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BIHAR , EDUCATION , TECHNOLOGY

One Man Is Using Games, Videos & Tech to Take Education to the Remotest Corners of India

by **Shreya Pareek**

March 26, 2017, 5:51 pm

An interesting initiative called iSaksham is bringing the best of learning opportunities to some of the remotest corners of India, by using technology in an innovative manner to generate students' interest in education.

Mamta, a Class 11 student in the Jamui village of Bihar, is differently abled. She had to quit her studies due to various reasons, including the fact that her marriage was fixed at a young age. The iSaksham team did not only ensure that her marriage was delayed but also motivated Mamta to start teaching other village kids. She now earns a monthly income of around Rs. 3,000.

There are many young girls and boys like Mamta who have received amazing opportunities through i Saksham, an organization that is enabling them to complete their education and get respectable jobs.

Started three years ago by Aditya Tyagi, a Prime Minister's Rural Development Fellow, iSaksham is focusing on some of the remotest locations in India, especially those affected by Naxals.



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The iSaksham initiative focuses on some of the remotest areas of the country.

“

“When we first started we observed that either the schools were dysfunctional or the students did not attend classes on a regular basis. Many Class 8 students were unable to solve maths problems that 2nd graders should be able to,” says Aditya.

Aditya started engaging the kids through mobile games and suddenly saw great student participation. So he decided to adopt a model where low cost tablets would



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“I once saw a video course on robotics. I thought, if students can learn a complex subject like robotics through videos, they can surely learn basic science, maths and computers,” he says.



Aditya saw great student participation after introducing new activities and games in classrooms.

The iSaksham team has reached out to around 4,000 students so far and a tremendous change is visible in the children. From their attitude towards studies to their level of confidence, much has changed for the good. Many of them can now converse in English. Even young girls, initially shy about speaking up in class, now come forward and ask to see videos on menstrual hygiene on the tablet.



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“The Saksham Mitras charge very nominal fees for their services – like Rs.10 for an MS Word or other small computer course. In this way, they not only engage the kids but also earn extra income,” says Aditya.

The team has trained 40 Saksham Mitras so far.

Agatha Hansda is one such girl whose life changed after intervention by the organisation. Her training is now helping her use digital content to educate women and adolescent girls about menstrual health.



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The organization is using digital content to help students develop interest in education.

Though iSaksham has come a long way in its journey of three years, the path to success hasn't been smooth. Since India has such a vast number of languages and dialects, it is difficult to find content in languages that kids can easily understand and relate to. Although iSaksham is a sustainable model (the villagers pay for the tablets – not more than a day's earnings – in installments) it is still a challenge to recover the money from them.

Aditya is now trying to scale up the operation and is seeking financial help through a crowd funding campaign. The team of three is also willing to help anyone who would like to replicate the iSaksham model.

The organization is currently buying tablets in bulk to reduce costs. It will also be recruiting additional people to work on a regular basis on this project and create more relevant content for the children. Check out their [website](#) for more details.



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BENGALURU , CHILDREN , TOURISM

Summer Vacations in Bangalore? Do Something Different With Your Kids & Rediscover the City!

by **Sanchari Pal**

March 25, 2017, 10:51 pm

Looking for interesting getaways to take your child to when the schools break up for the summer vacations? From hidden-away historic buildings to unique farms in the lap of nature, Bengaluru has many attractions that don't appear on traditional tourist itineraries for the city.

As the temperatures begin to soar, here's a look at some great summer escapades in Bengaluru for you and your family. These off-the-beaten-track treasures won't stay secret for long, so get exploring!

1. The Martin Farm



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Photo Source

The Martin Farm is an attempt to ensure that urban kids can get a close up view of animals, birds and even bugs. The farm also organises experiential nature workshops on wildlife conservation concepts, scientific phenomenon, traditional agricultural techniques and more. For instance, mulching, bird watching, tracking pug marks, observing a pond at night and even digging through elephant dung.

Also, getting up, close and personal with the farm's chaotic but cute assembly of pigs, cows, goats, horses, emus, rabbits, ducks, guinea pigs and turtles is definitely more fun than a visit to a zoo or a mall!

To know more, click [here](#).

