



## Charan evictees still await rehabilitation



Makeshift hutments raised in Charan (image credit-Harshil Thakur)

**By Harshil Thakur**

**DHARAMSHALA:** Tears still roll up in his eyes when Bhau Das (65) recollects the eviction drive at Charan Khad two years ago. "We have lived there for more than 35 years, it was a black day in my life", he said.

It has been more than 2 years now, but no development project has yet been started on the site near Subzi Mandi in Charan Khad where hundreds of hutments were demolished by the Municipal Corporation of Dharamshala (MCD) on 17 June 2016. Evictees

like Bhau Das are still waiting for rehabilitation.

Life is very tough for Bhau Dass and other families at their temporary settlement at Chetru, a village 13 kilometers from Dharamshala, as they do not get jobs easily to earn a livelihood. Elderly people and women have to stay at home, rendering half of the people jobless. Young men work as waste collectors for MCD with a meager wage of Rs. 200 a day.

At Chetru, they have set up small hutments in a private land. Owner of the land collects

rent for each hutment. "He threatens to burn our shelters if rent is not paid on time", said Das. Arranging RS.700/slum a month is a daunting task for them.

The slum dwellers at Charan Khad belonged to the nomadic tribes from Maharashtra and Rajasthan who came here during the Maharashtra droughts in the 1970s and soon became an integral part of the local community.

The situation changed when they received a notice by MCD on 16 May 2016, order-

ing them to vacate the place within 10 days. Owing to a complaint by Irrigation and Public Health Department accusing slum dwellers of damaging sewage pipe lines and open defecation.

"Rajasthan wale matka banaate the, Maharashtra wale kachra uthaate the" (Migrants from Rajasthan were potters and Maharashtrians were garbage collectors), remember the vegetable traders in Charan. Many in the neighborhood of the erstwhile slum are of the view that government should not have allowed them to settle there earlier but after living at a place for 35 years they should have been given permanent shelter.

The eviction drive destroyed 150 hutments, forcing the slum dwellers, including toddlers and pregnant women, to spend several nights on streets.

At Chetru, they live in 40 to 50 *jhuggis* cramped into a small area very close to the river bed. Some of them have moved to another area, setting up similar tempo-

rary shelters there, says Bhau Das.

Without proper waste management options, residents here live in unhygienic conditions. Several of the kids here suffer from diarrhoea and respiratory illness. Poor access to primary medical facilities has resulted in malnutrition and lower vaccination rates.

"There is no access to clean water, no sanitation and the area is subject to flooding in the monsoon", says Brigid Whoriskey, member of Tong-Len, an NGO helping out the evictees. "There is evidence in some families of malnutrition", she said.

Locals in Chetru are also of the view that government should provide them permanent shelters. Many are concerned about the littering by the slum dwellers.

Slum dwellers complained that they approached government officials and the MLAs several times for help, but with no result. "No government official or service reaches us, our life has become hell", says Bhau Das in a low voice.

## University will close for Winter break on Dec 14



**Dharamshala:** The end term examinations in the Monsoon Session at the Central University of Himachal Pradesh will start from Monday, 3<sup>rd</sup> December onwards. According to the officials with the Office of the Controller of Examinations, the exams will finish by Friday, 14<sup>th</sup> December.

After the exams, the university will close for winter vacations. The Spring Semester will start from 15<sup>th</sup> January 2019 onwards, informed University authorities.

## Changing Paths: From Hacking to rescuing animals

**By Himanshu Sharma**

**DHARAMSHALA:** "I don't think we thank god enough that we are not a dog suffering from severe mange, starving on the streets" Robin Singh exclaims.

He runs Peepal Farm, an organic vegan farm and a stray animal recovery center at Dhanotu, a village 13 kilometers away from Dharamshala.

Peepal Farm is spread across one-and-a-half acres of land with an organic farm, an animal rescue facility, cowsheds, and pet homes. The rescue center has a staff of eight, including a veterinary specialist. Thanks to the proximity to Dharamshala, Peepal Farm gets lot of volunteers and numerous calls for animal rescues.

"Initially we treated only dogs and gradually started helping other an-

imals including cows and horses," Robin explains.

King, a bull, is the newest resident of the animal shelter in Peepal Farm. King is under treatment for the burn injuries he suffered when miscreants poured hot water on him near Palampur.

King is getting familiar with the animal family at Peepal Farm which includes a monkey, four dogs, 4 bovines, a goat and a sheep. After the treatment is over, majority of the animals are released. In many cases, Peepal Farm has successfully sought out animal lovers who wanted to adopt these animals as pets.

