

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

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Compiled & Edited by
PJ Mathews



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Make a Difference

A man was walking down a deserted beach at sunset. As he walked along he began to see another man in the distance.

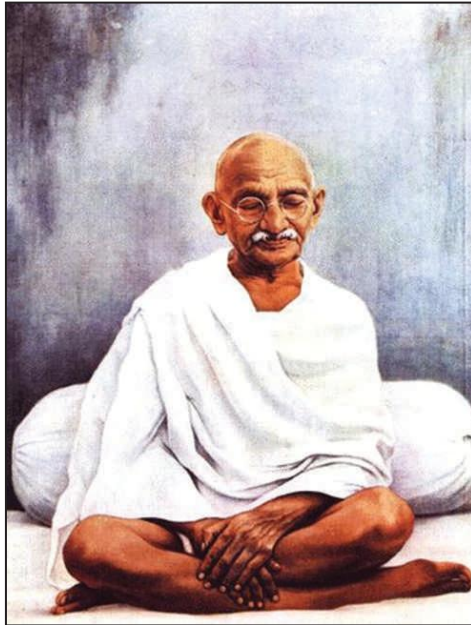
As he grew nearer he noticed that the native kept leaning down, picking something up, and throwing it out into the water. Time and again he kept hurling things out into the ocean.

As our friend approached even closer he noticed that the man was picking up starfish that had washed up onto the beach, and at a time, he was throwing them back into the ocean.

The first man was puzzled. He approached the man and said, "Good Evening Friend, I was wondering what you are doing?" And he replied, "I'm throwing these starfish back into the ocean. You see, it's low tide now and all these starfish have been washed up onto the shore. If I don't throw them back into the sea, they will die from lack of oxygen."

"I understand," my friend replied "but there must be thousands of starfish on this beach and you couldn't possibly get to all of them. There are simply too many and don't you realize that this is happening on hundreds of beaches up and down this coast Can't you see that you can't possibly make a difference?"

The local native smiled, bent down, picked up yet another starfish .. and as he threw it back out into the sea, he replied, "it made a difference to that one!"



“Be the change you wish to see in the world”

– Mahatma Gandhi

Foreword

Of all the acronyms we hear in the world of business today, CSR is the chosen one, the one that pops out of nowhere and falls around in conversation and corporate literature almost everywhere. CSR, of course, stands for Corporate Social Responsibility, a kind of gobbledygook that has traveled far to become common business usage. It is now as fashionable a term as flawed can be its understanding, delivery and practice.

This book seeks to illustrate through small examples the CSR construct as seen by NTPC Limited over the years, long before the CSR debate and the questions these have raised hit us in India and in B-schools around the country and indeed the world.

These stories are from far and removed corners, places where NTPC operates its power plants that work to light up homes, businesses and the lives of people we interact with on a day-to-day basis. There is the story of workbenches for schools, made by inmates of the Warangal Central Prison [A 'Bench' Mark of Compassion, Page 65]. There is the story of one of our employees who wanted to run away from Kalahandi only to end up wishing that he was never transferred out [The Man from Kalahandi, Page 7]. And there are many more.

The point that these are stories from our history is significant. Our interactions acquired the colour and flavour of CSR activity only later.

At their core, they represent a philosophy, a worldview and a business outlook that has marked our company and been imprinted on our souls as it were right from the time of our inception in 1975.



In fact, this is a philosophy that has been wired into the very DNA of India's public sector, which was mandated as much to build capacities in industry as it was to spread the fruits of development and help create a balanced social order.

As our first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, who well articulated the role of our public sector, said in a speech: "... we have kept the aspect of social growth in view, which is not the same as making money. We want to produce more and more wealth and also have it properly distributed..." [Address to the annual meeting of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry, New Delhi, March 16, 1963]

A lot has changed since those days. Our nation is on the move. Our growth has accelerated. India has liberalized and our businesses have globalized.

But some basics will never change. Among them are business models of public enterprises that see the entire community of people as stakeholders. It was so when the sole shareholder was the Union of India. It is so now when the shareholding has diversified, when several public sector enterprises, including NTPC, are listed on the stock exchanges and when our performance is measured rigorously and in the conventional sense of the term as understood by business.

PSUs must and do to meet these performance standards of a modern day business; our shareholders are entitled to reap the rewards of all that we deliver in terms of earnings, growth, market capitalization and beyond, quarter after quarter. That is a necessary condition for survival, growth and prosperity in the competitive environment of today. This is as it should be. But this is not a sufficient condition.

What will keep NTPC and companies like it apart is the spirit, the mind and the heart that beats for the common man. Look at the ordinary Indian any way – as a customer, a neighbour, an employee or as a simple citizen – we must meet the aspirations of the common, unsung, unheard and often little known Indian.

It was no one less than Peter Drucker, the man who founded the study of management as a formal discipline, who wrote in his masterpiece of the 1960s, 'The Practice of Management': "What is most important is that management realize that it must consider the impact of every business policy and business action upon society. It has to consider whether the action is likely to promote the public good, to advance the basic beliefs of our society, to contribute to its stability, strength and harmony."

This is the high watermark that we at NTPC seek to reach as we continue to grow and build on our position as India's largest power producer. The stories in this book are a true measure of our success. They touch us deep in our hearts

and they tell us that we must do more, not less, for all the people who we have had the fortune to interact with in the course of what is a routine business day. It is the people in this book who make our company special and it will always be that way for all of us at NTPC.

ARUP ROY CHOUDHURY

Chairman & Managing Director

NTPC Ltd.

Acknowledgments

On a Sunday early morning in July 2011, as I was entering the gates to the church I attend in New Delhi, my mobile phone rang just as I was about to switch it off to spend some time in silent meditation and prayer. The caller, Shri Ambareesh Nath Dave, Regional Executive Director (Corporate Affairs), NTPC, told me that since I have now moved to NTPC's Corporate Communication group, I should make a difference.

In the twilight of my career with NTPC, I told myself that whether I made a difference or not, I should definitely strive hard to, among other things, capture and document the difference NTPC had already made. It continues to do that in and around its 25-odd projects and places across India. After all, every effort counts, no matter how small and insignificant it may seem, and in the outcome of every effort there is an interesting and inspiring story to tell.

As the idea of *Making a Difference* began taking shape in the months that followed, I look back with immense gratitude for the steadfast support and encouragement given by Sh. Dave, whether or not I was making a difference.

The first of the 35 stories arrived from Tanda near Ayodhya on how a crawling Sunita was up on her new feet from the rehabilitation outreach of Tanda. Thanks to young Sahadev Sethi. Elbert C. from Hyderabad visited Kundanpalli village in Ramagundam and traced its rebirth and development. He also narrated the Warangal Central Jail's unusual bond with the school in Hyderabad. Teaming up with K.B.K. Rao at Simhadri in Vishakapatnam, he threw light on how women in Parvada Mandal have been liberated from the daily morning drudgery of fetching water in pitchers trekking long distances. Thanks to both of them.

Ashok Kumar Tewari visited Singrauli, Rihand, in Sonebhadra district of UP and Vindhyaachal in Madhya Pradesh and brought home the moving story of Asha Kiran, a unique school, out of 48 schools run by NTPC, for specially-abled children. He also brought home the story of the playful children, blissfully unaware of their parents' economic background, in the remote school supported by NTPC on the UP-MP border. I acknowledge his contribution, in addition to

P.K. Bannerjee's, whose idea it was to send him back to his roots to ferret out the details. I acknowledge K. Ravindran's efforts from Mumbai for his stories from Baruch and Kawas in Gujarat.

This book would not have been possible without a great deal of inputs from many people from many places. My thanks to Sukanto Choudhury from Bhubaneswar, Ruchi Ratna and Shyamala Sarathy from Noida, R.K. Jaitly from Lucknow, Saibal Ghosh from Farakka in West Bengal, A.K. Das from Kahalgaon in Bihar, Kundan Kishore from Anta in Rajasthan, Supran Kalra from Faridabad, Abha Pandey from Badarpur, Prageesh from Talcher in Odisha, Ashutosh Nayak from Korba in Chhattisgarh, and Vijay Juyal from Tapovan Vishnugarh in the mountains of Uttarakhand.

Thanks also to Utpal Dey and Vishwanath Chandan for seeking out the colorful, inspiring story of an unusually enterprising land oustee married to an Italian and running a star hotel in lush, beautiful Koldam in Himachal Pradesh! Thanks also to all others who have directly and indirectly contributed to the compilation.

My thanks especially to colleagues closer home K. Prashanth and Manjul Tewari, who gave useful feedback, and also to Luv Tandon for reading some of the manuscripts and expressing delightful disagreements.

In the compilation of *Making a Difference*, I would like to acknowledge the relentless and single-minded pursuit by Deepna Mehta, ably assisted by the budding writer, Madhurjya Singha Lahkar, who made the project easier to complete.

When the idea of compiling making a difference was initially broached, one of the first people to give it a leg up was Sunil Trivedi. He did not stop there; he repeatedly followed up the status as if a book of this sort were long overdue. My thanks to him for the encouragement.

I specially thank NTPC's CSR and R&R groups for being forthcoming with support and clarifications and especially Shri N.K. Sharma, Executive Director (CSR, R&R & Safety), for his encouraging words after reading one of the first manuscripts.

In compiling *Making a Difference*, my gratitude to Shri S.P. Singh, Director (HR), NTPC, for being the prime mover behind the CSR efforts, which in turn have inspired these stories, especially the 'Man From Kalahandi.' Without the CSR outreach of the NTPC management, there would have been no story to tell, let alone a book to compile.

I am deeply indebted to Shri Arup Roy Choudhury, Chairman and Managing Director, NTPC Ltd, for agreeing to write the foreword for the book. Apart from his significant suggestions and contributions to this work, he has

been a source of inspiration with his heightened sense of literary aestheticism. Ever open to new ideas — the ideas which transcend the humdrum and the mundane — he really made a difference for this project.

Moving away from the routine and conceptualizing a book needed guidance and editorial support. Free Press Journal lent support in ample measure and helped give shape to the concept and my gratitude to them. Finally, thanks to Tata McGraw-Hill, and their many teams for spending long hours with my team working out the details, and for readily agreeing to publish the book.

This was a project I loved to execute. The experience was delightful. Even the most beautiful days eventually have their sunsets.

PJ MATHEWS

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Introduction

Conflicting emotions of humility and pride overwhelm us as we present this compendium. We feel humbled by the feats of the differently-abled and the poor, the people who overcame their own inadequacies as well as substantial obstacles to achieve something worthwhile. At the same time, we feel proud that we, the NTPC family, had something or other to do with all these people. We rejoice in their triumphs and accomplishments, their joys and jubilations.

This compendium comprises the stories of courage and hope, of limitless striving and boundless enthusiasm, of men and women, of the young and not-so-young, of the rich and the poor, of villagers and townspeople. What it shows is that all people — cutting across the boundaries of community, caste, creed, and even class — are endowed with abilities and fortitude. With a little support and some sincere effort, they can come out of the morass of poverty, backwardness, and privation.

So, a small endeavor — arranging tailoring classes — by NTPC Anta in Rajasthan helped, among others, Khursheed Bano and Hemraj overcome their misery caused by want and handicap. The young couple, Dhananjay and Simi Haider, in West Bengal's Malda village, transformed their life after a vocational training course in cutting and tailoring conducted by NTPC. A similar course changed the life of Champaben Patel, transforming her from an ordinary housewife to an entrepreneur and role model in a small village near Bharuch town in Gujarat.

From treating members of the Jarwa tribe who reached hospitals with broken limbs fleeing the killer tsunami waves in the Andamans to providing houses to victims of cloud burst in Leh, NTPC has been there everywhere lending a helping hand. More illuminating than the 1/3 of power of India it produces, and true to its vision of Powering India's Growth.

Skills training provided by NTPC Ramagundam in Andhra Pradesh made the 35-year-old P. Anjali, a widow with three children, economically independent. By sheer willpower and grit, and some assistance from NTPC-

promoted NFNDRC Sunita overcame the congenital defect in both legs. Then there is Veena Mehta, one of the over 300 physically challenged employees of NTPC; she was born blind but is now an inspiration for many. The Delhi-based Babita also benefited from NTPC's CSR initiative, prevailing over the hearing-and-speech impairment and the esteem-eroding melancholy.

Vijeta Parmar and Karan Singhania triumphed over visual impairment to pursue higher studies at Delhi University. The 17-year-old Shibu Malik has successfully fought against his hearing-and-speech handicap, loneliness, and despair. Sunita Ramveer Singh, a semi-educated widow of a Kargil martyr battled dejection and emerged as a responsible mother and multifaceted professional.

Various terms are used, often patronizingly, for the poor—the downtrodden, the excluded, the marginalized, the deprived, the bottom of the pyramid, etc. Almost invariably, the implications and allusions are tacit but obvious, they are the people who are absolutely helpless, who need to be ‘uplifted’. The men and women whom we have profiled in this compendium give a lie to the condescending doctrines, theories, and attitudes that the poor are absolutely dependent on others, who can only be ‘delivered’ by some messiah. Our experience shows that the poor don't need messianic backing or spectacular programme; they need, as we said, just a little support and some sincere effort.

While our efforts to help the poor have been a cause of satisfaction, our interventions in other spheres of life have been no less important. Providing scholarships for needy students, distributing story books to boost reading habits, improving infrastructure in schools, organizing sports competitions, arranging potable water in distant areas, providing healthcare, preserving heritage—NTPC has been involved in multifarious CSR activities. An interesting fact emerges from the compendium: The stereotype of people displaced because of industrial—the poor, exploited, helpless, impoverished, etc.—has little to do with the reality. Yes, there are problems related to displacement—traditional modus Vivendi and habitat vanishing—but the benefits far outweigh the losses. This becomes evident from the stories from Rihandnagar project on the UP-MP border, the Koldam Project in Himachal Pradesh, and Kundanapalli Moghal Pahad in Andhra Pradesh.

And it is not just propertied oustees who have benefited, the fruits of progress and development have reached all. The new resettlement colonies have the facilities and amenities that were unheard of in their old villages; now they have better and bigger houses, proper roads, decent schools, good healthcare infrastructure, and so on. The resettlement stories show that industrialization is the answer and not a menace as it is often made out. Last but not the least, this compendium is the result of the firm commitment and tireless work of the entire NTPC family, especially those who are directly involved in the CSR

activities. The NTPC ladies club took upon themselves to convince people at Dadri in Western UP to send their girls to school. Hari Shankar Prasad, initially reluctant to go to Kalahandi as part of NTPC's endeavour to provide electricity to below poverty line families in poor districts, carried out his assignment with considerable zeal and zest.

For us, this compendium is more than an exercise in CSR. It is a love of labor, of making a difference.

PJ MATHEWS

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Contents

<i>Foreword</i>	<i>vii</i>
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>Introduction</i>	<i>xv</i>
1. A Village is Reborn	1
2. The Man from Kalahandi	7
3. Training for Tomorrow	12
4. On a Firm Footing	17
Inspiring Tale of Rahat Bano	20
Small Help, Big Change	21
5. When Uprooting Brought Prosperity	23
6. No Child Left Behind	29
7. Gollagunta's Quest for Water	35
8. Gifts Given and Received	41
9. Displaced, Not Uprooted	45
10. The Seamstress of Samlod	50
11. Empowered with Education	54
12. The Brushstrokes of Destiny	59
13. A 'Bench' Mark of Compassion	65
14. A Sense of Pride	70
15. An Affair with Heritage	74
16. Falling in Love, Rising to the Occasion	79
17. Beyond Chalk and Talk	83
18. Booking the Future	88
19. Hitting the Bull's Eye	92
20. Sewing a New Life	95
21. The Good Samaritans	99
22. Healthcare on Wheels	104
23. For a Better Tomorrow	109
24. Service Before Self	114
25. Navpath: A New Road	120

26.	Future Perfect	123
27.	Overcoming All Challenges	128
28.	Meaningful Change	133
29.	Let There Be Light	138
30.	From Darkness to Light	142
31.	The Pursuit of Happiness	146
32.	Stitching their Lives with Hope	151
33.	(a) A Cut Above	156
	(b) Of Daughters and Difficult Times	160
34.	The Witness to Change	165
35.	Providing a Healing Touch	170

<i>Bibliography</i>	175
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1

A Village is Reborn

Decades ago, Kundanapalli Moghal Pahad in the Karimnagar district of Andhra Pradesh was like any other remote village in the country — poor, inaccessible, and lacking in basic infrastructure. Then NTPC acquired land for the 2,600-MW Ramagundam super thermal power station. And it helped rebuild a new village with all modern amenities.

Every village takes pride in its birth. But Moghal Pahad takes pride in its rebirth too. Tucked away in a remote corner of Ramagundam Mandal in the Karimnagar district of Andhra Pradesh, this tiny village presents the story of reincarnation, a gritty saga of how an entire village was relocated to a new place, given a new identity, and presented a new look.

Decades ago, Kundanapalli Moghal Pahad, also popularly known as Rajapur, was like any other remote village in the country — poor, inaccessible, and lacking in basic infrastructure like roads, drainage, water, power, health and education. What triggered the process of transformation was the stepping in of NTPC to acquire land for the 2,600 MW Ramagundam super thermal power station to locate its ash pond. In the late 1970s, NTPC started work on its first generation pithead super thermal power projects. The Ramagundam project was the third in the series of power plants set up by NTPC with the World Bank aid.

Because of Moghal Pahad's close proximity to the ash pond, the entire village, comprising 150 households, faced the threat of being displaced. Relocation has its own social, economic, cultural, and psychological implications. The acquisition of their lands and homesteads was a major issue and it presented a huge challenge to look for a new place to relocate the project affected persons and help them start a new life.



New Moghal Pahad – on a new path of progress

In June 1980, NTPC came out with a policy on facilities to be given to displaced people, which perhaps was the first policy document to be brought out by any public sector organisation in India. Although this policy did not address the issues of resettlement and rehabilitation, the subsequent policy of 1993, approved both by the Government of India and the World Bank, provided a retrofit facility for a range of community facilities to address issues of resettlement.

Keeping the interests and aspirations of the displaced villagers, an integrated resettlement and rehabilitation plan in line with the policy was set in motion. The plan incorporated the reassurance that for people who have been relocated, the quality of their lives in the new settlement would necessarily turn for the better.

NTPC had acquired 793 acres of land for construction of the ash pond. Wherever the land titles were clear, the compensation was paid for the land. And wherever the lands were in dispute, the cases were referred to the court and the corresponding compensation was deposited in the court for disposal. The company, after paying cash compensations and ex-gratia, provided transportation facilities to move the people with their belongings to the new location situated about three kilometres away, adjacent to Rajiv Rahadari, the state highway.

This endeavour gave birth to the New Moghal Pahad. A village was thus reborn at a new place with a new identity. What was once an impoverished village was transformed into a self-sufficient habitation. After roads, drains, and electricity, a scheme was evolved to construct houses on plots allotted free of cost for the affected people. In close coordination with the district administration, construction of *pucca* houses was taken up under the *Indira Awas Yojna*. In a

unique partnership with the district administration, bricks made of ash produced from burnt coal used for generating power were used to construct the house structure, while the rest of the inputs came as part of the *Indira Awas Yojna* scheme, which is a Central government social welfare programme to provide housing for the rural poor.



Smiling new generation of Moghal Pahad village

Today, the new village boasts of concrete houses, clean roads, a pipeline network, drainage system, street lights, and power connectivity to individual houses and a school. Safe drinking water, a primary health centre, and a community centre complete the picture of a model village. The model was not

only successfully replicated across most of the NTPC stations located in various states where displacements were involved but also improved upon with the help of a revised policy which came out in June 2005. This was based on the Central government's maiden National Policy on Resettlement and Rehabilitation-2003. Resettlement and rehabilitation efforts of NTPC got an impetus when the policy was further liberalized in 2010, based on the government's policy promulgated in 2007.

In June 1980, NTPC came out with a policy on facilities to be given to displaced people, which perhaps was the first policy document to be brought out by any public sector organization in India. The subsequent policy of 1993 provided a retrofit facility for a range of community facilities to address issues of resettlement.

"They gave us the new village," reminisces 80-year-old Dontala Mallaiah, a farmhand who explained how the NTPC authorities helped them reconstruct the entire village at a new location. Going down the memory lane, he recalls the life and times in their old village, where they lived in thatched houses and could

not afford to provide education to their children. "We did not have electricity in our homes or streets nor did we have a school or a health centre in our village," he says. There are many old-timers in the village who echo Mallaiah's views and acknowledge NTPC's role in giving their village a new look and new facilities. Today, Dontala Mallaiah's grandson Rajesh is pursuing a B.Tech. degree.

To provide sustainable sources of livelihood for the relocated families in New Moghal Pahad village, the company has chalked out plans to create various avenues for income generation.

However, reflecting the rising aspirations of the people, particularly among the youth, there is a growing demand in this small village, with a population of 1,000, for more employment opportunities for youth and women.

"We have several young people without jobs. We will be happy if some of them can be provided with employment," said Irugunuri Srinivas, a driver by profession. His wife Irugunuri Latha, who is the Deputy Sarpanch, says she is happy about the initiatives undertaken by NTPC in improving the village infrastructure and also in providing income-generating and self-employment schemes.

Latha wants the NTPC authorities to set up a candle-making unit which will be useful for the village women. The community development efforts of the public sector utility giant can be seen in the clean, re-carpeted roads, a

well-laid drainage system, drinking water supply, and a community hall. A free health camp is organized on the first day of every month where medicines are supplied to the needy free of cost. Medical cards have also been issued to get regular treatment in the NTPC hospital.

Vemapalli Raj Kumar represents a new, entrepreneurial face of the village. This 21-year-old underwent training in mobile repairing and now makes a decent earning of ₹ 9,000 per month. Under the CSR initiative, NTPC provided training to 30 people in mobile phone repairing. Son of a daily wage worker, Raj Kumar now brims with confidence about his future.

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Amenities for families in New Moghal Pahad

“Due to the efforts of NTPC, our village is now better placed compared to others. We have a reverse osmosis water treatment plant, a community hall and vocational centre as well,” says Jukkala Ramadevi, the Sarpanch of Kundanapalli, under whose jurisdiction the village of New Moghal Pahad comes. Summing up the unique bond between NTPC and her village cluster, Ramadevi says, “NTPC’s involvement in the development of our village is very deep. This often prompts the state government officials to wonder why they should be involved in development work in the village when NTPC is around as a neighbour!”

In government records now, the old village of Kundanapalli Moghal Pahad is listed as a “deserted village.” On the other hand, New Moghal Pahad just a few kilometres away and adjacent to the highway stands as a tribute to just how much a village and its residents can thrive when the right minds and the right attitude come together to deliver progress and development.

2

The Man from Kalahandi

Some are born heroes, some acquire heroic attributes, and some have heroism, thrust upon them. Hari Shankar Prasad belongs to the third category. Extremely reluctant to go to Kalahandi as part of NTPC's endeavour to provide electricity to BPL families in poor districts, he gradually fell in love with the assignment and Kalahandi.

Little did Hari Shankar Prasad know that the transfer which he was dreading to take would change not only his life but also 144,000 lives forever. For it brought not only fame but also satisfaction that no money could ever buy.

When Prasad was transferred to Kalahandi in 2009, he felt that his world was falling apart. Nothing could be worse than this, he thought as he packed his bags in the comfortable environs of the self-contained NTPC Singrauli Township in Uttar Pradesh. The sun-scorched Kalahandi in distant Odisha — the very prospect was frightening. He had a scary image of the place — bow-and-arrow wielding tribals, angry, starving people, a gloomy, inhospitable terrain.

With so much ranged against him, he knocked various doors to spare him the ordeal of staying in Kalahandi. He made repeated appeals not to throw him into the 'black pot,' as Kalahandi means in English.

His appeal was answered with the suggestion that he should give the new posting a chance and try doing something for the tribals of Kalahandi. He was nudged and encouraged to try his hand at the new assignment by the CEO of NTPC Electric Supply Company, a subsidiary of NTPC. His job was to bring electricity into the houses of Kalahandi tribals. He did more than that.

Kalahandi often evokes negativity as a land of drought, starvation, and death. But these images do not tell the full story of the place, for Kalahandi has

a rich history. The name 'Kalahandi' can also be literally interpreted as 'pot of arts.' According to one interpretation, the name has possibly been derived from prehistoric paintings in red and black colours found in the caves of Gudahandi hill in the district.



The tribals of Kalahandi celebrate arrival of electricity

Kalahandi was once called the cradle of civilization, but its rich history is seldom recollected. More than a century of famine has made it poor and backward; has a high proportion of below poverty line or BPL households. It

Kalahandi was once called the cradle of civilization, but its rich history is seldom recollected. More than a century of famine has made it poor and backward; has a high proportion of below poverty line or BPL households. It is among the most backward districts of five states in India. So, it was decided that electricity would be provided to BPL families here.

is among the most backward districts in India. So, it was decided that electricity would be provided to BPL families here.

Prasad was one of the several officers deputed by NTPC to 29 backward districts of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Jharkhand, and West Bengal under the *Rajiv Gandhi*

Grameen Vidyutikaran Yojna (RGGVY), a flagship programme of the Government of India.

The RGGVY is the biggest rural electrification drive in the country and, in terms of sheer numbers, also in the world. Electrification is the backbone of rural economy and a basic input for rapid development. The RGGVY envisages 100 per cent electrification of all villages and habitations in the country.

Not only will electricity be accessible to all households, it will be free of cost for the BPL households.

When he arrived in Kalahandi, Prasad's idea of a difficult terrain and inhospitable conditions seemed real. He found the same situation in village after village. The sight of tribals trekking to the forests to cut wood and the reports about malaria spreading in the area increased Prasad's resolve to somehow escape from this place. He wanted to go back to Singrauli or get to some other place before disease got him. Prasad repeated his request for a transfer from the district.

While he hoped his request for a transfer was being processed, Prasad reluctantly began NTPC's work. He needed to set in place the system of providing electricity to 2,017 villages in the Kalahandi district under the rural electrification programme for BPL households taken up by NTPC. One day, when he was on his way to a village called Dharakhuman, a group of tribals — men, women, and children surrounded him. They told Prasad that electricity reaching their village was not the issue; the village had power but their homes had none!

For instance, they pointed out, a rice mill in the village ran on power, while they lived in darkness. Several requests by them and several assurances by various officials made no difference. They continued to live in darkness.

Their plight moved him. The NTPC officer started working on the ways to meet this challenge. He got immersed in the task, more with the zeal of a missionary than the resolve of a professional. In fact, he forgot his own desire to leave Kalahandi! Within a few weeks, homes in Dharakhuman village were electrified. The villagers of Dharakhuman were the first beneficiaries of NTPC's rural electrification programme for Kalahandi's BPL households.

Providing electricity to the tribals of Kalahandi district is not easy. The villages are in remote areas and are often inaccessible. The households are often far apart. The inhospitable terrain and the lack of local skilled and unskilled technicians make the task even more difficult. The migrant labour often fled the place.



A village elder blessing Prasad

Dharakhuman village erupted in joy and celebration. The centre of all the excitement was Prasad. He was put on a wooden pedestal by the tribals, garlanded, and had rice sprinkled on him. In keeping with local custom, some of them even washed his feet, much to his embarrassment. A village elder in his nineties, placing his hand on Prasad's head, said "*ebe moriba aageru bijuli ghore aasibo*" (Now my house will have electricity before I die). It was an emotional moment that really transformed Prasad. He had never before been adored like a hero. And there was joy, the joy of having made a difference to the lives of the marginalized.

NTPC identified in 2009 more than 200,000 tribal families in Kalahandi as beneficiaries of its rural household electrification programme. In about three years 1,100 of the 2,017 selected villages of Kalahandi have received electricity. This has taken power to as many as 75,000 tribal homes, benefitting 144,000 people.

By the end of 2012, NTPC expects to provide the remaining villages with electricity. This would mean the entire target group of 216,253 BPL families will get electricity connections. This target, NTPC expects, will keep Prasad charged.

Providing electricity to the tribals of Kalahandi district, however, is not as easy as it sounds. The villages are in remote areas and are often inaccessible. The households are often far apart. The inhospitable terrain and the lack of local skilled and unskilled technicians make the task even more difficult. The migrant labour brought in to help often fled the place leaving the task unfinished, unable to cope with the harsh conditions.



Kalahandi Tribal women sing and dance welcoming electricity to their homes

The rural electrification drive first began in 2009-10 when NTPC sent officers to remote areas of the country to help provide electricity to over 800,000 BPL households. The company upped the target in the next fiscal to over 1.2 million BPL families. By the end of this financial year NTPC aims at providing 2.7 million BPL families with electricity.

In addition to Kalahandi, over 37,000 villages of Odisha which are located in the districts of Balangir, Bargarh, Deogarh, Dhenkanal, Jharsuguda, Keonjhar, Koraput, Nuapada, and Sambalpur will soon get electricity. The drive will also take place in several backward areas of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and West Bengal.

Back in Kalahandi, Prasad, now a deputy general manager, remains focussed on his work. The tribals of Kalahandi plead with him not to leave. Prasad is in no rush to do so either. The place he dreaded to go to is the place that he has come to love.

3

Training for Tomorrow

The 23-year-old Vishakha Gupta hopes to get a government job, thanks to the training she is getting at the ITI in New Delhi's Malviya Nagar. The ITI was augmented by NTPC in its bid to help the Central government to upgrade 500 ITIs and make them centres of excellence.

