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ELECTORAL FUNDING

Electoral Reforms in India- (Campaign Finance)

*-By Shri O P Rawat**

1. We have had a long history of electoral reforms proposed by various bodies such as the Election Commission of India (ECI), Civil Society Organisations, judicial interventions, technological developments and Government of India.
2. Ornit Shani in her book "How India Became Democratic" captured the toughest times faced by the ECI in preparing the first electoral roll post independence when Constitution and election laws were in the making, merger of princely states was in a flux in the Union and partition caused mayhem in whole of North and East India was at its peak. But they not only delivered a voter list of 173 million voters based on Universal Suffrage against a pre-independence voter list of 30 million electors and proved some doom sayers from British Raj totally wrong, but also completed first General Election to Lok Sabha and State Legislatures well in given time (1951-52). Every polling station had to be provided with as many ballot boxes as the number of candidates because of low literacy levels in the country it was thought prudent to give a ballot without names and only the box displayed the name and symbol. Just drop your ballot in the box of the candidate of your choice. By 2017, technological development facilitated ECI to use a third generation electronic voting machine (EVM) which is so fool proof that the slightest malafide touch would send it into factory mode; it stops functioning and can be made functional only after getting a new security certificate at the manufacturer's works. This coupled with the Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) is, by far, one of the best voting technologies available globally. A

- landmark ruling of Supreme Court "Mohinder Singh Gill & another Vs Chief Election Commissioner(CEC) and others, interpreted the Constitutional scheme of Articles 324 to 329 as providing plenary powers to ECI in situations/ facing challenges where there was no legal provision to empower it. This ruling was made use of several times during Mr. T. N. Seshan's tenure as CEC, and by his able successors thereafter, to reassure Indian voters about the integrity of our elections. With changing times a lot of legal changes and procedural changes reformed the conduct of elections and the great march of democracy continued gaining strength by every election.
3. Noted historian R.C. Guha had stated, in 2017, that India, after 70 years of independence, has had one singular achievement of holding free, fair and credible elections regularly resulting in peaceful transition of political power. Hillary Clinton claimed that India's elections are the Gold Standard for the World.
 4. Besides such subjective impressions about India's Elections, there is only one research based time series data on Perception of Electoral Integrity (PEI) of elections of different democracies and that has been put together by Prof Pippa Norris of Harvard University with research teams at Harvard and Sydney University. Their Electoral Integrity Project rates PEI based on eleven parameters seeking feedback from academics/experts on elections in that country. On a scale of 1 to 100, PEI between 50 to 60 is considered Moderate, 60 to 70 as High and above 70 as very High. India as of 2016 scored as under:-

Parameter	India PEI Score (Overall 59)
Election Management Body(EMB)	77
Election Procedure	72
Election Laws	72
Vote Counting	72
Result Declaration	67
Delimitation of Constituencies	58
Political Party registration	58
Media	55
Voting Process	53
Voter Registration	40
Campaign Finance	33

(Ref: "Performance of Indian States in Elections" by Zaad Mahmood and Rahul Ganguli January 2017- Electoral Integrity Project)

It is apparent that Indian Elections display a very high level of integrity in EMB or the Election Commission; Election Procedures; the Election Laws , viz., The Representation of Peoples Act 1950 and 1951, Conduct of Election Rules 1961; and Vote Counting. Even the Result Declaration, delimitation process and political party registration scores are near Country's overall score of 59. Media including Social Media and Voting Process have been focus areas for ECI to reform and make these systems robust.

5. A lot has been done by the ECI on voter enrolment and purification of Electoral Rolls in the last 5 years. In fact we are now having a digital electoral roll and all the Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) are on a single network called ERO-Net. This has facilitated ECI to provide a common voter to go to the Voter service portal and seek editing facilities for changing his address to migrate his vote from present address to new one without any paperwork. This could be done after the

remaining 2-3 states also join the network as of December 2019.

