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THE QUIET GOOD NEWS

A Monthly from Mission Samridhi

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Catalyse

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Unlike a drop of water which loses its identity when it joins the ocean, man does not lose his being in the society in which he lives. Man's life is independent. He is born not for the development of the society alone, but for the development of his self too.

– Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar



Stories of change have their roots in self - belief.

Mission Samriddhi is a social impact enterprise focusing on something fundamental to change - the belief system. Belief in oneself. Belief in the community. Belief that change is possible if we put our mind to it. If we can dream it, we can do it!

The cover story of this issue focuses on sports as a medium for development. The story follows Sanjay's struggle to revive sports in their Korku community to help build stronger bonds among fellow community members.

We cover this and other such stories of change that are sprouting in the various initiatives of Mission Samriddhi.

Hope you enjoy the issue and if you'd like to know more about some of these programmes do feel free to get in touch with us at info@missionsamriddhi.org.

Team Mission Samriddhi

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Cover Story



Sporting a new mindset!

Sports play a pivotal role in building human character. Sports use physical activity to strengthen muscle memory, leading to greater coordination skills, problem-solving abilities, and increased response in high-stressed environments. These abilities are important to lay the foundation for a better future. Athletes are noticeably adapted to perform better in teams, have improved abilities in goal-setting skills and determination. Some of these characteristics are directly transferable to the classroom environment, leading to improved academic performance and concentration in adolescents and young adults engaged in sports.

Banking on these pillars that sports activity commits to improve, Mission Samridhi and partner organization Institute for Regional Analysis (IRA) founded Ullas Youth Clubs (UYC) in various clusters of Betul, Madhya Pradesh. This article follows the growth of this initiative in Palaskhedi, Gram Panchayat Thapora in Madhya Pradesh and the improvements seen thereafter: Sanjay Kumar Mausik, (30) (B.Sc.), a young man from Palaskhedi belonging to the Korku tribe describes his village as an underdeveloped settlement. He is a prominent member of the Korku community and has been engaged with the IRA at various capacities over the years. Korku, an indigenous tribe of the Satpura range, has a concentrated population in Madhya Pradesh and adjoining areas. Predominantly, a hunter-gatherer tribe with deep-rooted ties to the environment, the Korku tribe had several indigenous sports in their community. Some of the indigenous sports still practiced include dori khel, ghotul race, archery and kushti. Some of these games are not only recreational but also hold cultural and historical significance.

Palaskhedi lacked a community playground. The Ullas Youth Club members volunteered to build a common playground on an abandoned farmland in the village. Mission Samridhi and IRA donated sporting gears, jerseys, nets, and equipment to make the club functional. The Youth Club, focusing on volleyball, recruited participants for camp training. The camp attracted over 100 adolescents and young adults from Palaskhedi, with district level players agreeing to coach young kids in the camp.



A volleyball tournament was organized by the club facilitated by Mission Samridhi and IRA where 35 teams from various villages across Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra participated. The members of the Ullas Youth Club contributed and gathered an INR 30000 fund for the entire event. The local MLA and BDO officer inaugurated the tournament. Sanjay adds, "this was a first such initiative in Palaskhedhi that saw the participation of the local MLA and government dignitaries. We, as a community, spoke in front of them regarding our troubles in the village. They assured us help in the coming days." The entire tournament lasted for over five days with the Palaskhedhi-Ullas Youth Club bagging the first prize in the tournament. "We donated the prize money to the runners up team as a token of appreciation for participating and making our village tournament an enormous success." commented Sanjay.





The children of Bal Sansad recycled plastic shreds to create volleyball nets.



Focusing on volunteering effort of the youth in the village, the Ullas Youth Club rebuilt a 2km stretch of road to help ease farmers in accessing their land. The club also formed a local Children’s Parliament (Bal Sansad) to increase the participation of adolescents in volunteering work. The Ullas Youth Club, with the Bal Sansad, volunteered to rejuvenate a few unused wells in the village. Palaskhedi has a severe water crisis during the summer. These wells will play a crucial role in providing clean water for the entire village. “Adolescents and young adults are now more aware of not polluting the wells of the village. Now, we see more awareness among young children and adults in keeping their environment and water resources clean.” added Sanjay.