Amidst the traffic and din of the busy market at Malviya Nagar in New Delhi is a training institute. The façade is freshly painted, and as you pass through the corridors you see well lit and airy classrooms. Students in their uniforms bend over different machines getting to know the nuts and bolts of it. In a class under a huge air conditioning duct students are learning all about the workings of an air conditioner. The computer class with its brand new computers could belong to any private training institute.

But it is a government-run industrial training institute, or ITI. Typically, ITIs are known for dusty, decrepit buildings, broken window panes, ill-lit classrooms, greying blackboards, old machines, bored students, indifferent teachers, and generally dismal surroundings. The Malviya Nagar ITI is surely different. And this difference was made in a short period, a couple of years.

In one class, students are busy running machines. They are working on lathe machine, shapers, milling machines. Among this class of young boys is the 23-year-old Vishakha Gupta, the only woman in the class who is training to be a machinist. A profession dominated by men because of the heavy physical labour involved, Vishakha in many ways symbolizes change in workplace and society. She is married and leaves her two-year-old daughter with her relatives when she comes for the class. Her husband is a self-trained electrician.

This graduate is pursuing a two-year ITI course. Vishakha says, "I never feel out of place here. Whenever I work on a machine, my fellow students come

to help. Our teachers are very good and I hope that with this course, I get a government job—in the Railways or the Army.”

In its 2004-05 Budget, the Central government had announced its plans to upgrade 500 ITIs and make them centres of excellence. It was during this time that NTPC decided to actively participate in this plan. Today, the company is associated with 25 ITIs of which it has adopted 17 and is building eight new ITIs near its plants. NTPC has adopted the ITIs either under the public-private partnership (PPP) scheme or by way of helping state governments improve this backbone of vocational training. Most of these ITIs are in the countryside and play an important role in skill upgrade, meeting the trained manpower requirement in rural India.



Providing skills for the future

Ajay Shukla, a deputy general manager with NTPC’s power management institute, says quality control and regular inputs of industry reach through the Institute Management Committees (IMC). He says, “The adopted ITIs are usually attached with a project. The one in Malviya Nagar is attached to the Badarpur Thermal Power Plant. The plant can get trained manpower to meet its needs and the students get trained and get exposure at big plants. For the contractors who supply manpower to the plant, such ITIs become a resource centre for supply of trained manpower.” So, it’s a win-win situation for both the students and the company. For the 4,000 students who have passed out from these ITIs after

Typically, ITIs are known for dusty, decrepit buildings, and generally dismal surroundings. The Malviya Nagar ITI is surely different. And this difference was made in a short period, a couple of years.

NTPC's involvement, getting jobs has been easier as their institutes have been attached to the industry.

The principal of the Malviya Nagar ITI, Vijay Kumar, says the formation of IMCs has been good because

the industries for which the ITIs provide the workforce are now involved in all aspects of the training programme. "The requirements of the industry are rapidly changing. We need to constantly upgrade our equipment and change training methods to be in sync with the industry and these partnerships with the industry help a lot. Decision making is now faster and we are getting proper guidance unlike in the past."



Students honing their skills

Once an ITI is adopted, companies like NTPC look at the needs of individual ITIs and review syllabus, training, and technology needs. In the areas where inhabitants have been displaced and lost their livelihoods these ITIs help such people gain new skills and get employment.

There has also been a change in the way these institutes are run under the PPP scheme. Vijay Kumar says, “The students are very well behaved, disciplined, and hard working. Almost 70-75 per cent get jobs after passing out. This has happened because we have campus interviews and centralized placement.”

Further, he adds, it’s not just the students who are doing better. The quality of teaching has also improved. “Teachers are sent on training and skill upgrade courses which help them keep pace with changing technology and new teaching methods. This has helped everyone.”

There is a constant need for trained manpower. And this growing interface between industry and vocational institutes like ITIs is helping the companies get the kind of trained people they want. For the students, their skills are enhanced and they stand a better chance of getting a job.

Manikant is from Newada in Bihar and lives with his uncle and aunty in Delhi. He is training to become an electrician. He says he’s learning a lot: “Teaching is good and the method of teaching has novelty. We are sent for real life experience of the industry. I went to NTPC and for the first time actually saw how electricity is produced. This is really helpful.”

His classmate, Govind Verma, is also pursuing his degree in chemistry through distance learning. Govind used to help his uncle who is an electrician. Govind says he learnt a lot of things on the job. But he also realized the need to understand the processes and think of solutions to electrical problems. And for this he needed to have formal theoretical and practical knowledge. “Here the machines are new, we get to learn and now I feel I will be well equipped to get a job in the government or private sector.”

The computer operator and programme assistant course is full of young girls working on new computers. In this class is Sudha Joshi, a teacher. She says, “I want to become computer literate. I am a teacher by profession and this skill will help me immensely. Knowledge of Excel, Power point, networking, and languages will all help me in my profession.”

Deepika Mishra hopes that, armed with this training, she will be able to get a government job. She looks forward to coming here, “The institute is clean and we feel safe coming here. The training and facilities are excellent. So I feel confident going out in the world.”



One of the ITIs adopted by NTPC

In another room, some young boys in the carpentry workshop are polishing their craft by making computer tables for their institute. They are getting to use their training and the ITI is getting the kind of furniture it requires in-house.

NTPC's Rachna Singh, who heads the training division at Badarpur and Ajay Shukla say, "The PPP-run ITIs see more students enrolling, the course has been upgraded, the teachers are motivated, and after a course students are more likely to get a good job. All this has transformed the vocational training scenario in the country."

There is a constant need for trained manpower. And this growing interface between industry and vocational institutes like ITIs is helping the companies get the kind of trained people they want. For the students, their skills are enhanced and they stand a better chance of getting a job in this fiercely competitive work environment. But there are a few more steps which need to be taken for the industry-institute interface to be complete and nearly perfect. These would be to increase the confidence of the students, improve their communication skills and bridge the remaining gap between their skills and their employer's requirements. Once this happens the transformation will be complete.

4

On a Firm Footing

By sheer willpower and grit, Sunita overcame the congenital defect in both legs. With some help from NTPC promoted NFNDRC, she is not only financially independent but also a role model for her students and others.

Sunita's story does not make the headlines. She did not scale Mt. Everest like the amputee mountaineer Mark Inglis of New Zealand, nor can she boast of headline-making achievements of many other differently-abled people. Yet, she has an indomitable spirit and is a role model for many, especially those who are physically challenged.

In her own way, the girl from a remote part of India has a story that is inspiring. Born with a congenital defect in both her legs, Sunita today walks like a normal person, thanks to prosthetic legs. She also carved a niche for herself as a teacher. She is not only financially independent but also carries out the responsibility of shaping the future of scores of students with aplomb. Her students love her for liveliness and teaching proficiency.

Born at Katehari village in the Ambedkarnagar district of Uttar Pradesh on August 14, 1982, Sunita had to face many hardships during her early life. She was born in a low-income family with nine siblings. She started her schooling when she was 10 because of her physical disability. She passed her high school exams in 2004 with first division and intermediate in 2006 with first division from the UP Board. Sunita was 22 years old when she passed Class X.

It was around this time that her life was set to take a dramatic turn. Soon after she passed out of school, Sunita came in contact with the NTPC Foundation NIOH Disability Rehabilitation Centre, or NFNDRC. Within a year, her legs were surgically corrected at the NTPC-Tanda Hospital, a 30-bed facility in

Sunita's home district and part of NTPC facilities for the Tanda thermal power station. In 2006, she was provided with prosthetic legs. Till then, Sunita was dependent on her family members even for the simple day-to-day activities. It was her prosthetic legs that gave her a firm footing even literally. Now, she had a world of possibilities to explore.

In 2006, while appearing for intermediate exams, Sunita never felt physically challenged. She passed the intermediate exams in arts, also from the UP Board, again in first division. In 2008, she bagged the job of 'Shiksha Mitra.' But her quest for higher studies continued. In 2010, she enrolled at the Avadh University for graduate studies. Sunita looks forward to the day she would complete her graduation and go on for post-graduate and doctorate level research.

A teacher by profession, Sunita understands the importance of education. Though she couldn't start her own schooling early in life, she is an advocate of 'education for all' to be provided at the right age. The school at Katgharwa, where she teaches primary school students, is one and a half kilometres away from her residence, but Sunita has received special marks for her punctuality. She is never late.

Speaking about her, the school headmaster Vijay Bahadur says, "Sunita uses private transport to reach school and is always punctual. Initially, she had problems in standing while teaching throughout the day and using wall blackboard. We have arranged a modified wooden blackboard so that she can teach without any inconvenience."

Acknowledging Sunita's endeavor, Dr. L.M. Pandey, Chief Medical Officer, NTPC-Tanda Hospital, says, "Sunita is the perfect role model for persons with disability. Her confidence in her abilities coupled with hard work has been the key in helping her secure a teacher's job and gain financial independence."

Sunita's is not an isolated example in Ambedkarnagar district. Over the years, a little help from NFNDRC (the erstwhile District Disability Rehabilitation Centre) has led to big changes in the lives of differently-abled persons of Ambedkarnagar and its neighbouring districts. Many like Sunita have gone back to their villages to tell stories of how they benefitted.

Be it for the services like physiotherapy, audiometry, surgeries or aids, the NFNDRC is today the one-stop destination for people with any disability. Between 2004-05 and 2010-11, a record number of 22,206 people with disabilities registered their names with NFNDRC. While 2,693 people with disabilities registered their names at 47 camps, the rest registered their names at the NFNDRC itself.

NTPC Tanda is the first thermal power station to establish a Disability Rehabilitation Centre through which it provides rehabilitation services to people

with disabilities of Ambedkarnagar and five surrounding districts. Some of the differently-abled are also given training so that they support themselves. Several of them have been trained in candle making, computers, tailoring, and envelop making. The centre provides career counselling, educational support under the inclusive education programme, to help make available equal opportunities and bring them to the mainstream of life.

She started her schooling when she was 10 because of her physical disability. She passed her high school exams in 2004 with first division and intermediate in 2006 with first division from the UP Board. Sunita was 22 years old when she passed Class X.



A role model: Sunita with her students

NTPC – Tanda's rehabilitation outreach programme and its success has galvanized more projects of the company to open similar centres in other parts of the country, offering a ray of hope to a number of differently-abled people living in remote areas, in tune with NTPC's belief we have a moral responsibility to assist the less fortunate.

INSPIRING TALE OF RAHAT BANO

Rahat Bano was born with multiple and complicated deformities that did not allow her to walk or even sit properly. Her family members did not know how she could ever lead a normal life.

Today, she is educated and works as a teacher in a local school. Her story is as moving as it is inspiring.

Rahat lived at Tanda, the industrial city in Uttar Pradesh's Ambedkarnagar district that is known for its handloom and power-loom textiles. She was helpless but not pessimistic. Life was difficult but she always hoped it would turn for the better someday. Her place was not far from NTPC's Tanda thermal plant, which is located on the sandy plains of central-eastern Uttar Pradesh on the banks of the Saryu river in Ambedkarnagar district.

The Tanda plant is considered a remarkable turnaround story. The plant was taken over from the Uttar Pradesh State Electricity Board in January 2000. The Plant Load Factor, PLF, of the power station improved from 21.59 per cent at the time of the takeover to 91.66 per cent now.

But the big-ticket turnaround — which showcased NTPC's managerial, operational and technical capacities — is not the only achievement the public sector corporation is proud of. Tanda has also achieved something which is not well known. This plant is unique in the NTPC universe as it has one-of-its-kind

The case of Rahat Bano is striking since she, because of her deformities, lived a life of misery. The DDRC provided her prosthetics and a tricycle, as a result of which she became mobile and went on to not only study but also teach others. It's an inspiring story and stands out as a true measure of success.

District Disability Rehabilitation Centre, usually referred by its acronym, DDRC and now NFNDRC.

It was in 2003 when, as part of its efforts to reach out to the community, NTPC took the initiative of finding out the most serious health-related problems in the vicinity of its plant.

In India, persons with disabilities (PWDs) constitute about 2 per cent of the population. But in the region around Tanda, this figure was 5-6 per cent. It was observed that the high number of disabled persons was possibly because of poverty, lack of education, backwardness of the area and lack of facilities. Congenital deformities, probably because of generations of consanguineous marriages in certain communities, were also very common.

The plan then was to set up a disability rehabilitation camp, the first of its kind in any NTPC project area. In no time, as many as 583 people got themselves registered at the camp.

Seeing this, the NTPC began the search to identify a partner organization that could provide the necessary knowhow to help Persons With Disability (PWD) and their relatives and caregivers in the area. After an intensive search, NTPC partnered with the National Institute of Orthopedically Handicapped (NIOH), Kolkata, for the proposed disability centre.

“It is a service that has come as a boon for the physically handicapped persons of this area,” says Saryu Prasad, an experienced farmer of Tanda.

The case of Rahat Bano is striking since she, because of her deformities, lived a life of misery. The DDRC provided her prosthetics and a tricycle, as a result of which she became mobile and went on to not only study but also teach others. It’s an inspiring story and stands out as a true measure of success in the efforts at reaching out to the disabled population in and around Tanda.

SMALL HELP, BIG CHANGE

A bicycle without brakes at handles seems unusual. While for some it is a circus-styled bicycle, for others it is an Indian *jugaad* — that is, improvised technology. For Avinash Yadav, who hails from Benipur, UP’s Ambedkarnagar district, it is big help. He lost both hands in an accident seven years ago at a sugar mill in Mijhoda where he used to work. Thereafter, he customized the bicycle to suit his requirement.

Speaking of the accident Avinash remembers: “Before the accident, I used to work normally and maintained my family well. The accident changed the course of my life. Suddenly, I became a dependant on my family members, particularly my spouse. Had I lost my hands before birth, I would not have regretted as much as I do today.”

After the accident, Avinash spent a miserable life, until he came in contact with NFNDRC in 2006. The centre counseled him and sent him to the NIOH, Kolkata. The centre also issued a Disability Certificate, a Free Bus Pass, a Railway Concession Pass, a Disability Pension, and artificial limbs. “The personalized counseling and service and, more importantly, the artificial limbs provided by NFNDRC gave me a new lease of life. The centre had sent me to NIOH, Kolkata, where the prostheses engineers added the artificial hands. It reminded me of my good old days. Though I cannot work in the manner I used to work earlier, but I can do the minor things now,” Avinash says.

Post-accident, he used to walk kilometers to reach nearby areas. Now, he can do the things like shifting chair, shaving, cutting fruits and vegetables, bringing grocery items up to 3kg, and collecting water from tube well.



Avinash Yadav pedals to a new life

Post-accident, he used to walk kilometers to reach nearby areas. Now with prostheses hands, he rides a bicycle, even carrying his spouse or children. For this to happen, he customized the bicycle by attaching the brakes in pedals. He can also do the things like shifting chair, shaving, cutting fruits and vegetables, bringing grocery items up to 3kg, and collecting water from tube well.

For this 36-year-old man, it has been a big change.

5

When Uprooting Brought Prosperity

NTPC's Koldam hydroelectric project in Himachal Pradesh has not only helped the national economy by boosting the power potential, but also been a boon for the locals who were displaced because of it. They have used the compensation money to plough into enterprises, thus ushering in unprecedented prosperity in the area.

A young man in a smart grey tweed jacket saunters to his Ford Endeavour. Walking through the furrowed land, he inspects saplings and talks about farming and new techniques. He is Anit Sharma, 34. He dreams big.

Anit is from Bohat village in Bilaspur district where he had 35 *bighas* of land. He had a four-room house; he lived off his farm land comfortably. But his land was acquired by NTPC for the Koldam hydroelectric project.

This changed his life.

He and his family moved near Sundernagar town. From the compensation money he received, he bought a flat and fertile 21 *bighas* of land. Today, not only all his food needs are met by his farm but also he makes a handsome living out of it even though he owns less land than before.

Popularly known as Bunty, he is quick-witted and is known for sharp thinking. He realized that with the good money he got as compensation he could invest in a greenhouse which would improve the agricultural yield.

The Himachal Government was helping farmers by giving them almost 80 per cent subsidy to set up a greenhouse. He built one in 2007 and there has been no looking back.

He says he took the right decision. “What you earn in six months from farm produce in ordinary farming, you do that from a greenhouse in a month.”



Anit Sharma and his family with the greenhouse in the background

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Anit has shown innovation and ambition — the essential ingredients to make it big. Enthused by this new scientific farming technique, he is now planning to have a fully automated greenhouse. He says, “Give me five to six years, and I will make this dream true.”

Walking through his green house where he is growing capsicum, he talks about the tender loving care with which his crop grows. He says the plants are like children and they have to be nurtured or they wilt. As for farming, he says, “If all of us start thinking of working on computers, who will feed us?” This is a farmer who believes that India needs better farm practices to make agriculture viable. He also acknowledges that the money he got from the compensation helped him take risks and experiment.

He succeeded in some, while some experiments ended as failures. His apple plantation didn't bear fruit. He grew his saplings late. He says, "I could lose some money and try new things. You only get high profit when you take high risks." The compensation amount helped him have some surplus which he employed to take a few risks.

Anit doesn't quite resemble the image of a displaced person, for he is not struggling to make ends meet — uprooted yes, but not insolvent. In fact, his achievements are examples of how to transform challenges into opportunities. Mahendar Thakur is no different.

Half of Mahender Thakur's land came under the project area. He also got compensation and a plot in the residential colony being built by NTPC.

As you sit in his balcony, you can still see the plot of land which was his and now comes under the dam project. A distance of merely 500 metres but in reality he has moved much beyond and upwards in financial terms.

Mahendar was a computer engineer working at Manali when he heard that the Koldam project, about which they had been hearing for decades, was finally being built. By 2002, they had received the compensation money from NTPC. Their life was about to change.

The resettlement and rehabilitation team of the company was not just looking after the compensation process but also encouraging the locals to use the money wisely. Mahendar was away on his job, while his two brothers, one a teacher and other working in the post office, lived in the area. The R&R team suggested to Mahendar now that a new project was coming up, there would be a lot of opportunities, so he should also think of working from here rather than being away from home.

Since he knew about computers, he started by leasing a computer for NTPC work; then he set up a photocopier business, which was followed with another one involving vehicles. He hasn't looked back since then. In 2005, he got into the civil works of the dam; he bought a heavy-duty excavator worth ₹ 1.15 crore.

Today, he has machinery worth ₹ 30-35 crore, all being used in the Koldam-related work. With a working capital of ₹ 3.5 crore, he is now a big contractor of civil works. He says, "Things have definitely changed. I used to work for someone; now people come to me looking for work. About 150 people work with me."

There has also been a complete change in his lifestyle, which is a far cry from the days when he earned a salary of ₹ 18,000. He says with some satisfaction on his face, "What has essentially changed is that my wealth has increased, and this

has increased my confidence. Earlier, I would think twice even before investing a lakh rupees or two. Now, I don't worry even before putting in ₹ 1 crore."

Mahendar was a computer engineer working at Manali when he heard that the Koldam project. The R&R team suggested to Mahendar that now that a new project was coming up, there would be a lot of opportunities. Today, he has machinery worth ₹ 30-35 crore, all being used in the Koldam-related work

Mahendar and his brothers live in the same plot of land. He lives with his wife and two sons in a 45-room mansion. He houses his staff and runs a mess for them.

At the moment, his family is happy because his business is right at his doorstep and he doesn't need to get out of his house for work very often. With a turnover of ₹ 12-13

crore and a lot of investment in heavy machinery, he is assured of a good life at least till the end of this project. He says he will think of other projects only after the completion of Koldam, because he cannot single-handedly manage his business spread out over many areas.



Mahendar Thakur: making it big

Mahendar has transformed his life because of his risk-taking ability, while his brothers played safe and are only investing their money in civil works.

Like Mahendar, CP Bansal is also reaping the benefits of the enterprise they showed. When he came to know about the impending displacement from Hanrola village in Bilaspur district, his first concern was to find a place to live in. He had 10 bighas of farmland and he got a compensation of ₹ 66 lakh. He decided to move from his village to a city and bought a plot in Sundernagar. His was one of the 150 families which had trust and faith in NTPC honouring its commitment; that they left the village even before the land was given to them.

He built a five-storey building on the plot he had bought and decided to build a girls hostel here. It made good business sense, because there were three colleges in the vicinity and an acute shortage of safe places for girls to live. Today, he rents out 21 rooms with two girls living in a room and paying ₹ 3,000 each. He is also running a cyber café and a restaurant from the premises. He makes over ₹ 1 lakh from the premises, apart from the salary he and his wife get.

He says, “My father runs the place. My wife, apart from her regular job, doubles up as warden. It saves us an extra salary and the girls also feel secure. My sister-in-law, who was a housewife in the village, now looks after the cyber café and restaurant.”



Bansal with girl inmates of his hostel

No longer a farmer, his life has undergone a sea change for good. What began in 2005 with seven lodgers now houses 45 girls. His family used to struggle hard in the non-irrigated land in the village; now it is running a prosperous business

in the city. The children have better educational opportunities and the quality of life has improved.

Bansal says, “We hardly grew enough grain to feed us for four or five months. We were hardly making ₹ 1 lakh in a year, now we make over a lakh in a month. For us, Koldam has proven to be a boon.”

The lives of these dam-affected people show that displacement is not ruinous if managed properly. In fact, it can bring in prosperity and progress for the people for whom bleeding hearts shed copious tears. NTPC’s Koldam project is testimony to this truth.

The story of resettlement doesn’t just need to be just one of uprooting but also of growth and prosperity. What better examples than these who lead lives none of them would have imagined a decade ago.

6

No Child Left Behind

Shibu Malik is a warrior, having fought many a battle against his hearing-and-speech handicap, dejection, loneliness, and despair. And he has emerged victorious against all odds despite weak financial conditions at home and physical disability with a little help from NTPC-supported *Asha Kiran*, a school for such children in Vindhyachal.

Shibu Malik holds you in conversation with his gaze, which is alert and intense. Born with hearing and speech impairment, the 17-year-old tries hard to lip-read, which explains the gaze. He will suggest with signs that the conversation be carried out on paper. He has learnt to read and write, despite struggle against odds that tested his perseverance for years and he never lets go of a chance to use these skills.

Seven months after his birth, his parents had found out that their firstborn could not hear them. Shahid Hassan, Shibu's father, panicked. He feared that the future could be unkind for his son. The dreams he had for his son died when he came to know about his handicap. A daily wage labourer, he would find work in NTPC's Vindhyachal project on better days. On others, he would walk up to 40 kilometres away from his hovel at Nav Jivan Vihar — a resettlement colony for those who had been ousted when the project came up — in search of work. With an income that barely met his family's needs, he could not conceive of getting his son medical attention. So, he would sit and brood. Shibu's mother Asma found some solace in prayers. But long before the child could walk, they had given up hopes of a normal life for him.

"It is often the case with the parents of children with handicaps from poor families. Some have told me that they felt tied down with the child, not knowing

what to do. They give up hope of a normal life for their kid and keep them at home,” says Poonam, principal of Asha Kiran School, which is meant for the hearing and speech impaired.



Asha Kiran — Bringing hope and smiles to many

Shibu was six when he joined Asha Kiran which was set up by the Ladies Club of the township with aid from NTPC. Two years ago, he passed out of Class VIII, the highest class offered there.

As a kid, Shibu was shunned by other children in his village. They could not understand why he could not speak. Some would bully him, while others, even though they did not mean to hurt him, caused misery by refusing to mingle with him. “I became something of a loner. At home, my siblings would be scared by

As a kid, Shibu was shunned by other children in his village. They could not understand why he could not speak. Some would bully him, while others, even though they did not mean to hurt him, caused misery by refusing to mingle with him.

my grunts every time I tried to speak,” he says in sign language which Poonam interprets. “The lonelier I got, the more I craved for friends.”

When he was around four, a man stricken with polio came looking for Shibu. Wary and confused, he waited as the

stranger spoke to Shahid and Asma. Sanjay Agrawal loved to teach children, especially those who were differently-abled. He had requested them to send Shibu to his place where he taught a few other kids with special needs from the nearby villages. The couple acquiesced, believing that it could be Shibu's only chance at getting an education. Agrawal would draw figures on a slate and familiarize letters of the Hindi alphabet. Shibu never got to know the sound of the letter or the word the figure represented, but he would read haltingly the letters of graffiti and posters on the walls in the markets of nearby Waidhan when his father took him there.



Specially abled students of Asha Kiran

After a few months of this home schooling, Agrawal took his pupils to Asha Kiran. The kids received a set of uniforms and textbooks. "I could not contain my joy," Shibu flails his hands wildly to say. School, Poonam translates, soon gave him all that he had been seeking. Back from school, he would stand in front of posters on walls and copy words on to his slate. He would make sure that the kids who had refused to be friendly to him watched him doing it. Soon after, a few curious boys would come to him still not believing that the boy could neither speak nor hear was writing words that they learnt at their schools. This then became a game, Shibu says. The boys would point at something or draw a figure and ask Shibu to write the corresponding word. Sometimes, he would be spot on with the answer, sometimes he would struggle with the spelling. At

The school also organized vocational training classes for the students with a range of activities — from tailoring and sewing to crafts and pottery. Shibu joined tailoring classes on a whim, learning to stitch clothes. He didn't know then that the classes would someday pay off.

other times, he would just blink furiously trying to recollect if he had learnt the word at school or not. But, in the end, the only thing that would matter was that he was making friends.

Seeing his progress, Asma and Shahid rekindled the hope that had died in them long ago. They knew they could not give

him much. So, they were thankful for all he got at Asha Kiran.

The school grew with Shibu. Poonam had joined one year ago as mathematics teacher. Students from the nearby Kharia, Waidhan, and Dharti had joined the school. Some came from as far as Bijpur, a village that was nearly 30 kilometers away. A few years later, Agrawal would leave for his hometown. Shibu was sad to see his first teacher and inspiration go but had gotten equally attached to the school. It was here that he met one of his closest friends. His classmate Amit Pandey came from a lower middle class family. He would often share the snacks he got from home with Shibu. They would sit on the school lawn and practice the English letters in sign language. The school also organized vocational training classes for the students with a range of activities — from tailoring and sewing to crafts and pottery. Shibu joined tailoring classes on a whim, learning to stitch clothes. He didn't know then that the classes would someday pay off.

In 2008, he finished school at Asha Kiran. "It was a bittersweet moment. I had completed upper primary, but at the same time I had to leave my school. I have requested the principal many times to start secondary level classes at our school," Shibu writes on a notepad with a wistful look. Poonam reads it over his shoulder and smiles.

"Shibu and many others have asked us to start Class IX and X. We have been thinking about it but we will need more funds and more teachers," she says. She has been teaching specially-abled children for over a decade and a half now, and there is nothing more she would like than to see her students beat the odds.

A month after he passed out, Shibu found out from Amit about a school in Indore that had a hostel for students with special needs. He informed his parents, Asma and Shahid, who were immediately concerned about the cost of education. However, the teachers at Asha Kiran spoke to the two and convinced them to let their son go to Indore and try the school out. However, the living

far away from home in a hostel did not suit Shibu's temperament. Besides, there was the cost to consider.



The school with a difference

He left Indore and came back home, crestfallen that he could not overcome homesickness. "I would sit at home and think of what I could have done better at Indore," he gestures. Then, one day, his father suggested that he should start working — may be at a tailor's shop since he had learnt it in school. To beat boredom and negative thoughts, Shibu approached his trainer, the proprietor of Stylo Tailors, in one of the markets in the township. Fortunately, the latter was more than willing to hire him. He had seen his talent with fabric and threads during the classes. He agreed to train him further. Soon, Shibu was hired and is now earning ₹ 3,000 a month — a sum that his poor family feels is a blessing. He hopes to save enough to get his sisters married someday. There are other dreams also — fuelled by the audacity of hope. "I will complete school. I need it. Being at Asha Kiran, I found some of the things I had desperately craved — friends, confidence, a feeling of being treated equal," Poonam translates for him.

There are children sitting in classrooms as one walks around the school with Poonam. There is no sound but the classes seem charged with the enthusiasm of these children. Manish Sahoo, a four-year-old in Class 1, can barely reach the blackboard, but immediately points out that his teacher has missed a blank

between 'r' and 't' in an exercise with the English alphabet. He smartly turns and makes a blank himself and writes 's' on it.

NTPC runs 48 schools across the country teaching over 40,000 children, but Asha Kiran is one with a difference. It is an attempt to make sure that no child, absolutely no child, is left behind.

7

Gollagunta's Quest for Water

For the people at Suneri Jan's village of Gollagunta, which falls in Ravada Panchayat in the Vishakapatnam district of Andhra Pradesh, getting water was a long, agonizing, and back-breaking struggle. The Sarpanch and her son approached NTPC's Simhadri power plant for help, which came in right earnest.

For 40-year-old Shaik Suneri Jan, a mother of three children, life was an unending battle for survival. During the harvest season she used to work in the fields, while in the off-season she used to tend sheep and gather firewood from the forest to feed her hearth. But fetching water used to be the hardest of her daily chores. It involved a long and tiring walk around the hill to gather water in trickles. On good days it used to take a couple of hours; on bad days, she used to spend the entire morning for it. But water was never really clean. As a result her children often fell ill with diarrhoea.

