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AROEHAN's Monthly Newsletter

Volume 3, Issue 2

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In this issue:

(Tap to jump to article)

In solidarity for tribal governance

Migration brings work,
but at what cost?

Mokhada girls visit Palghar

Photo of the Month

An Introduction to Right to Vote

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AROEHAN organised a taluka-level discussion on tribal governance on January 21st, 2023 at the Lions Club of Palghar. Various NGOs, their representatives and journalists from Palghar attended the session. AROEHAN's chairperson Dr. Helen Joseph, secretary Ms. Anjali Kanitkar, CEO Mr. Amit Narkar and several team members were present on the occasion. The discussion was facilitated by renowned Marathi author and sociologist Mr. Milind Bokil, known for his acclaimed novel 'Shala'.

The main objective behind this discussion forum was to address ways in which different NGOs from the area can come together to work on tribal governance. Bokil spoke about the fundamental issues faced by the tribal communities of Maharashtra. The rapid industrialisation of natural resource-rich tribal land has affected tribal communities drastically. It has led to cases of extortion, exploitation and violation of their rights. After privatisation

in the 1990s, there have been drastic social, political, economic, educational changes in the tribal areas.

One of the key points discussed at the forum was the importance of the Panchayat Extension to Schedule Areas (PESA) act. Emphasis was laid upon the necessity of making the communities aware of this Act, the 73rd and 74th Amendments of the Constitution of India and the formation of the Panchayati Raj, the importance of an efficient governing system in the community and the village level and laws such as Forest Rights Act of 2006 and Biodiversity Act, 2012.

As per Section 4(5) of the Forest Rights Act, no member of a forest-dwelling Scheduled Tribe or other traditional forest dwellers shall be evicted or removed from the forest land under their occupation until the recognition and verification procedure has been completed. However, a large number of forest-dwelling indigenous people have been denied their rights in recent years.

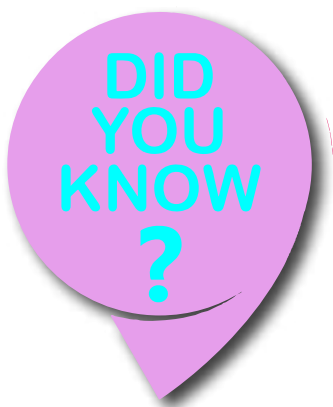
As per the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, as of August 2021, a total of 42,64,959 claims had been filed across the country under the Forest Rights Act, 2006, of which 42% (17,83,708) were rejected. The grand number of rejections is not because of lack of eligibility but the inability of the vulnerable groups to fill out the forms correctly, to begin with. The subdivisional-level committees and the district-level committees are dominated by government officials, especially the forest departments and there is a reluctance to acknowledge the Forest Rights Act.



**Migration brings work, but
at what cost?**

Migration for work continues to be one of the major phenomena faced by villages across the country. Lack of gainful employment in and around the place of residence has forced generations of villagers to migrate. Conditions surrounding the migration process can increase the vulnerability of these people to ill health, poor sanitation, socio-economic crises, school dropouts and exploitation.

Recently, our Health team visited 97 of many tribal families that migrated from our project areas post-monsoon. Upon reaching the place, we found 47 people living in plastic tents by the roadside. For sanitation, they used outdoor bathrooms and toilets. They relied on a nearby well for drinking water. Without any job security, they worked as per the availability of work at different places. Male labourers were paid Rs. 600 per day whereas female labourers were paid Rs. 500 per day.



The Government has allotted Rs 60,000 crore for MGNREGA for the year 2023-24, the lowest allocation in 17 years, cutting down nearly 32 percent from the revised estimate of Rs 89,400 crore.

When we interviewed women, to our dismay, they expressed satisfaction with the work. The living situation was not ideal or safe. They lived in breakable tents with very less sanitation around them. None of them knew about the Anganwadi centres or schools nearby. It is likely that the mothers and children there do not get the necessary vaccinations and also children drop out of school due to migration. However, in spite of all these disadvantages, they had relief in the fact



they were receiving daily wages for their labour work.