The Ullas Youth Club, promoting volunteer work with sports, has rekindled a sense of ownership among the young community members in Palaskhedi. The youth club will organize more such events in the coming days.



Samridhi Yatra - Exposure Visit to Eraviperoor (Kerala)

Exposure visits are key elements in development practice. It promotes cultural exchange, helping participants gather first-hand knowledge. It enables individuals to learn about the best practices and innovative approaches used in different programs. Additionally, it provides an opportunity for individuals and communities to learn from experience and avoid making mistakes in developing effective solutions for developmental challenges. Institutionalising these elements, Mission Samridhi with partner organization Banwasi Sewa Ashram (BSA) organized an exposure trip for 62 participants from CDP cluster panchayats of Sonbhadra, Roberts Ganj, UP to Eraviperoor (an ISO 9000 certified) model panchayat, Kerala.

Eraviperoor, in the past, has received several accolades and admiration for its various initiatives in effective public administration through e-governance and planning. The ISO certification committee inspects the administrative, social, and economic functions like public service delivery, maintenance and construction of water resources, roads, drainage, waste management, school buildings, levy and collection of local taxes and executing government schemes related to employment and others for providing the international standard Quality Management System certification. Among the 62 participants, there were various elected panchayat representatives, Self-Help Group (SHG) members, FPO board members, volunteers, and youth leaders. The participants travelled over 40 hours to reach the panchayat and learn from the local governance structure in Eraviperoor, Kerala. Mission Samridhi structured the two-day visit into interactive sessions between participants and committee members of the Eraviperoor panchayat to learn from their experience in managing the different core functions.

Day 1 began with an introductory session between participants, team BSA and Eraviperoor panchayat members including N. Rajeev (former President), Anil Babu (Ward Member), Sali Jacob (V.P) and Shashidharan Pillai, the current president, and the vice president. Shubha Prem, the Secretary of BSA, provided an overview of the organization's work. BSA, a Gandhian organization established in 1954, has been actively involved in promoting self-sufficiency and self-reliance in the tribal regions of Sonbhadra District, Uttar Pradesh, through community engagement.

After the interaction, the participants visited the ISO certified Family Health Care Center. Some key observations about the center were noted: **Systematic Procedure:** The center follows a structured procedure for attending to patients. The medical team strictly follows the protocol established by the Panchayat. **Focus on Different Age Groups:** Each day, the center diagnoses specific age groups, ranging from neonatal to palliative care. **Emphasis on Women's Health:** Women's health is prioritized, with a particular focus on yoga. The center is recognized as Kerala's first Panchayat, with ISO-9001 certification for its Primary Health Centre (PHC). It has also received the state government's Health Award and Pain and Palliative Care Award. Additionally, the PHC has obtained NQAS certification under the National Health Mission, the Government of India.

The Eraviperoor Gram Panchayat manages the PHC with support from the Government of Kerala. The Gram Panchayat oversees medical and non-medical staff employed by the government. Residents of the Gram Panchayat are required to pay a nominal fee of 5 rupees to access the medical facilities. Specialists also tour the GP on designated days to provide expert care for various diseases.



The Gram Panchayat and its functioning were also explored:

Award-Winning Administration: Eraviperoor received a national award for public administration. The front and main offices of the Panchayat are fully computerized, with over 20 computers. The front office regulated service delivery, ensuring that people did not need to approach multiple authorities or sections. A receipt system facilitated easy tracking of applications, and important messages and services are conveyed through SMS alerts.

Efficient Documentation: The Gram Panchayat's systematic documentation impressed the participants. The Gram Panchayat meticulously carries out tax collection and planning on a priority basis. All office records, information, and transactions are digitized, leading to the launch of the one-minute certificate scheme. Birth, death, and marriage certificates are registered and issued within minutes.