It was the same story in all the households of Suneri Jan's village of Gollagunta, which falls in Ravada Panchayat in the Vishakapatnam district of Andhra Pradesh. Gollagunta is a rain-fed village, located at the foot of a hill in Ravada. As in a number of villages in India, even after a bountiful monsoon, Gollagunta is short of water. Its 1,050 people eke out its living as daily-wage farm labourers or as contract workers for NTPC's 2000-MW Simhadri power Station, which lies a few kilometres away.

During the off-season, men of the area go to the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme work sites to get some work until the next farm season.

Women stay at home to take care of household chores, the most important and onerous of which being the collection of water for drinking, washing, and other daily necessities.

India is on a fast-track trajectory towards modernization, marked by rapid industrialization and economic development. But, unfortunately, a large percentage of rural population is devoid of basic necessities. The lack of clean drinking water is at the root of water-borne diseases like diarrhoea which take a huge toll on the lives of children across the country.

The village used to rely on its community well, called *bavdi* in local parlance. When it went dry, people turned to bore wells in local farms, but they yield only muddy water, not fit for drinking or even washing. For some time, several alternatives were tried, such as water rationing and arranging water from the nearby Gangamambapura Agraharam. But nothing worked out on a sustainable basis. This left the women of Gollagunta with no alternative but to trek a few kilometres each morning to the neighboring villages for a few pitchers of water. With every passing summer, this search for clean drinking water took them farther and farther.

Surveys carried out in the region showed that fetching water was the crucial chore around which these people's lives revolved. Many villagers spent up to two hours each morning in search for water, only after which they could go to work. The water being mostly non-potable resulted in disease, frequent visits to the primary health centre, and regular absences from work or school. For women, it restricted their participation in economic activity such as local thrift groups. An assured supply of clean water would improve the poor condition of the people, the surveys concluded.

Driven to despair, the Sarpanch of Gollagunta Kona Suryanarayana and her son K.S.A. Ramaiah Naidu approached NTPC's Simhadri power plant where many of the villagers worked as contract laborers. NTPC accepted the request immediately and, within a year, a protected water supply scheme was executed. Ten community taps were provided to provide water supply at fixed hours in the morning and evening to the villagers. Gollagunta was among first villages where the power company constructed water tanks and launched piped drinking water supply in 2010.

In fact, NTPC's survey found that the scheme would be a force-multiplier with numerous benefits. In Gollagunta and other villages, the water tap has brought immediate results. First, it immediately cut out the drudgery of trudging to distant water sources. Second, it eliminated the need for water rationing from the community *bavdi* or the emergency water tankers supplied from the Simhadri Project. Third, it introduced the concept of water prudence with panchayats adopting water conservation protocols.

Taps and the water tank have been entrusted to the care of the Gollagunta panchayat. The caretaker is paid to take care of maintenance, chlorination, and regular cleaning of the tank. Now, people have seen what a water tap can do, and the whole village has become more aware about the importance of each and every drop of water. “We are proud of our water tap,” says Saidunnisa, a middle-aged woman. “Our *grama sabha* (village community) has adopted a resolution not to waste a single drop.”

For 40-year-old Shaik Suneri Jan, a mother of three, fetching water used to be the hardest of her daily chores. It involved a long and tiring walk around the hill to gather water in trickles. But water was never really clean. As a result her children often fell ill with diarrhoea.

The benefits to people like Suneri Jan were immediate and far-reaching. Today, she has a reliable source of clean water right near her home. Her children are healthier, her husband gets his food on time as he leaves for work, and she doesn't have to trek long distances for water. She has time to take up thrift activities in the self-help group of which she is a member. It's no less than a celebration. “It's such a change. Until last year, my children would fall ill frequently, and we had to go to hospital almost every month. I feel so much freer now,” she says.



Fetching water is no longer a drudgery for women of Parawada Mandal

There are deeper changes, too. Each success story in the neighbourhood encourages a new village to unite and invite the power company's team to take up the scheme in their village. And they enthusiastically agree to raise 30 per cent of the funds needed. To give just one example, the initiatives taken up by the power company's Simhadri Super Thermal Power Plant at Parawada Mandal in Visakhapatnam district of Andhra Pradesh tell the story how a simple water tap connection can pave the way towards development. Enlightened by this knowledge, the power company has replicated this little miracle in a number of locations. The benefits to those villages have been immediate, measurable, and fulsome.

For instance, the small miracle at Gollagunta soon caught the attention of their neighbours. Villagers in the vicinity began to petition NTPC to replicate the scheme in their area too. So, the power company decided to extend initiative to more villages. Similar schemes have been implemented in several hinterland habitations of the Simhadri plant: M. Swayambhuvaram, P. Swayambhuvaram, Kalapaka, Korangivanipalem, Polipali-Gollapeta, and Somanaidupalem. These villages have a total of 37 community taps, erected at a cost of ₹ 39.24 lakh, benefitting 7,350 people. Villages further away have also been drawn to power company's little miracle: Now the scheme is being taken up in 20 villages in Paravada mandal at a cost of ₹ 1.52 crore.



A reliable source of water nearer home

In each of these villages, the day a water tap is erected it becomes a red-letter day. In Kalapaka, farmer Marisa Srinivasa Rao exults, “April 27, 2010, is like August 15 for us. It brought us freedom from water-borne diseases.” In Marisivanipalem, a hamlet of 293 people, the red-letter day is eagerly anticipated.

In Kalapaka, farmer Marisa Srinivasa Rao exults, “April 27, 2010, is like August 15 for us. It brought us freedom from water-borne diseases.” In Marisivanipalem, a hamlet of 293 people, the red-letter day is eagerly anticipated.

The water tank, built by NTPC at the invitation of the villagers, is ready for commissioning. Says farm worker Yerra Lakshmi, “We will celebrate the day the tap gives us clean water.” This feeling propelled the Parawada Mandal Praja Parishad to take the unusual step of passing a resolution in October 2010 hailing NTPC’s efforts and asking other organizations in the area to emulate the power company.



A view of overhead tank in Gollagunta

Simple measures have helped unleash creative energies in India’s villages. Each scheme has freed hundreds of villagers like Suneri Jan from a life of drudgery; it has enabled them to utilize their time in a better way, apart from lending some financial support to her family and raising their children as healthy citizens. In a country where 75 per cent of the rural population does not have access to safe

drinking water and 500,000 children under the age of five die every year due to waterborne diseases, there can be no greater a duty for India's corporations than to provide clean water to the community in which they operate. A reliable and regular supply of clean water is all it takes to keep the village children well, cut absenteeism in schools, encourage its women to take up small enterprise and improve the health of its people. When you turn on the tap, you get more than a precious trickle of water!

Gifts Given and Received

An essay-and-debate competition organized by NTPC galvanized an Orissa schoolboy to excel in studies. He went on to become a physicist and publish papers on high science.

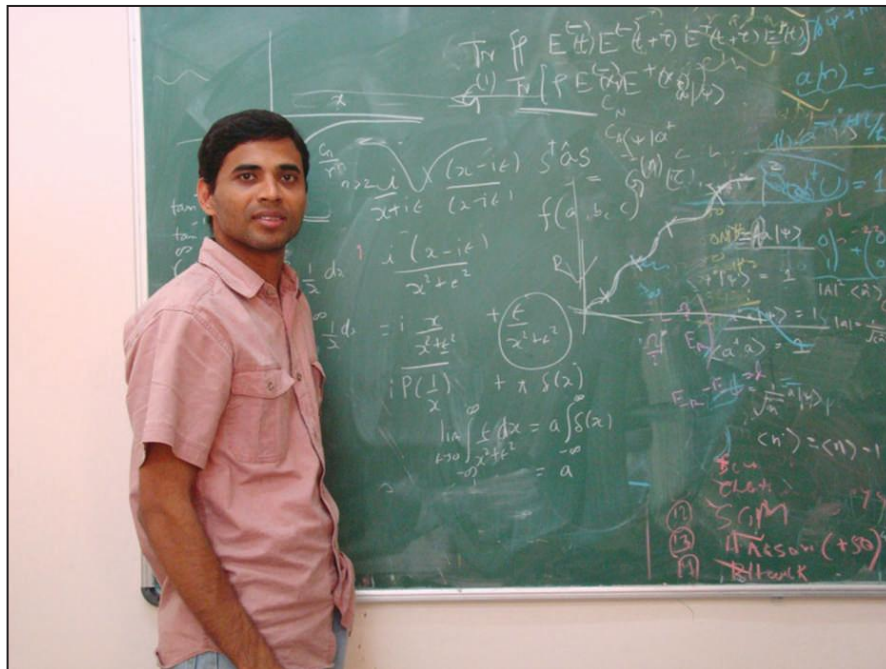
Dr. Ashok Mohapatra works as Assistant Professor at the National Institute of Science Education & Research (NISER), Bhubaneswar, where he is immersed in teaching and research. He earned his Ph.d. from the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Mumbai, in 2006. His field of study is ‘Ultra-cold atoms and Bose-Einstein condensation.’ His other work, ‘Measurement of the van der Waals force using reflection of cold atoms from magnetic thin-film atom mirrors,’ was work done with a colleague, C.S. Unnikrishanan, in 2006.

Much of his work appears incongruous at the NTPC site offices in Talcher, Angul, or Dhenkanal from where the power company manages its social outreach initiatives. But it was here over two decades ago that NTPC officials first learned of Ashok Mohapatra, then a 13-year-old boy who excelled not in physics but in crossing a turbulent river that stood between his home and his school in the rural hinterland of Odisha. Ashok had to go to his Panchayat school at Bijigol, 12 km from this home village of Barubahal.

The story dates back to August 14, 1989, when Ashok had a harrowing time crossing the Tikira that was in spate amid the heavy rains that season. Tikira is a tributary of the Brahmani and is in an area that records an average annual rainfall of 1,370 mm. There was an essay and a debate competition; he was keen on participating in it. Ashok wouldn’t miss school for any reason that day.

Sitting in his modest office at the NISER, Dr. Mohapatra recalls: “I can still see the water in that river and my desire to push through it to go to school

that day. The journey was difficult but then it was the journey that changed my life.” Incessant rains and floods in the overflowing river nearly cost him his life and his friends.



Dr Ashok Mohapatra the physicist : The journey changed his life

Young Ashok made it to school, sat through the competition, and was declared a winner. He was invited to be felicitated the next day, Independence Day, at the nearby power plant that was being put up those days by NTPC. The river he had crossed with great difficulty in the morning had become uncrossable by the evening, its roaring water flowing well above the danger mark. Ashok was helped by a kind teacher, who asked him to stay at his house and to go to the NTPC plant site for the award ceremony right from there.

The General Manager of the power project felicitated young participants, including Ashok. That plant has now grown to be one of NTPC's second largest, the Talcher Kaniha facility at Angul in Orissa, with an installed capacity of 3,000 MW .

And that boy has grown to become a physicist. The plant and the professor are serving society in their respective fields.

Twenty three years ago, when they first crossed paths, it was a different tale. The award was a NTPC local area initiative that would support meritorious

students around the then upcoming plant. The corporation then had about 10,000 MW of installed capacity. Today, of course, it has emerged as a power major with a colossal 35,000 MW of generating capacity and a presence in the Forbes Global 2000 list of the world's largest companies. NTPC has grown; so has Ashok Mohapatra.

This is not to say Ashok Mohapatra's problems came to an end when he came into contact with NTPC. It is nobody's case that a mere prize or one-time appreciation removed all hurdles in his path; but the encouragement came at the right time, instilling new zest and zeal in the youngster.

And just as NTPC encouraged Ashok Mohapatra, the people who devised and executed the programme were supported by others who believed that these programmes were a good way of doing business. Now, in turn, Dr. Mohapatra encourages NTPC to do more. The wheel has turned full circle.

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This is just one story but it is not the only one. The NTPC Talcher Super Thermal Power Station has in the last three years rewarded scores of meritorious students. In 2009-10, 21 schools of the peripheral villages covering 132 students were given scholarships amounting to over ₹ 1.6 lakh. In 2010-11, another 32 schools were covered and 197 students were given scholarships amounting to more than ₹ 2.4 lakh. The following year, 2011-12, saw 32 more schools covered and distribution of scholarships amounting to almost ₹ 3.5 lakh.

NTPC projects, spread across difficult geographical terrains, contribute to various areas towards peripheral development, adult education, and infrastructural progress. Merit scholarships are but one area where most of NTPC projects have made sure that merit is recognised at the local level in whatever manner possible.

A programme for scholarships is one of the best ways in which direct benefits can reach meritorious students, including those among the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and the physically challenged. NTPC also awards scholarships to students pursuing full-time engineering, degree or diploma courses, Master of Business Administration, and Post-Graduate Diploma in Business Management studies in any of the institutions recognized by the government from the second

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year of full-time courses within the prescribed period. The company gives extra leverage to the students so that, upon successful completion of the course, they can be called upon to go through the process of selection for employment in NTPC.



Students receiving merit scholarship at a function in one of the NTPC stations

Promoting meritorious students at Industrial Training Institutes has also been on NTPC's agenda. The NTPC Korba project in Chhattisgarh rewarded 20 meritorious students studying ITI courses at ITI Pali, Korba, for a total amount of ₹ 80,000. The power station has also given scholarships to students belonging to the category of below the poverty line, or BPL, studying engineering courses.

As Dr. Mohapatra puts it, "Much after I left, the company continues to encourage meritorious students. NTPC brings them hope and encouragement."

Displaced, Not Uprooted

The Kyan village in Himachal Pradesh's Bilaspur came under the Koldam project. All the 51 village households were not only compensated but provided with much better infrastructure and gave a fillip to local arts and culture. The result is all-round prosperity and end to migration of locals to other places.

As you walk up the narrow, rocky mountain path to reach this light blue-colored two storied house, you get the feel of the tough life in mountains. What may amaze you is the structure in front of you. A new construction with fancy tiles, carved wood furniture — all the trappings of a modern dwelling.

But, along with it, you find goats tethered in the compound, toilets away from the house, and you realize the house is a neat amalgam of two lifestyles — one, the newly acquired and urban; and, second, rural.

This is a contrast to what you witness all around in Koldam, a hydroelectric power project on river Sutlej, being built in Bilaspur in Himachal Pradesh by NTPC. The 800-MW project will be complete by 2013.

Here you can see two hills — one with small houses and narrow windy lanes, and the other where fast-paced changes are taking place. In Birbal Singh Thakur's house at Sanihan in Mandi district, change is visible.

Thakur had to leave his home in Kyan village because it came under the Koldam project. He was given compensation for the house. In fact, all the 51 village households were compensated. It was in 2003, after an agreement

In Birbal Singh Thakur's house at Sanihan in Mandi district, change is visible. He was given compensation for the house. Today, Thakur has 22 bighas, instead of 12 which he possessed earlier: 'Now I have a bigger, better house. We also have a middle school, a dispensary, and better roads.'

between the government, NTPC and the villagers, that those who lost their lands were rehabilitated.

Today, Thakur has 22 *bighas*, instead of 12 which he possessed earlier. "The compensation was good. I used to live in a slate-roofed traditional house, now I have

a bigger, better house. We also have a middle school, a dispensary, and better roads," says Thakur.

He recalls that with a lot of encouragement from NTPC's Resettlement and Rehabilitation team, 13 people from the village set up a cooperative society. They had no experience but decided to take up civil work on a contract basis from NTPC. Over a period of time, they have acquired considerable domain expertise and have also started taking up work individually.

Thakur says, "When a big project comes up, it's always a mixed bag. There are some disadvantages but lots of benefits too. We did not just get money but also new opportunities to get employment; we started going out for work which boosted our confidence. Now, those who had never left their homes are doing new things. And the project itself has opened many new avenues for us."

Talking of new opportunities, Thakur says that he makes a handsome amount as rent from the mobile towers which have been set up on his land and also gets paid to keep it secured!

This has happened because of a well-thought-out policy for the welfare of project affected persons. NTPC looks at R&R apart from making efforts at community development. The company encourages the project-affected people to seek employment in the project-related activities and also gives incentives and preference in jobs and contracts to those who lose their lands for the project.

At Koldam, a senior official of the company looking after R&R says that resettlement colonies have been built with the best of amenities. Schools, medical centres, water and sewerage, concrete roads, and street lights complete the picture of a model resettlement colony. Those who lost their houses were given plots in the resettlement colonies.

The compensation rate for the land was decided with the help of the land acquisition collector appointed by the Himachal Pradesh government. The amount was on a higher side; this is the reason people are not complaining about inadequate compensation.



Birbal Thakur in his new home

Further, the money they got as compensation was used for buying land. And in this they got advice and help from the R&R team, which facilitated purchase of suitable land on a willing seller-willing buyer basis.

A lot of emphasis is laid on not just rehabilitating people but also helping raise their standard of living and providing them better living conditions. Medical camps are organized at regular intervals for comprehensive health check. There are *anganwadis* and primary health centres; nurses visit households; and health camps are well-attended.

The aim is to settle here all the 1,125 affected families from the four districts of Bilaspur, Solan, Mandi, and Shimla before the water submerges their villages or their land is taken away for project work. It is not just people; the environment too will be affected by the project. NTPC has plans to plant trees on 100 metres on both sides of the reservoir to regenerate the soil. The company has already spent ₹ 165 crore in R&R work, area development, and environment conservation.

The effectiveness of the policy is evident. Pyar Singh had to move from Kasol village. He was given space in the resettlement colony at Jamthal. Pyar Singh now runs a car on hire in NTPC as does his father. They get 10 per cent more than other taxi companies as an incentive from the company. Pyar Singh used to work as a driver in Delhi for 15 years; when the work on Koldam started, he began driving the car of a company official. Then he thought that he should buy

It's not just the men whose lives have also been transformed; the project has also benefited women. Mangla Devi used to live in Kyan, which was a typical village, lacking many modern amenities; now, in the new place, her life has completely changed. She has moved to a new, bigger house.

a car and run it commercially rather than drive other people's cars.

The story of his uncle, Roda Ram Thakur, is quite remarkable. A firebrand retired teacher, he was one of the most aggressive voices against the project which he believed would displace the

locals and render them jobless. His grouse was that his son, who had just taken admission in B.Tech., wasn't given a job by NTPC. But, as fate would have it, after he passed out, he got a job with another company and later got into NTPC as an executive. Today, he is a deputy manager. Not just this, now his other son also works for NTPC.

It's not just the men whose lives have also been transformed; the project has also benefited women. Mangla Devi used to live in Kyan, which was a typical village, lacking many modern amenities; now, in the new place, her life has completely changed. From a small, semi-permanent structure with slate roof, she has moved to a new, bigger house. She says, "We had to move because the project was coming but we had no major problems. The only thing I miss is my old neighbors because people have moved away to different places to resettle."

She says now her house, surroundings, and living standards have improved; they are much higher than those at her parents' place, which is away from the dam site and still underdeveloped. While she now enjoys the benefits of better infrastructure facilities, her children go to good schools.

Suma Devi is still trying to cope with all the changes around her. She lives in a joint family in a house with over 25 rooms. She says, "We used to farm our own foodgrain, now we buy it. Earlier, it was easy to get grass for our cattle, now you have to buy it. The same is the case with firewood."

This has happened because a lot of land has been used by the project and the forest land has also become out of bounds for these people who now live in a semi-urban setting. They miss their surroundings and still haven't been able to build bonds with their new neighbours, though some of their old neighbours have gone to the resettlement colony built by NTPC. The loss of native home is a big shock for anyone. It is a new world they are living in.

Overall, however, things are better. "I used to go for farming and had to do a lot of back-breaking work. Now, I am free and have an easy-going life," she says.

Her husband, Daulat Ram, has bought land and is growing commercial crops like peas, potatoes, and apples. Their financial condition has improved, opening up new opportunities.

NTPC made efforts not only to create better living conditions but also preserve the culture and traditions. It promotes traditional sports like wrestling for enhanced community participation. Folk instruments, songs, and dances are performed at such events which are immensely popular with the people.

The makeover of the hills is complete, with sleepy small hamlets getting space to build huge houses. The rural landscape has changed. So has human geography, for earlier people from here used to go to other districts of Himachal Pradesh or other parts of the country for work and now they are gainfully employed here. In fact, now it is reverse migration! Outsiders come here looking for jobs.

For people in the Koldam area, the NTPC project meant a little displacement but finally resulted in much greater attachment to their land.

The Seamstress of Samlod

The tailoring classes sponsored by NTPC changed the life of Champaben Patel, transforming her from an ordinary housewife to an entrepreneur and role model. In the process, the small village near the Bharuch town in Gujarat got its seamstress.

About 16 km from the Bharuch town in Gujarat, there is a village called Samlod where Champaben Patel runs a special garment and tailoring store. Here, you can pick up a simple garment that can be worn at home or an outfit styled in the latest fashion. There is variety, color, style, and fit — all that this village of 3,000 can wear. The enterprise is impressive, so is the entrepreneur, Champaben, the seamstress of Samlod.

As a young girl, Chambaben studied in the Kanya Vidhyalaya, not far from her home at Samlod. The young girl student was not very different from her contemporaries, but two things set her apart from the others: she had a burning ambition to be independent, and a definite idea about the kind of work she would like to do. Unfortunately, Champaben had to drop out of school at Class IX, leaving unfinished not only her ambition to complete studies but also leaving the tailoring classes that ran as part of the curriculum.

Her studies abandoned, Champaben married a farmer named Shaileshbhai from the same village and settled into her new home. Now, there was not even the time to think of financial independence, thanks to household chores, the daily routine, and family responsibilities. Her household responsibilities increased after the birth of her two sons. Having left her school midway, Champaben was clear that her sons would not follow that path. She ensured that, unlike her,

both her children completed their studies. The lives of her husband and in-laws revolved around agriculture. She never imagined that life could be about anything more than farming and work related to agriculture.

It was around this time (May 2007) that an entirely unrelated event changed the life of Champaben. NTPC at Jhanor-Gandhar in Gujarat, a gas-based power station, tied up with an NGO to offer tailoring classes to people in areas neighboring its plant. At first, the villagers were baffled; they could not immediately understand the connection between power generation and tailoring classes.

Here was India's largest power generation company, with a colossal capacity, nearly 38,000 MW; one of the largest power generating companies in the world. And it was sponsoring a village tailoring class! If NTPC's involvement in such a venture made little sense to the panchayat, it made less sense to the women attending these classes.

Having left her school midway, Champaben was clear that her sons would not follow that path. She ensured that, unlike her, both her children completed their studies. The lives of her husband and in-laws revolved around agriculture. She never imagined that life could be about anything more than farming and work related to agriculture.



Champaben Patel: Transformation from an ordinary housewife to an entrepreneur

Now the locals know the meaning of and connection between power generation and a tailoring class. Chambaben is happy. She says, 'NTPC lights bulbs in India but it also lit up my life!'

The general secretary of Sahara, Mr. Saji Chako, took the matter to the village panchayat. The panchayat had to support the efforts; they would have to encourage homemakers to join the classes that were on offer.

Before the month-end, village housewives poured in to Master Ghanshyam's 'cutting & tailoring' course. To Champaben, this was an unbelievable opportunity. Backed by her husband and in-laws, she went for the classes and soon successfully completed a course in cutting and tailoring. Taking these skills back home, Champaben started making clothes for her family. By the time she realized that her family did not need an outside tailor, Champaben had fresh customers. This time, it was relatives who needed clothes stitched. The word about Champaben's special stitching skills spread around the village of some 550 households. Samlod had found its seamstress.



Champaben's classes in progress

And Champaben Shaileshbhai Patel had found a new identity.

It was not so long ago that Samlod's seamstress would have had to visit a tailor herself to get a dress stitched. But the housewife's story changed on a specific day. The date is etched in her memory: May 25, 2007, the day she

enrolled for the tailoring course. Her interest and determination helped her acquire and develop new skills.

Champaben is now an entrepreneur with a successful tailoring business. But she is more than a tailor or a designer. She is also a role model to others, a beacon light to those who have a passion, a dream, and the determination to turn challenges into opportunities, and opportunities into success stories. Now the locals know the meaning of and connection between power generation and a tailoring class. Chambaben is happy. She says, “NTPC lights bulbs in India but it also lit up my life!”

Empowered with Education

NTPC's adult education programmes, which began in the 1990s, not only raised the literacy levels but also helped womenfolk at Korba, a remote Chhattisgarh village, become self-employed. And a lot more is in the pipeline.

She was ridiculed for attending the village school in her late thirties. While her neighbors would often taunt her that her own child was studying in a higher class, her school-going son poked fun at her for wrong spellings. But nothing could deter Madam Noni, as she is called today, in her struggle to become literate.

The 48-year-old Madam Noni, alias Laxmi Rathore, is an adult learner-turned-teacher at the Indira Nagar Adult Education Centre at Korba, an underdeveloped village in Chhattisgarh. "Earlier, people used to call me Noni (meaning *chhori* or *ladki* in colloquial Chhattisgarhi language). Now they call me Madam Noni," says she, capturing her transformation.

But Madam Noni is no exception at this remote hamlet today. Korba, the village known for its Kosa silk and the thermal power station with a population of 10 lakh (as per the 2001 census), had 32 per cent literacy among women. Two decades after the setting up of 2,600 MW power station by NTPC, social transformation found its reflection in more than 3,000 women of the village who have passed the fifth, seventh, and even eighth standards. As many as 40 per cent of them are self-employed in professions such as tailoring, stitching, sewing, toy making, and embroidery.

As part of the National Literacy Mission, the power company introduced an Adult Education Policy for its projects and a number of adult education centres were set up across the country in the early nineties. At Korba, the power company, under its corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiative, set out with a mission to bring the rural illiterate to the mainstream. Teams went door-to-door in nearby villages and requested families to send their womenfolk to the adult education centres that are running in five villages — Sumedha, Ayodhyapuri, Darri, Indira Nagar, and Yamuna Vihar. Other volunteer teams were knocking the doors in other rural peripheries of the country.

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Madam Noni with her students

Such efforts helped Chhattisgarh reap rich dividends. From a literacy level of 63 per cent in 2001 census, it shot up to 71 per cent in 2011, an increase of nearly 9 per cent.

“The desire for education could not materialize due to domestic compulsions. After marriage, it was nearly impossible. But repeated insistence from the NTPC people and the opening up of a centre close to our home, and that too with a provision of flexible timing, helped us join the centre,” says Madam Noni, who has been a part of the transformation phenomenon of the local women from a homemaker to a responsible member of the family.

Today, most adult learners of Korba village agree that they are now able to help their kids in their study, travel on their own, use cell phones, and carry out bank transactions without depending on others as they did earlier. Some of them have been able to convert their skills into enterprises by establishing shops in the locality.

With an increasing level of awareness and communication skills, adult learners and family members, who were once apprehensive of such a programme, today realize that it has helped them grow up with times. The 33-year-old Rajni Lata, a resident of Gopalpur village, 4 km away from the power project, has become a popular name with such ability.

Thanks to her competence in tailoring, she was offered to teach at Bal Bhavan in a nearby township of the power company. Soon, she was provided with a sewing machine to carry on with her practice. In a couple of years, she has been able to teach as many as 60 women, made her home a laboratory with people going to her house to acquire skills. Rajni has at least six to seven people enrolled at any point of time, helping her earn at least ₹ 5,000 per month which has been a great support to her husband who works as a supervisor in a local private construction firm.

“Over 300 women, studying between the first and eighth standards, are currently being imparted education in these centres as prescribed by the Chhattisgarh State Board. Training programmes such as stitching and painting are organized for them. Efforts are made to enhance their communication skills. While 11 teachers have been appointed specifically for teaching, members of the Matreya Mahila Samithi also put in their efforts on a regular basis,” says Mamata Srivastav, in-charge of the study centres.

The centres run from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. everyday with special emphasis on games, curricular activities, and personality development. The syllabus has been designed in a way that it helps the learners to develop self-confidence and, in turn, help them to become employable in future, she adds.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that Korba village in Chhattisgarh has been converted into an education hub by NTPC. The power station has taken up rebuilding of the dilapidated schools in the remote areas. Schools in Kohadiya, Kalmidigu, Pandiripani, and Rawatpura villages have been provided

with classrooms. Over 1,000 children, who used to squat on the school floor at Lata, Jamnipalli and Darri villages, now sit on benches. School surroundings, earlier plagued with stray cattle have been secured with compound walls, thereby creating a better ambience for children to study and play. The Government Middle School at Lata village faced this problem acutely.



Rajni empowering herself

Continuing with the efforts, free coaching facilities for students of Class XI and XII have been started in order to help the rural children compete with their urban counterparts at national level competitive examinations such as AIEEE and PET. Also, an Industrial Training Institute (ITI) is being set up by the power company at an estimated cost of ₹ 10 lakh, bringing the much-needed skill development opportunities closer home to the rural youth, who have earlier been going to Pali, 60 km away. Moving a step further, the company has adopted the ITI at Pali under the public-private partnership scheme of the Government of India. New trades of house wiring, tally, welder, and motor mechanic have been introduced and infrastructure augmented with addition of a new workshop building.

Korba is now looking forward to have an Institute of Technology, the first in its region, for which an amount of ₹ 6 crore has already been sanctioned by the power company, the construction of which would be taken up by the state Public Works Department and scheduled to be completed by the end of 2012.

