

PROJECT FOR CHANGE

RE-IMAGINING THE LABOR SETTLEMENT



Women in Real Estate Network

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Introduction

The fast developing world we live in, where innovation is at the forefront of transformation, and progress is evident, we see a rapid urbanisation. The construction industry which is spearheading the development presented its vulnerable facade in the post-pandemic world. At this juncture, the “Project for Change - Reimagining Labour Settlements” was envisaged to sit at the core of this transformation by bringing focus on the invisible force that propels this development. As the Sustainable Development Goals promises to leave no one behind, we will require an intensified focus on the humble construction worker whose dwelling and settlements garnered the utmost focus during the pandemic which brought to the fore the lack or shortcomings of the settlements across.

In 2020, about one in four urban dwellers lived in slums or informal settlements. This translates into more than 1 billion people, 85 percent of whom live in three regions – Central and Southern Asia (359 million), Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (306 million), and sub-Saharan Africa (230 million). Empirical analysis shows that a 1 per cent increase in urban population growth will increase the incidence of slums by 2.3 per cent and 5.3 per cent in Africa and Asia, respectively. The reasons behind slum formation in developing regions are many: rapid urbanization; ineffective planning; lack of affordable housing options for low-income households; dysfunctional urban, land and housing policies; a dearth of housing finance; and poverty. To achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, the world’s 1 billion slum dwellers must be given the support they need to lift themselves out of poverty and live free from exclusion and inequality. Adequate and affordable housing is key to improving their living conditions.¹

The deep inequalities exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic and other cascading crises further highlight the importance of sustainable urban development. Strengthening the preparedness and resilience of cities, including through

¹ Source: UN SDG Report on Goal 11 <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal11>

high-quality infrastructure and universal access to basic services, is crucial in the recovery phase and in our ability to respond to future crises.

All stakeholders in the construction fraternity, acting in collaborative partnership, will enable a more comprehensive and sustainable outlook / impact on the construction workers overall well-being. We propose to initiate this through the path of labour settlements which are co created by the construction workers enabling a collective and participative engagement. We are determined to take the bold and transformative steps which are urgently needed to shift the focus of the construction sector onto a sustainable and resilient path.

 What should the focus of the construction sector be on and where is it now?

Purpose

WiREnet World as a group intends to bring about sustainable and impactful change to the construction industry through the process of dialogue, research, publications, advocacy and partnerships

The recent times have brought immense focus on the plight of one of the main back bones of our industry - the migrant labour force. Their lives on construction sites, the facilities or the lack of it have all come under intense scrutiny. PROJECT FOR CHANGE is a way forward on how we could help bring about a dignified change to this incredibly important stakeholder in our industry.

We believe that addressing these issues will result in a much more stable and robust industry with better quality of work being produced and better construction timelines.

WiREnet World intends to study the various needs in detail through existing construction labour facilities, analyzing the various ways things can be improved using sustainable practices, documenting the findings and then strategizing on how we could work with the various stakeholders on how it can be implemented. We recognize that there are several NGOs already working in this space and intend to partner and collaborate with them in suggesting the best practices possible. The goal is to suggest a workable model with better typologies, common amenities and a safe living environment that could easily be used across construction sites which benefit not only the labour force and their families, but also, all other stakeholders in the industry.

The purpose of this report is to suggest avenues which can be adopted by all stakeholders in consciously contributing to the larger goals impacting People, Planet and Profit.

People | It will make the labour settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable (SDG 11)

Planet | Cultivate practices for sustainable management of water and sanitation (SDG 6). Enable ways to form self-sustaining energy models (SDG 7).

Profit | It will result in a much more stable and robust industry with better quality of work being produced and better construction timelines (SDG 9)

Continued partnerships between all stakeholder will ensure a sustainable development (SDG 17)

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



Leaving no one behind will require an intensified focus on urban slums – home to 1 billion people

💡 Are we focused on People, Planet and Profit or just plain Cost, Quality, Time?

Approach

1. PHASE I:

- Collaborate – Foster an environment

We will understand the various perspectives through the questionnaire we share with the builders and contractors And through the surveys and conversations with people in the industry and online sessions. Get a holistic viewpoint about nurturing the living conditions of the labour, regularising their welfare needs and above all bring dignity to their lives.

