decisions to ensure that the canons of simplicity and certainty of taxes are not compromised. However, “while most of the frequent changes brought about in GST laws and procedures are directed towards better implementation of GST, some of the recent decisions of the Council such as to double the threshold for registration, that too only for supply of goods, and giving an option to States to decide the threshold for supply of goods in their jurisdiction, allowing imposition of an additional element of tax in the form of cess on intra-State supplies in Kerala will affect the GST uniformity which is crucial for endorsing acceptability of GST by stakeholders,” he says. Now, these are crucial issues he raises.

Ajay Bhushan Pandey also draws attention to the need to make it more convenient to file returns and promote self-compliance. “Our aim,” he says, “is rather than (implementing) coercive measures, people should be motivated to comply.” He says he sees changes already in this direction with the growing number of returns being filed.

“People are giving details of sales and purchase through invoices and the seller’s invoice is automatically matched with the purchaser’s invoice,” he points out, explaining how if the chain breaks, the system throws up the information and the very fact that the system can do it means it’s leading to self-compliance.

As he says, “Please remember, you are not the only who is giving information about your trade, people dealing with you are also giving information and this encourages self-compliance.”

Today, however, the biggest challenge relates to the political equation. With the Opposition now ruling in 10 States and two UTs, it is to be expected that bringing about policy changes proposed by the Centre will meet a wall. At the last three meetings of the GST Council, the Opposition was strongly united on issues such as lowering the rate for many commodities from 28 per cent to 18 per cent and even lowering the rate on real estate, and the last meeting was adjourned (for the first time) only because Opposition-ruled States did not want the meeting conducted via video conferencing.

So, what can we expect now? One thing is very clear: future meetings of the Council will have many more dissenting voices, making consensus-building a far bigger challenge than it has been so far.

“It is incumbent upon the GST Council to take decisions to ensure that the canons of simplicity and certainty of taxes are not compromised”

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Changemaker of the Year | **Petitioners against Section 377**

When one for all became all for one

How a group of people got a law targeting same-sex couples struck down



Activists and members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community take part in a pride parade in Siliguri, West Bengal AFP

BY POORNIMA JOSHI

For seventeen years since 2001 when her organisation, Naz Foundation, moved the court with an appeal to read down Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code which criminalised homosexual intercourse, the dynamic Anjali Gopalan gathered allies, spread her work against the HIV/AIDS epidemic and campaigned against societal prejudices and legal discrimination against people with alternative sexual orientations.

By September 6, 2018, when the Supreme Court's landmark judgment finally struck down the archaic, draconian provision, Gopalan was followed by as many as 32 human rights activists, artists, IITians and members of the LGBTQI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex) community, among whom were artist Navtej Johar, journalist Sunil Mehra, food entrepreneur Ritu Dalmia, hoteliers Aman Nath and Keshav Suri, and business executive Ayesha Kapur.

Significant milestone

This spirited group of changemakers has achieved a significant first milestone in the struggle for ensuring equality – social, economic and before the law – for the LGBTQI community by eliminating the law that labelled them as criminals. While every individual associated in this struggle believes that decriminalisation of gay sex is only the beginning, no one disputes the fact that it was a historic moment for the community. “It is the first but an extremely significant step. We have a long way to go before we

ensure equality for each one of us in the LGBTQI community,” says Keshav Suri, who joined as a petitioner in 2013 when the Supreme Court overruled the Delhi High Court's earlier judgment legalising gay sex.

Suri's petition coincided with other petitions seeking reversal of the Supreme Court's decision in 2013 that decriminalising gay sex is an issue to be decided by Parliament. Finally, in September, 2018, the Apex Court struck down the penal provision. Of course, changing societal attitudes and institutional responses are still a long way off, but a beginning was decidedly made with this group of changemakers leading the legal fight.

When she first started her campaign against Section 377, Anjali Gopalan knew she was in for a long struggle. The law was allowed to continue for nearly 160 years – from 1861 until 2018. “I know that societal attitudes take a long time to change and it takes years of sustained movements to do it. But to have a law which criminalises you was an absurdity and offence that needed to be simply removed,” says Gopalan.

As the Court observed, the petition against Section 377 has helped correct a big wrong in India's legal history. Justice Indu Malhotra put it in perspective when she said in her separate but concurring judgment striking down the section: “History owes an apology to the members of this community and their families, for the delay in providing redressal for the ignominy and ostracism that they have suffered through the centuries. The members of this

The petition against Section 377 has helped correct a big wrong in India's legal history



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community were compelled to live a life full of fear of reprisal and persecution." It was the culmination of an almost two-decade-long struggle for the restoration of human rights and dignity of the community, and to prevent their harassment.

A question of individuality

The true measure of a democracy is the way it treats its minorities. The position vis-à-vis LGBTQI is that they are much more marginalised than the minorities who have legal and constitutional rights to housing, insurance, inheritance, matrimony. And before Section 377 was struck down, they not only did not have these basic rights, their very existence, their sexual orientation, was considered a ground for criminality. "What business is it of anyone, especially of the state and the law, to decide that I am a criminal because I prefer to be with men? That my sexual orientation should be a ground for not just discrimination by the society, but criminalisation by law constitutes a violation of my right to exist, to lead my life. By striking down 377, all that has been done is that my fundamental right to exist has been accepted through a case law," says a petitioner who did not wish to be quoted.

Section 377 conferred a vast degree of arbitrariness to the authorities. Arif Jafar, a petitioner in the case, was arrested in July 2001 and jailed for 47 days under this law. He has, in various accounts, described it as a period in which he was abused, humiliated and tortured. Eighteen years since, the case is still ongoing. "The petitioner's sole motivation in approaching this honourable court is his wish that no other person should suffer what he had to suffer on account of a discriminatory law, i.e. Section 377, IPC, and fellow LGBT citizens can live with the freedom, dignity and respect that they are entitled to," Jafar told the Supreme Court in his petition.

According to a 2016 study by Humsafar Trust, a petitioner working in Mumbai in the area of health and human rights of sexual minorities, two among five LGBTQI persons they interviewed faced blackmail or knew someone who had been a victim of blackmail. An online survey among gay men and transgender persons by the same organisation showed that 57 per cent had been subjected to fear and misuse of the law under Section 377.

Gautam Yadav, another petitioner, is a young gay man living with HIV. His life story illustrates the stigma and constant fear his community lives in. "The petitioner number 3 (Gautam Yadav) was forced to drop out from the school at the age of 14 years due to the constant bullying, molestation and violence he faced by his peers at school as he was deemed 'effeminate' due to his sexuality. The school had no trained counsellor who could have provided therapeutic intervention to him while he was facing verbal, physical and sexual abuse and also struggling to understand and accept his sexual orientation as a gay person," says the petition filed by Yadav and three of his senior colleagues at Humsafar Trust.

"The humiliating experience at school combined with lack of access to suitable mental healthcare services led to him contemplating suicide, as a conspiracy of silence on the subject of human sexuality and gender identity in our educational institutions - a product of stigma as well as the *de facto* criminalisation of homosexuality under Section 377, IPC - ensures that people like him do not have access to information which can affirm one's identity and saves lives," the petition elaborated.

Small step, big picture

However, the striking down of Section 377 is only the first step towards restoring the community's right to

privacy, equality, life and personal liberty, and freedom of expression. According to Suri, the next step is to push for more inclusion, housing rights, right to marriage, insurance and equality.

"When in 2013 the SC reversed the HC decision to decriminalise gay sex, the LGBTQI community woke up. Anyone who was in any position of privilege decided to show to the court that we are like other ordinary citizens, that we contribute to society and the law should not marginalise those who are already standing in the periphery. For the first time in my life, I cried before my team. But we all recovered and decided that we will be part of the change and I was, in fact, in a position to make a change in the institution that I headed. So we changed our hiring and HR policy, reached out to the customers. I decided to have affirmative action in my hiring policy. I work with over a hundred queer people, ten trans people. I launched my foundation, we had a conversation in FICCI about the community and its rights, I worked with insurance companies to cover same sex marriages, sex orientation surgeries. I went to a Niti Aayog conference with the LGBTQI agenda. It was time to push policy," says Suri.

When Suri moved the Supreme Court to challenge its 2013 judgment, he was joined by the Humsafar Trust, and other activists and artists, following which the historic judgment was passed.

"It is just the beginning. This is the first step towards equality. There are a whole lot of other things to do. For instance, I am married and my partner is French. I think it is totally unfair that I have more rights in France than he has in India. In Kochi airport, they hired transgenders and after a while, a whole lot of them left because no one was willing to rent houses to them," says Suri.