Citizen-Centric Governance: The Panchayat prioritized e-governance at the grassroots level, promoting direct conversations and discussions between the public and the Panchayat. As per the mandate of the Kerala State Panchayat Act, 1994, 11-line departments, including Agriculture, Health, and Veterinary, are placed under the GP's authority. This demonstrated the true devolution of powers to the Gram Panchayat, as mandated by the 73rd Amendment Act of 1992.

The GP received 29% of the annual state budget to carry out field-level work. It achieved 100% revenue targets, collecting approximately 1.2 crore rupees from house permits, house tax, shop fees, and trade licenses. The GP also provided a monthly honorarium to the PRIs from the revenue generated. It prioritized infrastructure development and improved public service delivery using its resources.

Following the visit to the PHC and GP building, the participants visited several other initiatives of the Panchayat. Listed below are some of the few places they explored:

Syam Prabha: In Eraviperoor, the below poverty line families, especially the senior citizens, receive exceptional care through Syam Prabha. Syam Prabha is dedicated to the well-being of the elderly in the village and goes beyond to support their mental health as well. Efforts are made to help senior citizens overcome the challenges of empty nests and loneliness.





Visiting the Ayurveda dispensary, Nutri-mix centre, and rice mill: The center is managed by 16 Kudumbashree members and supplies nutritious food to the balwadi (childcare center) and senior citizens. Moreover, the Nutri-mix is also distributed to six nearby panchayats, supporting the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme.

Interaction with Kudumbashree members: Kudumbashree plays a significant role in women's empowerment. The Kudumbashree follows a credit system where women engaged in business receive credits and are encouraged to repay them. Kudumbashree provides career counseling, financial assistance, and special training programs for teenage children, helping them develop their careers and secure government jobs. Kudumbashree operates through three layers: Neighbourhood Groups (NHGs), Area Development Societies (ADS), and Community Development Societies (CDS). The Eraviperoor Gram Panchayat has 240 NHGs, with 90 actively involved in income-generating activities.

Kudumbashree is primarily funded through district-level missions and supports various income-generating activities.

Visiting Aavi café: In Eraviperoor, the Aavi Cafe stands out as a place where the public can enjoy low-cost, high-quality meals. They offer breakfast, lunch, and dinner, serving between 250 to 400 meals each day at an affordable price of Rs. 20 per meal. The Panchayat further supports Aavi Cafe by providing a subsidy of Rs 10 per meal. The café is operated by members of the Kudumbashree.

Visiting the Anganwadi Center: The participants were quick to notice the cleanliness at the Anganwadi and the level of commitment they show in providing services. There are 11 well-maintained and functional Anganwadis where children receive proper care and support for their development.

Visiting the Waste Management Unit: The Gram Panchayat has taken a proactive approach to waste management. They have assigned specific collection dates each month for households to dispose of plastic waste, which is then recycled at the Panchayat's recycling unit. Annually, they sell 19 tons of recycled plastic products to road contractors at a rate of Rs 20 per kilogram. The women in the village have actively participated in this initiative, using the collected plastic waste to construct four plastic tar roads, setting an example of effective waste management.





On the second day, participants were encouraged to come together and reflect on their journey and themselves.

Bonding exercise: The day began with the participants gathering in an open area, joining hands, and forming a circle. This initial exercise aimed to cultivate a sense of togetherness and support among the group members. Moving on to the next stage, called "I am special," each participant was asked to select an adjective that best described them and share it with the group before their name. This activity provided an opportunity for self-reflection and self-expression, allowing individuals to celebrate their unique qualities. Examples of adjectives shared by the participants included 'Azad,' 'Hasmukh,' and 'Loudspeaker.' Through this exercise, the participants not only acknowledged their own strengths but also fostered an appreciation for the diverse attributes within the group.

Visiting the sports academy: On visiting the Sports Academy, the participants immediately noticed the Panchayat's commitment to promoting sporting talent. The academy offered athletes essential facilities such as a gym, training ground, and other amenities, enabling them to develop and refine their skills. The coaching staff at the academy comprised two sets of coaches. The government appointed one set, while the Gram Panchayat employed the other set. Numerous candidates from the academy have represented India at international podiums, achieving notable accomplishments along the way.