6. The only area of concern remaining is campaign finance where Indian Elections score very poorly. The regulation of campaign finance involves several aspects, including the provision of public support or state funding to political parties and candidates, regulation of donations and expenditures, as well as the transparency of the whole financing process.
7. India has chosen to limit election expenditure of each candidate seeking election and the limits revised and updated in 2014 are Rs 7 million per Lok Sabha Seat and Rs 2.8 million for State Legislative Assembly Seat as notified under Rule 90 of Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961. However, there is no limit to the expenditure incurred by a political party. This results in utter confusion in the minds of common electors as they see huge amounts being spent in rallies, advertisements, propaganda vehicles mounted with loud speakers and posters distributing pamphlets etc, distribution of freebies and more often than not cash to voters and expenditure declared is only a few lacs of Rupees.
8. Several fora, including the Sri Indrajit Gupta Committee (1998), Law Commission (1999) and others have gone into detail about the need for state funding of political parties. While they all were unanimous that state funding must be there, most agreed to go in for partial state funding only so long as a robust regulatory system for corporate donations and expenditures is not in place. This has already been implemented by ECI in terms of allocation of free air time on All India Radio and Doordarshan to political parties based on their performance in last election, free distribution of electoral rolls to parties and candidates seeking election, and taking over the responsibility of distributing voter guide and photo voter slips from the parties/ candidates just before the polling day.
9. Section 293-A of The Companies Act 1956 allowed for corporate donations to political parties and disclosure of all such individual donations above Rs 20000/= to the EC under Section 29-C of The Representation of Peoples Act, 1951, in the form of a return filed before the last day of filing income tax return, entitled the donating Company for exemption from income tax to that extent. However, the impact on Govt. policies of such donations soon became embarrassing, and in 1969, Mrs. Indira Gandhi amended the Companies Act 1956 to remove Sec293 A. It is also said that Mrs. Gandhi was

not happy with the rise of Centre-Right Swatantra Party floated by C. Rajagopalachari, an advocate of free enterprise, as a result of donations coming their way from Tata's and Birla's among others. This banned corporate donations to politics. Proxy means were devised by political parties to mobilise resources, e.g., seeking hefty amounts for the advertisements in souvenirs published for different occasions. Selective raids and threats of nationalisation resulted in the rise of evil business practices of tax evasion, black money and briefcase politics for licenses and permits.

10. A forward looking Prime Minister, Mr. Rajiv Gandhi, brought in Sec 293 A in the Company Law again, in 1985, to do away with this ban as also to prepare to dismantle the license permit raj. In the new Company Law enacted in 2013, Sec 182 provided for corporate donations to political parties with an enhanced ceiling of 7.5 % of the last three years' average profit as against 5% provided u/s 293 A earlier. Electoral Trusts were mooted in 1996 by Tata's to bring in some measure of delinking corporate identity from donations going to a particular party. This was further facilitated in 2013 when Company Law of 1956 provided for Sec 25 companies for charitable purposes. The New Company Law had a similar provision as Sec 8.
11. Cost of electioneering has been continuously rising. Advent of Big Data Research and targeted communication, Social Media to reach out to the electorate, paid workers as polling/counting agents as voluntarism in politics is drying up, distribution of freebies/cash to voters are adding more expenses to election campaigning. But total corporate donations reportedly never crossed a maximum of Rs 700 Crores in a year till 2017, the year when the NDA Government ushered in legal amendments for bringing in electoral bonds through Finance Bill 2017. These amendments removed the requirement of profit and a ceiling based on average profit of the last three years on corporate donations u/s 182 of the Companies Act 2013 and amended FCRA 2010 to allow foreign companies registered in India to donate to political parties. Also amended was Sec 29-C of RP Act 1951, lowering the ceiling of individual cash donations from Rs 20000 to Rs 2000. EC immediately raised red flags and wrote to the Law Ministry that this initiative is retrograde, bringing in opacity in political funding, opening flood gates to set up shell companies

merely for political donations and even dying companies could be used for the purpose.