Petitioner Akkai Padmashali, a transgender activist and winner of the Karnataka State Rajyotsava award, is a living example of the kind of societal and psychological trauma members of the community suffer. At 12, she contemplated suicide because of the confusion and oppression she felt in a family which did not understand her need to dress and behave like a girl although she was born 'male'. It led to her quitting school and living on the street, and forced her into sex work to make a living.

Padmashali conquered her fears and went on to become Karnataka's foremost transgender activist, championing gender rights on a global scale. She also was among the first persons in the State to register her marriage when she tied the knot with partner Vasu last year.

She acknowledges that the latest judgment will relieve the community from constantly feeling anxious about being penalised and harassed.

There are no definite estimates of the demographics of the LGBTQI community in India except for the figures compiled by the National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) of an estimated 2.5 million homosexuals which the Health Ministry submitted to the Supreme Court in 2012, based upon self-declarations by individuals.

However, many remain hidden due to the fear of discrimination. "These are some of the most marginalised and stigmatised people. The law has just let them feel they are not criminals anymore," says Anjali Gopalan.

The petition against Section 377 and the favourable Supreme Court judgment have been widely hailed by liberal sections of society and media, both in India and globally, even as the campaign was vociferously resisted by many religious leaders and politicians. Although the change in societal attitudes and prejudices is still a work-in-progress, this small step forward heralds a huge leap of faith.

These (LGBTQI) are some of the most marginalised and stigmatised people. The law has just let them feel they are not criminals anymore

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Iconic Changemaker | **Bezwada Wilson**

Getting a country to come clean

For centuries, people of certain communities have been forced to work as manual scavengers. Bezwada Wilson has dedicated his life to ending this inhuman practice

BY SHRIYA MOHAN

On a warm September afternoon, Bezwada Wilson led a group of volunteers to a garden in the heart of Connaught Place in New Delhi. Once there, he handed out some posters he had carried along. He and the volunteers then formed a chain and held up the posters, each emblazoned with a single letter. Together they spelled:

S-T-O-P-K-I-L-L-I-N-G-U-S

It's not every day that you see a Ramon Magsaysay award-winner lifting barricades on the road, distributing pamphlets to the public and asking them to show up for a cause, or holding up traffic for his poster-displaying team to pass through.

"People are dying in sewer lines. We cannot allow this to happen to our fellow human beings," he says, days before his massive dharna, also titled 'Stop Killing Us', at the capital's Jantar Mantar. A human chain was formed to protest the deaths of five sanitation workers who had inhaled toxic fumes while cleaning a sewage tank in West Delhi.

Last year, in a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Safai

Karamchari Andolan (SKA) formed by Wilson in 1991 to eradicate manual scavenging, pointed out that 221 people had died in sewers and septic tanks since 2017. Unreported deaths are estimated to be far higher. In June 2018, an inter-ministerial task force put the number of people engaged in manual scavenging – manually cleaning untreated human excreta from dry latrines, sewer lines or septic tanks – in India at 53,236, indicating a four-fold rise from the 13,000-odd people working as scavengers in 2017. The data, though, covers only 121 of the country's 600-odd districts.

At a protest meeting on September 25, Wilson shared the stage with their widows. He leaned into the microphone and roared: "Sewer ki hathya bandh karo! (Stop the killings in the sewer!)". The 1,000-odd manual scavengers from various parts of the country who had gathered there echoed his words: "Bandh karo! Bandh karo!"

Born in hell

Wilson, 52, knows about the darkness in sewers and the stench of cleaning excreta. Born in Kolar,

Karnataka, into a so-called caste of manual scavengers, he remembers his childhood as being filled with self-loathing. One of four siblings, he was always shy and hesitant. He recalls how he had to repeat his name at least thrice when asked "because people could never hear it the first time".

As a first generation learner, he studied the furthest in his family. After high school, he enrolled for a degree in political science via correspondence at the Ambedkar Open University in Hyderabad. But Wilson knew that he had work to do.

Years of daily verbal abuse and the insults he and his community had been subjected

Years of daily verbal abuse and the insults he and his community had been subjected to had turned on a tap of rage within him



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to had turned on a tap of rage within him.

"I would find out what it took to assemble a bomb and sit calculating how many bombs it might take to see all the dry latrines in the vicinity go up in flames," he reveals on a cold January day, at his office in East Patel Nagar. He also recalls how difficult it was to convince members of the community to stop scavenging. Their question was always: "If not this, then what?" Poor and illiterate, they had or knew no other way to earn a living.

Education made little difference, Wilson learnt after his graduation, when he approached the employment exchange in Hyderabad. "Even if you have a PhD in rocket science you will still not get a job except as a safai karamchari (sweeper)," he was told, mockingly. It was B. R. Ambedkar who changed Wilson's life. "He gave me wings to fly," says Wilson, who discovered the work of the iconic Dalit leader only ahead of his birth centenary celebrations in 1991. Wilson says that he had till then believed that cleaning latrines was the fate of those of his ilk. Reading Ambedkar radically changed his thinking.

"Why is it that a Brahmin cleaning a toilet in Sabarmati Ashram is treated with respect, while one who belongs to the Bhangi untouchable caste, even if a graduate, has to live his entire life with indignity?" Ambedkar had asked. It was caste that enslaved them all, Wilson realised. Setting them free needed a new kind of language and ideology.

"If Ambedkar could, in his time, do this in the face of tyranny and resistance, why could we not do it today?" he asks. This is the gist of his speeches, delivered loud and clear.

When Wilson gets hold of a mike, his team automatically lowers the volume, he confesses. He knows that loudness is integral to their movement, especially in a country where the voice of the disempowered is often muted.

The beginning of an andolan

In the late 1980s, Wilson began working informally on the issues of his community in Kolar. By 1991, he had successfully convinced the government of Karnataka to knock down all dry latrines, putting in place proper toilets, and offer manual scavengers rehabilitation packages. The lives of some 3,000 manual scavengers changed overnight.

In 1993, he set up the SKA. It has 6,000 members spread across the country today. It makes a record of every single manual scavenger in every district, mapping where each one lives and the dry latrines they clean. This data is then collated and taken to the district collector.

In the early years of the SKA's functioning, the biggest challenge was to tackle the mental block in the minds of members of the community itself. Wilson recalls their responses. What's wrong with what we're doing? It is part of our karma. We have to survive like this in this birth. "Everybody knows how to enslave somebody," he says. "Nobody knows how to bring them back from slavery."

Over time, members of the SKA slowly started changing people's mindsets. "We began to instil hope, self-respect and dignity through interactions that gave the people a lot of love; they loved us back," says Wilson.

The movement drew people from all walks of life, including journalists, social activists, technocrats, bureaucrats and professors. "We never wanted to be a casteist organisation; (we wanted to be an organisation) that drew people from all walks of life for a common goal - to end manual scavenging," he says.

The group invoked the Employment of Manual

Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines Prohibition Act 1993, which punished those employing scavengers or building dry latrines. In 2007, the Self Employment Scheme for Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers (SRMS) was introduced, giving focus to rehabilitation. Meeting parliamentarians and district collectors, Wilson would cite the example of Kolar and show how it would just take a week to ban the abhorrent practice. After all, once the SKA had mapped the problem areas, all that an administration had to do was demolish dry latrines, build new toilets and give manual scavengers rehabilitation packages.

But even this needed a mammoth effort. "I started to realise that bureaucracy was our biggest challenge," Wilson recalls.

The one gaping flaw in the legislation was how narrowly the manual scavenger was defined: as a person who carried dry excreta on the head. All other forms of manual scavenging were ignored. On December 6, 2013, mainly because of the SKA's advocacy, the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act was passed. This widened the definition to include those employed to clean unsanitary latrines, sewers and septic tanks. It also asked all the States to conduct a survey of manual scavengers and initiate their rehabilitation.

Tasks ahead

Wilson has three major tasks to tackle: dismantling the misconception that manual scavenging has been abolished and therefore doesn't exist; empowering the widows of those who lost their lives cleaning tanks and other such units; and pushing for the use of scalable technology to replace human intervention in cleaning. "While the use of dry latrines has reduced, that it still exists in 2019 should shock us into waking up to the problem with urgency. We may forget to address the issue altogether if we don't right now," he says.

Recent data collected by the SKA records 1,137 manual scavengers who are still engaged in cleaning dry latrines across seven States - UP, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Uttarakhand, Maharashtra and West Bengal. The first three collectively account for 1,000 cases.