2. The Green Pocket



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Photo Source

Located in the heart of Bengaluru, The Green Pocket is literally a ‘pocket’ of green’ that offers interesting outdoor experiences for children – like organic gardening, storytelling under the trees, craft, puzzle making, nature-inspired painting, harvesting vegetables, playing in tree houses, tyre swings and more. This pretty play space’s aim is to help children have a memorable childhood by providing a safe space to run around in, climb trees, interact with animals and learn from nature.

To know more, click [here](#).

3. Amma Saraswathi Loka



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Started in 2006 by PD Ravindra, former Chief of Maintenance at Hindustan Aeronautical Ltd (HAL), Amma Saraswati Loka explains scientific concepts in a fun way to children. A compulsive creator, Ravindra's exhibits at this free-of-charge museum include a shuttle launcher, a wave pendulum, a dancing fountain, a massive star gazing umbrella, a hovercraft model, a cycle-cum-wet grinder and even portable traffic kit (complete with lights and barriers).

To know more, [click here](#).

4. Turahalli Forest



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Photo Source

Considered to be Bengaluru's only surviving forest, the Turahalli forest is a stretch of lush greenery located at a distance of 20 km from the city (off Kanakapura road). With beginner-level cycling tracks and walking trails that take you up to a craggy peak (with sweeping views of the city), this place is perfect for a family picnic in the lap of nature. If your kid enjoys bird watching, don't forget to take a pair of binoculars along!

5. Embassy Riding School



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Photo Source

A novel horse-riding experience for your child with a qualified trainer and a relaxed Sunday outing for yourself sounds like the perfect plan, right? The rustic ranch-like ambience, verdant walking trails, a gaggle of geese hanging around and a charming Italian food joint all add up to the brownie points of this no-fuss getaway on the outskirts of Bengaluru.

To know more, click [here](#).

6. HAL Heritage Center and Aerospace Museum



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Photo Source

If your kid is fascinated by flying, take him to this wonderful museum for a peek into India's fascinating aeronautical history. At this one-of-its-kind museum, you can see some life-size models of indigenous aircraft designed by HAL such as the Marut and Kiran. Interesting exhibits also include a MIG-21 and a vintage Canberra bomber. The tiny café, a koi fish pond and the opportunity for kids to engage in mock dogfights at the simulator machines complete the experience.

To know more, click [here](#).

7. Pyramid Valley International



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Photo Source

Whether you enjoy meditation or not, a trip to simple but exceedingly lovely spot is something you will definitely enjoy. The main pyramid, Maitreya-Buddha Vishwalayam, is the world's largest pyramid for meditation and Asia's largest pyramid for any purpose. Designed on the principles of the Giza Pyramid, this mammoth pyramid is fitted with 640 Himalayan quartz crystals (in the King's chamber) and is surrounded by landscaped rocks, lush gardens and serene water bodies. Definitely a must-see!

To Know More, Click [Here](#).

8. Jus' Trufs Chocolate Factory



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Photo Source

Wouldn't it be awesome to take a tour of a chocolate factory to see how a multitude of scrumptious, melt-in-your-mouth treats are made? Jus' Trufs offers just this along with plenty of workshops for both kids as well as adults by master chocolatiers. From learning about the history of chocolate to making your own customised chocolate truffle, this activity is bound be lots of fun!

To Know More, Click [Here](#).

9. Jain Farm



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Photo Source

Located about 40 km from the heart of Bengaluru, Jain Farms is great for a fun-filled getaway amidst lush greenery. Kids are sure to have a great time as they spot exotic birds, frolic in the pool, try their hand at clay pottery, learn how to fly kites and take a plantation tour on a bullock cart. There is also a well-stocked library for bookworms and a sattvic vegetarian restaurant that serves delicious food made from farm fresh vegetables.

10. Bangalore Fort



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Photo Source

While most Bengalureans have visited the Bangalore Palace and Tipu Sultan's Summer Palace, few of them know about the Bangalore Fort and its significant history. Originally a mud citadel, the Bangalore Fort was constructed by Kempe Gowda, the founder of Bangalore, in 1537 and marks the city's first steps towards forging an identity.