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What started in a small way in the early nineties at Indira Nagar is touching the lives of many more in the tribal heartland of Korba today. People are poised to see a new dawn. “If nothing else, we are happy for the fact that the initiative of the power company has given us our due—a respect in the community,” says Madam Noni.

The Brushstrokes of Destiny

Hariprasad Prajapati was born to paint. His father frowned upon his love for painting but he persisted with his passion and ended up making it his profession. He got a major break at NTPC's Shaktinagar plant. Now a successful entrepreneur, he is trying to make things better in his locality.

As a child, Hariprasad Prajapati used to paint on the sly-fearing being reprimanded by his father who would rather have him study than do something which he deemed "unproductive." Those were hard times; the Prajapati family lived with the meagre earnings his father made from pottery. His family had lost the ancestral homestead to the Rihand dam project years before Hari was born and had moved to a resettlement colony. He was four years old when the colony's land was acquired for NTPC's Shaktinagar power project. The Prajapatis found themselves uprooted again.

As he and his siblings — three brothers and a sister — were growing up, hopes for a less impoverished future for his family were pinned on the boys. His parents fervently prayed that once they finished school, they would find some employment at the power plant. However, Hari found that the only subject that would hold his interest was art.

"I had no inkling that my future lay in painting. Here I was, drawing for my friends whose pencils would freeze between their fingers. I sulked every time I saw a mathematic problem, wishing it was an art assignment instead. My father would scold me and worry that I would turn out to be a wastrel," recalls Hari, now 34 years old and a painter-entrepreneur.

At school, he would sketch with pens and pencils, yearning for, and receiving, the praise of his friends. At home, he would hide a sketchbook inside a textbook and draw by the light of a lantern, stealthily trying to turn pages, out of everyone's sight. In the middle school, he would often skip classes and sit with the men who painted the township that was coming up in the project area. He would quietly observe the brushstrokes and colors. The painters would sometimes allow him to try his hand at coating the walls and doors with primers. Sometimes, they asked him to paint boards for street signs. Nascent as his aesthetics was, he would often wonder why the paint wasn't of a brighter color. By the time he finished school, he had befriended many painters. One of them was Jitender Painter, whom Hariprasad considers his mentor.

Hariprasad had started tagging along with Jitender as an ad hoc helper and a part-time apprentice by the time he reached senior secondary. He would work three days in the project area and show up at school on the other three of a working week. He took great pains to hide the little money Jitender gave him from his parents. Every time it would total ₹ 1,500 (in a little over a month), he would spend to buy for himself some clothes or treat his friends to a movie or food. It was 1994, and ₹ 1,500 was a decent enough sum.

Hari would have the occasional conscience pang about blowing up money while his family was working hard to stay out of debt. "I wish I could have told my parents then, but I was always scared my father would get angry. New clothes were difficult to explain — I would tell them that a friend gave them to me. They knew I was lying, but would drop the matter there," Hari says.

In 1997, while Hari was enrolled in a BA course in the Waidhan college, Jitender told him of a painting job at the Kharia project site of Northern Coalfields Limited (NCL). The company needed a few message boards with relevant artwork to spread environmental awareness. Being a man of method was fine, but this would be a test of his creativity and imagination, Jitender had warned.

NTPC officials would send for him for every odd painting job. His barely-visible signature would pop-up at one of the bottom corners of banners, boards, and signage. Hari was on a roll. His parents, who had despaired for their 'wastrel' son, were now proud of the sought-after painter he had become.

Hari met a senior official at the project and asked to be considered for the job. "The man was initially skeptical. I must have looked too inept for the job. But then he gave me an album with photographs of trucks being loaded, dumpers being emptied and general plant work. I was given 15 days

to submit four paintings for evaluation. The gentleman gave me the job the moment he saw my work when I brought it to his office,” Hari says. It was the first job he told his parents about.

He painted barren lands, tree stumps and green trees, contrasting them with degradation and conservation, on four boards for which he was paid ₹ 12,000. A decade and a half later, the paint has come off at places, the white of the messages is buried by the brown of dirt. The boards have rusted, but Hari feels as proud today as he did when he had finished painting them.



Hari Prasad displaying his art

Encouraged by the break and with the blessings of his parents, Hari soon dropped out of college to take up painting professionally. But the first year turned out to be lean. The Kharia job turned out to be not only his first assignment but also his only for the next eight months. He tried assisting a few of his painter friends but the earnings were discouragingly thin. The Prajapati household had grown with his brother's marriage and there were more mouths to feed now. Unemployed and despairing, Hari met Jitender who advised him to meet the officials at the NTPC plant.

Grasping at straws, he came to Shaktinagar and met an official at the resettlement and rehabilitation department.

“The meeting soon turned out to be uncannily similar to the one with the NCL official. The gentleman had seen my work at the Kharia site. However, he still gave me a test. I was given a marker and asked to draw on a board. Ten minutes later, I got my first job in months — to paint a welcome banner for a dignitary who was visiting in a couple of days,” Hari says.

He could only think of the money he would take home after a dry run that had lasted so long. “I went home, sat for a while and told my parents. They had been concerned for me all throughout. I felt I owed it to them that they should be the first ones I told,” he recollects.

A few days after the banner job, he was summoned to the plant by the official he had met. There was a road sign that needed to be painted over. Hari collected his pay the next day.

Over the next few years, the officials would send for him for every odd painting job. His barely-visible signature would pop-up at one of the bottom corners of banners, boards, and signage. Hari was on a roll. His parents, who had despaired for their “wastrel” son, were now proud of the sought-after painter he had become. His elder brother and one of the two younger ones had dropped out, but the youngest wanted to study. Hari could only think of it as his duty to fund his brother’s education. The Prajapati household was now better off.



Hari Prasad's work station attracts customers from periphery

But the real change came only when he decided to turn entrepreneur, feels Hari. In 2004, when he first set up shop as a painter and contractor, the network he had developed over the years came in handy. He bid for signage, address markers, and other projects at the plant. A few years later, Hari entered the sticker business making number plates for cars, nameplates for houses and repairing road signs.

Hari is keen to give back as much as he has got from the plant. He regularly gets involved in medical camps, blanket-distribution and other acts of philanthropy. He contributes freely and serves as a fundraiser sometimes. Then, there are the fests that he helps organize under the auspices of a youth club he has set up.

Today, his younger brother mans the shop and the sticker business, while Hari is on the move looking after his painting works. He takes us to one of his first works as an entrepreneur — signage at a nearby helipad. He proudly points at the white lettering on the green boards. “I wrote this,” he says. He painted one of the biggest boards in the premises at the Shaktinagar plant on for the visit of the then NTPC chairman a few years ago. In its place stands a huge plastic print of the plant. “These flex banners are eating into my business, but I guess, that’s the modern way. I am sure my art will have its place.”



Working on his passion

“I can’t forget how much I owe to the plant officials. They gave me the freedom to do what I love to do and get paid for it. It kept the painter in me alive. Unemployed for months and handicapped because of incomplete education, I would have turned to a different profession, but NTPC happened at the right time,” he says, humble in his gratitude.

Hari is keen to give back as much as he has got from the plant. He regularly gets involved in medical camps, blanket-distribution and other acts of philanthropy. He contributes freely and serves as a fundraiser sometimes. Then, there are the fests that he helps organize under the auspices of a youth club he has set up. He wants to open a music training academy for the poor kids of the area. “I have already spoken to the gram pradhan about it. I think every child should be allowed to explore their liking of the arts. This is my attempt at giving back a fraction of what I got from NTPC and the society at large,” he says earnestly.

A 'Bench' Mark of Compassion

In an innovative move, NTPC has chalked out a programme which connects the labour of the inmates of Warangal Central Prison to the needs of government schools. While prisoners find meaning in life and work, the poor children find their stay at school comfortable.

What is common between Rani, a tenth class student in Zilla Parishad School in Hyderabad, and Ramesh (name changed) a convict serving his term in Warangal Central Prison, 150 km away? And what is common between A. Arti, a child in class two in the same school, and Yadaiah (name changed) a prisoner serving a life term in the Warangal jail?

They are neither related nor have they ever seen each other. Perhaps the little girls may never get to see the men behind bars. Nor will the prisoners be ever free to see the school-going girls and life outside the prison. But there is a bond between them.

It is also an ultimate sense of redemption for the convicts — a prisoner in jail making a product that actually helps in molding the future of a poor child. Can there be a more heart-warming illustration of atonement than a convict contributing, in his own little way, to the betterment of the young?

This is what is happening at the Warangal Central Prison whose inmates are engaged in making wooden and iron benches that are donated to government schools for the benefit of students. Through an innovative initiative by NTPC, a new relationship, a new bond is being built between the two unlikely partners, a

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relationship that is founded on compassion and commitment. In a way, it is a relationship between the two unconnected worlds that has the potential to make a real difference.

What is the benchmark to measure the quality of schools? To begin with, it could be a humble bench in the classroom!

It may appear too simple, even

simplistic a parameter, but for a child the comfort of sitting on a bench in the classroom can make a lot of difference to his or her learning process. For, the bench provides a sense of dignity and pride, apart from giving comfort, as the child embarks on a journey of exploring the world of knowledge.

It is not an unusual sight to find thousands of tiny tots squatting on the floor of their classrooms in government schools across India, reflecting the pathetic state of school infrastructure. It is this concern over the plight of students that had prompted NTPC to come up with a novel idea of donating benches to schools to make a difference to the lives of children. The company drew up plans to make significant contributions to the improvement of infrastructure in government schools where children from poor families pursue their education against all odds.

In an interesting synergy, NTPC has tied up with Warangal Prison for supply of wooden and metal benches to the needy schools identified by the company. The jail inmates feel a sense of pride that the fruits of their labor are reaching the most deserving sections of society. “When we tell them that the benches they are making will be used by students in government schools, they feel elated and we can see a sense of immense satisfaction in their eyes,” says the Superintendent of Warangal Central Prison B. Saidaiah.

During 2009-10, NTPC had ordered 307 benches which were then donated to the schools. “We are expecting a much bigger order this year,” said the jail official. About 100 prisoners at Warangal Central Jail are engaged in carpentry and making steel furniture.

The impact of this gesture on the deserving schools is huge. The broad smiles on the faces of children say it all. The students at primary, central primary, and a Zilla Parishad high school at Neredmet in Hyderabad have found not only new comfort but also a reason to attend school.

“Earlier, we used to sit on the floor throughout the day. It was very uncomfortable and we could not concentrate on our learning. Now, we have

very comfortable desks and it feels good,” says Rani, a 10th standard student at Zilla Parishad High School, Neredmet. NTPC donated furniture, including dual desks, worth ₹ 5 lakh, to this school. Besides, the company also donated school uniforms, water tank and a kitchen shed for the mid-day meal scheme.



Students of Zilla Parishad School with their new desks and benches

The students of Mandal Center Primary School are also a happy lot now. They look forward to going to school regularly, since they do not have to sit on the floor any more. Metal benches made by inmates of the Warangal Prison are doing their bit to reduce the dropout rate here. Before the benches were donated to the school in August 2008, students were made to sit on the floor during class hours.

Seeing the plight of the students, NTPC Limited ordered 116 benches to be made by the inmates of Warangal Central Prison. With wood stuck to neatly weld metal frames, each bench accommodates four students.

In all, the primary school has 348 students in Classes I to V. It has eight classrooms. “We do not have to sit on the floor anymore and my classroom looks very nice and full now,” says A. Arti, a Class II student.

The teachers are happier too. “Their enthusiasm to attend classes has been boosted, thanks to the benches. It was nice of the company to come forward and encourage students,” says Ms P.M. Sumati, Headmistress of the School.

Before NTPC stepped in, the conditions at the primary school in Neredmet were pathetic. The students were exposed to several risks. Stray animals used to sneak into the school premises. The company pitched in and constructed a compound wall in February 2010, laid a water pipeline, and supplied uniforms to the children.

“My uniform would become dirty while sitting on ground. I always detested crouching on the floor from 8.30 a.m. to 3.00 p.m. The benches have come as a boon to us because now we sit on them and feel like we have private school like facilities,” says A. Sudheer, a Class V student.

Besides, 300 steel plates and mattresses were donated to the school; six blankets were given to the students who are orphans. “Such gesture has not only increased the students’ morale but has given them a sense of purpose. They wait to use the mattresses when the midday meals are given. Their happiness is evident,” concludes Ms Sunita.



A new environment for the students

Before NTPC stepped in, the conditions at the primary school in Neredmet were pathetic. Located very close to railway track and with no compound wall for protection, the students were exposed to several risks. Stray animals used to sneak into the school premises. The company pitched in and constructed a

compound wall in February 2010, laid a water pipeline, and supplied uniforms to the children.

“We feel very much secure now. There is no fear of encroachments and the children are safe inside the premises,” says the Headmaster of the school Vithalachary. “We also have access to safe drinking water, thanks to the NTPC contribution,” chips in Ms Namsheer, a senior teacher. The school has five rooms and student strength of 160, all hailing from poor families.

Apart from benches, NTPC has donated two prefabricated rooms, worth ₹ 6 lakh, a water tank, given scholarships to meritorious children, and distributed note books. It has also contributed to the construction of toilets and a water pipeline at the Central Primary School, Neredmet.

NTPC officials frequently visit these schools and ascertain their requirements. The officials say that they would be willing to pitch in with any help that the schools require.

“It is because of NTPC’s gesture that we have so many amenities. Their contributions made a big difference to us,” says the head master of Zilla Parishad High School at Neredmet, P.L. Narasimha Reddy.

This school has strength of 1,070 students. Of them, 700 are girls. All of them have comfortable dual desks donated by NTPC. The results of the school have been excellent so far. “We plan to achieve 100 per cent result this year,” says the proud head master.

A Sense of Pride

Skills training provided by NTPC Ramagundam (Andhra Pradesh) helped the 35-year-old P. Anjali become economically independent. The homemaker, widowed not long back, had faced the uphill task of raising her three children. A vocational training centre in Annapurna made her and many others capable of earning a livelihood.

The world came crashing down on 35-year-old P. Anjali when her husband died in an accident one year ago. The dreams built around her small world stood shattered. Being a homemaker, she did not know how she could ever support her three children after having lost the family's sole breadwinner.

However, Anjali did not lose heart. Displaying enormous grit and courage, she searched for an opportunity. That came in the form of skills training provided by NTPC Ramagundam, the 2,600 MW coal-based power plant complex in Karim Nagar district of Andhra Pradesh.

Anjali enrolled herself in the tailoring class at a vocational training centre in Annapurna Colony set up by NTPC. A three-month long training course in tailoring and fabric painting at the centre has virtually transformed her life.

There is now a new sunshine in her life. Putting her skills to good use, she has proved that given an opportunity, one can not only overcome adversities and become economically independent but also serve as a role model for others. Anjali now bags orders not just from Annapurna Colony, a fully-developed resettlement colony, but also from neighboring villages, and feels empowered in the true sense of the word. Her good work and talent is recognized by her peers as she steps into the vocational training centre with a new sense of confidence.

The trainees at the centre, a majority of them young girls, draw inspiration from her saga of courage and self-reliance.



Economically independent P. Anjali

As part of efforts to encourage skill development programme and improve income generation of its neighboring communities, NTPC Ramagundam has established seven vocational centres in its four resettlement colonies and the nearby villages. Such centres were set up at Kundanpalli, Narshalapalli, Annapurna Colony, Elkalapalli, Sai Seva Samithi and the shopping complex in the NTPC Township at Ramagundam. Sewing and embroidery machines are provided to the trainees, for which vocational teachers have been appointed.

The four fully developed resettlement colonies together accommodate over 1,000 families displaced as a result of land acquisition for setting up the power station.

Women from the economically weaker sections are mainly selected for skill improvement to help supplement family incomes.

As part of efforts to encourage skill development programme and improve income generation of its neighbouring communities, NTPC Ramagundam has established seven vocational centres in its four resettlement colonies and the nearby villages. Sewing and embroidery machines are provided to the trainees, for which vocational teachers have been appointed.

The first batch was started in 2006 at Narrashalapalli, and the experiment was replicated at other resettlement colonies. So far, over 1,100 women have been trained in these centres. During the training, the trainees were provided with tailoring kits. Most of the women are now engaged in stitching of school uniforms.

Apart from tailoring, the women and youth have been put through skill development programmes like fabric painting and designing, *zari zardosi*, mobile phone repairing, and food processing and preservation.

These projects were rolled out by Employees Voluntary Organisation for Initiatives in Community Empowerment (E-VOICE). Have they really benefited the people? Take the case of Vemapalli Raj Kumar, a young man from New Moghal Pahad village who underwent training in mobile repairing and now makes a decent earning of ₹ 9,000 per month. He represents the new and confident face of the village which was relocated to its present place after NTPC acquired the original village for construction of an ash pond.

The 21-year-old youth was among the 30 people who were provided training in repairing mobile phones. Son of a daily wage worker, Raj Kumar is now brimming with confidence. His skill improvement has resulted in raising the living standards of his family. He is now keen that his sister, Mounika, who is in the tenth standard, pursues higher studies. “I want to become an engineer,” she chips in.

“We have a very proactive approach to development initiatives, which aims at lending a helping hand to the people by providing a means of livelihood and empowerment. We are providing quality training to talented youth to improve their skills and employability,” says Y.V. Rao, General Manager of NTPC Ramagundam.

In another moving tale, P. Saritha has demonstrated that physical disability is no obstacle to self-empowerment and economic independence. A woman who

M Srinivas, a physically challenged person, is a proud entrepreneur. Srinivas, a project-displaced person from Kundanpalli village situated adjacent to NTPC Ramagundam power station, had no means of earning a livelihood. Responding to his plea, the NTPC authorities allotted a shop to him and provided him with a photocopier machine.

is speech-and-hearing challenged, she is now an instructor at a tailoring and embroidery centre at the NTPC Township, Ramagundam. As many as 16 project – affected persons have been allotted shops at the company’s shopping complex. One of these is the tailoring centre where Saritha imparts her skills to women. She makes about ₹ 3,000-4,000 per month.

Similarly, M. Srinivas, a physically challenged person, is a proud entrepreneur who not only earns his livelihood but also provides photocopier services at a very economical price at the shopping complex. Srinivas, a project-displaced person from Kundanpalli village situated adjacent to NTPC Ramagundam power station, had no means of earning a living to support his wife and daughter. Life was not easy for him due to his physical disability. He had lost his parents at an early age. Responding to his plea, the NTPC authorities allotted a shop to him and provided him with a photocopier machine.

Srinivas is now doing brisk business, attracting a large number of customers because of his competitive pricing. He is not only able to earn his own livelihood but is also able to support two of his brothers.

The quality circle leader at Annapurna Training Centre, Sarala, is another fine example of empowerment. From being a humble homemaker to a catalyst to skill improvement and an efficient trainer, she has come a long way. “So far, I have trained 11 batches, each comprising 20 women, in tailoring, fabric painting, and embroidery. I feel a sense of fulfilment,” she says. She is paid a monthly honorarium by NTPC.

Not just earning a decent livelihood for herself and her family, she has also set an example for others by working to help others and drive charity activities. She has motivated other homemakers to contribute food grains for the poor and actively coordinates the charity mission in her village.

“We also undertake several awareness campaigns on the ill effects of tobacco use, on the need for energy conservation, and a nutritious diet. We also give health tips for children and promote the use of paper bags,” Sarala says. She is able to provide a decent education to her three children, while her husband works for Singareni Collieries.

Her training centre supplies paper bags to supermarkets. “Recently, we received an order from NTPC for the supply of cloth and paper bags,” she said. Sarala’s eyes shine with a sense of pride as her students queue up to show their progress in tailoring works.

An Affair with Heritage

Aimed at preserving the religious and cultural heritage, NTPC has undertaken many projects in various parts of the country, be it Uttarakhand, Odisha, or Madhya Pradesh. Working with the Archeological Survey of India, the power company has added its bit to restore and maintain many monuments.

Pious Hindu pilgrims feel that they would achieve *moksha* only if they have done the pilgrimage to the Char Dham in Uttarakhand. In the Himalayan terrain, this journey often was a journey of a lifetime. People prepared long and hard, invested their life's savings to feel the presence of gods. The journey was rough and arduous and many did not survive.

The state of Uttarakhand is popularly known as Dev Bhumi or the Land of Gods. It is a place for all seasons and all reasons. To this region also belong some of the holiest Hindu shrines, and for almost 2,000 years pilgrims have been visiting the temples at Badrinath, Kedarnath, and Jageshwar in the hope of salvation and purification from sin. The chilly wind and mountain rains, against the backdrop of the majestic temples, often make us wonder how did our forefathers build such massive complexes on such high altitudes.

Today, with better communication links, the four holy towns of Gangotri, Yamnotri, Badrinath, and Kedarnath have become very accessible. During summers, you see a trail of cars and buses carrying pilgrims. But the ease of travel also means a growing pressure of footfalls in these religious places.

On these high altitudes, at 1,890 m above Mean Sea Level, is Joshimath. It is situated on the Rishikesh-Badrinath highway where NTPC is setting up the 520 MW 'run-of-the-river' Tapovan Vishnugad Hydro Power Project. The

engineers at the project often meet the pilgrims thronging various temples. The engineers also take their relatives to the temples.



Pilgrims at the renovated Badrinath Temple

Once, a group of engineers set out with their relatives to Badrinath temple. They offered prayers and then walked barefoot to do a *parikrama* around

NTPC has undertaken restoration work at Ananta Sayan. The site has the second largest reclining statue of Lord Vishnu in the country. Not long ago, however, magnificent sculpture had no protection from the elements. NTPC has made an elaborate shelter to preserve and protect the site.

the temple. This *parikrama* became difficult because the stones on which people walk barefoot were cold, wet, and even slippery. But things have changed now. The NTPC engineers went back and talked to their bosses in Joshimath and soon began an effort to refurbish the temple complex.

It was no easy task to manage the upkeep of these temples which are thronged by thousands of devotees every day while they are open. They are almost completely shutdown in winters

NTPC provided wooden flooring all around the temple, increasing the comfort of pilgrims. Says the 15-year-old Shivang, who just visited the temples at Badrinath and Kedarnath, “I had heard from my grandparents how tough these travels used to be. But I found the premises well lit and I did a *parikrama* 21 times despite the cold weather, thanks to the wooden pavements. For me, it was not just visiting a holy place but also like a vacation in a hill station!”

Three kilometres from the Badrinath temple is the quaint cave complex called Vyas *gufa*. It is in Mana village, which is the last village on India-China border. It is believed that the author of the *Mahabharata*, Vyas Rishi, lived here and composed the epic. The rock formation inside the cave looks like a stack of palm leaf manuscripts. NTPC has given a new lease of life to this cave, which is the only place where you can see river Saraswati and enjoy a warm cup of tea at ‘the last tea stall of India.’

It is not just in the Himalayas that NTPC has worked for improvement at religious places. It has also undertaken restoration work on the banks of Brahmini River in Odisha. On the southern banks of the river, some 50 kilometres from Angul and 28 kilometres from its Talcher power plant, is the Ananta Sayan. The site has the second largest reclining statue of Lord Vishnu in the country. It is a magnificent sculpture, 42 feet long and eight feet wide. It is believed to have been constructed in the eighth-ninth century AD.

Tradition has it that this statue, with its head facing the east, reflects a peaceful civilization. The Archeological Survey of India (ASI) has declared it a protected monument. Not long ago, however, it had no protection from the elements. NTPC has made an elaborate shelter to preserve and protect the site. It has also beautified monument and made the area surrounding this Vishnu statue lush green.



NTPC's restoration work at Ananta Sayan. The site has the second largest reclining statue of Lord Vishnu

Just eight kilometres from Odisha's capital, Bhubaneswar, is Lalitgiri. The Jajgir district has one of the earliest Buddhist structures. There is a huge and magnificent monastery, remains of a *chaitya* hall, a number of votive *stupas*. It has a renovated stone *stupa* at the top of a rugged sandstone hillock which overlooks the greenery around. The excavations made here show the cultural sequence of Lalitgiri ranging from post-Mauryan (second century BC) to medieval times.

It is no mean task to preserve the sites for organizations like the ASI; they need a great deal of monetary support and logistical help. It is here that the corporate sector steps in. NTPC is among the few corporations that have taken the lead in this area.

Then there is Dhauli where emperor Ashoka, seeing the horrors of war, became remorseful and became a man of peace. He donned his orange robes and became a great patron of Buddhism. There is a rock edict marked by the image of an elephant sculpted

from the overhanging rock. The third century BC monument has footsteps of the Buddha, Ashokan edicts, and many significant Buddhist cultural edifices.

NTPC has offered to restore some ASI monuments as part of its policy of preserving the heritage. In August 2008, NTPC earmarked ₹ 5 crore to help maintain some sites and restore them to their former glory (A National Culture Fund was set up by the Ministry of Culture which covered 3,667 monuments. Of these, 18 are world heritage monuments). Some of the efforts are expected to show results at Mandu (MP), Jageshwar (Uttarakhand), and Lalitgiri and Dhauli in Odisha.

At Mandu, as you climb up the windy, hilly path you see an incredible site. The early rock-cut caves, palaces, mosques, tombs, and pavilions all in one place, with the Narmada looking like a white thread flowing in the misty backdrop. This is some 35 kilometres from Dhar in MP.

This is the land of Baz Bahadur and his beautiful consort Rani Roopmati. From the Roopmati pavilion, one can gaze at Baz Bahadur's palace. The influence of Afghan architecture is there for all to see. Perched on the Vindhya, Mandu is a celebration of life and joy. Under the Mughals, it was a pleasure resort with its lakes and palaces; this remains the same even today. In fact, some believe that the Jami Masjid and Hoshang Shah's Tomb were inspirations behind the Taj Mahal. This group of monuments of Indian architecture of the Islamic period between 1410 and 1526 awaits the caring touch of NTPC.

NTPC has adopted a policy to help preserve the amazingly rich archaeological treasures this country has. The vast range and breathtaking beauty of India's cultural heritage, buildings, sites, and structures built over hundreds of years are evident all over the place. Regrettably, the richness of heritage is often ignored. Growing industrialization, modernization, and lack of appreciation of the past has spelt neglect for these monuments. Also, it is no mean task to preserve the sites for organizations like the ASI; they need a great deal of monetary support and logistical help. It is here that the corporate sector steps in. NTPC is among the few corporations that have taken the lead in this area.

16

Falling in Love, Rising to the Occasion

An Italian girl and a young man in Himachal Pradesh fell in love and got married in Italy. When the man's land was acquired by NTPC for its hydro-project, the couple used the compensation to grow his hospitality business, which they do successfully.

*"Once on a high and windy hill,
In the morning mist two lovers kissed and the world stood still,
Then your fingers touched my silent heart and taught it how to sing,
Yes, true love's a many-splendoured thing"*

—Frank Sinatra

When Frank Sinatra crooned this beautiful love song, he had no idea that some four decades later, two strangers will meet and bring his song to life! But that is exactly what happened with Premlal and Anjala.

Premlal, a young man running his own small hotel in Tattapani, and Angela Monterosso, an attractive physical education teacher from Italy, were brought together by fate. When they met, they had not the slightest idea of what the stars had in store for them, but they were destined to spend their lives together.

Premlal's hotel was more like a guest house that comprised two or three rooms that were often occupied by tourists, including foreigners, who visited the

It is on the high and windy hills of Himachal Pradesh, in the picturesque and natural setting by the river Satluj, that their love story took birth. Angela met him for the first time in 1996 when she visited India as a tourist on vacation.

place for the beauty, peace, and quiet it offered. Premlal charged his visitors a meagre amount, ₹ 25, for one night. He would often use the natural river water to refrigerate cold drinks before selling them to his visitors.

It is on the high and windy hills of Himachal Pradesh, in the picturesque and natural setting by the river Satluj, that their love story took birth. Angela met him for the first time in 1996 when she visited India as a tourist on vacation. Perhaps, they did not realize at first that the cupid had struck because, Angela left for Italy after her holiday. But something urged her to return. The very next year, Angela visited twice — first, in the beginning of the year and then again in December. Something kept bringing her back to this beautiful haven. She preferred the solace of Himachal to the glamour of Italy. Well, as it turned out, it was not just the natural beauty of the place but the golden heart of the man that kept bringing Angela back from Milan, the fashion capital of the world!

Their frequent meetings led to their tying the knot in Italy in 1999. Everything changed in their lives.



Capitalizing on change: Premlal with his family in their opulent house

Change was also happening back home. In 2000, NTPC took the initiative to build a hydro-power station at Tattapani; approval came the same year.

Premlal did not know but his family was soon to be affected by this decision. He, with Angela by his side, was dreaming big. He wanted to do something but was not exactly sure what. Italy was a strange place for him and he did not know where or how to begin his career. In Premlal's words, "Italy was a very strange country right from the beginning. Moving from India, that too from a small village, was difficult. Language was a barrier. The city was much bigger than our place, people were very punctual and, more than anything, there were a lot of cultural differences. All these things added to the woes of living in Italy."

With the support of an independent and strong-willed woman like Angela, Premlal made a new beginning. So, he first worked in a furniture factory for a while, then tried his hand in a chocolate factory, and finally found his calling in naturopathy. He knew what he had to do. With his wife's help and support, Premlal enrolled himself in a three-year course of physiotherapy and *punchkarma*. After the completion of this course, they together started a health centre in Italy called Satya. It was successful and still is. Angela and Premlal were very happy.