"The state isn't moving to stop this," says Wilson who criticises the "lazy approach" of earmarking compensation schemes instead of banning the practice and using technology to prevent deaths in the first place. According to him, there are 4,600 towns and 6,000 municipalities where scavenging is still a reality.

"The quantum of the problem is huge. Tech innovations such as Bandicoot and Sewer Croc, developed by entrepreneurs, need state support to scale. The Government should use this as an opportunity to serve the people and reap their gratitude," he adds. Wilson holds that the Government's Swachh Bharat mission is flawed because it approaches sanitation in a silo, segregated from the concerns of the people involved in the process. "This has only increased the number of casualties given the frequent cleaning of septic tanks," he says.

In 2016, Wilson was awarded the prestigious Ramon Magsaysay award for "asserting the inalienable right to a life of human dignity". While that brought about more media recognition, he doesn't for a moment assume he has 'arrived'. His foot is still firmly pressed on the pedal. As he explains, "People tell me that I have become quote-worthy. I tell them that I have been saying the same things for years. You only started listening now."

"While the use of dry latrines has reduced, that it still exists in 2019 should shock us into waking up to the problem with urgency. We may forget to address the issue altogether if we don't right now."

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Young Changemaker | **Kush and Arjun Pandey**

When teenagers turn talent scouts

Kush and Arjun Pandey dreamed of unearthing sporting talent from the grassroots. Technology helped them realise the dream



Arjun (left) and
Kush Pandey
VIJAY KUTTY

BY CHITRA NARAYANAN

There's a lot of sporting talent hidden away in India's over six lakh villages, most of them remote. But it's only a rare Hima Das from the hitherto unknown village of Kandhulimari in Assam who can break out and win international glory. For the most part, athletes with superlative potential living in rural areas remain unnoticed.

Kush and Arjun Pandey would like to change that. These teenage brothers, aged 18 and 15 respectively, have created an easy-to-use mobile app called ScoutMe to identify rare football talent from the grassroots. The app was found to be so effective that it has been adopted by the All India Football Federation (AIFF). In barely six months, 3,000 of its scouts have filed an unbelievable 12,000 scouting reports on the app. As a result there are now 29,000 players registered on the app!

Gains from a loss

The Pandey brothers began working on their idea nearly four years ago, when Kush was barely 14 and Arjun 11. The trigger, says Kush, a class 12 residential student at the Jayshree Periwal International School in Jaipur, was when he was in class 9 and trying for a place in the Rajasthan football team. "I had gone for the State tournament to Bandikui, a small village in

the State. We had cleared the group stages very easily, brushing aside all the teams. We thought we had an easy match as this was a poor village team," he says. To their surprise, they lost, 1-4.

That set Kush thinking. As he points out, there was so much talent in that unsung village team, yet the chances of any of their players representing the State were remote. "I knew it would be students from Jaipur, Bikaner or Kota who would get more opportunities to play in the nationals. I wanted to change that somehow," he says.

Passionate about sports and a keen footballer, Kush mulled over what he could do, especially as he was really despondent over India's lack of medals at the Olympics. He knew there was nothing he could do about infrastructure or coaches but as he pondered over the matter and did some research he got the idea of scouting for talent. "I started digging deeper into how scouting is done in India and how it is done around the world," he says.

He found that in many parts of Europe, it was done physically. In England, for instance, recruitment experts in each of the big clubs watched league matches in search of prospective players, and gauged not only ability but aptitude and attitude as well. Given India's size and lack of qualified scouts (you need a trained eye to spot talent), he realised that this approach was not feasible. That was why city kids

"India needs an efficient scouting system that is inclusive. Otherwise, all the urban kids will end up getting selected, the rural guys will not be in the reckoning."

KUSH PANDEY

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scored over rural kids come selection time; they got noticed more easily. Kush, however, felt this was not fair. "India needs an efficient scouting system that is inclusive. Otherwise, all the urban city kids will end up getting selected, the rural guys will not be in the reckoning," he points out.

The best way to be fair and cover greater ground appeared to be through a mobile app. Kush's idea was that rather than have scouts travelling to interior regions, local experts in those regions could just feed in a report of players' performances and skills on an app that could then be downloaded by anyone. He had seen how some English clubs used software packages where video clips of potential sportspeople and their performance statistics are provided at the click of a button. Technology was definitely an effective way of bridging physical distances.

And thus was born ScoutMe.

Creative juices

Kush was now in class 10 and feeling the pressure of schoolwork and the upcoming Board exams. He needed help and so he roped in his younger brother, Arjun. Both began working on the project in right earnest, with Arjun putting in a large chunk of the tech work. Says Arjun: "We decided to redefine the process of scouting and digitise it. It is extremely cumbersome to do it manually." This is because typically, scouting reports involve a lot of paperwork.

To begin with, they talked to their erstwhile coaches at the Baichung Bhutia Football Academy where they had trained at in Delhi to find out what parameters needed to be put in. The boys had initially studied in Delhi at Mother's International School, before they moved to the boarding school at Jaipur. The BBF coaches, who had Asian Football Championship licences, helped them with the criteria and skills that they looked for in a player.

In a crude first version, the boys created a Google Documents form in which various parameters of a player, ranging from dribbling skills to striking ability, could be rated by a scout, and shared. This was later refined into an app.

The boys created the entire app from scratch - learning how to do so from online tutorials and totally encouraged by their father Sanjeev Pandey, a petroleum consultant. They say creating the app itself was fairly simple, though on user experience they needed some help. Now, they have hired a full-fledged technical team that operates from Haridwar in Uttarakhand.

But how did they get the AIFF to listen to them? Initially, it was tough. "As kids no one took us seriously," admits Kush. "But, there was concrete evidence to show to the federation: our pilot with the BBF." The whole idea of taking the app to the AIFF came from their coaches at BBF, who had tested it and saw its potential. Upon their suggestion, Kush wrote to the AIFF, following which a technical team from the federation met them and evaluated their app. To the boys' delight, the AIFF team felt the app would work. "They suggested a few changes to our application which we were happy to incorporate," says Kush. An important modification was to segment the profiles into different age-groups given that skill requirements change at every level.

Kush says the app is kept deliberately light and easy to download, and simple to work on the field. The more information you add, the slower the app will get. The focus was on being able to feed inputs from the field easily and quickly.

Once the AIFF took the app, it was integrated to the association's central registration system. Now, its match fixtures are all on the app, as well as profiles of

all the registered players. How it works is that once a new player is spotted, a profile and scouting report is created, giving ratings on ball control, dribbling, crossing, finishing. There's also scope to write a detailed review of the player, and his or her potential.

Arjun describes how they have taken care to make the information age-group appropriate. While there's no call for too many details about younger players, there's scope to make the reports about older players more in-depth.

However, it's early days still.

Scaling Up

Although the first goal has been achieved, the boys are looking at a bigger picture. "The ideology we have applied to the football world can be replicated in other fields too," says Arjun. Kho Kho is the next sport they are thinking of expanding into, followed by hockey.

One way to scale is to expand into other sports, another is to take the app global, says Kush, clearly quite ambitious. "While Europe has a very well established scouting system, many parts of Africa too have the same problem as us. That can be an area where we can look to scale," he says.

The boys are encouraged by their teachers too to think big. At Jayshree Periwal, their Dutch football coach, Michael Roesler, is encouraging and supportive. Roesler who came to learn yoga in India but stayed on to coach at schools, points how in the Netherlands it is fairly easy for the system to pick out talent, but in India, not only is the talent spread out but the competition is intense.

Jayshree Periwal, the director of the school, remarks on the sensitivity and empathy of the boys as well as their all-round skills. "Both are doing academically very well and also shine at sports. But what endears them to me is the way they are constantly thinking about society and questioning how they can change things."

Kush and Arjun are not only about football and technology. They are also aware of social issues and are responsive to them. In this context, Jayshree Periwal points out how the boys played a football game dressed as transgenders so that they could understand first-hand what it feels like to be a member of the LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) community and the problems they faced. In light of this, the boys are now pushing for more inclusivity in the app. As they point out, the number of female players is miniscule. Going forward they also want to integrate the LGBTQ community in it, though there is no team really with transgenders.

Future Goals

Kush Pandey has his future all chalked out. It will be connected to sports. He hopes to pursue a degree in sports management in the US once he finishes school. With this aim, he interned for a month in London during his summer vacation at the Football Association (FA) of UK and actually got a chance to see how the scouting system worked there and got a feel of the behind-the-scenes action. "I shadowed Mr Mark Bullingham (the chief commercial and football development officer of FA), and also got to learn about the marketing of the game," he says.

