

Working towards multiple causes

Harpal Singh, the founder of The Nanhi Chaan Foundation that has been engaged in improving gender ratio, environment and interfaith harmony, talks about protecting the girl child through diverse initiatives

How do these three diverse aspects meet?

■ We began in 2008 by asking the community to plant saplings for those who have expectant mothers or brides in their family. The dedicated sapling for the girls and women in villages and communities will provide an identity to them, and they would in turn take care of the plant and nurture it. The gesture also indicates the community's will to support the rights of women. When we started the initiative, we launched it in the Golden Temple of Amritsar. We then moved to churches, starting with New Delhi and across several temples, and

Q&A



the Ajmer Sharif Dargah. When we did it, we also ensured that the participants took the pledge that they will respect other faiths. Encouragingly, the idea has found a lot of acceptance across communities.

What is the state of gender ratio in TN and in other parts of the country? Can you share your observations on the reasons for the skewed ratio?

■ We were surprised to see the disparity in gender ratio between two districts within the same State. Madurai had a good one, while Salem had a shocking gender ratio. When we tried to find the reasons, we found that social structures and leadership roles played vital roles. I have therefore argued that unless you make it transparent and remove the secrecy associated with it, like with the PCPNDT Act, we are not going to be able to tackle it. The Act makes the revelation of the gender of a foetus a punishable offence. I argue in favour of revealing it and making all the stakeholders accountable for the safe delivery of the girls.

What has been the reach?

■ From hospitals to the community and with organisations like the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII), we have found support. Interestingly, the CII has been celebrating March 8 as Nanhi Chaan Day. We encourage anyone to take up the objectives and propagate it, as long as the means don't go against the three objectives.

మహిళా సాధికారత వైపు అడుగులు వేద్దాం



విజయవాడలో అతిథులు పద్మశ్రీ నీలకాంఠన్, హర్నాల్ సింగ్



మహిళాసాధికారతపై వ్యవస్థాత్మక సదం

కొలంబులు: మహిళా సాధికారత దిగజూ అడుగులు వేయాల్సి స్పష్టం చేయబడింది. పద్మశ్రీ నీలా కాంఠన్ పేరుపై నిరంకుశంగా ఆంధ్రప్రదేశ్ సర్కార్ ద్వారా పాఠశాలలు ప్రారంభించబడ్డాయి. మహిళా సాధికారత అనే అంశంపై కేంద్ర ప్రభుత్వం నుండి స్పష్టమైన మార్గదర్శకాలను పొందడానికి మహిళా సాధికారత పాఠశాలలు ప్రారంభించబడ్డాయి. వీటిలో పాఠకులు మహిళా సాధికారతపై అవగాహన పెంచుకోవాలి. వీటిలో ప్రతి కుటుంబం కనీసం ఒక మహిళా సాధికారత పాఠశాలను ప్రారంభించాలి. మహిళా సాధికారత పాఠశాలలు ప్రారంభించడం ద్వారా మహిళా సాధికారతపై అవగాహన పెంచుకోవాలి. వీటిలో ప్రతి కుటుంబం కనీసం ఒక మహిళా సాధికారత పాఠశాలను ప్రారంభించాలి.

- పద్మశ్రీ నీలకాంఠన్ వెల్లడి
- విజయవాడలో ప్రారంభమైన సాధికారత పాఠశాల
- ప్రభుత్వం ద్వారా ప్రారంభించబడ్డాయి
- ప్రతి కుటుంబం కనీసం ఒక మహిళా సాధికారత పాఠశాలను ప్రారంభించాలి

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What's in a name?
The word *Nanhi* means little girls and *Chhaan* is the shade of a tree

Working together
Over the years, *Nanhi Chhaan* has been associated with several schools, places of worship and corporates like CII

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This year, children from 22 states took part in the *Nanhi Chhaan Schools' Essay* contest