Visualization exercise: The exercise began with the participants reflecting on their village's past, where some of the participants shared memories of a lush green landscape filled with trees that had unfortunately been destroyed over time. Others reminisced about how their entire village used to come together for various causes, highlighting a sense of community that seemed less prevalent in the present time.

In the personal reflections shared by the participants, Ramchandra recalled a mischievous act from his childhood involving stolen milk and yogurt, which resulted in severe punishment from his mother. Umesh Kumar shared a story of a childhood adventure near a river, where he and his friends skipped school, causing worry and scolding from his mother upon their return. Devnath fondly remembered stealing mangoes from an orchard with his friends and enjoying them with salt and chili powder, relishing the excitement of their secret indulgence. Bechan Ram recounted a joyful festival experience where he and his friends would collect rice and lentils from neighbors, cook khichdi outside, and then return home after the celebration. Kunjal Prashad recalled an incident during his hostel days when he and his friends got lost in the jungle while collecting firewood, facing scolding from their teacher, and concealing the true reason for their injuries from their father.

These personal reflections provided glimpses into the participants' colorful childhood experiences, filled with mischievous adventures, memorable festivities, and the formation of lasting bonds with friends. Each story revealed unique aspects of their individual journeys and highlighted the rich tapestry of experiences that make up their collective memories.



The yatra concluded with an interactive session between the Gram Panchayat leaders Rajeev and Anil and the Panchayat leaders from Sonbhadra. The members of the yatra posed important questions, seeking insights into Rajeev's initial challenges and how he managed to overcome them. The group was curious to know the sources of Rajeev's diverse ideas and how he strengthened and leveraged them effectively. The discussion also revolved around the significance of community awareness in the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) to ensure active participation from the people. Additionally, they sought guidance on generating revenue from internal sources.

The importance of Ward Sabha and Gram Sabha meetings was emphasized, and the conversation touched upon the political scenarios in Uttar Pradesh and Kerala. Rajeev, with his motivational spirit, encouraged the Gram Pardans to set their agendas for the upcoming year. One of the primary focuses was women's literacy, with an emphasis on conducting regular ward meetings and creating awareness about the importance of educating women. The proposed approach involved fixing the agenda, raising awareness, and forming ward-wise teams of volunteers who would actively participate in the campaign.

Another crucial topic discussed was the creation of livelihood opportunities in Sonbhadra clusters like Kudumbashree. The efforts being made to uplift Below Poverty Line (BPL) families were also addressed. In his concluding remarks, Rajeev urged the Panchayat leaders to maintain a motto of "Keep dreaming, keep learning, and keep working hard." This inspiring statement served as a reminder of the dedication required to bring about meaningful change in their respective Panchayats.

Technological Innovation and Income Generation

At the end of winter, the forests in the Yawatmal district in Maharashtra become alive with *Buchanania Cochinchinensis* flowers. A deciduous tree, commonly known as Charoli nut, Almondette or Cuddapah almond, *Buchanania cochinchinensis* is native to the Indian Subcontinent, South Central China and much of Southeast Asia. It sheds its leaves in the winter and comes out of hibernation in Spring with a promise of delectable nuts in April. Come April and the women from the tribal hamlets around the forests are seen collecting the precious fruits of this tree. Charoli, as it is called in the region, is an important Non-Timber Forest Produce with high market value. For ages, the Tribal population from Central India have been trading this precious nut from the forest, an important source of their livelihood.

The women from the region spend hours decorticating the nut to extract the priced kernel. "We use a stone to break the outer shell. In one day, we break only one kilo of nuts, giving close to 200 to 250 gms of whole Charoli kernel. Much of it gets damaged in the process. Broken kernels don't have market value. So, we end up using them at home", told Gopika Anna Tekam, president of Jay Seva Self Help Group. The process is time-consuming and involves drudgery. It also leads to wastage due to breakage.