- Conduit – Carry the message
- Bring together like minded NGOs / start-ups to partner and provide end to end solutions in this regard
- Document and deliberate on the current labour colony design and housing facilities
- Deep dive to find clarity on their pain points and real needs .

- Change – Through empathy

Empathy impacts change. The change can be documented however large or small. Sharing these success stories with the larger community ,highlighting some of the stories, especially about the women workers and how these interventions have improved health and hygiene, sense of belonging, higher self-esteem , while we also identify the social impact indicators and this will also include perspectives on the costs involved, capital and maintenance, ROI, compliance etc .

- Change impacts policy.

Establishing clear standards around construction labour welfare that can add to existing regulations (under BOCW act)

2. PHASE II: (Collaborate + Conduit+ Change)

- Undertake one project and see it through to completion as a pilot that can be the catalyst to inspire us as a group to build this further.

- Panel discussion Dialogue - What and how are we trying to achieve leaving no one behind
- Technical briefing Research - Presentation of the findings, successes, challenges & lessons learnt
- Presentation of case studies Publication – The Response: Key actions to be taken by key stakeholders including but not limited to All levels of government, private sector, and other Non-Governmental Organizations promoting the same cause
- Workshop with practical exercises The 3 A's to Accelerate - Adopt, Adapt and Advocacy. Train the Trainer to enable and engage in a multi-stakeholder mechanism to accelerate and build back better in the post pandemic environment.



Would you Collaborate, be the Conduit and enable Change?

BE THE CHANGE YOU WANT SEE IN THE WORLD

Current Scenario²

Construction activity in India is set to soar at an approximate rate of 700-900 million square feet of urban space each year, given estimates that 40% of India's population will be living in cities by 2030.

Construction is the third fastest growing industry in India

More than 50 million workers engaged in construction remain unaccounted because of gaps in identification and data disaggregation

The demand is limited due to gendered skill gaps and societal norms there are 10 times more men than women

More than 80 % of workers are informally employed .Besides agriculture construction employs the largest number of informal and migrant workers

Gaps in the last mile delivery of welfare and services

More than inr 380 million of the BOCW cess remains unutilised AApproximately 30 % workers remain unregistered less than 35 million are actually registered with the boards

Less than 30 million workers are live registered workers only 5 to 10 workers are eligible for benefits whose registrations are up to date

During the pandemic mere 36% were able to access direct benefit the rest suffered due to non availability of aadhar and bank details

This mid-skilled workforce includes circular migrants from distant or remote areas that score low on human development and economic indicators. They are entrenched in poverty and debt cycles , often struggling to make ends meet. Barely any women feature here.

3. Government and policy are backed by a strong legal framework but fall behind in implementation

- Gaps in enumeration of workers causes hindrances in the portability of basic services such as access to ration and accommodation

² <https://www.workersinvisibility.org/construction.html>

- Fragmented policy implementation and paucity of human resources leads to procedural hurdles in accessing entitlements
 - Shortfalls in monitoring of programs affects the feedback loops required to strengthen implementation
 - Ineffective utilisation of funds collected through BOCW cess deprives workers of due benefits
 - Fraudulent registrations under BOCw add to complexity further removing marginalised workers from the ambit of welfare
 - Lack of proactive policies to create an enabling environment for women reduces participation of women in the labour force
4. Industries survive due to underpaid informal migrant workers amidst a paucity of local workers
- On account of having several layers of contractors employers rarely extend formal company policies to the workers subjecting them to dismal living and working conditions
 - Legal loopholes that can be leveraged to limit accountability towards encouraging and facilitating registration of workers under BOCW
 - Lack of decentralised models for industrial expansion and development results in paucity of lucrative livelihood opportunities in source areas
5. Contractors who are primarily responsible for recruitment and welfare are often mired in informality themselves
- Workers dependency on and idolisation of contractors results in a complex relationship restricting independent mobility
 - The over reliance on the contractor creates a power dynamic leading to exploitation of the workers
 - Exploitative power centres among marginal actors further reduce the workers ability to break out of the trap of vulnerability
 - The lack of formal documentation hinders any semblance of job security, economic stability and financial inclusion
 - Lower wages and financial exclusion result in complex debt traps