Both boys love to read, and are inspired by Steve Jobs and Peter Thiel, the co-founder of PayPal. It's not surprising to hear that their favourite book is Michael Lewis' *Moneyball*. "I would love to do something with data and sports," says Kush.

With such role models, and such dedicated focus and confidence, there is no doubt they will achieve their goals.

Kush and Arjun are not only about football and technology. They are also aware of social issues and are responsive to them

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Young Changemaker | Anju Verma

From the village to the world

Anju Verma is on a mission. She is 16 and she wants to ensure that no child is ever out of school

BY PANIMA

At the muddy intersections of Daulatpur village in Haryana's Fatehabad district, elderly men sit around their hookahs, playing cards or just soaking in the winter sun. Men dominate public spaces in this village of over 6,000 residents. If you do occasionally run into women in the by-lanes, you will find them with their faces and heads veiled. So, when 16-year-old Anju Verma bounds out of her home greeting you with a breezy "Happy Morning", it comes as a surprise. Or maybe not, for this class 11 student of Fatehabad's Crescent Public School has been making big waves in the State.

Anju has a mission: She wants to get children to school, all children. And that's exactly what her NGO, Buland Udaan - which means soaring high - has been trying to do for the past year-and-a-half.

The campaigning spirit

Dressed in jeans and blazer, shirt tucked in, Anju is clearly in control as she sits in the living room of her modest home, surrounded by colleagues from Buland Udaan. They listen intently to her, speaking only when called upon to do so, the men included.

In Haryana's fiercely patriarchal society, this is an unusual sight. But they know and respect the fact that she is the face of their campaign and the spirit behind it too. Else, would it have been possible for them to enroll in school nearly 300 children from Daulatpur and Fatehabad districts over the last two years?

Anju clearly remembers what got her started almost four years ago. She speaks breathlessly, but events, anecdotes and conversations are stacked in a neat order in her head.

"I was in class 8 in a government school," she recalls. "There were some students who never completed their homework and were pulled up by the teacher almost every day. One day, I asked them, in jest, if they liked being rebuked."

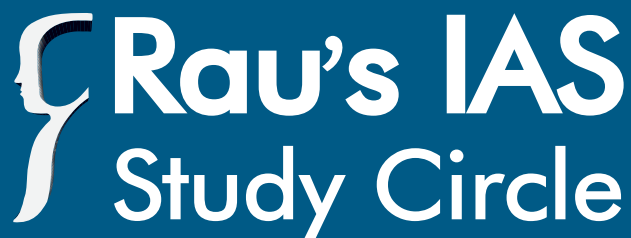
The students - all migrants from Punjab - she had addressed gave it right back. "We are not jobless like you," one of them said. Anju didn't know Punjabi but, as she says with a laugh, "curse words in all languages sound the same!"

That's when the penny dropped. She realised that many of her classmates were juggling with a lot more than just the usual rigid schedule of home and school. They scrubbed, cleaned, cooked, took care of siblings and fed livestock while their parents left home early to work in the fields.

No wonder the parents got annoyed if they saw their children with their books. "Who will do the chores, they asked," says Anju. "My class fellows said that if I was so concerned about their education, I should talk to their parents."



In Haryana's fiercely patriarchal society... they know and respect the fact that she is the face (and spirit) of their campaign



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When she tried to share her concerns with her mother, Sujata Devi, she was ticked off for meddling in other people's business.

Anju then spoke to a teacher. He patiently heard her out and introduced her to the term 'child labour'. "He told me that making children under the age of 14 work was child labour and was punishable by law," she says.

Dragging along a friend, Anju visited the home of a classmate and spoke to her parents in an effort to convince them to allow their children to attend school and study freely. "All they wanted to know was my father's name," says Anju. In Daulatpur, if girls were found outside their homes, the matter was duly reported to their fathers.

"This made me nervous. I wondered if I would find myself out of school by getting entangled in these issues," she says.

However, she did not give up. With the help of friends and some teachers, Anju managed to finally get the parents to attend meetings at school. The feedback they got from teachers regarding their wards forced a few parents to think differently. They were insulted by the bad reports and didn't like that feeling. "Slowly, they started to let their kids do their schoolwork at home," says Anju.

Emboldened by these small successes, Anju began scanning the neighbourhood for children who had dropped out of school.

Typically, the maximum number of children dropped out during the cotton-picking season, which was from November to January, because they too had to work in the fields with their parents. "This fetched them money. But getting back to school and making up in class after an absence of three months or so was difficult. So they just quit altogether," Anju says. She, however, managed to get around 15 or 20 of them back to school.

Leadership training

Anju's work got noticed and Save the Children Foundation, an international NGO working in the villages of Haryana, chose her for training.

"Every Sunday I would travel to neighbouring Sirsa where they would train me on child rights," she says.

The Ashoka Youth Venture, a nonprofit that seeks to promote leadership at the community level, also took notice, and honoured Anju as a changemaker. "They gave a name to what I was doing. If I make people aware of an act or law, it is leadership. When I settle local issues, it's called creative problem-solving," she stresses.

All of this led to what she considers a life-altering moment — when she was chosen to be a TEDx speaker in Pune. "It convinced me that I needed to step out of my village," says this teenager, who is wise beyond her years. But there were other consequences too. Relatives and others started taking her seriously. Most importantly, her relationship with her truck-driver father, Rajinder Kumar, began to transform.

There was a time when months would pass without the two of them talking to each other. "My mother acted as the mediator if we wanted anything from him," she recalls. She first noticed a change in her father when she needed his permission to attend the training sessions in Sirsa.

"My mother asked me to talk to my father directly. I gingerly told him that I needed to travel on matters related to my studies. He grunted his approval. My mother was so shocked that she asked me to confirm it at least thrice," she recalls.

Later, he accompanied Anju to Pune for the TEDx lecture, and became emotional at the standing ovation she received. "Today, even the boys in my

village do not get the kind of support I get from him now," says Anju. In fact, most of the expenses of the Buland Udaan team on their village visits are borne by her father.

Freedom flight

Buland Udaan was set up in October 2017, a month after the TEDx talk, to make her village free of child labour and to ensure that all children attended school. In the last 18 months, the 55-strong team has surveyed 60 villages and ensured that all the children they had enrolled remained in school. The youngest member in the team is 13 and the oldest, 25.

"Sometimes, people are just waiting for someone to help them put their kids in school," says Anju.

It's not always easy. They had to visit Bodiya Kheda village almost 20 times to make sure that the children of daily-wage workers attended school.

"About 20 kids had never been to school. They worked in the fields," she says. "The parents made the kids run away when we visited. Finally, we threatened to bring in the police and managed to enrol 21 children."

Teachers let them know when a child misses school for more than three days in a row. Small teams make weekly visits to follow up cases, they conduct door-to-door surveys and cover all the 60-odd villages every month. They have managed to get the support of the sarpanch of Fatehabad, Om Prakash Gadwal, whose word helps make access easy. Every last Sunday of the month finds the members of Buland Udaan meeting to share stories of their visits.

Surinder Kumar, a teacher at the Rajkiya Pradhik Pathshala in Daulatpur, recalls how Anju's team enrolled a 15-year-old girl who had never been to school.

"It was a warm July afternoon, but Anju insisted on coming with me to the girl's house and talking to the parents until they finally agreed," the teacher says. He notes that the team continued to take care of the girl long after she was admitted to school. While the smaller children can get books and other school accessories under the RTE Act, the team often has to pitch in with bags, uniforms and books for the older ones. There are times when they don't have the money to do this.

Buland Udaan also teaches the children of migrant labourers by holding daily classes for them in the evenings. "We have been teaching 30 kids who are children of broom-makers and ragpickers," Anju says.

Beyond school

Anju's work goes beyond education. "Two days ago, I got a call regarding two child marriages. We got one cancelled the day before and have informed the police about the other," she says.

She has so far managed to stop 12 child marriages. As she says, "I just call 1098."

Thanks to her father's support, Anju has been instrumental in getting victims to file cases of sexual harassment for which, she says, she has sometimes been threatened by the families of the accused.

When they come to her house to make trouble, "my father stands his ground. He just tells them to get proof of my involvement, which they cannot".

But her mother worries, especially after friends of the accused in a harassment case threatened to burn her scooter. Still, Sujata Devi stresses that Anju has her full support.

"It is very difficult for a girl to work in these places. A lot of people now come looking for Anju and that makes me proud," she says.

Anju, meanwhile, is looking beyond her cluster of villages. Her work has just begun.

Anju's work goes beyond education... She has so far managed to stop 12 child marriages. As she says, "I just call 1098."