But there was a turn in the story. NTPC started work on its new project at Tattapani called the Koldam project. For the successful completion of the project, it had to acquire all the land within kilometres of the site. Premlal's 'hotel', where once Angela stayed as a tourist, was situated on this land that was due to be submerged as part of the project.

Now, land acquisition has a ring of calamity around it — uprooted people, the poor losing livelihood, local culture and tradition getting submerged in the deluge of soulless industrialization, and similar imageries conjured up by intellectuals. For Premlal, however, this came as a boon. His father, Vipatu Ram, sold

15 *bigha* land to NTPC and got ₹ 3 crore. Prodded by the Resettlement and Rehabilitation team of NTPC, Premlal took this exchange as a great opportunity to grow and achieve what was considered unimaginable earlier.

He and Angela returned to India with big dreams in their eyes. With this money, he thought smart and fast. He decided to buy 40 *bighas* land, out of which 20 *bighas* was an apple garden and the rest was bought as agricultural

In 2010, they inaugurated their new hotel and introduced Tattapani to naturopathy, punchkarma and spa treatments of international standards. Hotel Hot Spring was an instant success! Hotel Hot Spring is making great profits but they are not done yet. They have many more plans for the coming years.

land. The couple, with the rest of the family, built a massive residential house where all of them now live.

In 2007, Premlal bought a new guest house, called the Spring View, very close to his new land. He invested a good amount of capital in renovating and refurbishing his new purchase. He brought the hotel to life again and it soon started giving him and his family good returns. However, he did not stop here.

Angela and Premlal wanted to put his knowledge and training in naturopathy and physiotherapy to good use. For this purpose, they started working on a brand new project — Hotel Hot Spring.

At this point, they also had the old three-bedroom ‘hotel,’ which was still functional because the land had not yet been submerged by NTPC for the Koldam project; they had Satya, their health centre in Italy; they had Spring View, their recent investment; and now they had Hotel Hot Spring.



Premlal and Angela: Dreaming big

In 2010, they inaugurated their new hotel and introduced Tattapani to naturopathy, *punchkarma* and spa treatments of international standards. Hotel Hot Spring was an instant success! Hotel Hot Spring is making great profits but they are not done yet. They have many more plans for the coming years.

The story of Angela (now Anjala) and Premlal is a chronicle of silken tenderness and gritty decisiveness, of capitalizing on change, and of indefatigable enterprise.

Beyond Chalk and Talk

Kamini, a student in the Maa Arvind Vidhyamandir School at Jhanor in Gujarat's Bharuch district, was introduced to volleyball at a camp organized by NTPC. Now, she is contemplating a career as a sports person. She is among the many students who have benefited by the power company's initiatives to promote extra-curricular activities.

Kamini studies in the Maa Arvind Vidhyamandir School at Jhanor in Gujarat's Bharuch district. This student of the tenth standard is not known for academic excellence, but outside the classroom the story is different. Kamini has placed her school on the sports map by taking the volleyball team to victory in the interschool championship. The school volleyball team is now set to participate in the Baruch district tournament.

Excelling in sports and representing the school is much more than Kamini ever expected to do. She had never played volleyball; in fact, she was unaware about the game's existence till she participated in a volleyball camp organized by NTPC. The camp did not merely introduce her to the game of volleyball; it changed her outlook and her life.

Kamini turned out to be so good at volleyball that the game offered her a different kind of future. At home, her mother had often stressed the importance of good housekeeping. She made an effort to prepare Kamini for marriage and all the "adjustments" that would contribute to making it a success. Her parents felt that the best future for her would be a good marriage. Seeing her mother immersed in household chores throughout the day, Kamini accepted it as the reality of life.



Kamini: Placing her school on the sports map

In such circumstances, the world of sports was too distant to think about. The little village primary school that she went to had no facilities for games. Then she moved to a bigger school, the Maa Arvind Vidhyamandir. This is a school assisted by NTPC's Jhanor-Gandhar unit. NTPC's support over five years has helped the school grow and lent a new dimension to the education of the girl child.

While the teachers focused on academic excellence, NTPC concentrated on extracurricular activities that would help shape the personalities of the children. Cricket camps were organized for boys in various schools and cricket kits were gifted as part of the programme. Volleyball training sessions were organized for the girls. The volleyball camps helped in not just introducing a new game or honing skills in it but brought confidence to the girls and provided them with options for the future.

Kamini's excellence in volleyball gave her the confidence to talk to her orthodox parents about the game and her own aspirations. She talked to them about the importance of making a mark for herself. "The sports camps

organized by NTPC made me realize that I can become a good sportswoman. While I am good at athletics, my performance in our volleyball team has been extremely good. Even if I cannot pursue education for too long, I may be able to develop a secure career as a sportsperson,” says Kamini.

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Volleyball has made a difference for other students, too. Kamini’s classmate Montu Patel has been attracted by the idea of a sports career. The daughter of a cook, Montu’s favourite subject is biology. Her interest in the subject has brought her close to topping in the science section. But volleyball seems to have captivated her. “If it was not for our volleyball camp, I would never know that the sport is not just good for health but it is also a good career option,” says Montu. She is thrilled after contributing to her team’s victory in the interschool competition and paving the way for the district tournament.



Going beyond academics

When NTPC's Jhanor-Gandhar unit started helping schools in the vicinity as a social initiative, it raised the standard of education among the village children, especially the girls, primarily by shoring up facilities and infrastructure. Short of basic facilities, the schools themselves were struggling to provide support to the students despite government aid.

NTPC initiated a drive to motivate students to attend classes by providing infrastructural facilities in 11 primary and two higher secondary schools in Bharuch district. Boundary walls were built; school bags, bookshelves, water coolers, computers, and dual desks were provided to schools and the students. The improved study environment started attracting more and more students, including girls.

At work behind many of these individual stories of schools and their students are an approach, an attitude, and a commitment by NTPC to contribute and be a part of the developmental process in local communities.

NTPC contributes its bit to new efforts in primary and secondary schools in Gujarat. In Bharuch, where the NTPC efforts are concentrated, the survey entitled 'District Elementary Education Report Card 2009-10' showed a dropout rate of 1.7 per cent for

grades one to four. This rate was 4.1 per cent for the sixth standard. No data were available for higher standards in the report.

NTPC also addressed concerns of girl students who were not particularly keen or good in academics or sports. A special team from the National School of Drama (NSD) in Delhi came down in June 2010 and conducted a theatre workshop for these students. The theatre workshop was meant for both girls and boys. But along with it, the girls got an exclusive aerobics session. After aerobics, NTPC has lined up Salsa classes for these girls.

"Earlier we did not have extracurricular activities in school. But NTPC started sports as well as cultural events and this has enhanced our personalities. There is a new sense of confidence and I can now think of experimenting with different games and even careers," says Raisa Ben Ayub, the daughter of an auto-rickshaw driver.

Shoni Ankita, 22, once a student of M.P. Patel Vidyalaya in Samlod, has returned to teach in the school after completing her M.A. She finds major changes in the way of teaching. "In our time, education just meant chalk and talk. But now, with the help of NTPC, we have computers and teachers can use LCD and monitors to teach. We did not even have proper drinking water facilities, forget about exciting extracurricular activities. But NTPC has fulfilled these needs. I look forward to an exciting time teaching here," says Ankita.

At work behind many of these individual stories of schools and their students are an approach, an attitude, and a commitment by NTPC to contribute and be a part of the developmental process in local communities. It is an approach that not only generates goodwill and support for NTPC but gives immense satisfaction to NTPC workers and helps drive change at a level where change matters the most — in our small schools, among our children, and in the critical fields of education and sports.

Booking the Future

NTPC's effort to provide storybooks to the children of a school in West Bengal triggered huge interest in reading. The power company scaled up the endeavour and became the provider of books to thousands of school students.

A rumour had been doing the rounds in school since Monday. On Tuesday Imran, Akhtar, Parveen, and their classmates at New Farakka High School in Murshidabad district of West Bengal were told to be positively present in school the next day. The children did not dare to question why, but the rumour was about some kind of book distribution.

Next day, the students were asked to stand in queue in the school ground during the lunch break. "Students," declared teacher-in-charge of the school, "NTPC will be distributing notebooks to each of you. It will be a gift to you from them. So, be disciplined and stand quietly. The company's GM *sahib* will be here in a few minutes." Time passed and pupils waited, rather impatiently, under the warm winter sun. But their excitement did not die. "We will be getting those copies," whispered Sultan to one of his friends, pointing to the stack of notebooks neatly piled up at one corner of the table.

Soon, a white Ambassador car arrived at the school gate and rolled up to the makeshift dais. The guests from NTPC were greeted with bouquets by the teacher-in-charge and were escorted to the dais. Special notebooks containing value-based stories specifically produced for the students were formally released by the guests.

Next, students walked up to the dais one by one and received their copies from the two guests. Visibly delighted at the gesture, the school teachers thanked

the officials. “It’s really a great thing you have done, sir,” said the teacher-in-charge.

Parveen returned home excited as never before. But before she could say anything, her mother noticed a longish glossy book peeping out from her bag. She reached forward and pulled it out. “What’s this? From where did you get it? Did you steal it from someone?” her mother enquired. The girl did not expect the sudden flurry of questions from her mother.

The notebook was part of a range of educational initiatives by NTPC Farakka — an idea conceived to raise the spirit of students towards education. Ten stories with moral values were included in the 168-page books.

At that very moment, her brother Imran entered the room. “This beautiful copy was gifted to us today!” exclaimed a visibly thrilled Imran, waving his notebook in hand. “Did they give it to you free?” enquired the surprised mother. “Yes, two *sahibs* came to our school today and distributed the notebooks among us.” Their mother was relieved and flipped over the notebooks in appreciation.

Praveen took little time to freshen up that day and rushed to the front veranda carrying a plate of snacks in one hand and the new notebook in the other. Now was the time to go through the pages of the colourful notebook that she had received. On her way back home, she had been wondering what the stories in the notebook could be all about. Her first look through the pages had revealed pictures of Gandhiji, Mother Teresa, and a little girl. There was also picture of a bearded gentleman, whom she could not recognise.

The notebook was part of a range of educational initiatives by NTPC Farakka — an idea conceived to raise the spirit of students towards education. Ten stories with moral values were included in the 168-page books. To avoid copyright issues, stories, laced with cultural flavor of the region, were carefully selected from its in-house publication series ‘Timeless Treasures.’ Keeping in view the linguistic diversity of the region, the stories were also translated into Bengali and Hindi. The colorful front and back covers served as an informative canvas pictorially portraying various initiatives undertaken by it as a ‘corporate citizen’.

By the time Parveen had completed reading about half the stories, the sun had faded into the western sky. She raised her head and saw her father approaching. She was eager to tell him about the new gift that she and her class fellows had received. As soon as her father entered the house, Parveen placed her new notebook into his hands. “What is it?” enquired Md. Haque.

“It’s a notebook gifted to us,” replied Parveen in an excited voice, “It has so many good stories.”

The humble notebook distribution initiative went on to touch the hearts of students and teachers, while kindling more interest among students towards learning.

Haque is a teacher of Bengali at another high school in the area. Naturally, a present in the form of a book stirred up his curiosity. Relaxed after a cool shower, Haque reclined on the sofa and began to turn the pages, carefully, one by one. He asked, “How much did you have to pay for this?”

“Nothing,” replied Parveen. “Today, two *sahibs* came to our school and distributed these notebooks to us.”

The experienced eyes of Haque estimated rough cost of the copy to be anything between ₹ 25 to ₹ 30 each. But what caught the imagination of the school teacher was value addition done in it by including stories with morals, which had actually enriched the book. The photographs on the cover pages described the community-friendly development activities of the organization in a vivid way. Haque had never come across such a useful exercise notebook so far.



The notebook distribution initiative kindles more interest among students towards learning

The next morning he returned to school, not forgetting to take his daughter's notebook along. In the staff room, he showed it to his colleagues. All praised the

idea in unison. “Can we request the same organization to distribute this book to our students as well?” wondered the headmaster. “Why not, sir? Let’s request for it. I think they will agree,” suggested Md. Haque.

Soon, requests poured in from other schools as well. The first lot of 15,000 notebooks were distributed among the students of schools in and around Farakka and those located near the company’s rail transport system for coal at neighboring Jharkhand. The project received wide appreciation from the local teaching fraternity. Buoyed by success, a reprint of 30,000 copies was immediately ordered to cover equal number of students of schools in the vicinity.

The humble notebook distribution initiative went on to touch the hearts of students and teachers, while kindling more interest among students towards learning.

Hitting the Bull's Eye

In 2006, a team from NTPC Kawas, Surat, came to organize a darts training camp as an extra-curricular activity for the students at Sanjivani High School, Damka. Kajal Patel not only liked the game but went on to participate in national and international events. Sponsorship by the power company has helped her make a name for herself and her school.

Sanjivani High School, at Damka in the district of Surat in Gujarat, should rank as one of the better organized and equipped schools in the deep interiors of India. The school has an elaborate website which proudly displays its impressive beige and brown frontage with long corridors overlooking a huge open ground. The school was established way back in 1960 in the village of Bhatlai and moved some 1.5 km to Damka in 1972. Sanjivani now has 1,600 students on its rolls; it has grown with the years under the management of the Sanjivani Kelwani Mandal, Damka.

It is at this school in 2006 that a team arrived from NTPC Kawas, the 645-MW gas-based power project in Surat. They had come to organize a darts training camp as an extra-curricular activity for the students.

As any school kid would testify, darts can be fun. To take aim and hit a board can provide endless hours of play for children of all ages. So, it's a good game to hold attention in a large school. It was no different at Sanjivani that day in 2006 when the game was introduced to the kids. There was a scramble for the grounds. Every child wanted to be a part of it. It provided an easy way to the sponsors, NTPC Kawas, to not only provide an outlet and some physical exercise, but also to connect with the students.

Among the students rushing to join in the fun was Kajal Patel, who had joined the school only earlier that year. She was headed to the camp simply because everyone else was. Little would Kajal know that this was a journey that would change her life. For, apart from being fun, darts also is a keenly fought game that is played around the world.

Early on, the trainer saw something special in Kajal. “I noticed a spark in some students during the training camp. I thought Kajal was the brightest of them all,” recalls Hemant Sonawadia, the trainer.

Kajal was well spotted for she went on to win the 2006 games at her school. She did not stop there. With the help of NTPC, which worked to encourage the raw talent the trainer saw in her, she went on to learn, train, and hone her skills to become a champion in the game of darts.

Kajal has always been among the top three in any championship she has participated in since 2006. She, however, chose to take a small break and skip the upcoming darts world cup in Ireland in 2011, for she had to appear for her 12th standard examinations. But her focus is clear. She can't wait to return to where she belongs.



Kajal Patel: Champion in Darts

Kajal is now a proud state champion in darts, having represented it in national as well as international championships. NTPC can proudly claim to be the mentor which spotted and trained this talented girl.

“I had no idea a small decision will make such a big difference in my life. Had NTPC not introduced the darts training camp in our school, we would never know that there exists a sport beyond cricket, hockey or football which can be pursued as a career. Today, my name is not just taken in my school and village with pride but now all the girls in the darts game across the state know me,” says Kajal, who clearly enjoys the publicity the game has brought her.

In 2008, Kajal heard of the darts world cup in Singapore. So far, NTPC had sponsored her expenses at the state and national meets. For Singapore, however, she wasn't so sure. Her family could not afford the trip and NTPC had not sponsored a foreign visit for her so far.

“I was not sure if my family could bear the complete expense and if NTPC would be willing to share the burden. But when my school authorities approached NTPC, they readily agreed to take care of my travel expenses to Singapore. Because of this, I took the biggest leap in my darting career and after that there has been no looking back,” says Kajal, who secured the eighth position and got a lead of 200 points amongst participants from over 74 countries.

Hemant Sonawadia can never forget the starting point of this journey — that casual camp in one school deep in the interiors: “Had I not conducted that camp at the invitation of NTPC, the state as well as our country would have missed spotting this darting genius,” he says.

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Sewing a New Life

Babita's hearing and speech impairment had made her dejected. She even had to drop out of university. But she fought a heroic battle against esteem-eroding melancholy and, with a little help from NTPC, came out victorious. At 21, she has a job as a machine operator in a leading export house.

Babita looks happy and glowing. With a slight lisp, she talks about her job. At 21, she has a job as a machine operator in a leading export house, Shahi Exports. She is looking forward to saving some money for her marriage. Will she work after her marriage? She laughs and says that she would if her in-laws approve, but if they do not she will be happy to stay at home.

This sounds like the story of any young girl in Delhi. But she is an extraordinary girl who overcame a handicap to become part of the mainstream of society. Babita is deaf and was partially dumb for many years after a tragic accident when she was only three years old. As she was deaf, it was difficult for her to learn speaking. At the age of five, however, her disability was discovered and her parents ensured that she got the help needed to speak and also got a hearing aid to help her listen to the sounds of the world.

Babita's father, Bhagwati Prasad Unniyal, an employee of NTPC at the Badarpur Power Plant, wanted that his youngest daughter should enjoy life as her three siblings do. But it was difficult to draw her out of her shell. As she grew older, she realized that her disability made her different from everyone else in her school. Babita passed the 12th class but had few friends and was hesitant to go to college. She, however, mustered courage to study further and

got admission in Delhi University. Unfortunately, her stay at the varsity could not be sustained; she dropped out of the University. She stayed at home and started doing household work. But not for long.

It was Sampriti, part of NTPC's non-profit initiative called, E-Voice that came to Babita's rescue. E-Voice is the Employee Voluntary Organisation for Initiatives in Community Empowerment, named Sampriti. Badarpur Plant's E-Voice Secretary R.S. Sabharwal encouraged her to join a training programme being undertaken for disabled persons on textile machines used in export oriented factories.

Export houses have high-speed automatic machines and students need to be trained in these machines to become employable. Sampriti got in touch with the Ministry of Textiles, Government of India, and arranged a 30-day, free machine operator training programme at the Apparel Training and Design Centre at Okhla in Delhi.

This enabled 12 differently-abled girls, including Babita, to operate high-speed textile machines. Sampriti volunteers got in touch with various garment export houses and the 12 differently-abled girls appeared for trade tests in three export companies Pee Empro Export, Radhnik Export House and Shahi Exports

The training programme, which launched Babita into the workplace, was conceived by NTPC volunteers who run the Badarpur Power Plant's Employee Voluntary Organisation for Initiatives in Community Empowerment or E-Voice.

Pvt Ltd. Ten of them, including Babita, got selected and absorbed in the three companies. Babita joined Shahi Exports in June 2006 as a textile machine operator.

The new job meant a stipend of ₹ 5,000 plus other facilities such as medical treatment. It gave her a sense of pride and self-esteem. With her hearing-aid in

place, carefully hidden behind her well coiffed hair, she travels to and from her Okhla factory by bus without any hiccups. She has made friends in the workplace and says many don't even know she is hearing impaired because she hides her hearing aid behind her hair. They only know this charming, cheerful girl who often giggles and is full of life, though she has a slight lisp in her speech. Not many know that the smile on her face is the result of her own struggle to overcome esteem-eroding gloominess and efforts of few good Samaritans.

The training programme, which launched her into the workplace, was conceived by NTPC volunteers who run the Badarpur Power Plant's Employee Voluntary Organisation for Initiatives in Community Empowerment or E-Voice. This is one of the many non-profit societies run by NTPC employees at their numerous plants throughout the country. They strive to meet the corporate

social responsibility goals of the company. The areas on which the company tries to focus include women empowerment, literacy, training of uneducated youth and healthcare. In the National Capital Region, according to Mr R.S. Sabharwal, it was decided to undertake training of young men and women in stitching and tailoring, beauty parlour and healthcare.



Learning to be financially independent

The aim of NTPC's E-Voice activities in the NCR is mainly to cater to those who may have been affected by the power plants in the area. Thus the activities are carried out in the nearby villages where it is felt the plant and its operations could have had some impact on the lives of the people. A need assessment survey for NTPC power stations in the NCR was carried out by Jamia Millia University and NAS in 2007 to determine the kind of initiatives needed to be taken in the region. This covered power stations like Badarpur in Delhi and Dadri in Uttar Pradesh.

As a result, E-Voice decided to carry out training programmes for young men and women in the villages such as Mithapur and

The aim of NTPC's E-Voice activities in the NCR is mainly to cater to those who may have been affected by the power plants in the area. Thus the activities are carried out in the nearby villages where it is felt the plant and its operations could have had some impact on the lives of the people.

Aligaon surrounding Badarpur plant. This was in collaboration with the HRD Ministry which was able to provide teachers for this purpose. The result was that people like Babita now look forward to a new and productive life. Dedicated members of the E-Voice like Mr. Dharam Veer Yadav informed about other training programmes including mobile repair and screen printing which are carried out in the Okhla Development Centre of the Ministry of Small & Medium Enterprises.



Babita imparting the skills and sharing knowledge

Apart from these activities, Mr. Yadav, who is an Executive member of E-Voice, has been instrumental in building a network of trust in the villages surrounding the Badarpur plant, says E-Voice has been supporting an old-age home in the area. It has also organized health check-up camps with the support of leading hospitals. These activities form part of the women empowerment initiative, which is identified as a thrust area in NTPC's MoU with the Government of India.

As the years go by, E-Voice is becoming a support for the people living in the area around the power plant. They now come forward and ask the NGO for help related to education and training for young people.

The Good Samaritans

A young man's visit to, and poignant description of, the habitat of impoverished tribals moved a number of people to work for their upliftment. NTPC was among those who worked ardently to make life better for Pahariya people in the Bhagalpur district of Bihar.

A trip to know about the surroundings taught Sundor Rampahari, and others, a lesson for life. What lack of education and resources could do was till now unknown to this youngster.

Rampahari, a young smart boy pursuing graduation from Shankar Sah Vikramsila College at Kahalgaon in Bihar, was a bit nervous when he reached the stage on the Annual Day function of his college. Narrating something which was shocking and heart-rending was surely not easy. Nonetheless, he did not give up; he started what later became the catalyst for change in the lives of many.

While Rampahari's commentary gave goose bumps to many, the move ignited the altruist sentiment among students. Each of his words was full of conviction, paving the path for help to the nomadic tribes, the story of which he shared.

It was during a short summer trip to watch the relics of ancient Vikramshila that Rampahari witnessed the plight of nomadic tribes living in the area. Consumption of country-made liquor was common among men and women, the youth took to crime — theft, robbery, banditry — as their vocation to make both ends meet. These tribal-dominated villages held a bleak and dark future for their children.

The place he was referring to was Pahariya Tola, a sleepy hamlet near Kahalgaon in the Bhagalpur district of Bihar. The nomads residing at Paharia Tola were untouched by progress. On the other hand, Rampahari's village, Antichak, is in Bhagalpur district; it is located about 50 km east of Bhagalpur and about 13 km north-east of Kahalgaon, a railway station on the Bhagalpur-Sahebganj section of Eastern Railway. It is approachable via a 11-km-long motorable road diverting from NH-80 at Anadipur.



Cheerful women of Pahariya Tola

While his village was vibrant with development and activity, the neighbouring crossroad still reminded Rampahari of a primitive world — untouched by modernization. While Rampahari's village had savored the fruit of development,

the aboriginal tribes of Pahariya Tola appeared to be dwelling in medieval times.

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Thankfully, at the Annual Day function, Rampahari got a chance to narrate the gloomy circumstance around which the lives of Pahariya tribes revolved. He narrated the abject poverty of the tribes and how they were

eating animals, especially rats, besides *roti*, rice, and *sattu* (made of gram). He spoke with a heavy heart about the tribe which, he felt, was on the verge of disappearance.

Rampahari's presentation successfully drew the attention of all the invitees to do something for the betterment of these tribes. Besides noted educationists of the area, NTPC Kahalgaon's General Manager Shubhashish Ghosh was among the invitees to the Annual Day function. He made a mental note of what Rampahari said.

The very next day, a joint team of NTPC officials, members of Shishti Samaj, the ladies' voluntary organization and SC/ST employees association surveyed the Pahariya-dominated villages.

The sights of makeshift bamboo-made *machans*, cattle, and naked urchins on roads saddened the team. Help to locate the tribes came in the form of a boy, Ramesh, who guided them to Pahariya-dominated villages. The team of Kahalgaon was standing on the entrance way of Chandipur Pahariya Tola.

As the team moved towards the interior parts of the village, the children from nearby areas came running to see the vehicles, with surprised smiles on their faces. The visitors were no less surprised; it was virtually a new world for the reviewing team.

The tribals, who were hidden under their traditional roofs, were huddled in a few minutes. The team interacted with many local tribal people. The oldest among them was 80-something Gulma Ram Pahari. He told them that, due to lack of education, they could not get any job and remained detached from the developed world. "We were only getting part-time laborers' jobs in the fields near our villages with meagre wages," he said.

Another tribal elder, Shailesh Pahari, said that people were going to Delhi, Punjab, and other states as migrant workers in search of employment. "But now we are not going to be exploited anymore," he said. His brother Kailash — the only matriculate among the tribes — educates his people of the development projects for them.

After learning about the living conditions of the tribal people, the team came back to Deepti Nagar, the township of the power company. They had seen a different world — a world they had not imagined did exist, a world they were

In a bid to continue providing education, the government also started a middle school in the academic year 2011-12, building upon the primary school that NTPC had provided. The result is encouraging: 250-odd children get proper education, about 170 families get proper medical facilities with potable water.

determined to change. They now had bigger responsibilities to bear. The first step suggested by the team was to provide essential facilities like health, potable drinking water, and education.



Tribals of Pahariya Tola now have access to clean water

The prolonged association of the tribes with hooch also made it necessary to get immediate medical help to the place. Distributing free medicine among ailing tribals and subsequently shifting some of them who required critical medical care to Jeewan Jyoti Hospital, run by the power company, became the next step.

Safe drinking water — by boring tubewells in otherwise inaccessible Pahariya-dominated hilly villages like Chandipur, Qutubpur and Ramzanipur — was also arranged. Going further, several semi-clad tribals were given *dhotis*, *sarees*, and blankets. Stepping up the efforts in tribal welfare, NTPC, with the help of its voluntary group Chetna, started a primary school for the Pahariya tribals. The children were given free books, stationary, school bags, and bicycles.

The best part: The Pahariya children now recognize the value of education and development. To keep the tribal youth engaged and to provide them an engaging and productive vocation, 300 families have been provided unskilled jobs at the power station. Several of them have been engaged as contract laborers for the agencies involved in the ongoing project works. It has helped them earn better livelihoods; their women and children now have a higher living standard.



Emerging out of the morass of backwardness

In a bid to continue providing education, the government also started a middle school in the academic year 2011-12, building upon the primary school that NTPC had provided. The result is encouraging: 250-odd children get proper education, about 170 families get proper medical facilities with potable water.

A little thought and a little kindness, they say, are often worth more than a great deal of money. The thought shared by Sundor Rampahari paved the way for a whole new generation to emerge out of the morass of backwardness and strive towards a better life.

Healthcare on Wheels

The government's National Rural Health Mission works on mobile medical units, which are a critical tool in reaching out to remote areas. NTPC has also stepped in, working along similar lines to provide health services where these are needed the most.

Arjun Behera, along with other small and marginal farmers and laborers, waits in a serpentine queue, not for getting ration or any succor. The middle-aged farmer did not go to his field on Monday as he wanted to get his family examined by a doctor at Takua. He and others from Takua and nearby villages wait for the mobile medical clinic run by NTPC Talcher at Kaniha in Odisha.

The hospital on wheels has a doctor. It also provides free medicines for minor problems such as cold, fever, gastroenteritis, skin ailments, headache, and other minor diseases on the spot. If there is a major complication, the patient is referred to either the NTPC Hospital or the nearest government hospital.

Mobile Health Clinics is a health programme launched by NTPC at several of its stations. It has generated a lot of interest among the villagers living in the vicinity of power stations. "If our unit fails to reach a particular village on a notified date, it causes displeasure among people. Going by the response of villagers, the scheme needs to be strengthened," says Dr. S.R. Dev, Chief Medical Officer, NTPC Talcher.

"We are the first in NTPC to introduce the scheme of health on wheels in November 2010," says Shri Saroj Kumar, Manager (HR) with NTPC Talcher Kaniha. "Our clinic, sometimes even with specialists, visits adjoining villages

on all working days and fulfills the medical needs of villagers. Wherever necessary, medicines are also distributed free of cost.”

It is unfortunate that despite health improvements in India, the second most populous country in the world, lives continue to be lost because of preventable diseases, inadequate new-born care and childbirth-related causes.

An estimated 400,000 children under five years of age die every year because of diarrhoea, according to Unicef, the largest United Nations organization in the country which has been working in India since 1949. Several million more suffer from multiple episodes of diarrhoea. Then there are hepatitis A, enteric fever, intestinal worms, and eye and skin infections caused by poor hygiene, and unsafe drinking water.

NTPC mobile clinics move around 26 villages under Kaniha and Talcher blocks of Angul district and two villages under Sadar block of Dhenkanal district of Odisha, taking healthcare and related messages to people who would otherwise not have benefited from modern medicine.