12. The Government's response was that the Electoral Bond Scheme is not yet formulated and therefore these objections were premature. The Scheme finally got launched in January 2018 and the first tranche of bonds was issued through designated branches of State Bank of India. Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) went to the Supreme Court with a PIL in which the Election Commission reiterated all the points raised in 2017 in their affidavit submitted in 2019. The Case is pending further hearing.
13. One important point about the Scheme is, that whereas the maximum amount donated to political parties in a year earlier never crossed the Rs 700 Crore mark, in 2018-19 the total bonds purchased stood at Rs 2550 Crores (Ref: Dr Niranjana Sahoo and Niraj Tiwari- Financing Elections in India). Also from a normative perspective, a trade off exists between transparency and privacy. Disclosure requirements reflect the notion that the collective benefits of disclosing sources of financial support of political players far outweigh the donor's right to privacy.
14. We have still to do a lot in bringing a robust campaign finance regime with transparency and accountability inbuilt to safeguard our democracy without drying up or constraining unduly the resource flow to political parties for their legitimate activities. A very interesting quote on the subject from former US Senator and retired NBA basketball player Bill Bradley summarises it beautifully:-

"Trying to take money out of politics is like trying to take jumping out of basketball."

** The author, is a former Chief Election Commissioner (CEC).*

Financial Transparency by Political Parties

Ethical functioning of political parties has great relevance to the Governance of the country besides its standing in the eyes of the public. It is, therefore, essential that we examine some recent reports of the Association for Democratic Reforms to judge how far political parties and their members follow the norms laid down by the Election laws, and how transparent are the methods adopted by them to raise funds for meeting election expenditures.

In this connection we have reviewed some of the recent reports of Association for Democratic Reforms [ADR] and National Election Watch (NEW)-

- a. *Analysis of donations received by regional political parties-FY 2018-19 dated 6-May-2020.*
- b. *Analysis of sources of funding of regional parties: FY 2018-19 dated 18-May-2020.*
- c. *Analysis of Discrepancies in PAN details in Contribution Reports of Regional Parties, FY 2014-15 to 2018-19.*

A. Some of the key observations from the ADR Report on donations declared by Regional Political Parties, during the FY 2018-19.

1. Status of submission of Contribution Reports by Regional Parties to ECI (FY 2018-19).

Out of 52 regional parties analyzed, only 15 had submitted their donations reports to the ECI in the stipulated time period. 10 other regional parties have delayed their submission by a maximum of 34 days to 4 days. There are 26 regional political parties who have defaulted in the submission of their donations reports to the ECI during FY 2018-19, till date, 6th May, 2020.

2. Donations to Regional Parties as declared to the ECI (FY 2018-19)

Under Section 29C (1) of the Representation of People's Act, 1951, political parties are required to prepare a report providing details of contributions in excess of twenty thousand rupees from any person in a particular financial year to avail 100% tax exemption. The total amount of donations declared by 25 regional parties analysed, including both above and below Rs 20,000, was Rs 230.45 cr, from 4046 donations.

3. Cash donations declared by the Regional Parties – FY 2018-19

Out of the total donations of Rs 230.45 cr declared by the regional parties, Rs 3.20 cr from 450 donations was received in cash during FY 2018-19. This formed 1.39% of the total donations to the parties. Donations worth Rs 1.59 cr in cash did not have the address of the donors.

292 donations from corporate/business sectors amounting to Rs 188.42 cr were made to the regional parties while 3414 individual donors donated Rs 39.97 cr to the parties during FY 2018-19. In the case of National Parties, 1776 donations were made by corporate/business sectors amounting to Rs 876.11 cr (92.06% of total donations) while 3509 individual donors donated Rs 71.407 cr (7.50% of total donations) during FY 2018-19.

5. Disclosure of PAN details in donations

Out of 23 regional parties who had declared receiving donations, 16 parties have declared donations of donors without their PAN details. Rs 40.42 cr or 17.54% of the total amount of donations received by regional parties do not have PAN details. Some parties have not provided PAN details of even a single donor in their donations statement.

Observations

- a. ECI notification dated 29th August,'14 stated that "...no tax deduction shall be allowed on the contributions made in cash by any person or company to a political party. Accordingly, the political party shall maintain the name and address of all such individuals, companies or entities making donation to it, excepting petty sums, donated by the public only during its public rallies". This notification was applicable for donations made from FY 2014-15 onwards. 2 regional parties have received cash donations worth a total of Rs 1.59 cr that do not have address details. For FY 2018-19, address details for 516 donations worth Rs 6.85 cr (2.97% of total donations received by the regional parties) were not declared by parties.
- b. Out of 23 Regional Parties who had declared receiving donations, 16 parties have declared receiving 728 donations worth Rs 40.42 cr without PAN details.
- c. For a large number of donations, regional parties have mentioned 'Online/RTGS/Cheque no.' as a mode of contribution without providing any further information such as bank details. This makes it difficult to verify whether the information given is accurate or not.
- d. Out of a total of 4046 donations, mode of contribution for 776 donations worth Rs 56.87 cr is incomplete/undeclared. Of these, mode of payment for 59 donations worth Rs 39.775 cr received by one regional party is incomplete/undeclared.