Later, Hyder Ali used granite stones to further expand and strengthen the fort, which played a big role in Tipu Sultan's stiff resistance to the march of the British army under Lord Cornwallis. If your kid is a history buff, he/she will love this place!

You May Like: 8 Talented Children's Authors Who Will Make Your Kids Fall in Love with Books

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A lover of all things creative and happy, Sanchari is a biotech engineer who fell in love with writing and decided to make it her profession. She is also a die-hard foodie, a pet-crazy human, a passionate history buff and an ardent lover of books. When she is not busy at The Better India, she can usually be found reading, laughing at silly cat videos and binge-watching TV seasons.



BENGALURU

SOLAR

SUSTAINABILITY

This Bengaluru Man Can Run an Air-Conditioned House Without Paying a Rupee in Electricity Bills

by **Sohini Dey**

March 25, 2017, 6:55 pm

Ugadi is one of the biggest festivals in Karnataka, and marked with holiday and merriment. Bengaluru resident Dinesh Pagariya has more than one reason for celebration.

His new house is slated for a housewarming and *pooja* on the day, but that isn't the only reason. Even before its formal inauguration, Dinesh's house has captured attention for its completely eco-friendly initiative.

Dinesh's new house has successfully harnessed solar energy from scratch, and did not seek even a temporary Bescom connection.



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A city-based real-estate developer and nature enthusiast, Dinesh has always emphasized on living a green life, from running an off-grid office operation to taking an electric-powered car over conventional vehicles. “I keep renewable energy as the criteria for all my activities.” He found himself deeply interested in solar energy and found an opportunity to incorporate the technology when he built his cousin’s house two years earlier.

“

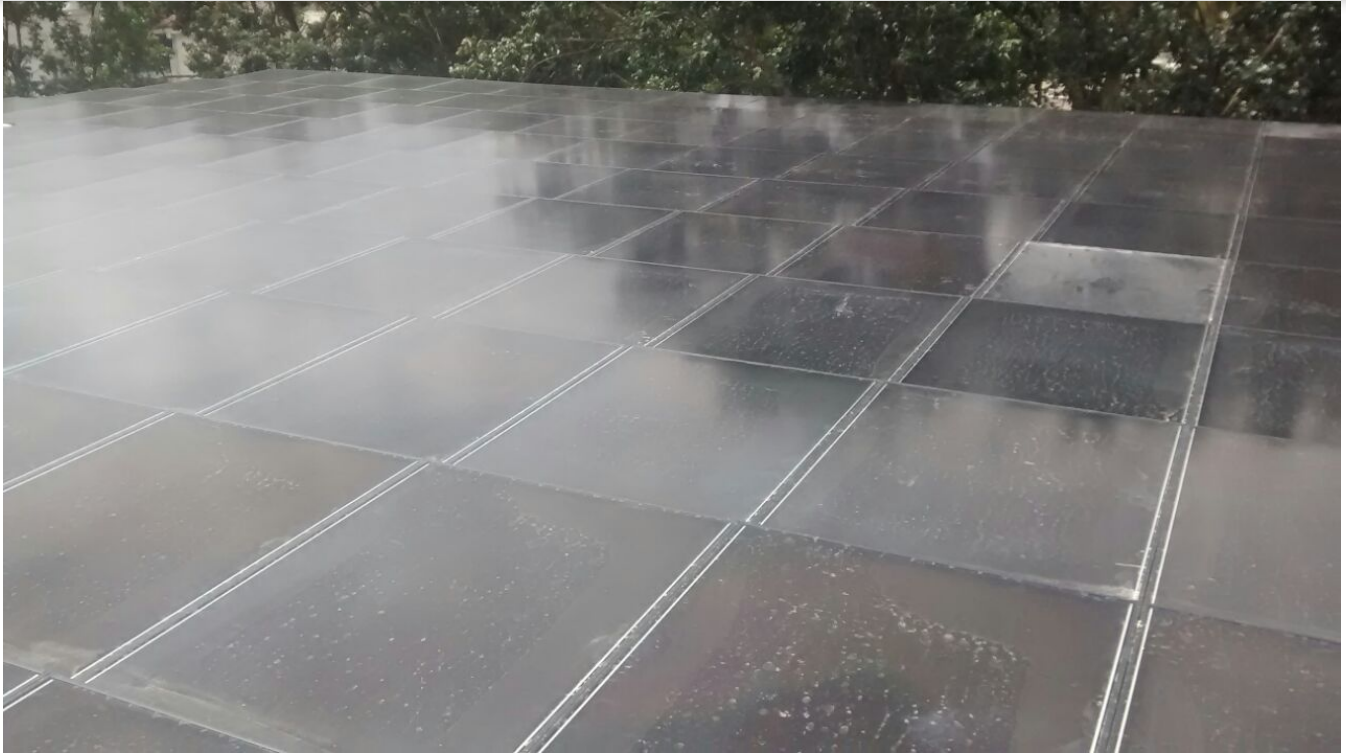
“We wondered why we should have to keep taking power from the electricity department,” he says. “Why don’t we generate our own power? My cousin’s house was somewhat smaller in size, and I thought that I could fix any errors more efficiently.”