Mobile health clinic for the villagers in Farakka, West Bengal

As Unicef puts it, “Despite the government and Unicef’s best efforts, diarrhoea remains the major cause of death among children after respiratory-tract infections. Unhygienic practices and unsafe drinking water are some of its main causes.”



NTPC doctors visiting villagers in remote locations near Kahalgaon in Bihar

While the authorities at various levels work to improve rural water supply and sanitation and disseminate good hygiene practices, there remains a need to spread medical help. Healthcare must reach remote corners in the face of bad or non-existent roads, insufficient infrastructure, poor transport services and lack of trained personnel. Often healthcare centres are at a distance from rural habitations, making it difficult for ailing villagers to avail themselves of these services. The same problem is faced by healthcare workers at the centre.

That was why the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) has worked on Mobile Medical Units or MMUs, which are a critical tool in reaching out to remote areas.

And this is precisely where NTPC has stepped in, working along similar lines to provide health services where these are needed the most. NTPC mobile clinics move around 26 villages under Kaniha and Talcher blocks of Angul district and two villages under Sadar block of Dhenkanal district of Odisha, taking healthcare and related messages to people who would otherwise not have benefited from modern medicine.

“Clinics are a big support to us. We not only get free medicines but also proper guidance and counseling whenever we are detected with a health complication,” says Ganguli Sahu, who grows paddy on his fields near Takua.

According to a report titled ‘NRHM-The Journey So Far 2005-2010,’ Odisha alone has 171 MMUs under the NRHM. This is the second largest

number for any state after Tamil Nadu, according to the report. The mission was launched in 2005, seeking to provide effective healthcare to rural population throughout the country with special focus on 18 states including Odisha.

The report does not count NTPC mobile units, because the service was started after the NRHM report was authored. The large number of NRHM MMUs in Odisha is a proof that these are clearly working and helping deliver healthcare goals.

The experience of NTPC MMUs is no different. As an elderly resident of Manipur village under the Sadar block of Dhenkanal district of Odisha put it succinctly: “We have medical help at our doorstep now.”

The service was introduced at Talcher Thermal and Talcher Kaniha in November 2010 and later at Gajamara in March 2011. Since its launch, it has benefited about 25,000 people at several villages in the two districts. The regular check-up also enables them detect ailments like hypertension and diabetes early.

“A large number of people throng to the clinic every time we visit. Looking to the massive response received from them, we now plan to increase the frequency of the health clinic to thrice a week,” said a senior executive of Gajamara. The mobile unit of Talcher Kaniha visits the villages on all working days, while those of Talcher Thermal and Gajamara do that twice a week.



Reaching out with health services in Korba, Chhattisgarh

“For every NTPC project, service to the people starts with service to the communities around it,” comments a senior executive of NTPC Talcher Thermal. “To reach out to the people, the company from time to time launches various initiatives, bringing its valuable resources to bear on the development of the rural communities around it to supplement the government’s efforts in the area of healthcare.”

For a Better Tomorrow

Chetna Vidyalaya at Nemna village in.... is unlike many schools in rural areas. It has regular classes and good teachers. The teenage Dhanu Kumar is proud of the school which has changed his life and given him hope of a better future.

Blue paint flakes off the rust on the gates of Chetna Vidyalaya at remote Nemna village in Sonebhadra District of Uttar Pradesh on the UP-MP border. Dhanu Kumar, a Class VIII student, points at the gate and says flatly, “These are here to keep thieves out. There have been thefts at the school before.” He is unabashedly protective of “the only real school he has been to,” a school founded by “Chetna”, an NGO run by NTPC employees of Rihand Station in 1996.

He was ten years old when he walked in through these gates for the first time in 2007. He had walked three kilometres from his home in Jurhatola village. The few boys in his village who went to the school had many stories to tell, some from their books and some from the happenings at school. He had heard that the classes were regular and the teachers, kind.

His schooling so far had been mostly informal. Though he had earlier enrolled in two primary schools, he knew he had learnt nothing in the classes.

“Daliya (bulgur) was served at lunch. The kids ate and left for home. The teachers came once in a while and even then, they just lolled around and left,” Dhanu says of the last primary school he attended.

Years earlier, as a child he had wanted to read because of reasons he did not fully comprehend. At home, the adults often left him wondering if one really grew wiser with age. His parents would often squabble with his grandparents

(they used to harass his mother, he says). Longing for a quiet spot, away from fights and sulking adults, he would sit through the evenings, looking at stray pages of newspapers by a *dibri* (an oil lamp common in rural areas). He had carefully retrieved each bit whenever something came home wrapped in them. He would look at the lone picture or two on the pages. The print, however, would remain indecipherable.

One day his father, Chottelal, decided to move out of his ancestral house. Dhanu, his mother, and his siblings (a brother and three sisters) moved with him to Telgurwa. By now, thanks to the infrequent classes at the first school he attended, he could recognize some of the letters. His father found work as a cook, earning ₹ 5,000 a month.

He joined a school for the second time in his life. However, it did not seem to him to be any different from the last time. Fearful of him remaining unlettered, his parents had sent him to a private tutor he only knew as 'Masterji'. Masterji taught at one of the neighbour's house. "We were taught basic arithmetic and Hindi. We started with the alphabet and then were taught simple words. He would teach for about half an hour and then let us play," he recollects of the classes. He used to stay back after Masterji's lessons, reading his notes out to his friends.

Things would change. His father had taken up drinking and would get into fights with his mother. Beginning to understand worldly matters, he would often wish to talk to his father, but the fear of getting beaten would cut all his plans short. One night, his father did not come home. Dhanu, his brother, and a few neighbours went looking for him dead in the night. They found him lying by the road a few kilometres from home, in a drunken stupor.

It was payday and he had been robbed of the salary he was carrying home.

"He was so drunk he could not feel a thing. We could see he had been beaten up bad, but he lay at home in the stupor we had found him," he says.

A few days later, Chottelal lost his job. Having lost his job and his salary

because of alcoholism, he began to talk of moving again. The family resigned to his decision and it was not long before they moved to Jurhatola, Dhanu's maternal grandparents' village.

Dhanu's family moved to Jurhatola, his maternal grandparents' village. It was here that Dhanu heard of Chetna Vidyalaya. He was told that the school did not charge any fees and periodically gave students books, notebooks, and pencils. Always keen to read, Dhanu knew he had to check the school out.

It was here that Dhanu heard of Chetna Vidyalaya, started by the NTPC NGO, to take education to the remotest areas. He was told

that the school did not charge any fees and periodically gave students books, notebooks, and pencils. Always keen to read, Dhanu knew he had to check the school out.

Today, a lanky lad of fourteen, he politely asks for the reason of the probe into his past. He listens, understands and nods as he plays with the cuffs of his frayed but neat navy blue sweater.

He begins to talk of his school. “It is the only real school I have ever been to,” he says. “I had to manage pretty much on my own and with Masterji’s help in my last. “ Along with him, the school has also grown. It has over 660 poor children studying in various classes, whose teachers continue to be paid by Chetna.



Over 600 students benefit from the school run by Chetna,
an NGO run by NTPC employees

He enrolled in the fourth standard at Chetna Vidyalaya. Initially, the classes were a bit difficult, especially the social science classes. But he picked up fast. He would listen intently to what was being taught and note it down. The teachers were helpful, slowing down for those who had trouble comprehending.

Every morning, since the last five years, Dhanu wakes up by six o'clock in the morning. He has to walk all the way to school which starts at 8.30 a.m. He can't afford to be a late-riser, he says. In evenings, he sits with his textbooks until the *dibri's* flame wanes.

For an active 14-year-old, he has little interest in sports. “I go home at 2.30 PM when school ends for the day and have lunch. I doze off for a bit and get up and roam the village with a few friends. Once in a while, we play some cricket, but I am not that into sports,” he says. “I feel short of breath if I run or play too hard.”

“Walking to and from school is a good exercise, though,” he quips as an afterthought. He smiles as his friend who’s been standing nearby jokes, “He saves his breath for the walks.”

“I want to become a lawyer,” he says, breaking away from the interruption. The choice may appear intriguing — until he begins explaining. It turns out that his parents had bought land from his mother’s cousin when they moved to Jurhatola. The deal soured, when cousin’s family turned up at the field wielding sickles, insisting that the land Dhanu’s father had bought was jointly owned and that they would not give up their share.

“It’s been a long time but every sowing season, they are there at the bunds, threatening us out of the land,” he says. The rancor is evident in his voice. “We can’t evict them physically, but the court can. There has to be some law for this.”



Dhanu Kumar — Education has given him hope for bright future

An aging father and a sister fast approaching marriageable age has matured him well beyond his years. He knows his brother can support the family only and that too for sometime in the near future; the mantle of fending for the family will ultimately fall on his shoulders. Has he spoken to his father about giving up drinking yet?

“I have told him whatever I learnt about *nashakhori* (addiction) at school. He says he will give it up gradually,” he replies earnestly.

The bell for the junior classes at Chetna Vidyalaya has been sounded. Children run gleefully out of their classrooms, the ordeal of exams over — at least for the day. The school run by NTPC’s Chetna has completed 15 years providing education to the children living in these remote areas. The school saw hundreds of children complete their education with hope and promise of a glorious future.

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Chetna Vidyalaya in Sonebhadra: Providing quality education over 15 years

Service Before Self

What started as one man's initiative to help the needy has become a movement for the upliftment of the poor, education and healthcare. P. Ramdas, an NTPC employee, thought of providing succor to his less fortunate community members, and he got ample support from his organization.

The 57-year-old P. Ramdas, a lab technician in the pathology department of NTPC at Ramagundam, is a frail and simple person. Yet, he is a very strong motivator and energetic individual; he has shaped the lives of hundreds of poor men, women and children. He is the principal actor in the act of bringing social and economic change in the lives of the poor through selfless service.

He started Sai Seva Samiti, a voluntary organisation, 12 years ago in a one-room tenement in the residential neighborhood of the power company and with small contributions raised from his friends and colleagues to address the key issues like shelter, food, education, healthcare, and job skills for poor children.

His dedication, commitment to social service, and love for children soon caught the attention of the power company which enabled the Sai Seva Samiti to extend its services and welfare activities to more needy and poor people in the industrial belt. "I am proud to say that today we not only feed and educate around 200 children but also provide healthcare and skill development to poor women and men through our vocational training institution," says Ramdas.

Sai Seva Samiti is one of the 25 non-governmental organizations supported by NTPC across the country to help the poor and displaced persons, especially children. The Samiti has grown into a formidable institution serving not only the destitute children but also the rural poor. Starting off with a voluntary

contribution of a few hundred rupees from Ramdas and his friends, it has grown into a huge body with a sizable corpus fund, a committed army of activists, and the prerequisite infrastructure. The mission is 'service to society.' It is not only the zeal of volunteers but also the liberal contributions by NTPC that have made it possible for the Samiti to realize the dream of providing succor to the needy, he says.

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Ramdoss is a popular and respected name in and around the power station for his selfless service to society rather than as an executive in the pathology department. "We are not only powering the nation but also empowering the deprived people around us," says Ramdas, who is secretary of the NGO.

"Initially, I was scared for my security but with such supportive people around I soon realized that God has sent me to the correct place," shared Aruna Kumari, a student of Class III. She belongs to a backward community.

Since its inception in 1999, Sai Seva Samiti has served street children, poor casual laborers, and the poorer sections of the industrial belt of Ramagundam as well as the residential neighborhood of the power company.

Apart from providing the Samiti with staff quarters, the power company has also provided water, power, and other infrastructure to them. The biggest contribution of the organization has been the voluntary service of its officers for those in need. "We have been greatly benefited with the services provided. They charge a negligible amount of ₹ 1 as rent for the quarters in the township and also towards power and water bills," says Ramdas.

Not surprisingly, the Samiti is now spearheading a massive voluntary service in the region. It has been successful in garnering a corpus of ₹ 16 lakh in its kitty to take up service activities for the deserving poor in the entire Ramagundam belt.

What is the *mantra* behind success? "Our commitment to service and our credibility earned us the goodwill of NTPC employees, who came forward to donate their one-day salary for our activities," points out D. Ananda Rao, president of the Samiti and an electrical engineer at NTPC.

The Samiti works closely in five areas: Education; Free food — *Annadanam*; Healthcare; Vocational training; Community service.



Healthcare for the needy

Education The school in the area recently celebrated its 12th anniversary. Most of the students belong to the labourers working in the area. The school started in 2003 with 92 children and enrolled whoever wanted education irrespective of their financial background or their capacities. “We all strive to imbibe interest for education among these children so that they can find a new identity and social dignity,” says K. Padmavati, the headmistress of the school. In a bid to prepare children for the challenges of life in a better fashion, the school operates in the English medium and not Telugu medium, as many other schools in the area do.

Annadanam The clean and hygienic food provided by the Samiti is a big attraction for poor children. It invites philanthropists to donate generously for the *Annadanam*, that is, free food programme for school children and destitute. Though free food is generally associated with a lot of waste, it is not so with the school run by Sai Seva Samiti; it carries out the activity in an efficient and effective manner. So, it is not only school children but also other poor people in the village who benefit from the *Annadanam* scheme. “We have devised a scheme for the rich to celebrate their birthdays and other important days by donating food. We have schemes beginning with ₹ 500 to ₹ 3,000 to feed more than 100 to 500 people,” adds D. Murali, an executive member of the Samiti.



Education for destitute and poor children

Healthcare Sai Seva Samiti's flagship program is the medical service for the poor, particularly for lung diseases like tuberculosis (TB). "We started off as a free general clinic to check patients for respiratory problems and refer them to super-specialty hospitals. The situation is much better now," says D. Ananda Rao, president of the Samiti.

Thanks to the efforts of the power company, the Government of Andhra Pradesh has set up an urban health centre and a TB clinic in the Sai Seva Samiti premises to serve 20,000 people. Besides a full-time doctor and a nurse, the hospital is also served by visiting doctors from all over the district. The TB unit is a major centre for TB screening for the population of 60 villages under the Peddapalli subdivision. The power company has provided an X-ray machine and other infrastructure apart from the premises.

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“Though the coal belt has the largest number of cancer cases reported every year, early diagnosis help is timely treatment,” says Dr Sashmita Dash, who presides over the health centre. The Samiti hospital conducts free medical camps at various localities in the Ramagundam industrial belt besides regular health check-ups, immunization programmes, and health awareness campaigns for school children. In recognition of the social evils in the growing industrial belt, the Samiti has also set up an HIV screening centre. “We soon plan to offer ART drugs distribution to confirmed AIDS patients,” says Dr T. Sridhar, chest physician at the TB centre.

Vocational Training Sai Seva Samiti has also launched vocational training for women and men to promote them as self-employed and also to encourage entrepreneur talents among them. The target is to train uneducated people to earn a decent livelihood in a dignified manner. “We run skill development programmes,” says A. Ramkishan, the corporate social responsibility promotion officer at the power company.



Self reliance through vocational training

Considering the number of people who were keen to take training in vocational skills, the Sai Seva Samiti set up three vocational training centres to teach them various activities like making of candles, paper bags and paper plates; beautician courses were also introduced. Some of these centres were set up in

villages and close to the home of women for their convenience. Skills are taught over a period of three months in batches of 10 to 20 men and women. “We chose skills as per their demand in the local market,” says the Samiti’s vocational training centre manager.

“We have trained eight batches so far and the demand for training is increasing with every season. At present, 30 people are getting skills training at this centre,” he adds.

“My children and I would have been on the road without the training given at the vocational training centre,” says one of the trainees, a widow of a labourer.

Navpath: A New Road

Sunita Ramveer Singh, the semi-educated wife of a soldier, was shattered after the death of her husband in the Kargil War. But she heroically fought the feeling of dejection, and emerged as a responsible mother and multifaceted professional. NTPC's social service initiative, 'Navpath,' and family support stood in good stead.

Sunita Ramveer Singh is a mother, *anganwadi* worker, teacher, private tutor, and beautician. Her day begins early at home and she is at her workstation by 9 a.m. as an *anganwadi* worker, responsible for the welfare of 800 local people. She works in the field and among the people till 2 p.m. when she breaks for the day to switch roles.

Sunita, the mother, now picks up her daughters from school and sits with them over lunch, giving herself a one-hour interregnum to check on her kids, unwind with the family, and prepare for the day ahead.

At 4 p.m., her day begins anew, when she takes on a batch of tiny tots and takes them through some reading and writing. Children from nursery and up to the first standard spend time with her for one hour.

At around 5 p.m. Sunita reverts to the role of mother and homemaker — cleaning, cooking, checking on the school work of her children and winding down home and kitchen for the day.

After 7 p.m., she switches roles again and takes on the job of a beautician!

It is not often that one finds a life as busy and organized. Sunita is a self-made woman, the sole earning member of her family, someone who did not know anything about work until when her life was torn apart.

Sunita had a comfortable house at her village near Faridabad in Haryana. She was like any other young girl, with aspirations to a life of bliss with her family. Her parents helped her find a suitable match — a soldier who would complete the picture and settle her into just the kind of life she might have wished.

Lance Naik Ramveer Singh was deployed in the forward areas during the Kargil War in 1999. He made the ultimate sacrifice for the nation.

The news of her husband's death shattered Sunita. Besides dealing with the loss of her husband, she had the responsibility of bringing up her little daughters. Sunita had studied only up to the tenth standard when she was married and had never felt the need to study further. Though the Army offered her a job as compensation, Sunita could not take it up as her two daughters were too young.

Dejected and depressed though she was, she could not ignore the responsibility of bringing up her daughters. "I was so depressed that I often felt like committing suicide. It was just the thought of my little girls that kept me alive," Sunita says as she remembers those days. She was now staying with her parents, a move supported by her in-laws. Her life, however, was still submerged in sorrow.

'Earlier, I used to be too scared to go anywhere alone. Every time the Army office called me to complete some formalities or attend a function, my brothers had to accompany me. But today I can manage on my own, and that gives me a great feeling,' says Sunita.

Then, one day in 2006, the situation took a turn. She joined a beautician's course, which was run as a part of NTPC social service initiative called 'Navpath.' Her parents and brothers backed the decision. The course gave her the chance to interact with senior officers at NTPC. An officer's wife took a special interest in Sunita and suggested that she study further. Sunita was reluctant, but with her teachers constantly stressing the need for self-reliance, she took the plunge.

Her brothers helped her fill forms and complete the necessary formalities. Soon, Sunita successfully completed her school education from the National Open School. This inspired her to graduate and even do a basic course for teachers.

Her enthusiasm made her train in all available vocational skills at Navpath. So, after the beautician's course, she sailed through courses in tailoring, soft toys, and spoken English.

Apart from the supportive environment at NTPC, Sunita's family was a great support for her. This was despite the conservative outlook of the community regarding women in general and widows in particular. Regardless of what people said, her family encouraged Sunita to study and learn new things.

Education and training gave Sunita a sense of confidence she did not possess earlier. "Earlier, I used to be too scared to go anywhere alone. Every time the Army office called me to complete some formalities or attend a function, my brothers had to accompany me. I have been very lucky to get their support in everything. But today I can manage on my own, and that gives me a great feeling," says Sunita.

The beautician's course gave her the chance to interact with senior officers at NTPC. An officer's wife took a special interest in Sunita and suggested that she study further. Sunita was reluctant, but with her teachers constantly stressing the need for self-reliance, she took the plunge.

Sunita has even adopted a son, who is now six. Her elder daughter is studying in Class XII and preparing for an MBBS course. The younger one is in Class IX. The days of dejection and depression are over.

She is not only dynamic and energetic but works multiple roles and manages her time with the expertise of a corporate executive. The once-semi-educated housewife

has been transformed into a confident *anganwadi* worker, a teacher, a mother, and a beautician — all rolled into one!

As she recounts her routine, there is not a hint of tiredness in Sunita's expression. Like one who has come out of darkness to light, Sunita is radiant and happy. And she gives all credit for her transformation to NTPC and her family — in that order.

"I am what I am today because of NTPC. I was encouraged by everyone, right from the senior officers to the teachers at Navpath. They helped me find a new direction. Even today I am in touch with them. They call me for functions where I help the girls dress up for their performances. It always feels good to visit the place," Sunita says.

As her children grow up, she is confident she can take care of their needs. Her pension, *anganwadi* salary, tuition class fees, and her work as a beautician have ensured that she now depends on no one but herself.

Future Perfect

Youngsters in Odisha's remote villages are high on aspirations like never before. The reason is that NTPC, along with government efforts, have helped improve the education infrastructure for students from weaker sections. The students now dream big. Some of them have achieved their goals. Others are confident of doing so.

He may not have access to the best things in life, but the 11-year-old Dwaridhar Behera has his ambition right: he wants to be a doctor, serve the people of his state, and usher in a healthy world. "I have many dreams, but the goal is to become a doctor," he says. His friends Gopinath, Gourihari, and Pangala are no different. They also aspire to make it big in life.

As they play with friends, bask under the tropical sun, and cycle around the village, these youngsters have their share of both happy and sad moments. While Dwaridhar lost his parents at a young age and stays with his maternal uncle now, Gopinath's father passed away due to kidney failure, Gourihari's father died in a road accident, and Pangala's father died of disease. The best part in their life is the school where all friends and others meet and spend some of the best moments together. They study hard, play with gusto, and enjoy their company.

Take the case of 14-year-old Sabita Pujari, who has now become an accomplished *kabaddi* player and wants to achieve more. Sabita, who is in the ninth standard, wants to become a police officer and do her bit for the society. Gauuli Pradhan, also in the ninth standard, wants to study 'plus two' at a college in Kaniha and join the MBBS course. "I want to become a doctor and serve the poor," she says with conviction.

The 14-year-old Sabita Pujari has now become an accomplished kabbadi player and wants to achieve more. Sabita, who is in the ninth standard, wants to become a police officer and do her bit for the society. Gauli Pradhan, also in the ninth standard, wants to join the MBBS course.

Dwaridhar, Sabita, and Gauli are students of Maa Bhairavi Vidya Mandir School at Bijigol village in Angul district of Odisha which has around 220 residential students and is run on public contributions. Started by Lavanyamati Mohanty, known as 'Mataji' in the area, an active lady in her

early fifties, the school provides teaching to the poor and the needy, around 90 per cent of whom belong to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.



Lavanyamati Mohanty also called Mataji of Maa Bhairavi Vidya Mandir School devotes her time to the upliftment of poor and needy

Located near NTPC's Kaniha power plant, Maa Bhairavi Vidya Mandir School is noted for providing quality education to students from sixth to tenth standards. But there was a time when, while the students had high aspirations in their heart, the school's building showed signs of crumbling. The school building and its classrooms badly needed a facelift. It was here where NTPC stepped in to contribute its bit and help reinforce the school's infrastructure.

It constructed five classrooms and provided furniture and scholarships to the meritorious students. The Tanvi Sangam ladies club of NTPC Kaniha now regularly provides uniforms, clothes, blankets, and other materials required for the well-being of the students. The efforts made news when *The Hindu* reported in 2009 that the club distributed 40 sets of desks and benches worth ₹ 1.20 lakh and 210 uniforms to all the children of the school. Since then, there has been no looking back. Students today have access to potable drinking water in school premises, among other facilities.

As the school today dons a new look, students like Sabita continue to pursue their dreams but in better conditions. "By supporting us, the power company has helped shape the destiny of our school children. We have several success stories here. We are proud of our students like Jitendra Murmu, who is pursuing his engineering at a reputed institute in Bhubaneswar," acknowledges Biswaranjan Satpathy, headmaster, Maa Bhairavi Vidya Mandir School.

But this is not all. The students of Kandasar Project UP School also have an identical tale to tell. Set up in 1956, the school had a glorious past but fell on bad times. The school was suffering from want of funds and could find no way to raise the much-needed resources to teach students in this remote part of the country. "When I came here in 2006, the quality of teaching was not up to the mark. When I retired as the headmaster in June 2010, everything improved for good," remembers Padma Charan Mohapatra, former headmaster of the school. The change here too came through NTPC Kaniha and its mission to step in to support activities that would help build a future for students in neighboring areas of the project. Kandasar Project UP School is now a model school of the area.

Located at Kandasar, Kaniha Block, in Angul district of Odisha, Kandasar Project UP School now has 85 students from the first to eighth standards. It now has two new classrooms, as the old building was found to be inadequate to meet the growing number of students. The old

The corporate social responsibility activities of the power company also brought about a sea change in the functioning of Bijigol Panchayat High School. Though the school started in 1975, it is from 1991 onwards that it witnessed good times with liberal funding from the power project.

building was also renovated by the power company. Scholarships are offered to three toppers of standard Class VII and VIII. Children from Baradangua, Ampal, and Kandasar belonging to poor socio-economic backgrounds come here as day scholars for their study. Under the *Sarva Sikha Abhiyan* scheme, they are also provided mid-day meals.

The power company also stepped in to help a girl child at Bijigol village suffering from sacrococcygeal tumor (tumor at the base of the coccyx or the tailbone). The girl, who studied in eighth standard, was not able to lead a normal life because of her ailment. She went through a surgery conducted at the NTPC Hospital, Deepshikha. “The student is now quite normal,” points out headmaster Biswaranjan Satpathy.

The corporate social responsibility activities of the power company also brought about a sea change in the functioning of Bijigol Panchayat High School. Though the school started in 1975, it was from 1991 onwards that it witnessed good times with liberal funding from the power project. Today, it has eight proper classrooms, a library, and an overhead tank for 24X7 potable water supply. It also got 1,500 books for the library. A computer was also donated to the school recently.



Playful students of Bijigol Panchayat High School

The school boasts of a high 90 per cent success rate, with as many as 40 per cent getting a first class in the tenth standard board examinations in

2009-2010. “The power company at the neighborhood never said no whenever we approached them for some grant to conduct a sports tournament or to augment our existing infrastructure. With such support, we want to achieve better results during next year’s board exams,” asserts Chittaranjan Pradhan, confident headmaster of the school.

No wonder, students of Bijigol Panchayat High School are also brimming with confidence. Ajit Kumar Sahu, who is in the tenth standard, wants to become a doctor. Bulu Sethi, who also bagged a scholarship, last year (2009-2010) along with Ajit, wants to become a teacher. NTPC-Kaniha also stepped in with infrastructural grants to Takua Dereng, Gandaberna, Bijigol, and Kaniha schools, books to the PM High School, Kaniha and Bijigol High School, as well as merit scholarships to 197 students from 32 schools in Kaniha block and school bags to 303 students of Gadasila School.

From a broader perspective, these small initiatives to help develop infrastructure for primary and secondary education in remote villages of Odisha are looked at as a giant leap towards building a bright future for not only the region but for the country at large.

Overcoming All Challenges

Veena Mehta is one of the over 300 physically challenged employees of NTPC. She was born blind but has a personality which has all the colors of rainbow in it. And she has courage and determination to fight for her rights and excel in work. Unsurprisingly, she is an inspiration for many.

Veena Mehta loves to climb mountains. She is adventurous. If she had wings, she would fly like a bird; but she gets to feel the excitement of soaring in the skies by paragliding. An adventure-loving 27-year-old girl, she also has a taste for good food and a zest to live life king-size. A management graduate, Veena works with NTPC.

Veena is blind.

She was born blind but has a personality which has all the colors of rainbow in it, the colours she can't see. Not someone who has let blindness deter her, Veena says, "Sometimes, blindness is just like a prison, but the world and the people around you encourage you so much that you feel an urge to do more and feel all the colours of success and aspirations."

She has a story which can inspire many. This woman from Jodhpur might be the first in India to opt for a management career. But the road she took wasn't easy. A commerce graduate, she tried to get admission in Delhi University and in Jamia Milia Islamia's MBA course. But she was denied admission because of her handicap. Undeterred, she complained to the National Association of the Blind and the Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities. Her fight helped not only her but many after her; now most management colleges have opened their

gates for the visually impaired. Veena, meanwhile, did a post-graduate diploma in industrial relations from Bhartiya Vidya Bhawan and then got a first division in MBA in Human Resource from Pune.

Today, she is working with NTPC and is an inspiration to many. She contributes her best to the company; she is also a counselor at the National Association of the Blind. “As a person with a physical disability, I have a very strong desire to make a difference to my community. I am involved in many different areas and networks working to create real community partnerships and educational pathways,” she says.

She got the National Award for Empowerment of Persons with Disability from the President of India in 2007. She also received the Cavinkare Ability Award 2007-08. Fiercely independent, she has become a role model for many.

Veena Mehta tried to get admission in Delhi University and in Jamia Milia Islamia's MBA course. But she was denied admission because of her handicap. Undeterred, she complained to the National Association of Blind and Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities. Her fight helped not only her but many after her.



Veena Mehta receiving the National Award for empowerment of persons with disability from Ms Pratibha Patil, the President of India

She is one of the over 300 physically challenged employees of NTPC — a company which does not only want to be a partner in India's double-digit

growth story but which feels that people with disabilities are actually differently-abled. The company not just employs them but tries to get them to do jobs they can do. It also constantly reviews the list of posts where the physically challenged can be employed. The company believes in giving equal opportunities at the workplace.

It is estimated that there are around 40-80 million differently-abled people in India. And most of them don't get employed despite the country's economy growing steadily. Very few organizations employ them.

Swami Pratap Singh Baghel has been working as an attendant in the NTPC office in Noida since 2005. It is here that he met his wife to be, Radha. She is a stenographer. Both Baghel and his wife are visually impaired. Swami lost his eyesight in 1991. He was in Class VIII then. Today, he can see light passing through his right eye but cannot make out forms or shapes. His wife lost her vision when she was five but managed to graduate despite all odds. Today, like other ordinary parents they are working hard to give their two children a bright future.