Salient Recommendations

- a. ECI should publicize, on its website, details of the action taken (if any) against political parties that fail to provide required details (such as name and address) of individuals, companies or entities making donations in cash.
- b. Parties not adhering to the deadline fixed by the Election Commission of India should be penalized by making them liable to pay tax on 100% of their income from various sources.
- c. Incomplete contributions reports having missing or incorrect PAN/mode of payment details must be returned to the parties by the ECI, to deter them from providing incomplete information.
- d. The National and Regional political parties must provide all information on their finances under the Right to Information Act. This will go a long way in strengthening political parties, elections and democracy.

B. ADR Analysis of Sources of Funding of Regional Parties of India, FY 2018-19

Political Parties play a key role in democracies as they contest elections, form governments, formulate policies and are responsible for providing governance and improving the lives of the common man. Political parties need access to money in order to reach out to the electorate, explain their goals/policies and receive inputs from people. But where do they collect their funds from?

An analysis of their Income Tax Returns and donations statements filed with the Election Commission of India (ECI) shows that the sources remain largely unknown. At present, political parties are not required to reveal the name of individuals or organizations giving less than Rs. 20,000. As a result, a substantial amount of funds cannot be traced and are from 'unknown' sources. While the National Political Parties were brought under the RTI Act by the CIC ruling in June 2013, they have still not complied with the decision. Full transparency is, unfortunately, not possible under the current laws, and it is only the RTI that can keep citizens informed.

Income of Political Parties from Known, Other Known and Unknown Sources

For this report, known sources have been defined as donations above and below Rs 20,000, whose donor details are available through contribution reports as submitted by regional parties to the ECI.

❑ The unknown sources are income declared in the Annual Audit reports but without giving source of income for donations below Rs. 20,000. Such unknown sources include 'Donations via Electoral Bonds', 'sale of coupons', 'relief fund', 'miscellaneous income', 'voluntary contributions', 'contribution from meetings/ morchas' etc. The details of donors of such voluntary contributions are not available in the public domain.

❑ Other known sources of income include sale of moveable & immoveable assets, old newspapers, membership fees, delegate fee, bank interest, sale of publications and levy whose details would be available in the books of accounts maintained by political parties.

❑ Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), in its previous report dated 22nd August, 2019, analysed 28 Regional parties who filed both their Annual Audit and Contribution reports. For FY 2017-18, total income of Regional parties amounted to Rs 183.39 cr. Rs 31.82 cr or 17.35% of this came from unknown sources.

❑ For this analysis, 52 Regional (recognized) parties were initially considered, but out of them only 26 have filed both their Annual Audit and Contribution reports, remaining 11 had not submitted either one of the reports. 15 Regional parties' none of the two reports are available on the ECI website at the time of preparation of this report.

❑ The Annual Audit and Contribution reports of Regional parties such as TRS, SAD and LJP are available on the website, but parties' donations declaration show discrepancies between data in the both reports for FY 2018-19. Therefore, these parties have not been analyzed in this report.

❑ Total income of 23 Regional political parties in FY 2018-19: Rs 885.956 cr.

❑ Total income of political parties from known donors (details of donors as available from Contribution report submitted by parties to Election Commission): Rs 257.14 cr, which is 29.02% of the total income of the parties.

❑ Total income of political parties from other known sources (e.g., Membership fees, bank interest, sale of publications, party levy etc.): Rs 147.54 cr, or 16.65% of total income.

❑ Total income of political parties from unknown sources (income specified in the audit reports whose sources are unknown): Rs 481.276 cr, which is 54.32% of the total income of the parties.