6. Communities share experiences of distress from source to destination and over generations
 - Discriminatory practices at destination leave the workers aspirations of economic mobility unfulfilled
 - Lack of access to healthcare ration water hygiene sanitation and accommodation adversely affects their quality of life
 - Limited opportunities for quality education and skilling perpetuate an intergenerational cycle of informality and poverty
 - Widespread stigma and discrimination and lack of awareness about legal rights reduces bargaining power
 - Lack of universal resource centres exacerbates the barriers caused by incomprehensible systems and processes
7. Exclusionary practices and policy inaction make gender equity a growing concern in construction



Level playing field or 6' under?

BE THE LABOUR GREAT OR SMALL, DO IT WELL

Research

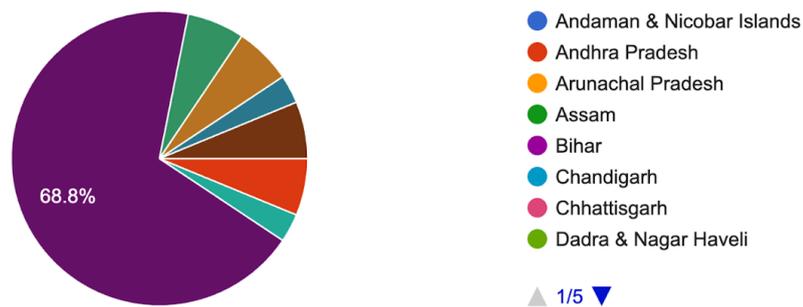
We have collected the data keeping it India focused .The intent of collecting the data on the role in project was to obtain a diverse opinion and deduce the key insights that commonly emerge from their responses that would influence the size of the unskilled labour and the welfare they benefit from .

The research was based on a questionnaire that was circulated within various stakeholders and the summary of the results are included below. We urge you to participate in this survey using the link below.

[Project For Change | REIMAGINING LABOUR SETTLEMENTS | A Survey - 2023](#)