But they are also doing something extraordinary. They have decided that they would help other blind people get a direction in life and not feel lost in this world. A follower of Radha Swami Sect, Baghel has formed an NGO for the visually challenged in Agra.

He says, "The Radha Swami Institute for Visually Handicapped has 15 students. We take care of boarding, lodging and education all free of cost. All the students are visually impaired. Whatever my wife and I earn, we make sure that we contribute half of the income to the organisation where we try to give free residential programs for the visually challenged so that they don't feel left out in the society."

Baghel doesn't want others with visual impairment to feel directionless like he once felt. He says, "I lost a lot of my precious years when I lost my eyesight because I just didn't know what to do. It was only in 1999 that I found out

NTPC acknowledges that the disabled people are productive and reliable employees who benefit the work place. It develops products and services to cater to people with disabilities. It also ensures that there is no discrimination in the workplace and sensitizes its employees about the differently-abled. It also mentors and trains them.

about special institutes for visually handicapped and managed to study, learn Braille and be equipped to meet the challenges of life."

Baghel feels that NTPC has helped disabled people like him by enhancing their skills. It has understood their needs and made the

workplace disabled-friendly. So, every weekend, when he is off work from NTPC, Baghel travels to Agra to take care of his NGO and replicate the ideas he has benefited from.

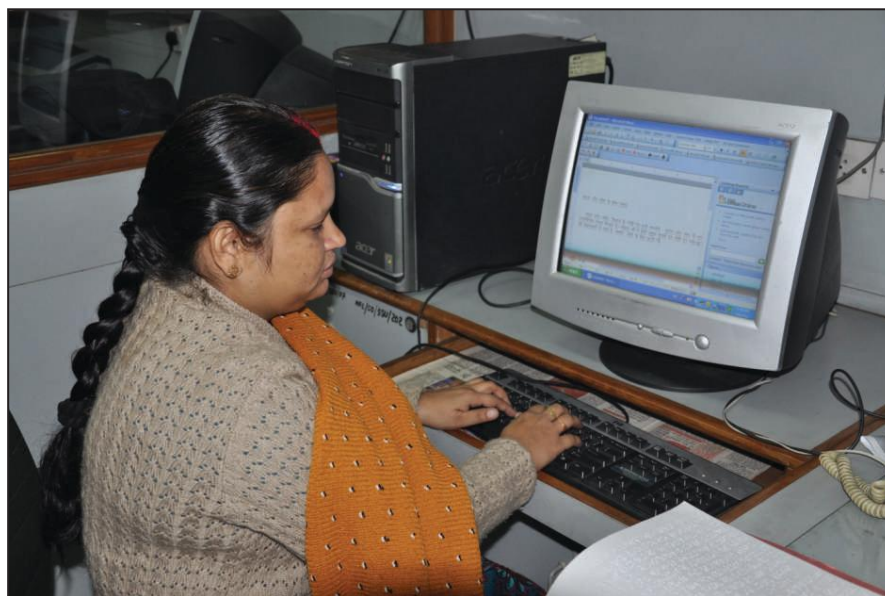
Children here can study up to Class VIII. He has tied up with some local schools to help his students enrol there for higher studies. He also knows the importance of keeping up with the times, so his students are getting trained at using computers and learn other skills like typing and stenography.



Swami Pratap Singh Baghel has formed an NGO to help visually challenged individuals

NTPC acknowledges that the disabled people are productive and reliable employees who benefit the work place. It develops products and services to cater to people with disabilities. It also ensures that there is no discrimination in the workplace and sensitizes its employees about the differently-abled. It also mentors and trains them.

Rakesh Kumar Jha lost his hearing ability while he was in college. He had the spirit to fight his disability. He did post-graduation in English and then B.Ed. from Benaras Hindu University. He didn't stop there. He got a diploma in computer programming and application from Tata Infotec. Now, he is pursuing his MBA from Sikkim Manipal University. Not just this, Rakesh is a leader of the Quality Circle named Powernet for NTPC, apart from being the President of Stephen Hawking Association which is an association of physically challenged people.



A graduate, visually impaired Radha determined to give a bright future to her two children

The people mentioned might have lost one of their senses but their disability has only increased their willpower manifold; they are not deterred by these challenges. The same indomitable spirit can be seen in others like them, be it William from Dadri, K.R. Anil Kumar from Kawas, Mirabati from Talcher Thermal, Rama from Farakka, or Manish from Delhi.

The list is long. They have not only been offered workplace but enabled them live their dreams. As Rabindra Nath Tagore said, “The problem is not how to wipe out the differences but how to unite with the differences intact.”

Meaningful Change

When NTPC decided to start a school near its project at Dadri, a small UP town, it had no idea about the obstacles it would face. It was to convince people that they should educate their girls. It took herculean efforts on the part of NTPC employees to make it a success but success it did become.

When people were going gaga about *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* in 1995, something radical and meaningful was being started in the small town of Dadri, Uttar Pradesh. A beginning was made to increase the literacy rates of the surrounding villages.

This story is not about what happened 17 years ago but about how the decisions made back then have impacted the future of the people involved.

NTPC Dadri gave the people of the villages around Dadri what they had really needed but perhaps had not realized at the time — a school. In 1996, it was a brilliant idea to start a school for all the 21 affected villages around Dadri. We say ‘affected’ because the villagers included the people displaced and relocated because of NTPC’s project.

It was not evident at that time the extent of change Saraswati Shishu Mandir was about to bring and the way in which it would eventually contribute to the society. The main motive was to impart the gift of education to the less fortunate community members, the stress being on the literacy of the girl child. At the time, the female literacy rate in all of UP was below 30 per cent, placing the state at the third lowest position (Source: Registrar General and Census Commission, India, 1993). At such a time, starting a village school, especially

for the girls, was no easy feat. For the successful implementation of this project, the collective psyche had to be transformed.



Encouraging education for girl children

There was no school within the 12 kilometre-radius of Dadri. NTPC built Saraswati Shishu Mandir at a location right next to the township. It not only constructed a building but also provided the infrastructure and made all the investments. But making it self-sustaining was still a challenge.

There was another challenge: the people of the villages had to enroll their children and permit their daughters to go to the school. The NTPC officials found that none of the villagers were ready to send their girls to school. First,

The villagers did not want the girls to travel all the way to the school because they were not sure of the safety aspect. Second, they did not want their daughters to be study alongside boys. And, most discouragingly, they did not really think that educating girls was any good. For what would the girls do with all the education?

they did not want the girls to travel all the way to the school; it wasn't safe for girls to travel alone. Second, they did not want their daughters to be studying alongside boys. And, most discouragingly, they did not really think that educating girls was any good. For what would the girls do with all

the education? Their destiny was to get married, have babies, and take care of the home and hearth. This was the mindset.

NTPC executives decided to talk to the villagers. A team went from village to village and spoke to the people through the help of the village panchayat. People had lots of things to say — mostly negative. Their concerns were the same — distance, boys, and *faayeda* (benefit). There were some, though, who were smart enough to listen and understand; they agreed but they were not many. Something else had to be done.

So, the NTPC ladies' club was called upon. The women were more than willing to promote such a great and noble cause. They literally went from house to house, knocking door to door, trying to convince the parents to send their girls to the school. They had to talk to the men, get through to the women in each house, and convince the girls to picture a brighter, better future. A life where each girl would be capable enough to contribute to the society in her own way, instead of being just a wife and a mother.



Imparting gift of education to the less fortunate

Slowly, students started trickling in. Boys and girls were admitted to the school but the school had only primary classes. The school had about 50-60 students. It was impossible for the school to become self-sustaining. Something new had to be thought of. A plan was needed. NTPC employees decided to get involved in a more vigorous manner.

They formed an NGO, Srijana Jan Seva Samiti (now called Prerna). This NGO consisted of NTPC employees who wanted to do something to improve the situation. Each person from this NGO started donating ₹ 30 per month towards the betterment of the school. This helped the school immensely. Also, the responsibility of running the school and providing faculty to the school was taken over by another NGO. A management committee was formed. Its members include a few local villagers, Saraswati NGO members, and members of NTPC employees' NGO.

It is everybody's involvement and contribution that has taken the school to new heights. So much so that a few years ago, a businessman, who owns many other schools, decided to open up a new, 'modern' school right across the street. He said he was offering high-class, private school education. However, despite all the hype he created about his 'modern' school, it was a flop. People wanted quality, not style. In fact, many of his students left and joined Saraswati Shishu Mandir after seeing the difference — and it was not just in fees but also in teaching and the overall atmosphere.

The thinking of villagers has changed over the years. They are excited about their daughters growing up to become doctors, engineers, teachers and successful individuals. However, there is still lot to be done to overcome the attitude that

An NTPC team went from village to village and spoke to the people through the help of the village panchayat. The NTPC ladies' club was called upon. The women were more than willing to promote such a great and noble cause. They literally went from house to house.

forces them to marry their girls off straight after school if a decent proposal comes their way. "There is a marked difference now in the way the village people think. They want to educate their children. However, even today the early marriage of girls is a bane of the local community," says Ms Sharma, economics teacher.

The girls of the school have big dreams and they work hard to achieve them. Sangeeta is an Arts student who scored 70 per cent in her 10th board exams. Her favourite subject is economics and she wants to pursue B.B.A. after school. "There is some household work but I always find time to study and complete my homework," she says.

Today, the school has classes till the 12th standard. The higher classes (10+2) are only for girls, and in the coming years, the school plans to admit girls only. Gone are the days when the school needed help. After 15 years, it is not only self-sustaining but also successful and popular. NTPC employees still donate ₹ 30 to the school, it is because of their concern and love for their project,

not because of financial duress. The girl-boy ratio in the school today is an astounding 60:40.



A class in progress at the Saraswati Shishu Mandir

With over 600 students in 2011, it is like any other village school but it offers quality education. The school and its students have big plans. They are confident of transforming these into reality.

Let There Be Light

NTPC provides power to the nation, but earlier the areas near its plants sometimes did not have electricity, eliciting a critical comment in the press that there was darkness beneath the lamp. NTPC, however, took the criticism in the right spirit and chalked out a plan to electrify the villages near its plants. And it did that.

A senior journalist with a language daily once visited the NTPC project at Talcher in Odisha. On his arrival, project officials took him to the various sites of the super-thermal power project.

The next day he was shown developmental activities undertaken by the company at various villages adjacent to the project site as part of its social development initiatives — construction of roads and culverts, additional class rooms for a school building, parks, digging of tube-wells in the nearby villages. The journalist also talked to the villagers.

On his return, the correspondent filed a story with the headline ‘Pradeeper Niche Andhakar’ (there is darkness beneath the lamp). He highlighted the plight of villagers in the absence of electricity supply to areas that were adjacent to the power project.

The power station is glowing, but see the villages surrounding the plant, the villagers had told the journalist. There is darkness everywhere, they lamented.

We are yet to get the fruits of modern technology at our villages in spite of a super-thermal power station in the area, they told the journalist asking, is it not possible to share a certain portion of the power generated in the station with the adjacent villages?



NTPC stations bring hope for development

Super-thermal power stations, which are mostly set up in the remote areas of the country, generate and transmit power over several hundreds of kilometers to various states across the country. Then, distribution companies distribute power to bulk and individual customers. In the absence of distribution network in several villages, they remain un-electrified and therefore households go without power in villages even adjacent to power stations.

More than 18,000 villages live without electricity in India, according to the International Energy Agency. As many as 404.5 million people do not have access to power. Rural electricity supply in India lags in terms of service (measured by hours of supply) as well as penetration. Only 31 per cent of the rural households have access to electricity, and the supply suffers from frequent power cuts and high fluctuations in voltage and frequency, with so-called blackouts and brownouts.

The issue was raised in various quarters and then reached Parliament. There were discussions on the subject at various levels within the Central government, state governments, and power companies.

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An announcement was made in Parliament in July 2009 that Central Public Sector Undertakings (CPSUs) like NTPC will supply reliable power to rural households of the villages within radius of 5 km of power stations set up by CPSUs. NTPC took the lead in implementing the scheme. Its aim would be to electrify all revenue villages and habitations irrespective of their population within a 5-km radius of its power stations, both existing and under construction. It is well known that expanding electrification and scaling up electricity services is critical to both the economic and social development of India.

An electrified village is defined as one if it has the basic infrastructure such as a distribution transformer and distribution lines in the inhabited locality as well as in the *dalit basti* or hamlet where it exists. The definition of electrification also includes public places such as schools, panchayat offices, health centres, dispensaries, and community centres. Further, the number of households electrified should be at least 10 per cent of the total number of households in the village, and the village panchayat should certify that.



Taking Power to remote areas

The scheme took off in Odisha. There was jubilation among the people of 118 villages surrounding the Talcher Super Thermal Power Station and the Talcher Thermal Power Station of NTPC in Angul district of Odisha when the company announced that it would execute the scheme. The respective general managers of the two stations signed separate agreements with the

state government and the Electricity Supply Utility of Odisha for creating the provision of supply of electricity in those villages. The total population to be covered was about 140,000.

As part of its electrification drive, NTPC committed itself to developing the infrastructure and also supply the power required under the scheme. This would be in addition to the state's share from the two generating stations.

The move was well received by the media. The headline of a six-column report in a business daily said, 'NTPC to provide 14 MW power to 118 villages.' Another English newspaper in the state published a report under the headline: 'Electricity to fringe villages of NTPC plants.'

Across NTPC's 30-odd power plants, several hundreds of villages fall within the 5-km radius and therefore qualify for getting power from NTPC. For the people in the surrounding villages, the search for energy would no longer be a back-breaking chore.

In a sense, the exercise that began with a journalist's observation led to a series of changes that ended in appreciation of NTPC efforts. This was not NTPC responding to local needs but taking criticism in the right spirit.

The beneficiaries of the scheme around both power plants at Talcher and Angul include 8,437 below the poverty line (BPL) families in five blocks — Kaniha, Talcher, Odapada, Barjang, and Banharpal. The endeavour was commendable, for in undeveloped areas, small amounts of electricity can save large amounts of human time and labour.

"We plan to complete the project in 12 months," a senior executive of the company said, adding: "The dream of the villagers will come true thereafter. There will be life, there will be a flurry of activity."

Across NTPC's 25-odd power plants, several hundreds of villages fall within the 5-km radius and therefore qualify for getting power. For the people in the surrounding villages, the search for energy would no longer be a back-breaking chore. Without electricity, women and children from these families have to spend hours each day gathering dung and wood — the hours they would be able to spend on productive work or education.

From Darkness to Light

Undeterred by visual impairment, Vijeta Parmar and Karan Singhanian have pursued higher studies and aspire to do more in life. With support from Delhi University-NTPC Foundation's Equal Opportunity Cell (EOC), which works towards empowering and training students with disabilities, they have joined the mainstream.

Vijeta Parmar, an employee of a leading nationalized bank, and Karan Singhanian, a B.Com (Hons) student from Sri Ram College of Commerce (SRCC), have a lot more than just their visual disability in common. Both hail from remote towns, have made their mark in the Capital of the country, and have realized their dreams. But, above all, both have been gifted with the ability to overcome despair.

A picture of courage and inspiration, Vijeta Parmar is pursuing M.A. final in Political Science from Daulat Ram College, University of Delhi. Even with visual impairment by birth and 100 per cent disability, she successfully completed her primary education from National Institute of Visually Handicapped, Dehradun. After this, she moved to the Sharp Memorial School for the Blind which in turn paved her path for integrated education from CNI Girls Inter College, Dehradun. She did her 12th class from Uttarakhand Board from the same school. With her persistent efforts, she cleared the clerical exam of a leading nationalized bank and is presently placed as a clerical staff with the bank.

Unlike Parmar, for Karan it was not easy to walk down the academic path. It was at the age of eleven when Karan was diagnosed with Retinitis Pigmentosa and he gradually started losing his sight. What the doctors then said was a blow to the young child's enthusiasm but he did not let his disability stop him from

succeeding. His vision gradually became worse, but his confidence did not sag. The tragic event came as a turning point in his life. Though initially it was tough to cope with the loss, destiny had a better plan for Karan. Belonging to a remote town in Korba District, Chattisgarh, he was not allowed to take up his Class X exams. Being a backward area, neither the school authorities nor Karan knew of the many assistive devices and alternative methods available to aid the visually impaired. Fortunately, one of his school teachers came as a savior. He put across the idea of getting his books recorded and providing him with a scribe to take up his exams.

A picture of courage and inspiration, Vijeta Parmar is pursuing M.A. final in Political Science from Daulat Ram College, University of Delhi. Even with visual impairment by birth and 100 per cent disability, she cleared the clerical exam of a leading nationalized bank and is presently placed as a clerical staff with the bank.



Vijeta Parmar: A picture of courage and inspiration

The reason behind constant determination of both was the support of their families. The consistent encouragement from Parmar's father — to be independent and self-reliant made her able to get a job. Her father, Harbans Parmar, a civil engineer, hails from Hamirpur in Himachal Pradesh. Her

mother, Maya Parmar, was also a strong support for her and her brother Ashish. Though she was diagnosed with cancer and passed away in February 2000, she always encouraged her children to aspire for greater roles in life. Like Vijeta, her brother Ashish is pursuing higher education — B.A. (Hons.) English from Hindu College.

For Karan, too, the support from family and teachers helped him fulfill his dream of pursuing higher studies. His determined efforts led to his securing 84 per cent and 92.4 per cent in 10th and 12th exams, respectively, from CBSE. His excellent grades in the 12th class secured him a seat in SRCC, one of the most sought after colleges of the University of Delhi.

It was during their graduation that Vijeta and Karan came to know about Delhi University-NTPC Foundation's Equal Opportunity Cell (EOC) at the varsity. The foundation works towards empowering and training students with disabilities so that they can join the mainstream.

The DU-NTPC foundation's ICT Centre extends support through their student friendly facility of computer labs, reading services, and conversion of textbooks into e-books, as part of a memorandum of understanding entered by NTPC with Delhi University.



Karan Singhania: Paving new path for students with disabilities

The ICT centre turned out to be a boon for Karan and Vijeta as they could use the computer labs for getting their books converted into e-texts and availing reading services. Using assistive technology such as screen reading software has immensely benefited them as they can read printed books after getting them scanned.

Being a commerce student, Karan had to be acquainted with graphs and tables which were not scanned. For this, the books were recorded. Though it took longer time, they are made accessible to the students. Vijeta, who now aspires to become a Civil Servant, successfully completed two short-term courses in basic and advanced computers through the facilities from the DU-NTPC Foundation.

It is the indomitable spirit of students like Karan and Vijeta who pave new paths for future students and make the efforts of the Equal Opportunity Cell, DU-NTPC Foundation, meaningful.

The Pursuit of Happiness

Nawab Ram, who belongs to a community that is not only marginalized but also stigmatized, has to work hard to improve his family future. But, with a little help from NTPC, he has managed to make his mark as an artisan making bamboo products.

The road to Dodhar village from NTPC's Rihandnagar project in Uttar Pradesh's Sonbhadra district is nearly six kilometres long. It winds down the slope of an odd hillock, part of the Kaimur range. The road, wearied by the hard wheels of carts and the occasional trucks, has sunk in patches. Potholes show where this year's rains have sloughed off the tar.

A small primary healthcare centre is at a turn that leads to the hamlet of the local Dharkars, a group of Scheduled Caste people who have branched off the Dom community. Traditionally basket-weavers and bamboo craftsmen, they have taken to begging and petty theft in such volumes that the word Dharkar is likely to invite sniggers and annoyance in the cities they have migrated to. This hamlet has not been spared the ignominy either. Most of its youth have migrated to Varanasi and Allahabad, while a few have chosen cities in Bihar. Some of them visit their elderly relatives, but not very often, says a local. Those who stayed back, till their small holdings for annual crops of maize, sesame, and pulses that feed their family for the year if the weather is kind. The handful who could not or didn't want to migrate despite being young find some employment in the nearby villages and at the power plant as labourers. Most families still have at least one member who weaves, though they insist it doesn't pay off as much as it did a decade or so ago. Such is the poverty here that any "officer" alighting from a car is taken by the villagers to be someone who will soon be distributing

blankets. This is how villagers view NTPC officials.

At 33, Nawab Ram looks near-beaten with his sunken cheeks and wispy frame. Without a visit to his village, it is difficult to understand why he has left it to stay at the Rihandnagar township campus instead. However, his voice rings confident and devoid of that lament his clansmen in Dodhar had.

Nawab splits a bamboo in the sun outside the four-room building where he has been allowed to stay by Chetna — the NGO founded in 1991 by the project officials (The building was given to Chetna by the company for use as a warehouse.) He is one of the 30 Dharkar youth from Dodhar who were trained by another NGO, in making wicker craft — from lamps to curios like boats to entire sofa-sets made of bamboo.

Nawab Ram is one of the 30 Dharkar youths from Dodhar who were trained by Advantage India, another NGO, in making wicker craft—from lamps to curios like boats to entire sofa-sets made of bamboo.



Nawab Ram and his family weaving craft out of bamboo clumps

“I stay in one of the rooms and use another for storing bamboo and my crafts,” Nawab says. “The village had drunkards fighting all the time. There would be shouts from some hut or the other — and people would know that the man of the house was beating his wife or children. Then, there were people

who rough up others for some reason or the other. I didn't want to stay there. I go there for a few months every year to tend to my hut. My family tills our field for a crop and we come back."

His wife Samundari Devi weaves a bamboo basket as she tries to soothe their infant daughter, the youngest of their three children. The eldest, a son, and the middle child, a daughter, play with the toys they have crafted. The son has just got done with school for the day. His father Shivadhari deftly bends a strip of dry bamboo as he shapes a rim for one of the baskets.

"I had learnt bamboo-craft from my father. As a child, I would go with him to the jungles near the hill. He would cut down the bamboo we needed from the many clumps that grew around. I would tie them in a bundle. Then, heaving the bunch on to our shoulders, we would walk back home," Nawab reminisces. There were no roads then. Nawab and father Shivadhari would walk on paths cleared in the jungles by the tread of the many bamboo-gatherers.

The father-son duo would then weave 80-90 baskets and trade them in the nearby villages for grain and clothes. On the rare occasions that they were paid in cash, they would get ₹ 400-500, selling around 10-12 baskets.

"I had never thought that one could do so much with bamboo — chairs, sofas. I had instinctively known, though, that these would sell for more than just clothes or grain," Nawab says.

'I can't beg or sleep on a pavement. I want my son to get an education, even though I might not be able to fund him beyond the primary level. All I can do is walk to bamboo clumps, and make something to sell,' Nawab says. He knows he has miles to go, and he is willing to do that.

He soon put the skills he acquired at training to work and made lamps and chairs that sold out in the project township. He cleared out his first stock for ₹ 5,000. However, this early success did not last long.

"I soon realized the township market was saturated. After some time, I found that there were not many takers for my lamps and

chairs," he says as he whittles down a strip of bamboo. "Business was thinning with each passing day and I was growing desperate. I had never given up weaving baskets as farmers everywhere need them. Even now, I make around 100 baskets every two months and load them on a bus to Ahraura. My wife and I go around selling them in the villages. We get some cash and grains. We get through the lean times."

Harvest seasons, thus, kept his hearth lit. But, always the entrepreneur, Nawab wanted to do more. Samundari and he, with the kids in tow, would

make trips to Allahabad almost every quarter. There, they would put up a tent by the roads and buy bamboo and make their wares. Once the bamboo ran out, they would return home having saved anything between ₹ 3,000-7,000.



A Doli created by Nawab leading the wedding procession in Rihandnagar

However, once his son started school at the Dodhar primary, he knew he had to save up for his education. He could no longer take him on the quarterly trips. Besides, Shivadhari was getting old and there were medical exigencies to be prepared for. He approached the office-bearers of Chetna for help. They knew of his skills and allowed him to stay at the warehouse.

NTPC Rihandnagar now buys his crafts through Chetna for gifting visitors to the project. The arrangement is a happy one — he makes tasteful lamps, lanterns, and little houseboats in bulk which Chetna buys. An income of ₹ 5,000-₹ 7,000 is assured for the craftsman's family with every sale. The campus festivities, like the annual Sharad Mela, are a bonus. He is given a stall where he can sell the wicker lamps and houseboats. "These are busy times. Samundari and I sleep at around 11 in the night and wake up much before dawn. We light a fire to keep ourselves warm and start work," he remarks explaining the Mela.

But the talk-of-the-town is his wicker palanquin — sturdy enough to accommodate a bride. It goes out on rent every wedding season, having caught the fancy of prospective brides and their families. Come Sharad Mela, it becomes

a money-spinner with children clamoring for joyrides, each ride going out for ₹ 10.

Nawab Ram still walks to the jungles near Jarahan, nearly 15 kilometres away, to cut bamboo culms for his modest enterprise. “These walks are draining, but bamboo is vanishing fast. I must walk to wherever there is bamboo,” he says.

But most of the Dodhar bamboo craftsmen cite the same reason when they are asked why they gave up on the skills they had acquired at the training session. Some of them had even said that they had forgotten most of it.

Nawab looks away for a while, and then slowly begins, “I can’t beg or sleep on a pavement. I want my son to get an education, even though I might not be able to fund him beyond the primary level. All I can do is walk to bamboo clumps, and make something to sell.”

He knows he has miles to go, and he is willing to do that.

Stitching their Lives with Hope

The Anta unit in Rajasthan's Baran district took the initiative to reach out to the differently-abled people in the area and make things better for them. In association with the government-run Krishi Vigyan Kendra, it offered teaching courses to the marginalized. The results were dramatic. The targeted beneficiaries got livelihood and a new meaning in life.

It is not always easy to break the barriers imposed by circumstances, particularly when it involves the poor living in faraway places.

Take the case of Khursheed Bano, who comes from a poor family and has lived life with both her legs dysfunctional. She had to drag herself from one place to another; she was completely dependent on others for survival.

Then there is Hemraj who looks much older than his 32 years. He used to run a tea shop. Stricken by polio in childhood, he was left with a deformity that made his life miserable. He found it hard to sustain his family, even with his wife chipping in as an occasional manual labourer.

Khursheed and Hemraj had given up hope. More than their physical problems, it was their psyche that crippled them. Khursheed needed help that would boost her self-esteem, give her a chance to be independent, and to be gainfully employed. Hemraj needed assistance to be able to look after his family better. Both needed support that would enable them to believe in themselves and their abilities.

Both lived in Rajathan's Anta town in Baran district, where NTPC has been running a 413-MW gas-based power plant since 1989-90. In 2007, the Anta unit decided to reach out to such people, but did not know exactly how and in what form.

So, NTPC joined hands with the government-run Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) to come up with a programme. They complemented each other: while KVK had expertise but did not have the funds, NTPC had the desire to help and could finance a programme. After many deliberations and studying the needs of the people, it was decided that skill enhancement would help those on the margins. Those who were poor, disabled, widowed, and divorced could benefit with skills.

The answer came in the form of a course in stitching. Dr. Sarla Lakhawat, a home scientist at KVK, recalls how local newspapers, pamphlets, and personal contacts were used to disseminate information about the free month-long stitching course.

It wasn't easy. There were not many willing to join; it took a lot of cajoling to find six students. They were differently-abled and came from different religious and caste backgrounds, but their difficulties and despair fused them into one community. They had to be pushed to take the opportunity to learn a new skill.

Even the parents of some students were reluctant; they agreed to send their daughters for the course only when they were offered reimbursement for the commuting cost of around ₹ 20 per day. Such was the despondency that the parents believed that going for a course would be a waste of time and money.

The six students were accompanied by five people who would help them come to KVK for the course and then take them back home. So, this became a batch of 11 — the helpers who stayed with the chosen candidates also took the course while they waited.

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It was during this programme that they realized that they had the capacity, aptitude, and now also an opportunity to do so much more than they had been doing all along. The one-month programme was more of a starter course; it familiarized them with the basics of stitching and tailoring but to become proficient tailors who could run a service,

they needed more training. And the students were ready for it. They wanted to get proper training which they could use professionally. So, with the help of NTPC funding, an 11-month tailoring course was organized. Here they learnt to make shirts, trousers, pyjamas, kurtas, and shorts—just like professionals.

Lakhawat of KVK smiles as she recalls, “These people had never put a thread through a needle and now they were thinking of stitching as a profession. It completely changed their world in more ways than one.”

The six disabled people formed the Sambal Nishakt Jan Self Help Group. Three more joined in later. They source their raw material straight from the mills in Bhilwara, which is about 250 km away. They cut the middlemen out and the profit is shared equally between all the members.

The group now also gets bulk orders for school dresses uniforms, as also work from Khadi Gramodyog. Their confidence has grown; they have taken big orders and delivered satisfactorily.



Readying bulk orders and earning handsome profits

Last year, the Sambal Nishakt Jan SHG made a profit of ₹ 120,000. Now the Hadoti Kshetriya Gramin Bank is ready to give them a loan but they prefer to rely on their own resources.

Hemraj still walks with the help of crutches, but he walks with a sense of pride. He has two sons, aged five and two. He says, “Now I can take care of my family easily. Earlier, it was tough. I hope that we get big orders.”