Income from Unknown Sources

❑ Rs 481.276 cr of the total income of Regional Parties came from unknown sources, 90.798% or Rs 436.99 cr of this came from Electoral Bonds.

❑ Income from Voluntary contributions (below Rs 20,000) formed 7.72% (Rs 37.14 cr) and sale of coupons formed 1.48% (Rs 7.134 cr) in income from unknown sources of the 23 Regional parties.

Observations of ADR

❑ Out of a total of 52 Regional Parties, 11 Regional Parties have not submitted their Contribution reports for FY 2018-19. For 15 Regional parties', none of the two reports are available on the ECI website.

❑ Where both the statements are available, donations data show discrepancies as declared in their Annual Audit report and Contribution report (donations above Rs 20,000) for FY 2018-19. Therefore, these parties have not been analyzed in this report.

❑ The amount of total contributions declared by three parties in their audit reports is less than the amount of total donations (above Rs 20,000 only) declared in their contribution reports by Rs 10 lakhs, Rs 10.20 lakhs and Rs 43 lakhs, respectively. This is an example of disregard of the parties towards the guidelines formulated for transparency and disclosure requirements.

❑ During FY 2018-19, total income of Regional Parties from Unknown Sources amounted to Rs 481.276 cr and constituted 54.32% of their total income as declared in their audit reports. 90.798% or Rs 436.99 cr of this came from Electoral Bonds, and Regional Parties collected Rs 37.14 cr from Voluntary contributions.

Recommendations of ADR

❑ Since a very large percentage of the income of political parties cannot be traced to the original donor, full details of all donors should be made available for public scrutiny under the RTI. Some countries where this is done include Bhutan, Nepal, Germany, France, Italy, Brazil, Bulgaria, the US and Japan. In none of these countries it is possible for more than 50% of the source of funds to be unknown, but at present it is so in India. During FY 2018-19, total income of National Parties from unknown sources totaled 67%.

❑ Any organization that receives foreign funding should not be allowed to support or campaign for any candidate or political party.

❑ Mode of payment of all donations (above and below Rs 20,000), income from sale of coupons, membership fees, etc. should be declared by the parties in the 'Schedules' of their audit reports, submitted annually to the Income Tax department and the ECI.

❑ The ECI has recommended that tax exemption

be awarded only to those political parties which contest and win seats in Lok Sabha/ State Assembly elections. The Commission has also recommended that details of all donors who donate above Rs 2,000 be declared in public domain. ADR supports ECI for its strong stand to enforce reforms in funding of political parties and hopes that these reforms are proactively taken up by the Government for implementation.

❑ Scrutiny of financial documents submitted by the political parties should be conducted annually by a body approved by CAG and ECI so as to enhance transparency and accountability of political parties with respect to their funding.

❑ The National and Regional political parties must provide all information under the Right to Information Act. This will only strengthen political parties, elections and democracy.

C. Analysis of Discrepancies in PAN details in Contribution Reports of Regional Parties during FY 2014-15 to FY 2018-19 summaries-

Political parties rely heavily on donations for contesting elections and running their daily affairs. They receive huge sums of money in the form of donations/contributions from corporates or business houses, trusts and individuals. Section 29C of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 mandates that political parties submit their contribution details in excess of Rs 20,000 received from any person or a company to the ECI annually, in such form as may be prescribed, in order to enjoy 100% tax exemption. As per rule 85B of the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961, the Contribution report is required to be submitted in Form 24A, before the due date for furnishing a return of its income of that financial year under Section 139 of the Income-Tax Act, to the ECI.

Details of the contributions received by parties which are to be provided as per Form 24A include name, address, PAN, mode of payment and amount contributed by each donor who has made donation above Rs 20,000 in their submission. An analysis of donations statements filed by parties with the ECI shows that there is incomplete, incorrect or non-disclosure of PAN information of donations in some cases as declared by political parties each year.

ADR, in its latest report on Analysis of Donations received by Regional Political Parties – FY 2018-19, found that out of the 23 parties which had declared receiving donations, 16 Regional Parties declared

728 donations worth Rs 40.42 cr or 17.54% without their PAN details. Similar observations were made after the analysis of donations received by Regional Parties for FY 2017-18, FY 2016-17, FY 2015-16 and FY 2014-15. During the period from FY 2014-15 to 2018-19, Regional Parties whose donations statements are available on ECI website declared receiving total donations (above Rs 20,000) of Rs 699.15 cr. Of these, total donations with undeclared, incomplete or incorrect PAN details amount to Rs 185.596 cr or 26.55%.