There were no errors and the construction success motivated the builder to take a more ambitious approach. He decided to build his new house, in Bengaluru’s Jayanagar neighbourhood, on the same principles of solar-powered energy.



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While installing solar units is becoming popular among many ecologically conscious people, to use solar power during construction remains somewhat rare. Builders and architects remain somewhat sceptical of the process of green architecture. Fortunately, Dinesh found an ally in his architect, Ganesh Kumar of Studio 69, who encouraged him to continue the project despite the initial challenges.

“

Ganesh says, “I always try to make an environmentally-conscious angle in my building. If there is a tree, I plan the architecture around it. Dinesh approached me after he saw some of my houses. He has a beautiful plot—I kept the solar energy in mind before starting and also the trees. It



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Construction began with the installation of a small power plant atop the worker's shed. The plant was upgraded as the building proceeded and eventually shifted in a higher capacity over the completed house.

Further, Dinesh and his team employed thin solar panels, conventionally used for commercial solar power generation, which makes it possible to generate full power on cloudy days. These thin panels can also be stepped on and the engineering team installed over 100 panels on the rooftop to generate all the electricity needed.

The only challenge in undertaking such an ambitious initiative, according to Dinesh, is in the mind.



A self-confessed fan of Elon Musk, Dinesh says that a challenge in his venture was really the hesitation in getting started. "Initially it looked challenging but my architect encouraged me and it gradually got easier. We hoped to finish in one year



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Following the success of his solar ventures, Dinesh has also founded JJJ Solar, a renewable energy firm where he is joined by like-minded experts who he had worked with on previous projects. Invested in eco-friendly principles, they hope to educate people on renewable energy and collaborate to build more solar-powered commercial properties as well as houses.

To contact Dinesh Pagariya's team at JJJ Solar, click [here](#).

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CHILDREN

MADHYA PRADESH

QUICK BYTES

This 10-Year-Old Suffering From Progeria Got to Become Chairman of MP Child Commission for a Day

by **Aishhwariya Subramanian**

March 25, 2017, 4:39 pm

Afflicted by a rare congenital progressive disease called progeria, Shreyansh Waghmare had been told by his doctors that his condition did not have a cure. But this vibrant 10-year-old boy from Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh, had one wish – he wanted to Visit the capital city of Bhopal.

So, when his family reached out to the authorities to help fulfill his dream, they went a step further. Not only did the state of Madhya Pradesh arrange for him a visit to Bhopal, but they also made him the chairman of the Madhya Pradesh State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (MPSCPCR) for one day.



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Shivraj Singh Chouhan

@ChouhanShivraj

प्रोजेरिया पीड़ित 12 वर्षीय श्रेयस को मप्र बाल आयोग का एक दिन का अध्यक्ष बनाये जाने पर जो खुशी उसके चेहरे पर थी, वह अभिभूत करने वाली थी।

728 6:11 PM - Mar 24, 2017

154 people are talking about this

Those who have progeria show symptoms resembling aspects of aging from a very young age. Shreyansh's father, Arvind, said that his son was a normal kid who went to school but also had to deal with his debilitating condition.

You may also like: [This 14-Year-Old with Progeria Saw Taare Zameen Par When His Dream of Meeting Aamir Khan Came True](#)



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them as happy as possible.”