For Robin Singh, this is a new incarnation. He used to be a hacker. Seven years back, he was running a successful online business organization in the United States.



Avni is a three-limbed monkey recently rescued by Peepal Farm. She is recuperating from her wounds. (Image Credit: Peepal Farm)

"But I was not happy. Later when I arrived in India to travel, I reconnected with my childhood dream of helping animals in distress," he added.

He visited Auroville, the township near Pondicherry, in 2012. He happened to come across an elderly woman, who was on her own, looking after 40-50 stray dogs. It was an inspiration to Robin

and he realized that he wanted to spend his life helping those who can't help themselves.

However, Robin is thinking of expanding the activities of Peepal farm. "We look forward to making a group of devoted people who can do great and draw in long-term solutions for animal welfare" Robin Singh added.

## Community Radio Workshop held in Dharamshala

**By Shubham**

**DHARAMSHALA:** There is an increase in the number of NGOs applying for community radio licenses in India, according to officials of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MoIB).

"In a recent survey, we have observed that NGOs are more appreciated for their work in the community radio sector and this has inspired more NGOs to apply for licenses", said Ajay Joshi, Deputy Secretary with the Broadcasting Wing of the MoIB.

He was speaking at a community radio awareness workshop conducted in Dharamshala. The workshop was held for promoting the use of community radio in rural areas. It was also aimed at the development of

grass root community services through community radio stations.

Community radio Gunjan, located in Shidhbari, Dharamshala was one of the organisations that participated in the workshop. Nitika, a member of Gunjan said, "Being an NGO operating our community radio station among rural audience the workshop was very helpful to improve our activities."

Community radio association office bearers from Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Uttarakhand participated in the workshop. There were 11 sessions in the workshop which discussed the present status of community radio sector, its technology, policy and application process in India, government schemes and sustainability options.

## New efforts aim to restore Kangra miniature tradition

By Preshita Thakur

**DHARAMSHALA:** Those who want to get a deeper experience of Kangra miniature paintings at Dharamshala have a better chance now as the Museum of Kangra Art in Dharamshala is going to accommodate more Kangra miniature paintings.

The on-going renovation at the museum aims at increasing the space given to Kangra miniature paintings, told the museum authorities.

It will take another two to three months to complete the renovation. "After the renovation, we will bring out more paintings from bigger names including Padma Shri awardee Vijay Sharma and other senior artists", says

Dr.Ritu Kumari, curator of the museum.

The museum, run by the Language and Culture Department of the state government, is one of the major art galleries in the area dedicated to Kangra miniature paintings.

The museum also used to conduct training classes on Kangra painting in collaboration with Kangra Arts Promotion Society (KAPS), an NGO working for promotion of Kangra art. The classes have since moved to Mcleodganj, due to the ongoing construction activities at the Museum.

As part of their initiative to preserve the miniature tradition, KAPS has opened 'Chitera', an institute to train bud-



Radha celebrating Holi, painting, c.1788. (Image Credit-Wikimedia)

ding painters in the traditional ways of *Pahari* paintings. Most recently, they have opened a new space in Mcleodganj with an art gallery to exhibit artworks.

Some artists who are also associated with the museum, practice and teach from the temples nearby. Dhani Ram Khushdil holds a clerical post at the Brijeshwari Temple. He also teaches students

interested in Kangra paintings for free. "I want to pass on this great tradition to the upcoming generation," says he.

Kangra miniature painting has its history rooted far back in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It is still practiced today, though the exposure is limited. The new efforts, aims to reinstate the glory and status of the paintings and artists.

## Incubating the untapped film talent in Himachal

By Anuj Kumar Pandey

**Shimla:** Himachal was never a soil for serious film makers, but with several independent film makers emerging from these hills with their own films, things are for a change, lately.

Growing up in Shimla, Siddarth Chauhan never thought of making films that would entice a world audience. But with multiple screenings of his films in festival circuits outside India, he needs no more introduction as the independent film maker of Himachal Pradesh.

Siddarth rose to fame when his film Pashi was selected for the Rhode Island International Film Festival, a coveted event where award winning films would get direct nominations for academy awards, the Oscars.

Being a self-taught film maker, Siddarth's initial training was his rigorous film watching. "I mostly despise action films and am a fan of coming of age genre", says he. He admires Indian directors who do not make cookie cutter features.

'Boys Dont Wear Nail-polish' was Siddarth's first film. "Making it was a hard task but I enjoyed the process", he says. With the help of his mentors such as documentary filmmaker Gurvinder Singh he made films like Papa and Pashi.