Recommendations of ADR

- a. The Supreme Court gave a judgment on September 13, 2013 declaring that no part of a candidate's affidavit should be left blank. Similarly, no part of the Form 24A submitted by political parties providing details of donations above Rs 20,000 should be blank.
- b. All donors who have donated a minimum of Rs 20,000 as a single or multiple donations should provide their PAN details.
- c. The Regional Parties should, lead by example by filing complete and correct statements of donations to the ECI well in time for public scrutiny so as to encourage financial transparency.
- d. It is suggested that the ECI publicizes on its website details of the action taken (if any) against political parties that fail to provide required details (such as name, address, PAN and mode of payment) of individuals, companies or entities making donations in cash.
- e. Incomplete contributions reports having missing or incorrect PAN/mode of payment details must be returned to the parties by the ECI, to deter them from providing incomplete information.
- f. The National and Regional political parties must provide all information pertaining to their finances under the Right to Information Act. This will go a long way in strengthening political parties, elections and democracy.
- g. Annual scrutiny of donations reports of National, Regional and unrecognized parties should be initiated by a dedicated department of the CBDT, to discourage donations from shell companies or illegal entities.

Conclusion: It would be amply clear from the analysis of these reports that political parties and their representatives are still not adhering to existing laws. All National and Regional Parties should file complete and correct statements of

donations to the ECI well in time for public scrutiny so as to encourage financial transparency. They must provide all information on their finances under the RTI Act. Any organization that receives foreign funding should not be allowed to support or campaign for any candidate or political party. It is high time that the Government consider many of the amendments proposed by the Election Commission to the Representation of People's Act. At the same time, political parties should do soul searching to cleanse politics from this debilitating disease. Will this be too much to hope for?

** Compiled by the Editorial Team of FRNV.*

Role Model 1: This Dynamic IAS Officer Has a Village Named in Her Honour. Here's Why!



“My posting was rushed as the clashes took a violent turn. It was almost an overnight move for me. The mistrust was at an all-time high when I took charge. The issue at hand was sensitive and needed subtlety and mature handling,” recalls Divya Devarajan, a 2010-batch IAS officer about her posting to Adilabad, Telangana amidst the tribal conflict of 2017.

With a firm belief in the power of dialogue and discourse, she knew that she had to find a way to get through the community for arbitration to work. Within three months, the solution-driven lady became proficient in the language of the Gonds (Gondi), enough to have a conversation with the people. And her efforts paid off.

The people only wanted someone to listen. And she Did.

“Once they realised I could speak their language, they poured their hearts out. In three months, the

scene of the panchayats meetings went from the groups sitting in pindrop silence to speaking freely,” says Divya. From appointing special tribal coordinators, language translators in government hospitals, making the administrative office more accessible, to learning the language herself, Divya went from being just an “Officer Madam” to a member of their families.

And now, as a new District Collector takes charge, the villagers paid their tribute to her by christening a village in her name.

A Village named Divyaguda – A Tribute to an IAS Officer.

Recently, the denizens of Adilabad named a village “Divyaguda” in Divya’s honour. This gesture shows the kind of impact she has left on the people and their gratitude towards her for bringing a change in their lives.

“If I were still in the district, I would have convinced them not to do this,” smiles Divya who was appointed as Secretary and Commissioner for Women, Child, Disabled and Senior Citizens in February 2020.

The community that Divya worked so closely with won’t forget the proactive lady who believed in providing quick solutions to several issues. Homing in on the basic problems that the region faced – high rates of illiteracy, unemployment, sanitation, irrigation health and floods, among others, she also worked incessantly to resolve the conflicts in the area.

“I appointed a special officer for the welfare of particularly vulnerable tribal groups to address their issues with more focus and better efficacy. It was important to understand their issues from their perspective, rather than rushing in with changes that were seen to be right by me,” adds the bureaucrat.