Of course, there is one more dream that Shreyansh harbours that his father hopes comes true some day. The child became a fan of Amitabh Bachchan after watching the film *Paa*, where the actor essays the role of someone who has progeria, and now he hopes to meet him one day.

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BENGALURU

CHILDREN

EDUCATION

INSPIRATIONAL

UNDERPRIVILEGED

WOMEN

Refusing to Retire, This Passionate Teacher Now Educates Trafficked and Abandoned Kids

by **Shreya Pareek**

March 25, 2017, 4:04 pm

Padmaja Ramamurthy has taught in both government and private schools during the course of a long career. But nothing compares to the work she is doing at the APSA Dream School, Bengaluru, using all the unusual teaching techniques at her disposal to help trafficked and abandoned children put their best foot forward.

Padmaja Ramamurthy, 60 years old, started her career as a primary school teacher in Bengaluru. Little did she know then that the profession she grew to love would not only change her own life but that of the hundreds of children she has taught.



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Padmaja's passion for teaching has only increased with time.



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School, which is one of the best schools of India. I also did B.Ed while working, to get deeper into teaching,” she says.

Her passion for teaching grew when she shifted to Kolkata. She began to discard traditional modes of teaching and engage students through projects, activities and technology.

“

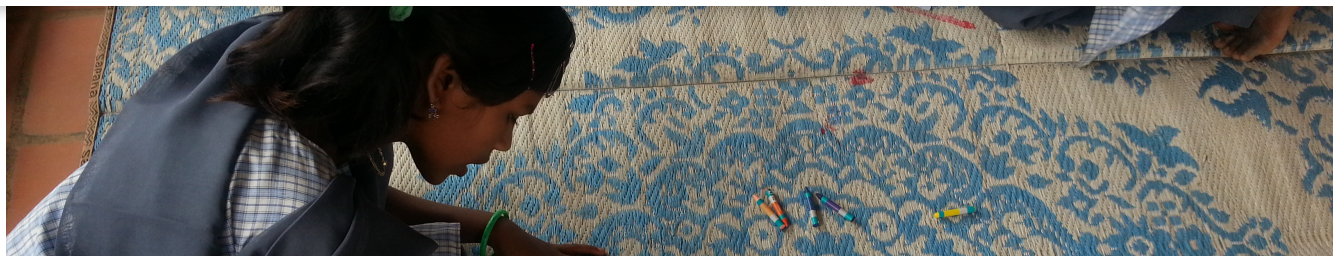
“I developed a strong bond with my students. They loved my classes and my passion to teach grew stronger,” she recalls. Later, she did an MS in Education Management and became more serious about her career as a teacher. “I had this urge to always know more than my students. I wasn’t taking it as job. I loved teaching and there was nothing else I’d have liked to do,” she says.

During her 13-year stint as a teacher, she worked with many different schools – including high-end private schools and poor government ones too.



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Art and activities are an integral part of her classes.

She would give students projects to do, which would make the learning process more interesting. She used technology, audio-visual tools, multimedia, etc., to keep their interest alive. “In government schools one has to usually dilute even simple things to make the children understand concepts, while in private schools a different approach should be taken,” she says.

After retirement, Padmaja did not give up on teaching. She started working with the APSA Dream School, which works with trafficked children.

“

“This, by far, has been the most satisfying and enlightening experience for me so far. These students come from a very different background. There cannot be one single syllabus that can be



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When Padmaja joined the APSA Dream School as an English teacher, she knew it would be a challenging task to help the kids clear exams in the subject as the students were mostly from Kannada medium schools. But her unique style of teaching has helped her students shine in the subject.



She has been an instant favourite among kids.

APSA runs a one year programme and offers various courses for trafficked and abandoned children. One of the programmes of APSA focuses on child labourers. “The children are often neglected or are orphans so we need to be very careful with them. We cannot be too harsh as they will not be able to learn and we cannot be too soft either, else they will take us for granted,” she says.



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are left at home by the parents to take care of younger siblings. “At APSA, we get both the elder kid and the younger sibling who might still be a couple of months old. While the elder kid is encouraged to study, our team takes care of the infant. We have cradle facility, soft toys and many activities to keep the kid engaged,” she says.

