



Wanderers with a MESSAGE

The nomadic Gosavi community has two sects – the Sanyasis, who renounce worldly pleasures and the Gharbaries, who live a worldly life

ANJALI JHANGIANI

"IN the 18th century, when the world was dominated by Buddhism, Jainism and Islam, Sri Sankaracharya, who is regarded as an *avatar* of Lord Shiva and the eminent exponent of the Kevala Advaita philosophy, gave four of his disciples the responsibility to manage a mission to revive Hinduism," says Dutta Goswami, ex-deputy commissioner. "Since the tribals had not been converted and followed their own, local practices, the disciples thought that the revival of Hinduism would have a good start if the tribals were converted. The tribals, after gaining these religious principles, went and spread it all over the country, and thus started this nomadic community which is scattered all across the nation," he adds.

The website gosavisamaj.com was created by Goswami, who is the current administrator of the site. The idea behind was to connect people of the Gosavi nomadic community from all over the country. "Since our community is scattered all over the



country, we connect with each other online, through social networking sites and mostly through our community website. I would really appeal to the members of our community to connect with each other and use the opportunities technology has provided us to unite," adds Dr Kalidas Bharti, a social worker who actively uses Gosavisamaj.com. There are 10

names for the nomadic cult of worshippers of Lord Shiva and Shri Dattatreya - Gosavi, Gosai, Gussai, Gosain, Goswami, Mahant, Jogi, Sanyasi, Dandi, Dashnami - one for each order.

The community can be largely divided into two sects. The Sanyasis renounce all worldly pleasures, and do not marry but devote themselves to

spirituality and the Gharbaries take permission from the Guru to marry and live a worldly life. "Only Gharbaries are predominantly found nowadays. It has become very difficult for a man to give up everything and take sanyas. However, though the Sanyasi sect is not very visible, it still exists," says Dr Bharti. Due to the nomadic nature of the community, the people also don't have a specific language of their own. "The people used to pick up the local language of the region that they would reside in," he adds.

For this community, death is not a mournful affair; instead it is celebrated. "We believe that the soul passes into the next life or absorbed into the higher being and must be given a joyful parting," says Goswami, adding "The corpse is made to sit in a Doli and taken around the residence with joyful cheering and music to the backyard or a burial place where the corpse is buried in salt. It is believed that the body doesn't need to be purified by fire, like that of an ordinary Hindu, as it has already been cleansed of all earthly frailty."

As far as festivals are concerned, being Lord Shiva *bhaktis*, it comes as no surprise that *Shivratri* is the biggest festival for the community. "*Shivratri* is our main festival. Only fruit juices, sabudana khichdi and fruits are consumed during the 24 hour fast of *Shivratri*. We break the fast with something sweet. We also worship the *Shiv Ling* by pouring water and milk over it and then distribute a prasad made out of jaggery and *kavat*," says Sameer Gosavi, an engineer at PMC. "We are pure and strict vegetarians," adds Goswami, with a smile.

Let the beauty abide

Trekdi is an organisation on a mission to save the butterflies of the city through treks and camps

SALONI DUTTA

AFTER being in the greys of a concrete jungle, a colorful dash of yellow, pink or orange flickering near your window or wandering around your plants may seem like much-needed relief. The butterfly is one of the prettiest residents of the fauna kingdom. Their colours and patterns mesmerise the mind and leave one spellbound. But like many animals and plants, the butterflies are reducing in numbers in both urban areas and jungle areas, due to poaching, habitat loss and lack of flora compatibility. Trekdi is an organisation that organises treks and camps to promote butterfly conservation. "Butterflies are insects and people rate them very low, hence the status of existence of many a butterfly species is not known," laments Pinakin Karve, director of Trekdi.

To help with butterfly restoration and conservation, a Butterfly Camp is being organised in Pune by Trekdi at the CDSA campus near Chandni Chowk on May 7 and 8.



The camp will cover theory courses to improve the know-how of people regarding butterflies and take them for a short trek near the Sinhagad valley to show them different kinds of butterflies that exist in their natural habitats. The concept of butterfly parks would be explained and a short brief on butterfly taxonomy & classification, life cycle, habits & habitats of butterflies, butterfly photography, individual & group efforts for butterfly conservation would be provided.

Pinakin has been a part of 'Butterfly India' nature trails and activities and has also tried his hand at butterfly photography. According to him, many of the butterflies are captured, collected and exported to be sold in grey markets across the world. Peacock Butterfly sells for around Rs 400 to Rs 500 each in the market and hence the trade is a tempting one as one trip to the jungle yields more than 10 to 20 butterflies at a time. Blue Oak Leaf, Blue Mormon, Striped Tiger and Great Eggfly are some of the other common and beautiful species of the Pune region.