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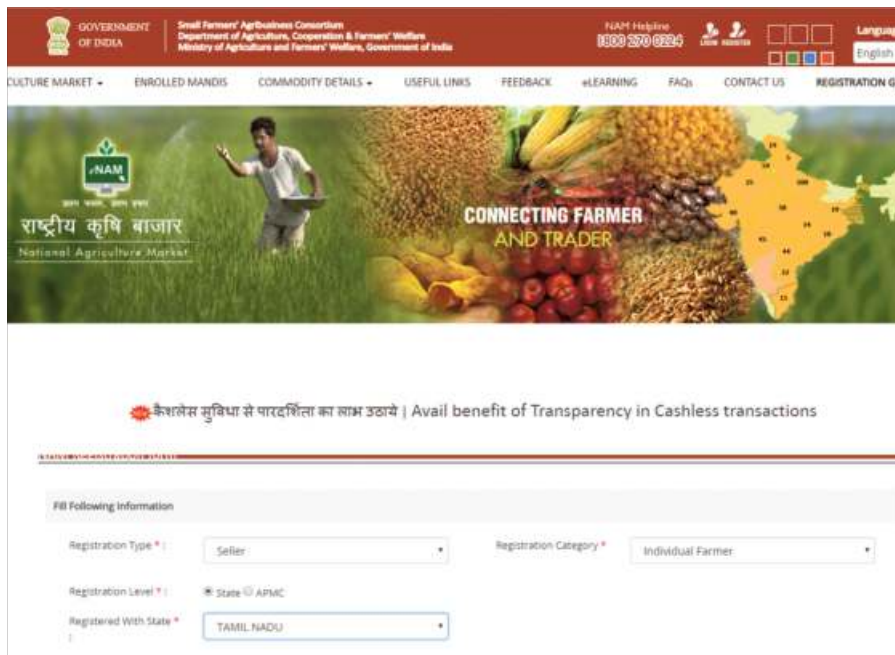
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RAJALAKSHMI NIRMAL

BY RAJALAKSHMI NIRMAL

I met Poolamma, a farmer from Dasthanda village of Nalgonda district in Telangana, on a cold morning in Suryapet mandi. “She has travelled 35 kilometres to be here,” said a mandi official standing beside me. Even before I could finish asking why, swiftly came the reply, “... because prices are better here than at the village”.

Suryapet mandi is one of 585 markets that come under eNAM – the electronic National Agriculture Market.

Walking around the market yard, I met many farmers who had come from far-off villages. When I asked one of them what brought him here, he replied, “eNAM-lo correct rate vastundi. Tookam kuda correct ga untundi. Kani annitikanna pedda upasamanam, payment ade roju ravadam. Ma oorilo ammithe padihenu rojulu nundi one nela padutundi.” (In eNAM we get the right rates. The weight is also correct. But the biggest relief is that payment comes on the same day. If I sell in my village, it takes 15 days to one month). Coming from a tenant farmer from Narayanagudem village in Nalgonda district of Telangana, this is high praise.

In the last two years, eNAM has transformed the way farmers sell their produce. From having to deal with secret auctions in some mandis and open-outcry auction in others, farmers today benefit from automated auctions for agri produce at the point of primary sale across all 585 mandis in the country.

A vision realised

It all started in 2015 with the Government’s vision of creating ‘One Nation One Market’ to give farmers the power to decide where to sell and at what price. The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs approved the setting up of eNAM in July 2015. The Small Farmers’ Agribusiness Consortium (SFAC) was given the responsibility of implementing the project with a target to cover 585 mandis by 2017-18. The Department



of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers’ Welfare (DAC&FW) was charged with funding the States’ expenses with respect to software, and with giving a one-time grant to each mandi to buy the required equipment and build infrastructure.

On April 14, 2016, the eNAM portal was declared open by the Prime Minister with a pilot launch in 21 mandis across Gujarat, Telangana, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Jharkhand and Himachal Pradesh. By March 2018, the untiring work of SFAC and its implementation partner, Nagarjuna Fertilizers and Chemicals – the company that won the bid to design, develop and maintain the portal – saw 585 mandis across 16 States and two Union Territories being connected to eNAM when Andhra Pradesh, Chandigarh, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Puducherry, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Uttarakhand and West Bengal also signed up.

But it has not been easy: changing the mindset of thousands of traders and over one hundred lakh farmers, and motivating them to move to the

Changing the mindset of thousands of traders and over one hundred lakh farmers has been a challenge

electronic system was a challenge. “In the initial days of eNAM, there were instances of commission agents and traders going on strike and bringing activities in mandis to a standstill, but thanks to the strong will and support of the State governments the idea of an electronic national agri market became a reality in two years,” said Dushyant K Tyagi, Chief Business Officer, Nagarjuna Fertilizers and Chemicals. Today, some 1.45 crore farmers, 1,21,000 traders and 67,455 commission agents are registered on the platform.

What are the benefits?

Telangana leads the country with some of the best eNAM mandis. The process right from gate entry to auction and then weighment of the produce of the farmer and issuing a sale bill, happens smoothly.

When asked to identify a key achievement of eNAM, Telangana’s secretary of the Agri Marketing Board, Laxmi Bai, responded with one word: “Transparency”. She said eNAM had brought in transparency at all stages, right from bidding to the point of weighment and sale.

Every trader at an eNAM mandi now logs on to the portal through the mobile app or the website, and places a bid. The system identifies the highest bid for every lot and declares the winners. A trader cannot revise or cancel a bid once placed and submitted. At Nizamabad mandi, a farmer from Munapally village said, “Earlier, traders use to collude and fix the price. But online auction has ruled out that possibility.” In December last year, the peak season for turmeric, Nizamabad mandi saw 10 to 11 bids per lot - i.e., there were 10-11 buyers quoting prices for each lot during the auction. When there are more buyers, rigging prices becomes difficult.

Commodities across all the 585 linked mandis are auctioned online. The initial problems of the system collapsing during peak arrivals have been sorted out. Vijay Vujjini, Chief Technology Advisor and architect of the eNAM platform, who was also involved in creating some of the core systems of UIDAI, said, “We scaled up the capability of the system to handle more traffic and work with less down time, and also put a backup in place.”

Another breakthrough was moving to electronic weighing scales that are integrated with the portal through Bluetooth. Earlier, farmers used to lose between two and three kilos a bag because of wrong reading or cheating by agents. But that’s not the case now. In Telangana, for instance, farmers get thakpatti, i.e., bill of sale from the POS machine once the weighment process is done. This carries the weight of the sold crops and the payment the trader has to make to the farmer.

The other huge benefit is how much time farmers save. “Earlier, since it was an open out-cry bidding and traders had to walk about and move from one lot to another and bid for it, not all lots that arrived in a day got sold out the same day. In some cases where bidding was over and the deal sealed, farmers had to still come again the next day to finish the weighment process and take payment from the trader,” said a farmer in Suryapet.

But with eNAM, auctioning, weighing and sale are all completed by the evening of the first day and the farmer can return home, payment in hand, the same day. In contrast, a farmer selling to the commission agent at the village gets paid at the agent’s convenience - sometimes 15-20 days later and sometimes after a month.

Laxmi Bai recollected the work done in the last two years or so. “We have 47 mandis under eNAM today, but it was not an easy task when we started. We had to deal with commission agents, traders and farmers.

Every day in the first six-seven months we had review meetings with mandi officials and addressed their problems. Today it is functioning smoothly, and we are happy.”

Gaps to fill

Apart from the benefit to farmers, eNAM has also ensured that all trade in the 585 mandis is in the books and the Agricultural Produce Marketing Committees (APMCs) in the various States get their due with respect to mandi fees. However, there are still some gaps.

Firstly, not all mandis have assaying facilities - the infrastructure to test the quality of produce on tradable parameters. Those mandis that do have an assaying lab, have only basic machinery capable of doing quality assaying of say about 30-40 per cent of arrivals in a day. At Suryapet, the assaying lab is run by about four-five people who manually clean and assay sample packets (500 grams each) of paddy - they separate good grains from shrivelled, spoiled/weevilled grains and foreign matter by hand. The lab has paddy cleaners, winnowing fans and a moisture metre but all these need to be manually operated. Imagine the scene during peak arrivals, when 8,000 lots of paddy arrive in a day.

The other problem is that payment to farmers is not happening online. Commission agents function as intermediaries between farmers and traders as the latter want 10-14 days to settle the payment. So, when the auction is completed via eNAM and the winning trader is identified, the agent settles the farmer’s dues by paying in cash or by cheque and gives the trader a credit period to pay back. It goes without saying that the agent takes a commission for the service from the farmer (without the agent, the farmer would not have got the payment immediately).