Though Padmaja joined APSA as an English teacher, she took up the role of coordinator and plays a key role in implementing all the programmes.

“

“There has been a huge change in the attitude of the kids. They had zero self esteem when they first joined, and after the one year course they are very positive, confident and ready to take up challenges,” she says.

In the future, she wants to continue teaching and make APSA a model school for all the non-formal schools. In her free time she reads a lots o books, goes for walks and enjoys time with her family.

“

“I take every day as it comes. There is nothing in particular that inspires me to teach – this is what I love to do. This is my passion and it keeps me going,” she says. “There are so many things that one can do even after retirement. Why waste your life doing nothing? You can contribute in so many ways to the community. Do your bit,” she concludes.



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BLOG

HIMALAYAS

MOBILE

RURAL INDIA

TECHNOLOGY

UTTARAKHAND

TBI Blogs: This Tiny, Remote Village in Uttarakhand Has Its Own Instagram Account!

by **Shivya Nath**

March 25, 2017, 3:34 pm

Technology has become ubiquitous, and has the potential for great positive transformation. A small village in the Himalayas is leveraging the power of social media and digital technology to attract tourism and support its community.

Around 11 hours by road from the nearest train station, Sarmoli could be just another mountain village tucked away in the remote Uttarakhand Himalayas, dealing with the impact of changing weather patterns on farming and tourism, struggling with average schools, and straddling India's great rural-urban divide. All against the surreal backdrop of the snow-clad Panchachuli peaks.

There was a time when we only heard stories of such villages from adventurous friends. These days, we are more likely to hear about them on Instagram. Stories that either romanticize the lives of their locals, or sympathize with them.

But Sarmoli (in *tehsil*/Munsiari) is not just another mountain village.



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Finally some #snow in #munsiari , everything and everyone breathed a sigh of relief, #winter has finally come , its time to take the morning off and enjoy the #earthly #pleasure of #heavenly #pristine snow #incredibleindia #uttarakhandtravel #uttarakhand ##himalayanark



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Thanks to the vision of avid mountaineer Malika – and Theo and Ram – who now call Sarmoli home, this is a village where locals come together every summer to run challenging marathons with an elevation gain of 8,000 ft. over 20 km., and have workshops around yoga, Wikipedia, and birdwatching in their annual Himal Kalasutra festival. A village where women juggle the hats of homestay hosts, entrepreneurs, guides, social activists, and homemakers. The philosophy is simple.

It's okay if the village folk want to move away for work, but they shouldn't have to leave out of desperation or boredom.



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White is nothing without black and vice versa #white-collared #blackbird #snow❄️ #himalayas
#himalayanbirds #himalayanark #turdus #albicinctus #winters #oak #birdstagram #birds
#birdsofinstagram #indiaclicks #indiabirds #uttarakhandbirds #munsiari #sarmoli

A post shared by The People of Munsiari (@voicesofmunsiari) on Mar 13, 2017 at 8:47pm PDT

Inspired by their organic way of life during my time in Sarmoli, I had a crazy dream of leveraging Instagram to encourage the locals to share their life philosophy directly with the world. A visitor like you or me can hardly do justice to their struggles and aspirations, their relationship with the mountains and rivers, and their daily lives.

Wouldn't it be something if they could use technology to tell their stories in their own voices?



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Views of #clouds playing with the #mountains from above Lilam villagr of the #Gori #river #Valley, the walk is nice, steep #exciting #himalayanark #himalayas #himalaya #trek #clouds #uttarakhand #india #munsiari #munsyari #pithoragarh #johar #joharvalley

A post shared by The People of Munsiari (@voicesofmunsiari) on Sep 26, 2016 at 10:37pm ...

A basic Instagram tutorial, followed by photography tips from a fellow traveller, led to the birth of [@VoicesofMunsiari](#) – India’s first Instagram channel run entirely by village folk, despite limited connectivity and English. A channel where teens and adults alike share pictures and stories of things that matter to them. These range from the 50-odd bird species in their backyard to the joy of school holidays and snow-filled winters.

You can see the challenge of keeping their spring water sources clean, and of course, the mountains that are home to them.