Understanding the commercial and economic potential of the nut in both national and international markets, Mission Samridhi partner, Gramin Samasya Mukti Trust (GSMT) took the initiative of mobilising women's groups to take up Charoli processing as an income generation activity. The villages Waghdara, Vasant Nagar, Durgada and Rohpat in Yawatmal district in Mission Samridhi Cluster, can produce up to 20 quintals of Chironji. The market value for the whole and undamaged Chironji kernel is INR1100/kg. What was required to harness this huge commercial potential, was a technological intervention for effective and efficient decortication of the Chironji nuts. GSMT introduced the decortication machine designed by IIT Mumbai to the Self-Help Groups.

Jayseva Self Help Group from village Waghdara from the Maregaon block in Yawatmal district decided to buy the decorticator as a group. The women from the group procured the Charoli nuts and processed the nuts using the decorticator. An activity which they previously did individually at home is now being done collectively, saving time, improving efficiency and therefore increasing production.



On average, the group processes 30 quintals of Chironji per month. The net profit earned by the group in a month from processing Chironji is INR 216000/-. Since the Chironji processing is a seasonal activity, the decorticator which can also be used to clean the pulses and grains, is rented out by the group to the villagers to process pulses and grains. The group earned a profit of INR 50000/-, in four months during which the machine was used to clean pulses and grains.

Together, that is through the processing of Chironji, pulses and grains, the group earned a total income of Rs 482000/- in just one season spanning six months. Considering there are ten members in the group, each member earned an additional income of INR 48200/- in six months. The initiative has enhanced household income and reduced women's drudgery.



Abhay - The fearless

Abhay is one of those boys who have a mind of their own. He fears none. He follows his heart. His spirit is free. He had already declared he would not attend the school saying he did not like to study and that teachers at the school beat him. No way could he be tamed.

Abhay Sirsham is a class 8th Student from Tehmni Panchayat, Athner Block, Betul, Madhya Pradesh.

In November 2022, when Mission Samridhi Partner, Institute of Rural Analysis (IRA) decided to mobilize the children from the village into a Bal Sansad, Abhay was approached by the IRA team. He was adamant. He retorted with a series of questions - why should I join? Who has the time for such things? What will I get in return? Who will take the goats for grazing? What is the use? While most of the children from Temni were excited to join the initiative, Abhay was least interested. "It was a challenge. We did not want to leave Abhay out of this Bal Panchayat. But convincing him to do so was a herculean task," says Radhika, from IRA.

The team managed to form a Bal Sansad with 30 children in the age group of 7 to 14. The children now started spending more time within the campus of the IRA. Each was given a portfolio. They were assigned different roles and responsibilities. Through various games and activities, the children were introduced to the concepts of democracy, voting, rights, and duties. Abhay was often found peeping inside to see what his friends were doing. He was now alone. Slowly he started participating in some of the activities. But Abhay being Abhay, he would often get into fights with other children, distract and disturb others. It was difficult to make this fearless boy fall in line. Radhika visited Abhay's school and met his teachers. All the teachers complained about him, stating he was a 'problem child'. His academic performance was poor. He could not read or write and failed to identify the alphabet. There were many other children in the school with similar dismal performance. The school dropout rate, especially amongst the girls, was high.

Most of the children in the region, which is predominantly a tribal belt, are the first-generation learners. The school dropout rate is high due to migration, poverty, and lack of awareness. There are instances where class 10th students are not able to read and write and as a result must drop out of school when they fail secondary school certificate exams. With COVID the situation only worsened. The lock down alienated children from formal education. In the absence of online classes, children in the region lost crucial learning time. Through Abhay, IRA team understood the disturbing realities of education in the rural and remote parts.

These insights prompted Mission Samridhi to initiate Ullas Libraries in the region. On November 14, 2022, the Ullas Library was started at the Temhni campus of IRA. This library was inaugurated by none other than Abhay. Abhay was given the responsibility of managing the library and motivating the children to visit the library regularly. Overwhelmed by this great honour and responsibility, Abhay changed. He now took interest in all the activities of Bal Sansad. His academic performance is slowly improving. With his potential being recognised and appreciated, Abhay is blooming. "I want to join the Indian Army and serve my country," says Abhay.