Looking ahead

Both the SFAC and Nagarjuna Fertilizers acknowledge the challenges. In order to address the problem of lack of assaying infrastructure, the SFAC is trying to loop in players such as FOSS, Nebulaa and CDAC (Centre for Development of Advanced Computing) to provide AI-based quality testing machines for grains and pulses. On the payments front, it is examining the possibility of bill discounting for traders or obtaining a credit limit for them, from banks, with the limit being based on the trade history of the individual.

To bring buyers from outside the mandi and to enable farmers to get a higher price for the produce, the SFAC has been pushing States to issue a unified licence that would help traders buy produce from across mandis in the State with a single licence. As of December 2018, 18 States had issued unified licences to a good number of their traders.

One step ahead, inter-State transactions have also started on eNAM. The first transaction was in tomato between a trader of Bareilly e-NAM APMC of Uttar Pradesh and farmer of Haldwani e-NAM APMC of Uttarakhand. On the same day, a transaction in potato was carried out between a trader of Rudrapur e-NAM APMC of Uttarakhand and a farmer of Moradabad e-NAM APMC of Uttar Pradesh.

The SFAC has also been working to bring more farmers on the eNAM platform by roping in Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs). The total number of FPCs registered on the eNAM platform since May last year is 634 (across 16 States). Of these, 29 producer companies have so far traded on eNAM.

The Ministry for Agriculture and Farmers’ Welfare has big goals in sight: it hopes to link all 7,500 mandis to eNAM by 2021-22. Once this is achieved, it will be a new India for farmers - one nation, one market.

eNAM has brought in transparency at all stages, right from bidding to the point of weighment and sale

Changeloger - Social Transformation | Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences

Opening doors to the world

The Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences knows and shows how education can radically change the lives of tribal children in Odisha



Achyuta Samanta with students of KISS, whom he considers his 'children'

BY N MADHAVAN

It was the day Puprem Oram dreaded and had hoped would never come. Naxalites had surrounded her school near Mahupada village located in the middle of a thick forest in Sundargarh district of Odisha and had begun identifying students for enrolment in their movement. The unwritten rule was that if a family had two or more children, one had to be given away to the movement. Her name was on the list and Puprem, a class five student, was terrified.

Her mother hid her when the Naxals came to take her away and a teacher smuggled her out of the village and spirited her 400 km away to the Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences (KISS) in Bhubaneswar. Within days, her father was killed by the Naxals for not handing over his daughter. Today, 12 years later, Puprem Oram has completed her masters in Odiya language and is captain of the Odisha volleyball team. She is on her way to achieving her dream of playing for India.

Hutasan Majhi from Andalpuri village in Bolangir district was resigned to life as bonded labour in a brick kiln in Hyderabad, living as he did in abject poverty and needing to support three children. His parents too were bonded labour at the same place. However, he did not want his children to continue this 'family practice' where he was paid a paltry

₹7,000 for six months of backbreaking work. This had been his life for 12 unrelenting years. Then one day he heard about KISS and enrolled two of his daughters there. Their education and other expenses taken care of, Majhi is now back in his village and the wage he earns as a daily labourer is enough to take care of his family.

Transforming lives

KISS, the world's largest tribal university, has transformed not just the lives of Oram and Majhi but that of over 50,000 children and many thousand tribal families in Odisha. Spread over 100 acres in Bhubaneswar, its fully wi-fi campus, with a built-up area of 35 lakh sq ft, a 25,000 sq ft-library, three dining halls with a capacity of 10,000 each, three modern mechanised kitchens, four computer labs that seat 2,000 students, swimming pool, automatic laundry and a 200-bed inhouse medical facility, would easily pass off as one of the many high-end private universities that dot the country. The similarities, however, end there. KISS offers free and fully residential education from KG to PG, kindergarten to postgraduation, to over 25,000 tribal students.

Unlike in other free schools, the high quality education offered here focuses on a holistic approach involving life skills and sports, and taking into account the students' disparate tribal upbringing and

Our philosophy is that each tribe's individual culture and tradition should be retained

value systems. Three KISS students cracked the IIT-JEE (Advanced) exam last year. Many have become entrepreneurs, successful sportspersons, and been appointed sarpanch/chairperson of the panchayat. Ranjit Nayak, a student of KISS, has been identified as a potential Olympic medal winner in archery and has been included in the Target Olympic Podium scheme for the 2020 Olympics.

Professor Ganeshi Lal, governor of Odisha, has a delightful description for KISS. He says "KISS is a flyover from India to Bharat". He goes on to add that "it is loving those who were never loved, respecting those who were never respected...and funding the unfunded".

That KISS is today seen as a unique model of empowerment is entirely due to the efforts of its founder, Achyuta Samanta. It is his firm belief that poverty and hunger can be eradicated only through education. This belief took root in the course of a childhood steeped in poverty, hunger and humiliation. "Seeking food or money is the biggest humiliation. The poor are humiliation-prone and it is not their fault. Their only fault is they are poor," he says as we sit chatting in a quiet corner of the conference room on campus. He does not have an office space and mostly operates from under a kadamba tree in the campus.

Getting past the past

Samanta's father died in 1969 when he was just four years old, leaving his family in highly straitened circumstances. His mother and her seven children would starve for days, only eating when she was able to sell the few vegetables she grew and when she boiled paddy for other villagers. The income from this was not enough to cover even one square meal a day. His older brothers were sent far away to live with relatives. His mother could not afford to educate Samanta, but one day he stumbled into a school while playing and a teacher caught hold of him. When the boy explained that his family could not afford his education, the teacher took him under his wing and sponsored his education. Very soon, Samanta realised that his family could escape poverty only through education.

In between helping his mother with her work and doing chores for his neighbours to make some money, Samanta went on to do a Master's in chemistry at Utkal University in Bhubaneswar, and began teaching. He took tuitions to help weak students. Slowly, he began making enough money to pull his family out of poverty and could have settled into a comfortable life. But he had other ideas.

"The pain from the past refused to go away," recalls Samanta. He wanted to do something to ensure that underprivileged children did not suffer as he had. He invested his entire savings of ₹5,000 of to start two institutions: the Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology (KIIT) and Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences in 1992-93.

KISS had just 125 students in its first year. KIIT, which offers education across multiple streams, too began slowly. By focusing on quality and recruiting good teachers and administrators, he ensured that KIIT became one of the top private universities in the country. Today it has over 27,000 students on its rolls across disciplines that range from arts, engineering, law and so on.

To ensure that KISS was never short of funds in its endeavour to educate the indigenous peoples (25 per cent of Odisha's population), Samanta stipulated that KIIT transfer five per cent of its revenue to KISS every year. "KIIT is KISS' rice bowl," he says. Almost three-fourth of the funding needs of KISS come from KIIT.

Last year (2017-18) it was ₹92 crore. The balance resources come from project grants, donations and contributions from the staff of both institutions who voluntarily donate 3 per cent of their salary annually to KISS.

Operational challenges

Apart from the sheer number of students it handles, KISS faces other formidable operational challenges. Children come from 62 different tribes (including 13 primitive ones) across Odisha, and they speak 62 different dialects. "To make this heterogeneous community a homogeneous one is the biggest challenge," says Prashanta K Routray, CEO of KISS. They tackle this by providing early education in the child's native dialect. "Our teachers can teach in all 62 dialects," says Samanta, adding, "Our philosophy is that each tribe's individual culture and tradition should be retained." It is only in class six that the medium of instruction becomes standard Odia.

The children, sometimes as little as four years old, require a lot of hand-holding as they are exposed to a whole new world. "The kids are used to open defecation. We need to teach them how to use toilets. They have never brushed their teeth," says Routray, to explain the vastness of the task KISS has undertaken. That's why there's an adult, a warden, for every 25 students, to deal with such issues.

"These wardens act more as a surrogate mothers," he says. This is all the more important as 60 per cent of the students at KISS are girls and 80 per cent are adolescents. "They need constant supervision, besides which preventive healthcare issues have to be addressed," he explains.

Since the children prefer non-vegetarian food, they get served that three times a week. This translates to 4,500 kg of chicken every meal. Care is taken to cook the meals, all 50,000 a day, in a hygienic manner. This is critical as tribal children are vulnerable to due to spending their early days in unhealthy surroundings. Their health is also checked regularly. Thanks to all these efforts, the drop-out rate is zero.