Khursheed and her co-student in the tailoring course, Rubiya, had never dreamt that they would be able to find a life partner and get married. Till now, they thought they were a burden on their own families. Now, with an income of between ₹ 3,000 to ₹ 4,000 per month, they often earn more than other family members. The way the world looks at them, and more important, the way they look at themselves, has changed. They earn more than their able-bodied husbands and command the respect of their families.

Not just have they made a success of their venture, they have also been awarded by the NGO World Vision; their SHG was declared the best in Baran district of Rajasthan.



The best Self-Help Group in Baran

The remarkable ability of this disabled group inspired others around them. It also reassured NTPC that it was going in the right direction. Another SHG was soon formed, the Jai Ambe Swayam Sahayata Samooh (Jai Ambe SHG). It had 10 women making travel bags, handbags, file folders, laptop bags, etc. They bought their raw material from Kota and stitched and printed the bags themselves. The group received bulk orders from panchayats, gram sabhas, companies, and found markets in rural bazaars and urban *melas*. Last year, they made a handsome profit of ₹ 1,80,000.

Among this group is Manju Bala, who also took a course in stitching organised by NTPC; she now works as a master tailor.

Manju was a simple housewife busy in family chores and fully occupied with her two children. Today, she runs a tailoring centre from home, named after her daughter. Not just this, she now goes to the nearby villages to train other village folk in tailoring. It has been a long journey from being a housewife, who rarely stepped outside, to a master trainer! Today, she has four sewing machines at home and hopes to get a loan to expand her business. Her other dream is for her daughter. She hopes her daughter bags a scholarship to study further. She wants to send her young son to Kota for better education.

For the people of this sleepy town some 60 kilometres away from Kota, the NTPC plant means more than power generation; it has also empowered them and changed their lives for good. Hope has replaced despair and endeavour has defeated dejection.

The leader of the Jai Ambe SHG, Kailash Verma, says, “Today, it is because of my earning that I can give our children a better education. One of my daughters is a nurse, another is in an agriculture college doing her BSc, while my son is in a private school in Class XI.”

A common thread runs through the thinking of these women working in the SHG. They see it as a means of giving their children a better tomorrow. But this empowerment has also helped them become more confident. Manju says, “I do not need to ask for money from anyone. I can spend on social occasions; I can give money to my children for their needs. But I never spend the money I get from training others. I save it for fulfilling such needs.”

Manju, whose husband is speech-and-hearing-impaired, lives in a joint family. She says, “I didn’t know how to read or write, had no skills and all I could do was housework. Now, even my in-laws say that I should look after my tailoring business and not worry about housework. I earn around ₹ 4,000 per month. I am sending my child to a private school. After all, I am doing all this for my children.”

For the people of this sleepy town some 60 kilometres away from Kota, the NTPC plant means more than power generation; it has also empowered them and changed their lives for good. Hope has replaced despair, and endeavor has defeated dejection.

Khursheed Bano loves to wear jewellery. With her first earning she got a gold chain made. She recently got married; she wants to gift her husband a motorcycle. All this has happened because she has tailored her life to become meaningful with a little handholding from NTPC.

(a) A Cut Above

A young couple, Dhananjay and Simi Halder, in West Bengal's Malda village seek to restart their life. They face financial problems but don't lose heart. A six-week vocational training course in cutting and tailoring, conducted by NTPC in collaboration with the panchayat, changed their life, as also of many others.

Dhananjay Halder and Simi Halder lived in a joint family where they did not enjoy the best of relations with other members. One fine day, the couple took their six-year-old child and walked out of the quarrelsome joint family home in the Malda district of West Bengal.

But they walked into a fresh set of problems. The family settled at a new place and it was not long before they realised that the meagre ₹ 5,000 that Dhananjay earned every month as a commission agent for a small company was not enough to make ends meet. There was also an additional financial burden: he had taken a loan jointly with his younger brother to fund a truck for the undivided family's transport business. The support of the joint family was gone but not the family loan that Halder still had to help pay every month.

The difficulties often led to discord, with couple blaming each other for their misfortune. Many squabbles later, and with no signs of their troubles ending, Simi decided to prepare herself to supplement the family income. The first thing was to finish school. She had only studied up to Class IX, so she got back to studying and cleared the Class X examination through the open school system. In between, she revived her love for embroidery, spending her spare time on the work for some of the villagers. In taking these steps, Simi showed herself

to be a fighter, an optimist, and a woman determined to do her best to improve the lot of her family.

This had especially impressed the head of the local panchayat, an elderly person who admired her talents with the thread and the needle. It is at the panchayat level that her luck would change one day.

Though Simi lived just outside the sprawling township of the NTPC Farakka Power Station at Pubarun, she did not know much about it. She had only visited the township on festivals or for occasional events like the flower and vegetable show. From the fleet of cars and two-wheelers that moved in and out of the township to the nearby power station every day, it seemed to be a prosperous place. She felt such levels of prosperity could be achieved only with a good education. Since that was something she did not get, Simi decided that her child should get a good education and enrolled him in a good local school.

Executives from NTPC approached the village panchayat with a programme to sponsor unemployed women interested in a six-week vocational training course in cutting and tailoring, which would be conducted by NTPC. The panchayat head immediately sent for Simi, and invited her to attend the workshop.

The prospect of acquiring vocational skills that could possibly be a future source of income was an opportunity that she could not miss. After discussing the matter with her husband, the couple went to NTPC. She was selected for the vocational training course in cutting and tailoring after a preliminary interview. Delighted, she returned home and told her friend and neighbour, Mampi Pal, about the new experience.

Mampi Pal lived with her widowed mother in the same locality and attended a vocational school at a nearby village. She had also completed Class X through the open school system and was supplementing the family income by tutoring students. Her mother worked as a domestic help and did not earn enough.

Mampi's late father had bought a sewing machine to help enhance the family income. After school, she often sat beside her mother to help thread the machine needle. On the eve of festivals, work pressure increased and dresses had to be delivered strictly on time. Inspired by her mother's hard work, Mampi began to like tailoring.

After her father's death, the family income decreased and her mother was forced to do domestic chores outside the home. Tailoring was not a business that could provide regular and round-the-year income to run the family. But now Mampi felt stitching clothes would be a way of helping her mother, adding to the family income just like her mother did at one time. A structured course in cutting and tailoring would help.

The next day, Simi took Mampi to NTPC. The friend qualified and she too enrolled for the course. Simi and Mampi became schoolmates, batch-mates, and the best of friends. They were taught the craft of cutting and tailoring by faculty members of the government-run Micro, Small, Medium Enterprises of Kolkata.

Apart from teaching the women the theory and technical aspects of tailoring, the programme also discussed ways of setting up businesses, so that after the training, the women could set up small sustainable enterprises. The trainees were given information about the ways of establishing a business, sourcing capital, the prerequisites of a sound marketing plan, etc.

Picking up the cue, the friends decided to give their newly acquired skills a try. But they could not venture into business alone, but together they made

Though Simi lived just outside the sprawling township of the NTPC Farakka Power Station at Pubarun, she did not know much about it. But it seemed to be a prosperous place. She felt such levels of prosperity could be achieved only with a good education. Since that was something she did not get, Simi decided that her child should get a good education and enrolled him in a good local school.

a perfect partnership! By virtue of her experience and exposure to embroidery work, Simi easily picked up cutting skills. Mampi was unused to and not confident about cutting the cloth. But she could stitch well with the help of the machine.

One could cut, the other could stitch.

Together, they made a good team. Yet, the partnership was not obvious in the beginning. The step from classmates to business partners had another twist that virtually forced the two into a partnership that just clicked.

As the two completed their course, they acquired the skills but little else. The Bengali New Year was approaching. Overburdened village tailors were turning down last-minute orders. Among those turned down by the local tailors was an elderly person whose daughter was visiting him after five years. He wanted to gift her new clothes, an auspicious gesture on the first day of the New Year, but no one would take his order. That was when the panchayat head called for Simi.

Simi had a simple question for the village head, whom she called Kakababu. "I would do it, Kakababu, but I don't have a sewing machine," Simi replied. "Then who does?" the village elder asked. The answer was obvious and instant: Mampi. "Why don't you use it? Make a partnership and start a tailoring unit," Kakababu said. It was the suggestion that started and sealed the partnership in an instant.

Everything was in place. The two had skills, a sewing machine, the drive, the motive. The timing was just right. And the tailoring business was born. It was a partnership based on friendship, trust, and mutual need. No agreements were signed, no documents were exchanged. Like the clothes they put together, this joint venture enterprise quietly took shape.

The arrangement is simple: Simi cuts the garments into shape and Mampi stitches them. The backyard verandah of Mampi's house serves as the makeshift tailoring base. And the backyard business goes on. The income is modest. Festive season brings good business and they earn ₹ 2,000 a month.



Simi and Mampi — partners in progress

Looked at from the terms of tens of thousands of businesses that are born and thrive, Simi and Mampi have not built anything extraordinary but, viewed against the backdrop of the hurdles they faced and the burden they overcame, the diligence and determination Simi and Mampi showed was indeed heroic.

(b) Of Daughters and Difficult Times

Cousins Alpana and Preeti Sinha did a Computer Course organized by NTPC. They went on to teach at a local School near the Shaktinagar Project, thus becoming a support to their own family's.

A few bicycles stand at the gate of cousins Alpana and Preeti Sinha's home in Kota Basti village some eight kilometers from NTPC's Shaktinagar project. The two girls sit on mats, out of each others earshot, in their yard. Eight to ten children of ages between seven and thirteen sit around the Sinha girls with notebooks open. A couple of them are chewing the pens while a few are flipping the pages of their dog-eared textbooks as Preeti stands up to bring chairs for us. The kids are distracted but they wouldn't show it. Preeti is not a very strict tutor but they would rather not have her telling them to pay attention to their books. Even Alpana, strains to hear as her cousin begins to speak. Having heard snatches of the conversation, she goes back to teaching her uncommonly quiet bunch.

The cousins, teachers at Saraswati Vidya Mandir and Intermediate College at Khadia by the day, turn private tutors in the evening. The students, most from the junior classes at the school, come to the girls for lessons in almost all subjects. Some of them walk from their homes, others cycle their way every evening from their villages that are a good two or three kilometers away. The students swear by their tutors' ability to make maths simple and English sound understandable. The cousins insist, it is an effortless chemistry they have with the students.

Preeti, however, begins with how she had never thought that she would end up a teacher. “As a kid, I wanted to be a dancer. Alpana has always been a singer, a good one. Our passion for our hobbies grew with time, but the trying times that my family had been through meant that they would always remain hobbies,” she says. “Besides, here in the hinterland, what chances does one have as a dancer?” she asks.

The girls’ family had always struggled for money. Alpana’s father worked as a mason with a contractor and Preeti’s still works as a driver — their incomes could barely take care of their household needs. There were years when the school would allow the girls a grace in paying their fees. There was even a year that Preeti’s cycle had to be sold to pay her fees. As children, they had wanted to help with the expenses, but had been left in knots about how they actually could.

The sun is out on a December afternoon, and Alpana is sitting bang in the middle of the playground of Saraswati Vidya Mandir and Intermediate College at Khadia. There are a few teachers from the school listening intently to the conversation, reminding her bits that she forgets to mention, which, they deem, make her story. It is her alma mater, so she speaks with ease despite the distractions.

“I would be lost thinking up the ways I could earn, even when I was in school,” Alpana says. She had passed the intermediate level in 2006 from there after 12 years of schooling and then enrolled for a private BA course. But her determination to work and earn kept growing. She talked to her friends, her teachers and read the papers, hoping to catch a break, but not one would come by for long. One day, a friend told her about a computer training course she was attending at the Computer Training Institute in Khadia.

Benefitting from NTPC’s initiative to bridge the digital divide between India and Bharat, 5,000 young boys and girls pass certificate courses in computer proficiency every year. The power giant’s collaboration with a Computer Training Institute promises that these could indeed be the first days of change.

“I was keen, having known that this was the digital age and I knew that NTPC had brought institute here. So, I assumed that the course would cost far less than elsewhere. The only thing I could think of then was how it would help my employment prospects,” she says. She convinced her parents to let her join. Meanwhile, to offset some of the cost, she started offering tuitions to the children in her village.

At Computer Training Institute, she found out that she had a flair for computers. Keystroke emboldened her. She would always try and keep pace with the instructor. The six-month long course, however, took a year to get over. Work at home and studies for the graduation course interfered, but her family and her instructors would prod her back on course.

The evening tuitions were the only time she felt less rushed, almost relaxed. She knew that being with children and teaching was working its magic for her. It was during one of these classes that she made up her mind about teaching as her calling. Sometime early in 2007, she spoke to Rajendra Singh, who had been her principal. Singh also had been a good friend of her grandfather. Acharyaji, as she calls Singh, was supportive. But the rules at school would not permit an undergraduate to come and work as a teacher.



Alpana — making most of the facilities available to learn computers

“However, there’s a vacancy for a computer instructor at the school,’ Acharyaji told me,” she recalls, “I knew right then that the Aptech course would save the day.”

Meanwhile, Singh was working at convincing the school’s management to let her teach other subjects for a slightly lower salary than a regular one. She was good at history when she was in school. So, now apart from teaching computer to students in all classes, she also teaches history in the junior classes, earning ₹. 4,000 a month.

“The break I was looking for came to me, and how,” she says, smiling.

Preeti had seen Alpana shoulder some of the burden, trying to keep the bills from mounting. It inspired her to give the option a long, hard look. She had been offering tuitions as well, and had liked it. A year junior to Alpana, she felt she had to contribute soon as well. Good in biology, she had worked for a short while at pathology lab for ₹. 1,500 a month. She learnt a lot on the job, she insists, but it wasn’t paying much. Besides, all she wanted by then was to teach.

Alpana’s appointment at their school had made it a little easier for her—she had a precedent to convince the management. Now, she teaches science in the junior classes and takes home ₹. 3,500 every month.

“When I was five, I used to take my notebook to the playground where my friends and I would play teachers. Little did I know, that someday I will actually be one,” Preeti says, her voice tinged with amusement.

“Sometimes, I teach the kids a little bit of the dancing that I still do,” she says, now in smiles.

Their family has been very supportive. Their mothers and Alpana’s elder sister take the pressure of household chores off them.

“I get time to sing,” says Alpana, “that’s how supportive they have been.” She also went to Allahabad to try for the talent show on TV, Indian Idol, a fact she is reluctant to disclose. “There was a big crowd. So, they cancelled the auditions,” she says.



Preeti shares knowledge and shoulders family burden

Both admit that they were a little worried about how they would perform but all apprehensions vanished when they heard from the other teachers that the children liked them. However, a personal loss is etched deep in their memories.

In 2009, Preeti's brother Aman was diagnosed with terminal bone cancer. The family pumped its entire savings into his treatment. They borrowed heavily, even sold some of their meager holdings. It was a challenging time for the girls — they had to keep coming to school to earn but their hearts were with the sick boy. The boy succumbed a few months later.

"We were very close," Preeti sighs.

The girls, despite their grief, picked up their bearings admirably, insist Preeti's parents.

"They have been more than sons," her father, Shiv Kumar says.

That comparison with a male child is not lost on anyone, and it is not a strange one. But it defies the sense it has traditionally carried. These two girls, empowered by a small act of corporate social responsibility, are challenging our patriarchal paradigm — even in a small Singrauli village.

The Witness to Change

When NTPC acquired land for its Rihandnagar project in 1980, Lokman Vishwakarma organized protests for higher compensation. However, the relations between the locals and NTPC officials not only improved over the years but also brought unprecedented development in the area, a fact the former antagonist acknowledges.

Septuagenarian Lokman Vishwakarma has seen it all — the arrival of the first land surveyors in 1980 in what is now Rihandnagar, the struggle of his people who had ceded their land to the project, the tents put up by the first batch of engineers, last year's Sharad Mela (the annual winter festival organised by NTPC), and every little thing that has happened in his part of the world.

With a good memory, he has many stories to tell. He colors them with details as his voice falls and rises with the twists and turns in the narrative.

"The project has been a mixed bag for the villagers," he says. "It brought for the villagers amenities which would never have come, for earlier they had been left to the government. Our children now go to schools which offer quality education. The sick are treated at the hospital in the township. It got us electricity, even though that took quite long. But it also has taken from us our land. Our people are drifting away from the simple life of the yore, some of the skills passed on from father to son since generations have no takers now."

At the outset, Vishwakarma offers his honest assessment of how life, since the coming of NTPC, has changed. "I can criticize the project for some of the wrongs but will not condemn it," he says.

His parents had moved to a settlement when their ancestral land came under the Rihand reservoir's catchment area. His father, a blacksmith and carpenter, eked out a living making agricultural tools for the farmers in the area. The family tilled a small patch of land for pulses, maize, and other crops. The produce was enough for their needs. Vishwakarma, at the age of seventeen, had worked as a watchman at the Rihand dam site. However, he left the job to train under his father. Soon, he was mending beds and making doors for the other families in the settlement. His skills as a carpenter had been noticed by the dam authorities and he was often called to fix furniture and mend door frames in the offices. There was no dearth of work and there was respectability in the trade, he says.

"We were one of the well-off families in the village. We had our craft for income and our land for food," he recounts. In time, he got married and had his "brood of children".

One day, in 1980, a few project officials and district authorities came to his village. "They wanted to speak to the village heads. So, the *pradhan* (village

Early in 1990, Vishwakarma was asked by the NTPC officials to train the local youth in carpentry. Forty young men were trained under the master carpenter for a year. NTPC had invited a senior district official to felicitate the apprentices on their passing out. The batch included the trainer's son, Keshri Prasad.

headman) and I went to meet them," he says, suggesting that he already held some clout in his village then. "We knew from the land surveyors who had come earlier that a project was to come up soon. The officials and the *babus* told us that our land would go."

Vishwakarma talks about where his house once stood, where his kids grew up, where he grew up as a leader. A *neem* tree he planted in his youth stands tall near the materials' gate of the project. It had once been the pride of his courtyard. Some evenings, when he is up for a walk, he goes there to see its gnarled trunk and yellow-green leaves.

A few months after the first visit of the officials, work started on the site. Not before long, the quiet humdrum of the village drowned in the growl of earth-movers. The contractors had rounded up labourers from almost all corners of the country. Vishwakarma saw the social fabric straining. A feeling of dispossession ran high among his neighbors and the outsiders arriving by the truckload had left them resentful. Fights would often breakout between the villagers and the outsiders. Once, a fight between the locals and the outsiders left almost 60 people injured.

Meanwhile, the construction work was edging out the settlement. “There came a day when the digging got to my doorstep. There was a trench right outside my house,” Vishwakarma recalls. By the end of 1983, most of the homesteads of his had been lost in the landscaping. In February the following year, the displaced families got some compensation and land.

“This land is where we are sitting now. It was initially a barren stretch as far as the eye could see, with tree stumps — it had to be bulldozed,” he remarks. “Most of the displaced also felt that the compensation amount was quite low.”



Lokman Vishwakarma—witness to the growth of Rihand

In the struggle for higher compensation, Vishwakarma emerged as a leader. The *pradhan*'s negotiations with the district authorities had been unsuccessful. So, Vishwakarma organized the protests against the possession of the villagers' land along with a few of his contemporaries. “There I was — a rustic peasant engaging with some of the senior officials of NTPC as well as the district authorities,” he says. After many protests and long rounds of negotiations, the compensation amount was hiked.

In the years that followed, calls for his services as a blacksmith became progressively rarer. However, his trade as a carpenter flourished. His standing with the project authorities has grown stronger over the years. “Each official I met would introduce me to a few others. I built on these contacts and there were times one of them would arrange a meeting with the project's top bosses,”

'The project brought for the villagers amenities which would never have come, for earlier they had been left to the government. Our children now go to schools which offer quality education. The sick are treated at the hospital in the township. It got us electricity, even though that took quite long," says Vishwakarma.

he says. "I had understood the nuances of networking. I would often debate the project's impact with some of the officers. At the same time, I would quietly acknowledge all the development it had brought us. The nearest school, before NTPC came, was some 70 kilometres away

as was the market. I couldn't ignore the fact that our children did not have to stay away from us to get educated. Neither did we waste an entire day getting rations anymore."

Early in 1990, Vishwakarma was asked by the NTPC officials to train the local youth in carpentry. Even without a formal policy, project officials had understood the need for strengthening the local stakeholders with rehabilitation. Forty young men were trained under the master carpenter for a year. NTPC had invited a senior district official to felicitate the apprentices on their passing out. The batch included the trainer's son, Keshri Prasad.



Lokman Vishwakarma overseeing his son's progress

Keshri now has his own flourishing carpentry enterprise. “Most of the cupboards, sofas, chairs you will see in the offices and homes in the township are made at Keshri’s unit,” Vishwakarma says with paternal pride. He attributes some of his son’s success to the latter’s entrepreneurial acumen, some to NTPC. When Keshri wanted to buy all-terrain vehicles, which are preferred for traversing the hills of Kaimur, the power company endorsed his credit-worthiness for a bank loan. The jeeps now run on hire, supplementing Keshri’s income.

Lokman Vishwakarma, the grand old man of Punarwaas Gaon, sits on his cot as he carefully dissects the Rihandnagar project’s role in shaping the lives of the villagers. The talk now steers to what is expected of the company.

“Today, there is a distinct restlessness in my village. The people are eager for amenities to come; they want to grow with the project. These are dreams that would have been lost on me if I had stayed opposed to the project. But I have changed with the times. I know what the project can give and what it can’t. I also know what it can take away from us. On the whole, I think that my people have got nearly as much as they gave up. But this exchange is not and should not be static. Needs will change with time and I hope my village and the project are sensible enough to understand and respect this fact,” he observes sagely.

Providing a Healing Touch

Whether it is the tsunami-hit Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Ladakh ravaged by a cloud burst, or Sikkim rattled by an earthquake, NTPC is always among the leading organizers of relief and rehabilitation operations.

It was like any other day in December but it changed everything.

The sea was in turmoil, huge waves started hitting the coast of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. And, for the first time, everyone in India came to know of something called tsunami. Apart from these islands, Tamil Nadu and Kerala were also witness to nature's fury. On December 26, 2004, the sea turned hostile and, in the early hours, hit the shores of these islands leaving a trail of death and destruction. Tourists and revelers queued up at the airport to save themselves, while the locals remained incomprehensible. Around the same time, thousands of miles away, a group of young men were packing their bags and medical equipment to reach this area to help the people.

These included an orthopedic doctor from Rae Bareilly, an ENT specialist from Ayodhya, and a physician and a pediatrician from Sonbhadra in Uttar Pradesh. They were probably the first doctors from mainland to arrive at the chaotic Port Blair airport. The task for these doctors, all from NTPC, was already cut out. They had to help the overcrowded hospitals of Port Blair. The hospitals told the story of the calamity which had befallen these islands.

The hospitals were witness to people suffering not just with the injuries caused by the monstrous waves that swept away their homes and hearths but also the trauma and scars of witnessing what for them looked like the end of the world.

They could not comprehend what was happening, children were getting nightmares, women were moaning the loss of their families. There were many men who did not just lose their limbs but their will to live. These were wounds which were deeper than what doctors could heal. The doctors of the NTPC team, during their 15-day stay, dealt with the people of indigenous tribes and others who had broken bones trying to flee the killer waves.

The scene was same in Tamil Nadu and in Kerala. In Kerala's Kayamkulam, near the Rajiv Gandhi Combined Cycle Power Project (RGCCPP) of NTPC are Arattupuzha and Thrikunnapuzha. These sleepy coastal villages, sandwiched between the Arabian Sea in the West and Kayamkulam backwaters in the East, share a distinctive geography. Both are thickly populated, especially on either side of a coastal road that barely separates the lake from the sea. Both are idyllic coastal locations, serenely tucked away from the mainstream bustle of Kerala but are highly vulnerable to natural calamities.

And they saw nature's fury when hit by tsunami in December 2004. The fishermen families, which had over the past 100 years witnessed sea erosion, saw on that fateful day the wrath of the sea. The land was flattened and they had to pick up the pieces to rebuild their lives with help from NTPC through various initiatives.

Mobile medical units were launched by the company to provide free basic medical help. To solve the drinking water problem, bore wells were dug and several education initiatives undertaken.

An NGO, Samunnathi — promoted by NTPC and comprising representatives from the region, district officials, and NTPC — coordinates the comprehensive and effective execution of various welfare activities in the region. It also oversees implementation of welfare projects. It played a key role at this difficult time.

The mobile medical units have also been game changers. People no longer depend only on the government run primary health centres (PHCs). On average, 90–100 patients visit each unit per day for free medical care. “We give better service to the patients than PHCs do. The number of patients is high during the monsoons, when the area is more vulnerable to infectious diseases,” says Dr. Ajith Kumar of the mobile medical unit.

Karthikeyan of Arattupuzha echoes the sentiment of many in his village, “We are happy and relieved by the services of NTPC's mobile units. We get free medicines and don't need to go to PHC.” Apart from this, the company organizes free medical camps and also helps the local PHC.

The RGCCPP has also given furniture and kitchen utensils for MIZPAH, a school for differently-abled at Peringala in Kayamkulam. The school coordinator says, “We are happy and indebted to the RGCCPP authorities for

their assistance. Our children got cots and other furniture in their hostel with the help of RGCCPP authorities. As our school does not get regular funds from government or other agencies, we find it difficult to meet the needs of children. The assistance is a blessing for us, as running a special school is not at all easy.”

Given the close proximity to the sea, the project-affected areas and the neighboring areas face the problem of non-availability of drinking water. In the absence of piped water supply, people are forced to buy water and store it in large containers inside and outside the house for washing and cleaning purposes. The RGCCPP has constructed an overhead water tank, with a capacity of 90,000 litres at AKG Nagar in Arattupuzha panchayat. The water tank project is functioning successfully in coordination with the Kerala Water Authority.

After the tsunami, the whole NTPC family got together to help the affected people. It contributed ₹ 1.52 crore as employees’ contribution; ₹ 8 crore was given by the company as its contribution to the Prime Minister’s Relief Fund. The doctors treated over 7,800 patients and provided food to over 18,000 villagers. Some 50-odd relief camps got power supply, thanks to the company. The company also helped in restoring the generating capacity of power stations in the months following the calamity.

It was not the only calamity that triggered a response from NTPC. When Ladakh suffered because of cloud burst, a freak weather phenomenon, in August 2010, leading to massive mudslide, the power major responded at once.

Karthikeyan of Arattupuzha echoes the sentiment of many in his village, ‘We are happy and relieved by the services of NTPC’s mobile units. We get free medicines and don’t need to go to PHC.’ Apart from this, the company organizes free medical camps and also helps the local PHC.

Choglamsar and Leh were the most affected areas. In just 10 minutes, huge boulders had come sliding down from the mountains, flattening everything that came their way. This cold desert, which hardly ever sees any rains, witnessed a flood. People were seen picking up their possessions

out of the debris with their faces lined with concern of the impending winters.

The school, which had become famous as the one which featured in the Hindi film, *3 Idiots*, saw a lot of destruction. A student, Kunzum, remembers that night in the girls’ hostel of the school. She says, “There heard thunder and a lot of rain. There was water all around us; our rooms were filled with water. We were lifted on the shoulders by our wardens and teachers.” Kunzum says that for months after the cloudburst, children still wake up in the night and fear the rains.

The worst fear among the people who had lost everything overnight was about the future. How would they cope in the harsh impending winters with no roofs on their heads? Aid worker Mohammed Sharif says that people are stranded in mosques and monasteries. He talks about the fear that the cloudburst spawned: “They are so afraid of rains that they walk up the mountains every time they see dark clouds.”

Isey Chawag is 54 and says he had never seen anything like that before; there was so much water pouring down that night. He managed to save himself, his wife and daughter wading through the mud, but his home was destroyed. Staying in a relief camp, he is worried about the future. He says, “I have no money, no resources to build a house. Mine has flattened. I dread the winters.”

NTPC promptly stepped in and as part of its corporate social responsibility, contributed generously to the project to build 450 prefab homes for the people of Ladakh.



Providing a healing touch: NTPC doctors with children in Andaman and Nicobar Islands

In September 2011, Sikkim was convulsed by an earthquake, measuring 6.9 on the Richter scale. It brought in its wake a lot of destruction. North and East Sikkim were the worst affected, where major stretches remained cut off from the capital Gangtok. Torrential rains, mist, and landslides made the rescue efforts by the Army jawans tough. Mangan was near the epicenter of the quake and

saw the worst of destruction. Along the Teesta river, villages such as Rangpo, Dikchu, Singtam and Chunthang saw their landscape being altered. The earth was cracking up, what were once roads were now mass of earth and boulders, land seemed to be cracking up at places, the mountains all around were shedding stones, large trees lay uprooted, and people lost lives, herds and property.

NTPC contributed with open arms. It gave ₹ 1 crore to the Sikkim Chief Minister's relief fund.

Whether it was the devastating tsunami that left a trail of death and destruction in the South, an earthquake in Sikkim, or a cloud burst in Ladakh, NTPC pitched in and made valuable contributions in the relief and rehabilitation works. More importantly, it stood by the people in times of crises and helped them rebuild their shattered lives — not just in the immediate aftermath of the destruction but in the long-term rebuilding activity. For it believes that its duty is not just to supply power to the length and breadth of the country and earn profits but also lend a helping hand wherever and whenever calamity strikes in India.

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