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This is Mesar Kund of Munsiri . It is very peaceful place the most important thing about this place is its beauty . I like to sit here and listen the song of birds . Also it is good place for birdwatching . Many birds like barbets , drongos , eagles , woodpeckers , sapsuckers and many more other species of birds you can see here easily . There are many tales about this pond . My Nani (grandmother) told that this pond was much longer than now it is , but year after year it started drying . There are two ponds . New one pond has been made by the villagers .

On May every year we celebrate a festival called " Mesar wan koutik " . I like this fair too much . Please come and enjoy 'Mesar Wan Koutik ' . Also the beauty of Munsiri . Photo by Alka...? #mesarkund #uttarakhand #uttarakhanddiaries #uttarakhandi #uttarakhandtravel #uttarakhandtourism #uttarakhand_travel_diaries #uttarakhandtrip2016 #munsiari #munsiari 🌤️❄️ #sarmoli #junglischool #travelling #bird #birdwatching #beautiful #photography #instagood #india #incredibleindia #like #like4like #like4follow #peaceful #peacefulplac

A post shared by The People of Munsiri (@voicesofmunsiari) on Mar 7, 2017 at 11:35am PST

I expected the interest to die away gradually, but the account has grown in reach and engagement, and also in storytelling and photography. One of their photos was even featured on Huffington Post India!



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outdoor education programme in the village.

This can also bridge the digital marketing gap between potential travellers and the women-led homestay programme in Sarmoli.



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#camping #mountains #peak #joharvalley #munsiari #munsiyari

A post shared by The People of Munsiari (@voicesofmunsiari) on Sep 25, 2016 at 7:48am P...

To nurture these rural Himalayan storytellers, we are now crowd-sourcing smartphones to enable more locals to share their stories. At the moment, only a handful of families in the village own a smartphone, limiting the content on the channel. May 2017 will see a Photography+Instagram workshop—geared towards the village folk but open to adventurous travellers—in Sarmoli. It will hopefully lay the groundwork for the crazy dream of a photo exhibition in urban India. Hopefully, it will turn out to be not such a crazy dream after all.

How you can support Sarmoli's Instagram project:

- Follow [@VoicesofMunsiari on Instagram](#) and encourage these Himalayan storytellers.
- Got a spare smartphone? We are crowd-sourcing phones with good-quality cameras to enable more locals to share snippets of their lives in the Himalayas. If you'd like to contribute a spare smartphone, please send an [email](#).
- Join the Photography+Instagram Workshop in Sarmoli on 8th-11th May 2017. Stay in the women-led [Sarmoli homestays](#). Join us on a creative journey as we explore smartphone photography and Instagram in this beautiful mountain village. If you'd like to lead a photography workshop, please get in touch.

The author spent a month living in Sarmoli and learning about the unique way of life of the locals. Read more of her stories and experiences in Sarmoli [here](#), and follow her on [Instagram](#).

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DISABILITY , QUICK BYTES , WOMEN

Beyond the Call of Duty: Differently-Abled Commissioner Goes Door-To-Door to Collect Taxes

by **Aishhwariya Subramanian**

March 25, 2017, 3:29 pm

AR Pappammal, has spent a lifetime in public service. The municipal commissioner of the Manaparai, a town in Tiruchirappalli district of Tamil Nadu, she has only a year of service left until she retires. And she has also dealt with disability nearly all her life having been afflicted with polio as a child.

But none of that is stopping this determined woman from personally making door-to-door calls to the constituents of the municipality encouraging them to pay their tax dues.

For Pappammal, it is a matter of ensuring that she is able to uphold her duty and meet her targets. Since four of the district tax collectors are currently not on duty on account of varied illnesses, the collection for the year has stood at 67%.

Thus, she along with her team, are working overtime to bring the numbers up in a short span of time.



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Image for representation. Photo source: [Flickr](#)

Speaking to *Times of India*, she noted that aggressive measures were being taken to reach out to as many people as possible. Shrugging her own disability, the public servant who has worked for 31 years, said that the municipality has taken to public address system to request, cajole and beseech everyone to come forward on their own accord.

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Her own efforts in personally going to people's houses has found some amount of success according to Pappammal. She says, "Some of them agree to pay on the spot after identifying me but some still offer excuses to postpone even after waiting for a whole year."



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