In fact, the success that KISS has achieved has made it a model to emulate. "Right to education was extended from class 7 to class 12 after seeing the work done by KISS," says Samanta who believes that half an education is more harmful than no education. Right now he is engaged in expanding KISS to meet the rising demand. "We get as many as 40,000 applications every year, but we can take at best 4,000 students," says Routray, adding, "There is a limit to which we can have students under one roof". So KISS has begun setting up satellite centres across each of the 30 districts in Odisha.

"In 10 years, all the tribal families in Odisha will have access to education through KISS," says Samanta who is now a Rajya Sabha MP.

He is also taking KISS to Delhi, Maharashtra, Kolkata and Kerala where the model is slightly different. Here the funding support comes from local partners while KISS gives the operational know-how.

"Many have asked me if my philosophy of freeing people from poverty and hunger through education is a utopian idea. KISS has proved that it is not," he says. "I believe that given an opportunity the less privileged will show that they are inferior to none."

He was proved right when their rugby team won the Under-14 School Rugby World Cup in London in 2007. Twelve tribal boys, who had never seen an aeroplane before or even gone beyond Bhubaneswar, travelled to a foreign country where everything was new and different, and faced some of the top teams from rugby playing nations. In the finals they beat the team from South Africa, thus making history.

"Many have asked me if my philosophy of freeing people from poverty and hunger through education is a utopian idea. KISS has proved that it is not."

ACHYUTA SAMANTA

NOMINEES

CHANGEMAKER SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION



Akkai Padmashali

From a childhood spent being confused about her identity, Akkai Padmashali, 32, grew up to become a champion of gender equality. At one time forced to be a sex worker, she transformed into a mature transgender rights activist with the help of Sangama, an LGBT group in Bengaluru. She was a key mover in enabling the repeal of Section 377, and is the first transgender in India to get a driving licence identifying her as 'female'.



Centre for Aquatic Livelihood – Jaljeevika

Offering alternative business avenues to agriculture-dependent small and marginal farmers, the Pune-based NGO, Centre for Aquatic Livelihood (CAL) – Jaljeevika, encourages them to leverage the huge opportunity available in inland fisheries by providing access to credit and markets and by fostering entrepreneurship. CAL – Jaljeevika has transformed the lives of over 10,000 men and women farmers in Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Jharkhand, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh.



Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences

The Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences (KISS) was started in 1993 to usher in social change in the Maoist and Naxal affected hinterlands of Odisha, and change the mindsets of young indigenous peoples. As the world's largest school for tribal children, KISS provides quality education to over 25,000 students without compromising their cultural roots and heritage, and placing social responsibility over commercial gains.



Organisation for Rare Diseases India

Bringing multiple aspects of rare disease treatment such as detection, drug availability and clinical trials under one roof, the Organisation for Rare Diseases India (ORDI), a non-profit founded by parents of children affected by rare diseases, serves as an umbrella platform for those affected. Its coordination centre offers free treatment for those with about eight-to-ten rare diseases; there are over 7,000 rare diseases occurring worldwide.



Samina Bano

A former management consultant turned Right to Education (RTE) crusader, Samina Bano, 35, founded the Rightwalk Foundation (RWF), an NGO aimed at getting children educated, irrespective of their socio-economic background. The efforts of Samina Bano and RWF have impacted more than 90,000 children from economically weaker sections across 75 districts and 10,000 schools in Uttar Pradesh over four years.

NOMINEES

CHANGEMAKER FINANCIAL TRANSFORMATION



Faircent.com

Faircent, India's first person-to-person (P2P) lending platform, was founded in 2013 to create an organised alternative credit market for the unbanked and underserved segments of society and to protect them from unscrupulous lenders. Faircent currently has 5.5 lakh registered borrowers and 86,000 registered lenders with a disbursement of ₹55 crore so far.



Kinara Capital

Targeted to fund the missing 'middle market', Bengaluru-based Kinara Capital offers non-collateralised lending to micro and small enterprises to enable and empower entrepreneurship and job creation. Through its custom risk assessment approach, Kinara processes loans within 7 to 10 days. The company offered 18,584 loans with AUM of ₹539 crore as on September 30, 2018.

NOMINEES CHANGEMAKER DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION



BetterPlace

Disturbed by news about the rape of a six-year-old girl in a school in Bengaluru, IT veteran Praveen Agarwala along with Saurabh Tandon developed BetterPlace, a digital platform to verify the blue-collared workforce in the unorganised sector. BetterPlace manages the entire life-cycle of blue-collar employees including onboarding, background check, training and certification.



eNAM

Disentangling farmers from the clutches of middlemen, the Electronic National Agriculture Market (eNAM), an e-commerce platform, enables farmers to sell their produce directly in the market at fair prices. Today, 585 mandis across 16 States and two UTs have enrolled under eNAM, trading over 40.8 lakh tonnes on this platform. A total of 1.31 crore farmers and 1,20,074 traders are registered on eNAM.



iKure Techsoft

From initially running one rural health centre in 2012, West Bengal-based iKure Techsoft now has 28 centres offering affordable and quality healthcare to over 5.5 million people in 2,300 villages in West Bengal, Odisha and Karnataka through the innovative use of technology. The company has a cloud-based database on patient history through its pending-patent technology, Wireless Health Incident Monitoring Service (WHIMS).



InMobi

InMobi, a global provider of cloud-based intelligent mobile advertising, serves ads on mobile devices based on analysis and understanding of the user's location and preferences. Once rejected by 20 venture capitalists, InMobi now holds the number two spot in the Chinese mobile ad business with a global advertising network of 1.6 billion mobile users across 22,000 apps.



Neurosynaptic Communications

Through indigenous technologies, Neurosynaptic Communications, a Bengaluru-based digital health care company, allows doctors to remotely conduct consultations for patients located in far-flung villages. The company's Remote Medical Diagnostics (ReMeDi) technology has enabled and empowered 2,200 rural tele-health centres covering over five crore people in the last 16 years.



Shram Sarathi

With its headquarters in Udaipur, Rajasthan, Shram Sarathi focusses on lending to the migrant workers' community which has poor access to formal financial services and is largely excluded from social security benefits. The company serves as a 'glass house' for financial service providers to engage with migrants. It reaches over 50,000 migrant families in Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra.



Shubh Loans

By preparing a credit score of low income households, Bengaluru-based Shubh Loans helps banks and financial institutions make lending decisions for a section of society that is outside the formal financial system. Using credit scores, the company helped extend credit of around ₹35 crore to people in the annual income group of ₹1.5-4.5 lakh during 2017-18.



Zerodha

It took just eight years for the online discount brokerage company, Zerodha, to become the second largest stock broker by active retail client volumes. Using technology, Zerodha disrupted the stock trading industry dominated by big players such as ICICI and HDFC securities. With six lakh active users, Zerodha contributes 8 per cent of the retail trade in the country.

NOMINEES

YOUNG CHANGEMAKER

Adhya Menda

Moved by hearing about the ordeals of homeless people from her domestic help, 16-year-old Adhya Menda, who is also an avid photographer, started WeRise, an initiative to provide low-cost affordable housing for the underprivileged through funds and other assistance. WeRise raised about ₹22.29 lakh by holding an exhibition of her pictures in Bengaluru.



Anju Verma

Using education as a tool to improve the social mobility of underprivileged children, 16-year-old Anju Verma is a torchbearer who confronted parents and convinced them to send their children to school. Anju personally rescued 46 children working as labourers and ensured that they were enrolled in school.



Kush and Arjun Pandey

Bridging the opportunity gap between urban and rural football talents, the Pandey brothers Kush, 17, and Arjun, 15, developed ScoutMe, an app that serves a football scouting platform to pick raw talent from across the country. With 28,000 players and 3,000 registered scouts on the platform already, ScoutMe is recognised as the official app of the All India Football Federation (AIFF).



Ishan Singh Malhotra

If getting water for irrigation is a major challenge for farmers, optimising the use of available water for irrigation is even tougher. Eighteen-year-old Ishan Singh Malhotra's Pluto device help farmers remotely control their irrigation pumpsets through a GSM-based sim card at the core area of switch board circuitry.



Chethan M

By creating a blood donor network even before becoming an eligible donor himself, Chethan M, 18, developed a database of donors to provide blood when all other sources are exhausted. Through his non-profit entity, Khoon, Chethan has impacted over 50,000 lives in Karnataka, Assam and Chhattisgarh.

NOMINEES CHANGEMAKER OF THE YEAR

#MeToo

Initially taking over social media by storm, India's #MeToo movement quickly turned into a strident and public conversation about a gamut of transgressions by men in power, ranging from sexual harassment to rape. Starting with revelations from the film industry, the movement reached the top echelons of the executive and even forced a junior minister in the External Affairs ministry to resign.