Siddarth did not expect a warm welcome to his films from a foreign audience. "For me, the experience was very unreal. It was jarring and rewarding. The success that Pashi got, especially the whole Oscar thing, put me in a peculiar space" says Siddarth.

Being an independent film maker from Himachal Pradesh is a journey Siddarth shares with several other budding film makers.

Piyush Kanga from Bi-



Siddarth Chauhan

laspur had an interest in dancing since childhood and while growing up he knew he could do something in films.

His first film was 'Dost'. He didn't expect it to get him anywhere but just enjoyed the experience of making it. He is currently pursuing his studies. He also manages a production house called Silent Hymns Production and continues to make short films.

Being in Himachal, there are several issues these film makers face. "The hardest thing to pull off in here is to get actors. Most of them are not professionals and professionals cost a lot of money", says Siddarth.

Finding serious film makers for guidance is also difficult. "Getting in touch with other film makers and learning from them is difficult here", says Piyush.

However, the film festivals which are recently mushrooming in these hills encourage these budding film makers. Piyush and Siddarth were part of a fellowship programme at Dharamshala International Film Festival (DIFF). They have screened their work at 'International Film Festival in Shimla and DIFF as well.

"Himachal as a location has always been an unexplored phenomena. It's ripe for depiction on screen. If the government supports then even Himachal filmmaking scene can improve a lot", says Piyush.

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## Young Himachal deserts farm fields for salaried jobs

By Manish Gupta

**MANDI:** "Twenty four" was the age when Tarun Kapoor from Churag in Mandi completed his graduation in Civil Engineering in 2015. Traditionally, Tarun's family managed agriculture in their small land holding. Before his graduation, he also tried his hands in agriculture for a while, but found it less attractive.

"I am fit for corporate jobs or running a business more, than taking to agriculture", he says. Now he is working as a construction supervisor in a company at Chandigarh. "Agriculture sector has been lagging a lot, lately. I was not able to make as much money as I wanted. I am no more interested in agriculture", he said.

According to the annual action plan of Department of Agriculture, Government of Himachal Pradesh, agriculture is the main occupation in the state with 62 percent of the working population employed in agriculture. However, youth in the state do not find agriculture interesting and prefer salaried jobs or running business ventures more.

It is not just Tarun's feeling that agriculture is not his cup of tea;



Farmer Ploughing field (Representational Image) Image Credit- wikimedia

his family also thinks the same. His father Parkesh, a Truck driver, thinks that being a farmer does not convert to social status. "Mein apne bete ko bada admi bnte dekhna chahta hun. Kheti-badi se ek achi zindagi nhi mil sakti" (I want to see my child becoming successful in society. Career in agriculture is not good for standard living), he says.

Puneet, another young graduate from Churag is working in his field. "I am compelled to work in fields because I was unable to study more", said Puneet. For him, farming is too laborious and is a gamble based on weather conditions. "Our luck depends on weather conditions. If it does not support, we are unable to get good crops", he said.

Comparing farming to a salaried employ-

ment, Tarun finds it too difficult. "Farming takes a lot of strength to do work. There is no time limit to the work and it just keeps getting more", he said.

"We work too hard but income is very low." Shubham another friend of Tarun, points to the lack of action from authorities for the plight of farmers. "There are less chances of making enough money in agriculture and current policies make it impossible to get a decent living from agriculture. The price that government offers is not satisfactory," he said.

Even if the policies exist, farmers do not get enough information regarding them. As per the 70th round National Sample Survey data, only 23.72 and 20.04 percent of farmers in the rural agricultural household in India are aware of MSP (Mini-

mum Support Prices) of crops grown by them during *kharif* and *rabi* season, respectively.

"Government policies also do not reach the farmers, they only exist on papers. So practically, there is no assistance from the government. People remain economically backward," says Shubham.

According to the latest Annual Status of Education Report brought out by Pratham, a non-profit organization, 79 percent of the rural youth in the 14 to 18 age group are employed in agriculture, mostly in their family owned lands, despite their enrollment status in education. But among them, only 1.2 percent want to be a farmer, taking agriculture as a full time employment.

Tarun thinks this is more about the sector being less lucrative in the absence of adequate government support for farmers.

"Govt. agar hum logo ko facilities de to hum sub aasani se farming kar sakte hain" (If government provides adequate facilities to us, we can easily manage farmig), says Tarun. "People wish to make a decent living from agriculture, they don't get it as of now" says he.