Adilabad is a region with a history of intertribal violence. From curfews to shutting down of data connectivity, the region had seen it all. In such a situation, the open-minded and soft-spoken Divya managed to earn the trust of the tribals and find a place in their hearts.

Maruthi, a tribal leader from the Thoti community, a particularly vulnerable section, who was also

instrumental in naming the village – Divyaguda, tells TBI, “We have had several collectors come and take charge – would you believe me if I said that the first time I stepped into the Collector Office was when Divya madam took charge? Until then no one seemed to care.”

When asked about the impact the IAS officer created in their lives, he shares, “First and foremost, she made the office accessible to us. She visited each household in the village and knew us all by our names.”

The region where Maruthi stays is prone to annual flooding, and after Divya took charge, she took steps to level the land which helped to a great extent. “We are tribals, we do not have the means to get any big gift but wanted to ensure that generations after me also acknowledge the work that Divya madam did for us, and hence we named our village after her.”

Learning their Language, Winning their Trust

Many bureaucrats before Divya had tried to learn Gondi, one of the tribal languages spoken in Adilabad, in an attempt to effectively communicate with them. While a majority of officers stopped with the basics, Divya persisted and learnt enough to be able to hold meaningful conversations with them.



“I wanted to make a connection with them, and it wasn’t just about being able to greet them,” dimples Divya. Each day, after work, she diligently spent some time with Durwa Bhumanna, a senior announcer of All India Radio station in Adilabad.

The fact that Divya learnt the language was of great advantage to her as the issues faced by the people started coming to the fore. They started to trust her

as they saw her make a genuine effort to understand them. She helped solve certain long-pending land issues in favour of tribals which were represented in the Monday Grievance Redressal sessions. Also, she streamlined cotton procurement and created platforms for tribals to access Minimum Support Price for their produce.

“It was important for us to start a meaningful dialogue with the groups,” says Divya. “Earning their trust was difficult, we were seen as people who had come to take away their rights from them, but we managed to find a middle ground,” says Divya.

Knowing that a language barrier may prove to be a bottleneck in communication, the IAS officer also appointed a Special Tribal Coordinator and Gondi language translators in the District Hospital (RIMS) to ensure better access to treatment.

Helping the People Learn their Rights

Divya’s primary thrust in Adilabad was to encourage the aggrieved tribes to use the legal and constitutional means to find solutions to their problems.

To that end, she appointed PESA (The Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas Act, 1996) coordinators at Gram Panchayat level and quickly filled the vacancies to create awareness on their rights and how to use them. She also helped revive their traditional panchayats called Rai Centers and engaged them in developmental activities.

Furthermore, to duly honour and preserve the culture of the tribal communities, Divya made efforts to officially support their main festivals like Dandari-Gussadi and Nagoba Jatra and document their traditions in the form of a documentary.

I asked Divya, who pursued engineering from BITS Pilani, about her motivation to become an IAS officer, and she took me back to her childhood.

Divya speaks about her grandfather, who was a farmer in Tamil Nadu. She says, “I saw how the loan system worked and how inadvertently they all (farmers) got pulled into it and lost so much. I

have seen my grandfather hide in the local temple out of sheer fear of the officials coming to collect the money.”

This incident made her realise how much the administration can do to help farmers, and change their lives by listening to their problems and giving concrete solutions. In Adilabad, she provided monetary and ambulance support to tribal patients who needed surgeries and better treatment in Hyderabad whenever needed.

Another reason behind her career choice was Divya’s father, who worked with the Tamil Nadu Electricity Board (TNEB). “He would often speak about the joy he felt at serving the people. Back in the 60s when he helped electrify villages, the happiness that he saw on farmers’ faces was his job satisfaction and I wanted to feel that as well,” she says.

Divya realised early that being part of the service would allow her to make a large-scale impact. It seems the IAS officer is already on the right track if the love of the people in Adilabad is anything to go by. After all, how many IAS officers get a village named after them?

“On a lighter note, I have had some of my friends call me and put in a request to have a small lane named after them as well,” laughs Divya, who feels she has miles to go and people to help.