Department of Education, Government of Delhi

Breaking conventional notions about government schools, the Delhi government's education department did a complete overhaul through sweeping changes in infrastructure, teacher training and pedagogy, and the introduction of innovative learning methods. After spending 24 per cent of its budget on education last year, the Delhi government has proposed an allocation of ₹11,300 crore for the current fiscal.



Petitioners against Section 377

In a historic verdict in September 2018, the Supreme Court repealed Section 377 of the IPC, thus quashing a law dating to the colonial era that had cruelly meted out injustice to members of the LGBTIQ community on the basis of their sexual orientation. This landmark legal and, hopefully, socio-cultural victory, followed from the efforts of a group of LGBTIQ petitioners who fought long and hard even as they endured social discrimination.



Reliance Jio

When Reliance Jio made a foray into the broadband and digital services space, signing on 100 million subscribers within a mere 170 days of making its entry in the market, it disrupted the Indian mobile network space forever. By making it possible for every Indian to be able to access the once exclusive broadband services, Jio pushed up Indian data consumption from 20 crore GB to 120 crore GB a month.



GST Council

As an example of the perfect coming together of cooperative federalism and an uncomplicated tax regime, the GST Council played a stellar role in uniting multiple State governments with varying political obligations under a 'one nation-one tax' system called the Goods and Services Tax. The most remarkable aspect of the functioning of the Council is that it has never had to resort to a vote to resolve differences.



The jury meeting with partners and *BusinessLine* representatives at New Delhi on December 17, 2018. On the left are Sanjeev Sanyal, Debjani Ghosh, Pallavi Shroff and Roshni Nadar. Jury members S Ramadorai, Gopal Srinivasan and William Bissell joined through video conference. **KAMAL NARANG**

How we did it

By adding another layer of scrutiny and tweaking the evaluation criteria, the Award process has been strengthened this year

This year we were wiser by experience. The second edition of *The Hindu BusinessLine Changemaker Awards* has incorporated, in its process, many improvements from last year's experiences. These have been made to strengthen the process further. More on that later. However, the principle underlying the awards remained the same - identify and celebrate changemakers who, through their unique ideas, have brought about a positive change to the world we live in.

The nomination window, which signals the beginning of the Award process, opened on September 15, 2018, for the public to send in the names of changemakers they thought were deserving. Simultaneously, journalists of *The Hindu BusinessLine* along with representatives from Knowledge Partners, Ashoka - Innovators for the Public and Deloitte India, began sending in their nominations too. In all, 562 nominations were received across five categories (we do not call for nominees for the Iconic Changemaker category) when the nomination window closed on October 22, 2018.

This set in motion the screening process which saw *The Hindu BusinessLine* and the Knowledge

Partners brainstorm and scrutinise all the nominations for the selection criteria. This happened over five rounds. The result of this process was a long list comprising 129 candidates. This list was further pruned to 45 names through a round of pre-evaluation. This shortlist was then subjected to our detailed evaluation criteria. This year, we tweaked the evaluation criteria to level the playing field for each class of nominees, namely Individuals, Institutions and Government. The end result was a list of nominees, five each for every category.

In another new this year the list of nominees was sent to our Validation Partner, Niiti Consulting, who subjected it to a round of due-diligence. After validation the list of nominees was sent to an independent jury. This year the jury included: S Ramadorai, Former CEO & MD, TCS (jury chair); Sanjeev Sanyal, Principal Economic Advisor, Ministry of Finance, Government of India; William Bissell, MD, Fabindia; Pallavi Shroff, Managing Partner, Shardul Amarchand Mangaldas; Debjani Ghosh, President, Nasscom; Gopal Srinivasan, CMD, TVS Capital

Funds and Roshni Nadar, ED & CEO, HCL Corporation & Trustee Shiv Nadar Foundation. The jury met on December 17, 2018, in New Delhi and identified the winners.

The jury thought it fit to select more than one winner in a couple of categories (Young Changemaker and Changemaker of the Year) in light of the fine work done by them.

At the same time it chose not to pick a winner for the Changemaker - Financial Transformation award as it felt that despite the good work done by the nominees, they needed to scale up their efforts further.



Evaluation meeting in progress at *The Hindu BusinessLine* office in Chennai. **BIJOY GHOSH**

2018 winners



Finance and Corporate Affairs Minister Arun Jaitley, *BusinessLine* Editor Raghavan Srinivasan (second from right), and K Venugopal, Director of KSL (third from left), with the winners of the *BusinessLine Changemaker Awards 2018* in New Delhi. The winners are (from left) Hilmi Quraishi (ZMQ), Dilip Asbe (NPCI), Srikanth Bolla (Bollant Industries), Chandra Shekhar Ghosh (Bandhan Bank), Dr Abhay Bang and Dr Rani Bang, and Subhi Quraishi (ZMQ) KAMAL NARANG

Small Is Powerful

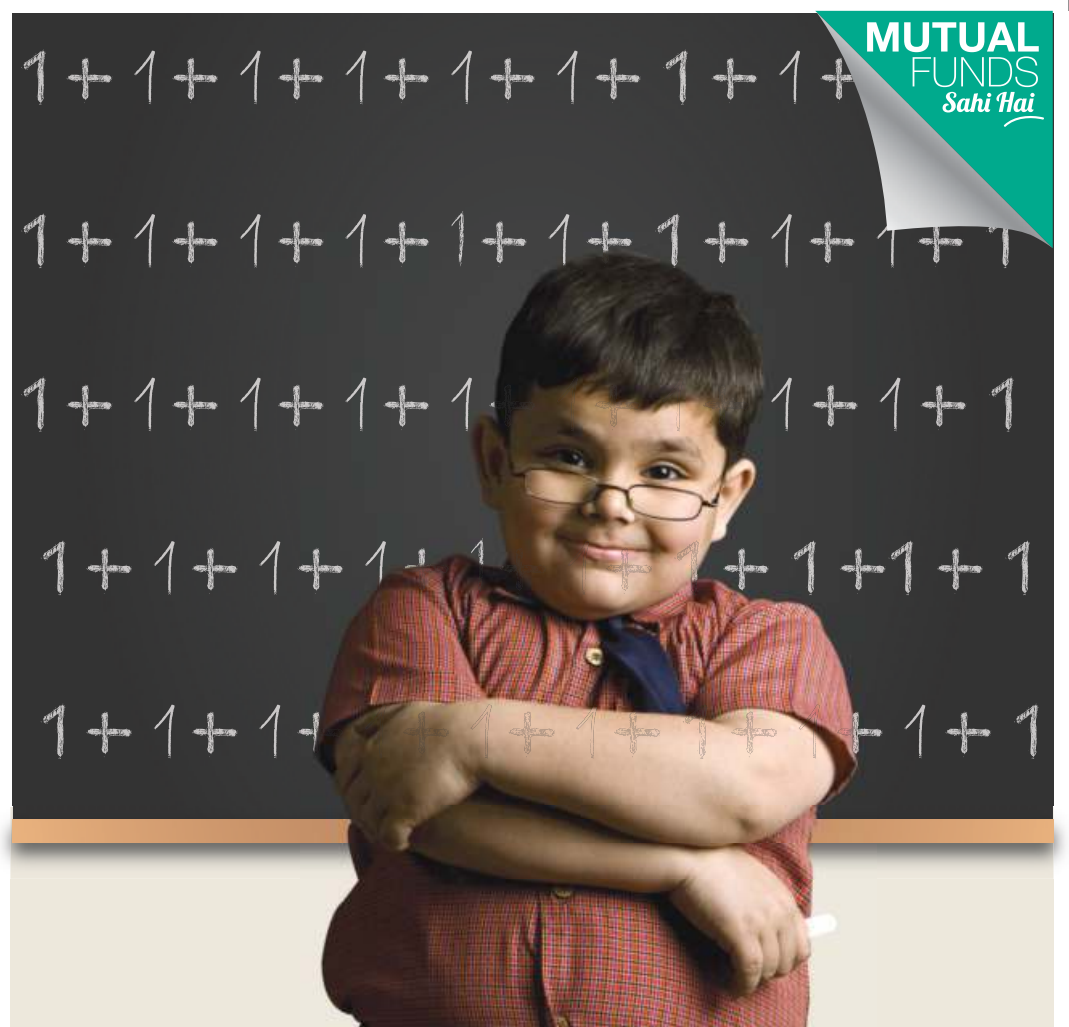
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