Abhay's story gives hope for many other first-generation learners who could achieve so much in life if they are rightly motivated and encouraged to live their dreams.



Guaranteeing access to knowledge – Ullas Library

The MV School at Madhya Hollongpar in Jorhat, Assam has a new Ullas Library. Inaugurated on the 23rd of Feb, the school is part of the Madhya Jorhat Education Cluster of Central Jorhat Development Block.

Stacked with insightful books on literature and science, the Ullas library came into existence with the combined efforts of the Mission Samridhi Education initiative and the school administration. The library, as many others in the district of Jorhat, houses several books on Assamese folklore and literature. These books will provide an essential reading nourishment for the children of MV school in Assamese culture, history, and its geography. Assamese folklore combines both oral and documented history. The children, while reading these books, will engage with ideas and imagination that are central to the culture. In other words, storytelling is central to human existence and the children will find scores of ideas to rejuvenate their minds in this library.

MV School, Madhya Hollongpar, reached out to Mission Samridhi with the request to build an Ullas library in their school premise, back in 2022. Most of the students in the school are tea plantation workers' children and children from neighboring areas. Surrounded by tea gardens, the school has several students whose parents work in these gardens. Ullas library seeks to develop a reading habit in these children, guiding them to believe in a more just future. Previously, the school had a repository of government course books and other learning materials, but lacked literature books, specifically Assamese literature. The Ullas library will help bridge this gap and make the school learning experience more wholesome for the children. The students will have endless access to these books and can also borrow these books for leisure reading at home. Being inclusive, the library will also nurture a space that allows students to be more imaginative and forthcoming in reading and borrowing books. The library houses several books from both regional and national level publishers.

The students, both excited and entertained, were happy to provide first-hand feedback on the literature books available at the library. The sustained collaboration of the school administration will help this Ullas initiative reach newer heights and students to a brighter future.

Highlights from our Clusters:

Wardha

- 7 new SHGs formed and were linked to MAVIM/UMED
- 167 new kitchen gardens were setup
- 42 pregnant women were linked to Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana
- 8 beneficiaries with disabilities were linked with Sanjay Gandhi Niradhar Yojana
- Women entrepreneurship training was organized for 90 women participants

TNCDP

- Partnered with RangDe, peer to peer lending platform, to launch a campaign to fund 40 mushroom farmers in Namakkal District of Tamil Nadu. Collected corpus fund of around rupees 50 lakhs.
- Partnered with 44 Panchayats across 8 districts to help them restructure their Gram Panchayat Development Plan

Betul

- Purna Jal Samrudhi Mahotsav was organized to motivate the youth clubs for soil and water conservation. More than 250 youth from 60 Youth Clubs participated in the event
- 2 kms road was constructed in Palaskhedhi panchayat of Bhainsdehi block by motivating the youth to contribute labour through Sharamdhan
- Meetings done with farmers to promote biodynamic organic practices and 250 new Farmer Interest Groups promoted

Sonbhadra

- 63 individuals participated in "Sramiddhi Yarta" in Eraviperoor Gram Panchayat of Kerala.
- Self-assessment was carried out in 17 panchayats across all 5 clusters. 53 panchayat members, 77 FLWs, 70 volunteers, 7 Gram Pradhan, 5 CLRPs, and 17 PRPs participated in the self-assessment.
- Organised 37 ward Sabhas in the new CDP and 48 ward Sabhas in the old CDP, with a total of 2005 attendees
- A seeds shop was inaugurated under Jugail Farmers Producer Company Ltd. in the Jugail cluster
- 587 families have started nutrition gardens this month
- Supported 246 individuals in accessing various social security schemes

Jorhat

- Mission Antyodaya successfully implemented in a special Gram Sabha at Dhekorgorah GP, Jorhat
- Field visit to Marigaon and Majuli districts for interaction with Gram Panchayats, ASRLM, community cadres and farmers to review the progress as well assessing the requirement of these GPs for CDP
- Organized monthly producer group meeting of Goatery PG in Dhekorgorah, Jorhat. 62 women farmers have availed the Revolving Fund (RF) support to set up Goat rearing units as means of livelihood.

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