FOR A BETTER FUTURE

Harpal Singh tells *Shresha Ghosh* how our country's skewed gender ratio can be made better by celebrating the birth of the girl child

“ Girls grow up to be mothers, nurturers — they are givers not takers. Saplings also grow to be the same. They give unconditionally”
Harpal Singh

We live in a generation that has advanced technologically, academically and economically. But given the current state of affairs, it seems that we have not advanced socially. Headquartered in Gurugram, *Nanhi Chhaan Foundation* is a not-for-profit organisation set up with one primary objective, which is to address three important social issues the country is currently facing relating to the adverse gender ratio, environmental degradation and secularism. The objectives of the foundation since its inception in 2008 have been to wholesomely address these issues and restore nature's balance, says Harpal Singh, Founder-Chairman of *Nanhi Chhaan Foundation*, during his recent visit to the city. Excerpts from an informative conversation:

What was the objective behind setting up *Nanhi Chhaan Foundation*? Why target the girl child?
Currently, there is a lot of talk about the girl child and the environment, but if you go back ten years, you will find that there wasn't much talk about these two extremely important subjects. One of the problems prevalent in Punjab and other northern states is the adverse gender ratio — more males are born than females. We wanted to celebrate the girl child. So, we decided that whenever a girl is born into a family (or married into one), the family would plant a sapling in the park surrounding the Golden Temple, in honour of the girl. We started at the Golden Temple, but very quickly, we launched the idea in other places of worship — we went to churches across the country, temples in Jaipur, dargahs in Ajmer and temples in Mahabalipuram. The idea is that it should spread across all faiths and we should work together.

that it's our idea. We tell people that it is their idea, they can adopt it as their own and become ambassadors.
How has the shift from a fast-paced corporate life to a life of social service changed you?
For the past ten years, I have spent 90 per cent of my time not in the corporate world, but being a part of many not-for-profit institutions. In these places, we work for disadvantaged children around the world like Syria, South Sudan, Afghanistan and the Rohingyas too. I have enjoyed the corporate world, but I have learnt a lot more while working for non-profits. The basic phenomenon of how one should integrate empathy, good work, and social service and combine them not just for profit, but for a larger purpose, has been a wonderful evolution and I have been enjoying it thoroughly.
Working with the idea of secularism is scary in India. Why did you do it?
Faith is a powerful idea and Indians are religious in their own way, so we decided to use the power of faith positively. We wanted them to engage with India's issues and people have been nothing but supportive. I will give you one example. When we went to the Govind Devji temple, the chief mahant there suggested that we give saplings to families from the temple whenever we launch a programme. He, in turn, promised to call upon the ten most important mahants in Rajasthan and give them a sapling each in honour of our foundation. I think this is why we do well; we never say



Almost a decade later, do you sleep better at night knowing that you are making a difference?
Today, many people feel that we should do socially relevant work only when we're much older. In my case, I can say that I have been doing it for many years. It's actually immensely more satisfying and rewarding than what I was doing in the corporate world. What is really satisfying is that nowadays, I find more and more young people wanting to be a part of non-profits. Experiencing this wonderful shift where youngsters become social entrepreneurs is satisfying and they are finding good causes like water conservation, environment protection and women's safety to fight for.
Reach Out: nanhichhaan.com

Pic: Ashwin Prasth



The Shri Ram School

18 mins · 🌐



Good morning! We are super proud to announce that a student from our Mousari campus, Aakansha Narain of IB1, has won the finals of the 5th Nanhi Chhaan National School Essay Contest, 2018 amongst participants from 250 prestigious schools across India.

There were 17 finalists from 22 states with over 8000 entries.

She has received the prestigious trophy along with a cash prize of Rs. 40,000.

Many congratulations to her!



Towards a better **TOMORROW**

Harpal Singh, Founder of Gurugram-based Nanhi Chhaan Foundation, champions causes including the adverse gender ratio, through his initiative **P6**