Source:<https://www.thebetterindia.com/228620/ias-officer-hero-gondi-divya-devarajan-adilabad-village-named-after-collector-inspiring-vidoi/>

Dated: June 2, 2020

Role Model 2: A Barefoot Journey to Tilonia

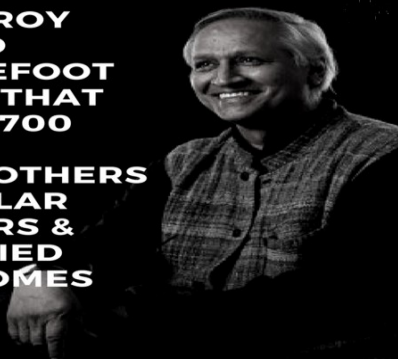
-By Chandrika Maheshwari

A less traveled track to Tilonia gives one a journey into Indian entrepreneurship and perhaps changes the way our villages are perceived by city dwellers. Tilonia brings you face to face with the real spirit of India. Its misty hopefulness uncovers the nature of the task that is ahead for a social entrepreneur, its uniqueness and challenges.

Tilonia is a small town 25 kms from Kishangarh near Ajmer in Rajasthan. Barefoot College, established in 1972, inspires this town with the conviction that solutions to rural problems lie

within the community.

**BUNKER ROY
FOUNDED
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ENGINEERS &
ELECTRIFIED
20000 HOMES**



These solutions are broadly classified by Barefoot College into solar energy, healthcare, education, water, rural handicrafts, people's action, communication, women empowerment, income generation, wasteland development, electricity and power as well as social awareness and conservation of ecological systems in rural communities.

Barefoot College was founded by Sanjit 'Bunker' Roy, an Indian social activist and educator. Roy was influenced by the philosophy of Mao Zedong, and modeled his organization after Mao's Barefoot Doctors. Roy has worked all his life with the Barefoot College.

Spread over more than 8 acres of land, the campus of Barefoot College was built between 1980 and 1986, designed by a team of rural 'barefoot' architects, masons, blacksmiths, farmers and members of women groups who sat and struggled through the initial basic designing of the campus. This institution believes in imparting informal, non-structured, on-the-job practical training by identifying the poor, unemployed youth who have been unable to finish their formal education and have returned to their respective villages as dropouts. The five principles which are an integral part of the functioning of the college are equality, collectiveness, self-reliance, decentralization and austerity.

The education program focuses on the overall development of rural children, with literacy being just one part of it. It encourages hands-on or learning-by-doing processes of gaining knowledge and skills. Lessons are focused on awareness about the environment and socio-economic and political forces that dominate development.

The aim is to provide the children with a right balance of education and literacy so that they choose to stay in their village and work for its development. The college has different programs for children and women. There are Balwadis (rural crèches) established for children between the age of 6 months-5 years for the convenience of working mothers. Night schools have been set up for 'working children'.

There are bridge courses, courses for night school children who aspire to join formal day schools. In these night schools, initiatives like the children's parliament are established which allow them to participate in the management of their schools through a democratic process. Candidates are selected through a proper election process, giving them an idea of the working of a democracy.

There is also a huge emphasis on the holistic development of women by empowering them socially, financially and politically. In the past 38 years, the college has trained more than 15,000 women in jobs ranging from construction work, education, metal craftsmanship, toy making and solar engineering, to mechanical repair and fabrication, health care, water testing, handicrafts, film making and social activism. The Barefoot College has set up eight field centers in Rajasthan and a society known as SAMPDA (Society for Activating, Motivating and Promoting Developmental Alternatives) through the collective efforts of which the Barefoot approach is replicated in rural communities across 14 states in India.

The global response received by the organization is worth acknowledging. The institute has witnessed semi-literate middle aged women traveling from places as diverse as Afghanistan, Cameroon, Gambia, Mali and Sierra Leone to undergo training to become barefoot solar engineers.

Source: <http://vikalpsangam.org/article/a-barefoot-journey-to-tilonia/#.XvoCk6EzbIU>

Dated: Feb. 26, 2014

Dear Readers,

FRNV invites stories from its readers on deep-rooted values that have helped us in our everyday lives. Some of these stories will be featured in the next issue of our newsletter. So put your thinking caps on, recall the values integral to your life which you cherish and write to us at shilpi@valuefoundation.in.

Chief Editor: Shri Gopal Ganesh