They revealed that despite applying for labour work under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) back in their respective villages, they hardly got any work. There were also discrepancies in payment even if they got work. This happens often due to the litigious and technological gap among people regarding availing benefits of MGNREGA. Hence, they find relief in being paid on a daily basis for their work rather than not getting paid or not getting work, even if it is at the expense of family health and education.

Through AROEHAN, we try to leverage schemes like MGNREGA, PESA and Forest Rights, as well as allied livelihood opportunities, to ensure the sustenance of people within their villages. We also help ensure the good health of the community with our various health initiatives, including monitoring the health of children and counselling mothers. Migration makes it difficult to keep track of their circumstances, thus, increasing their vulnerability to various health and socio-economic issues.



Mokhada girls visit Palghar

On 17th February 2023, a group of girls from Mokhada came to visit the Palghar Zilla Parishad for an exposure visit. At first, they visited AROEHAN's Project Office in Palghar, where they were greeted by CEO Mr. Amit Narkar. Out of almost 47 of those who visited, 32 girls were visiting Palghar for the first time. The group included adolescent girls between the ages of 11-19 years, including students, school and college dropouts and even young mothers accompanied by their children. AROEHAN Prerikas, PCMs, Health PO Tamanna, Documentation Officer and admin PA were part of the visit.



At Zilla Parishad, the Extension Officer Mr. Govind Dhanga greeted the group and introduced the girls to different departments within the building. The group took a tour of the Health department, Education department, Women and child development department and CO offices. They were guided thoroughly by officials at each department. The group gathered in a speaker hall and conveyed their concerns regarding healthcare to the Extension Officer and other officers. They spoke up about the lack of resources and facilities in the healthcare systems of the Primary Health Centres (PHCs) and rural hospitals. AROEHAN's activists as well as locals from Mokhada were also vocal about the negligence of government employees toward the needs of the communities and their arrogance toward the tribes. They requested to look into the lack of resources in their areas and suggested supervising the situation.

Later, the group visited the office of Childline 1098 in Palghar. They were guided by Rushabh Nikam about the organisation's work for child protection and safety.

Most of the group had never seen a railway station or travelled in railways. Hence visiting Palghar Railway station was also a part of this exposure visit. They were guided about trains and train platforms and were provided with a demonstration for purchasing train tickets.