Dwindling urban diversity of butterflies is a matter that asks to be looked into seriously. Steps need to be taken to make people aware about how their actions lead to habitat destruction of butterflies. "The rapid change of land patterns has led to a quick decline in the numbers of butterflies across urban lands. An area that used to be a river bed is now a road, a dense park is now a housing society; all these changes are taking their toll on the butterfly population by shifting them to alien habitats," says Karve.

The pattern of distribution of butterflies depends on the availability of their food plants. The use of foreign plants in our gardens and homes is hence quite taxing for the butterfly as it deprives them of foliage, nectar and pollen as food. Use of Taiwan grass instead of the local grass of the region, Chinese bamboo, different kinds of palms, nursery-developed orchids, and so on, provide a harsh environment to the butterfly even in a garden. "Use of nursery grown plants and especially flowers, deprives the butterflies of nectar and hence the use of indigenous flowering trees and plants should be promoted for restoration of the butterflies," explains Karve.

Around Town

Special tribute

A SPECIAL *smriti satsang* had been organised in memory of Sathya Sai Baba at Sadhu Vaswani Mission on Monday, May 2. Mission members as well as Sathya Sai Baba's devotees gathered to sing *kirtans* and bhajans at a hall. At the end, the chairperson of the Mission read out Rev. Dada J P



Vaswani's tribute; "For him to live, was to love. Unborn generations to come will wonder at and be amazed by the grandeur of the individual that Baba was and will revere him as a benefactor of humanity. His overpowering love mesmerised and drew thousands to him from all over the world."

NUPUR CHAUDHURI

ON April 30, the 60 people who had gathered at High Spirits, Koregaon Park, had only one subject in mind – fighting Childhood Sexual Abuse. The event, Take Back The Night, was organised by Aks Counseling and Training Agency, and it brought together teachers, parents and counselors from different schools to learn more about how they can empower children against sexual abuse.

"In the last six months, out of the 10 cases I got, six were related to child abuse. That's how I decided on the topic for this year's event," says Barkha Bajaj, director, Aks Counseling and Training Agency. Since 2009, Bajaj has been hosting Take Back The Night in the month of April, which is the Sexual Assault Awareness Month. Last year, the subject was Sexual Assault and Stalking. "Take Back the Night first appeared in Europe in 1976 and is today a sign of empowerment for men, women, and children across the world. This year's event organised by us saw representatives from seven to eight different schools. It's important for teachers to understand what a child is going through and what necessary steps should be taken. A teacher can help the child to open up and talk about the abuse. Then parents or helplines can be involved," says Bajaj, who is also a counselor at the Mercedes Benz International school.

The event addressed various myths associated with child abuse, the main one being that nothing can be legally

Together, Against Abuse



Childhood sexual abuse needs to be talked about in order to empower children, say those who attended 'Take Back The Night' on Saturday

done about such a situation. Says Shubhada Randive from Muskaan, "The event had parents, teachers and young adults supporting the cause. Each one was so keen to know about the issue. Breaking the silence about abuse is the best thing to do. Child sexual abuse cases

should be reported and there are ways to empower the child to deal with it."

The other panelists included Anuradha Sahasrabudhe, director of Childline India (Pune), Dr Radhika Rawat from Muskaan, Dr Naina Athayle from Holistic Child Development India, pe-

diatrician Dr Anupama Sen, and lawyer Gaurav Sharma. "I have launched anti-child abuse campaigns for years now and I've realised that majority of people tend to brush the issue under the carpet. They avoid talking about it. Take Back The Night was a

good platform for people to ask questions and get more informed," says Sahasrabudhe. "People think that such things don't happen in our society, but the truth is that this form of abuse is spread across all sections and income groups. It is important for parents and teachers to ensure that a child has the correct support system," she adds. For that, she stresses that appropriate sex education should be imparted at a young age. "A lot depends on how parents approach the topic. Their body language should be such that the child is encouraged to talk about abuse if it takes place," she says.

The crux of the event was that child abuse is not a personal or family issue. It is a societal issue. Bajaj stresses, "Most juveniles have at some point faced abuse in their lives. Very often, the victim later becomes the perpetrator. Also, people think that it is strangers who abuse, but 70 per cent of the times, the abuse is done by someone that the child trusts – even a family member." The evening also saw everyone participating in a candle light vigil post the interactive panel discussion. "The candles were lit in the hope that together, by spreading more awareness, the abuse will be effectively dealt with and children will be saved from the trauma," Bajaj concludes.