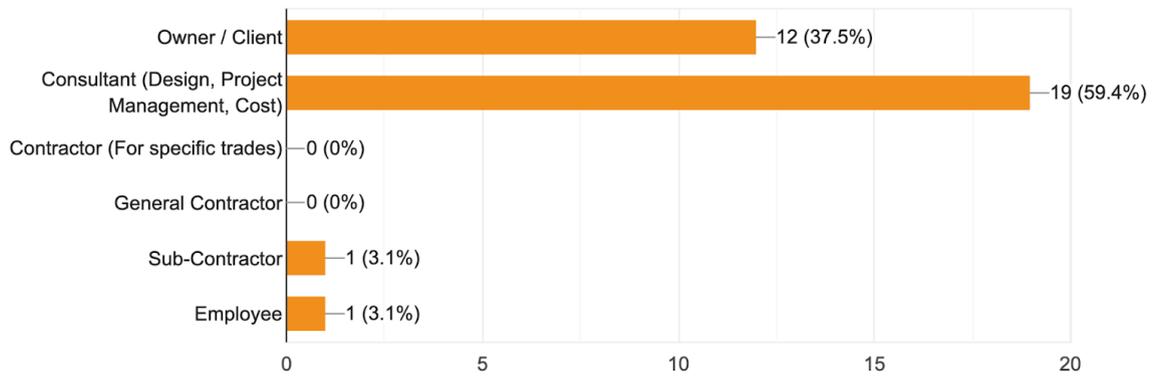
Location of Project

32 responses



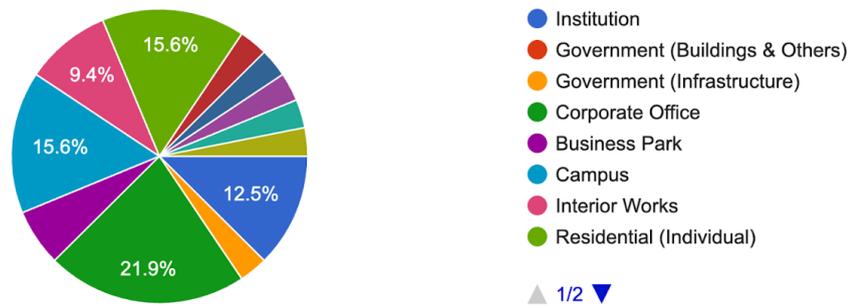
Role in Project

32 responses



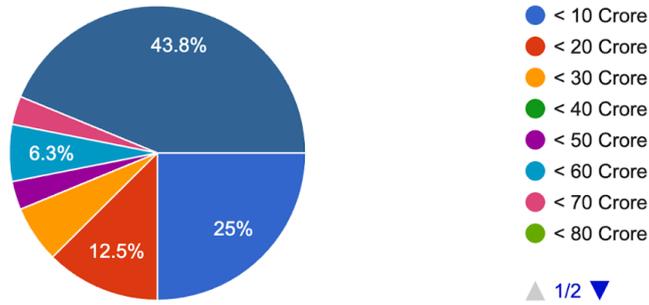
Type of Project (scope)

32 responses



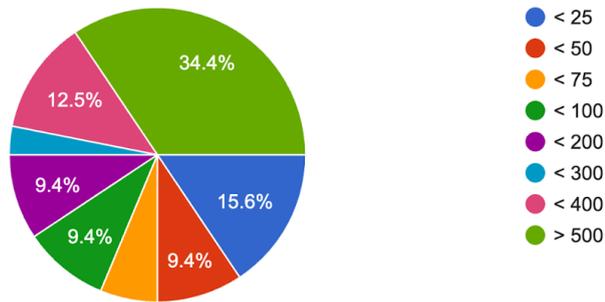
Size of Project (Overall Project Cost in INR)

32 responses



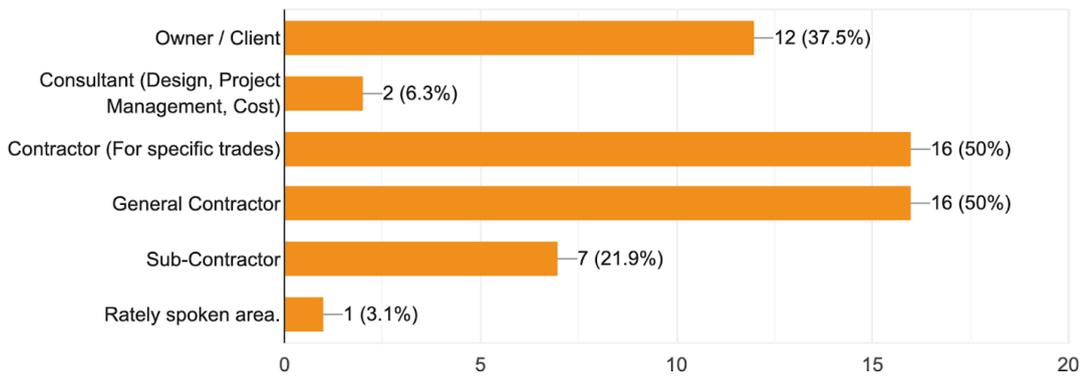
Average Maximum Labour Strength

32 responses



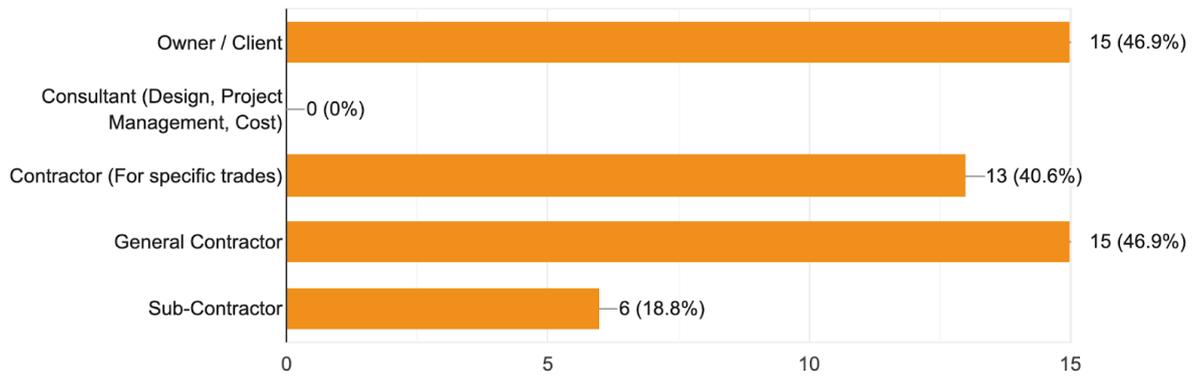
Labour Welfare was the responsibility of