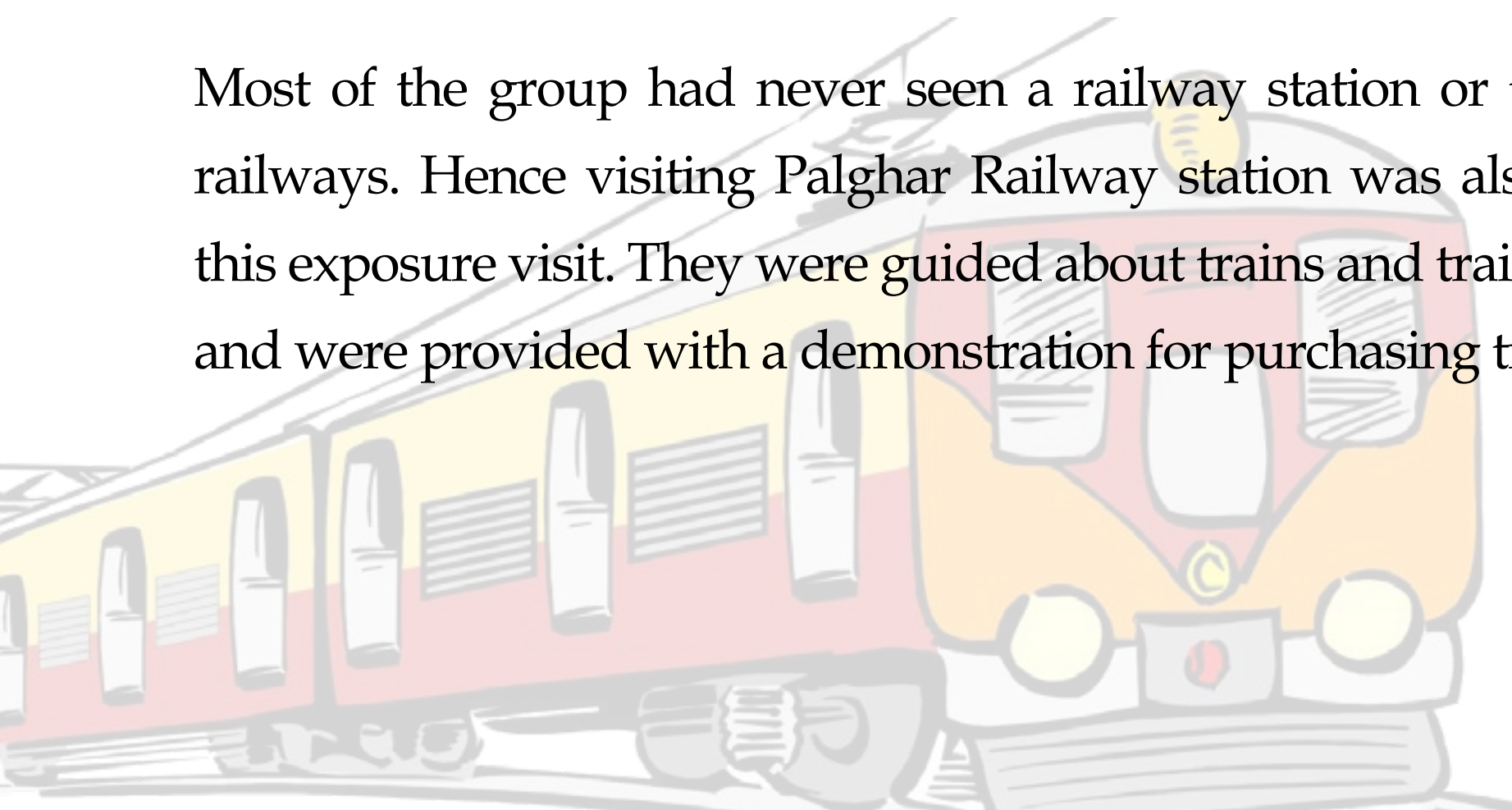


Photo Of The Month

Credit : BHAVESH PORE



Child Cabinet Elections: An Introduction to Right to Vote



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Voting is not the most we can do in democracy but it is the least.
- Gloria Steinem

India is among the largest democracies in the world. Voting has been instrumental in the growth of the country. While voting privileges are provided as soon as an individual turns 18, not everyone understands the power voting holds. A vote is valued more than the voter in a democracy. It is important to develop a temperament about the importance and consequences of voting in the future generation.

The initiatives like Bal Panchayat and Student Cabinet Elections expands the potential of children in skills like public speaking, creativity, leadership and academic skills. It also gives them a platform to voice their thoughts and opinions. In December 2022, the Education team started the preparations for the first-ever Students Cabinet election by AROEHAN at Suryamal and Palsunda Ashram Schools. Students were excited to participate in all the activities with great enthusiasm - right from canvassing, polling to counting.



The Education team started the process for Bal Panchayat elections and interested students gave their names for various positions in the cabinet. Nine positions were shortlisted for the exercise - Chief Minister, Deputy Chief Minister, Education Minister, Health Minister, Sports Minister, Discipline Minister, Cultural Minister, Cleanliness Minister and Admin Minister. Students from classes 8th to 12th participated. They organised rallies and shared their roles and agenda.

Initially, 2 Student Cabinet Elections were held in Suryamal and Palsunda Ashram Schools in December 2022. The initiative received positive feedback and was encouraged by the school headmasters, teachers and the School Management Committee. The total participation in both schools was 667 out of 818 students and 17 teachers. As of February 2023, a total of 8 such elections have been conducted in 8 Ashram Schools with attendance of more than 2,000 students and a participation rate of approximately 93% per school on average.





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