32 responses



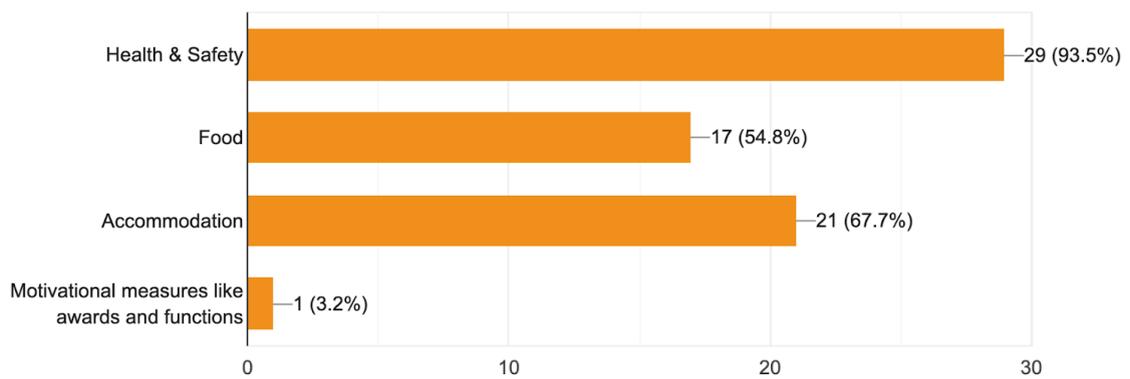
Cost of Labour Welfare was borne by

32 responses

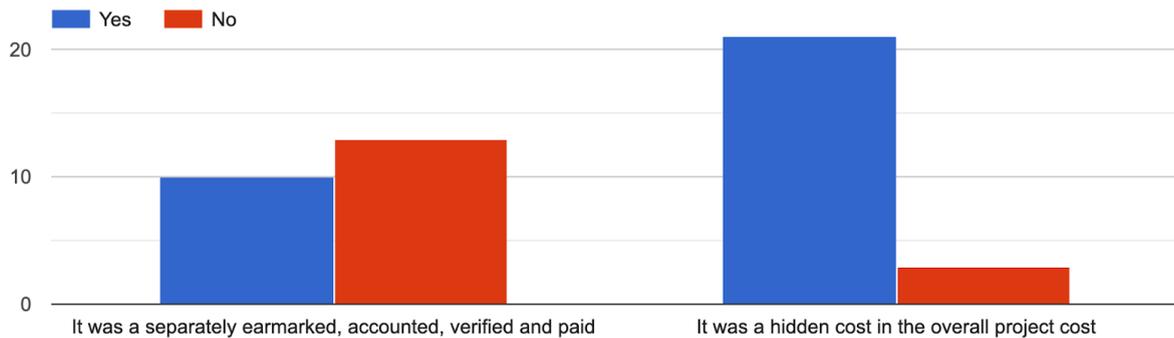


What constituted Labour Welfare

31 responses

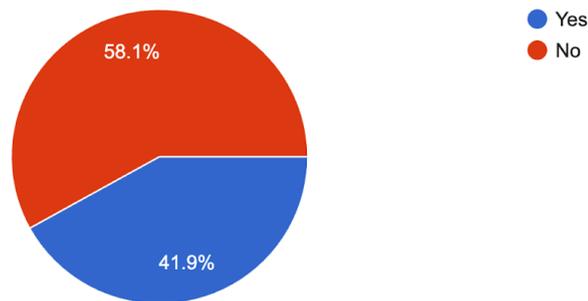


How was the cost of labour welfare accounted for



Were any government policies or schemes access for labour welfare

31 responses



There are many insights that can be drawn from the results of this study conducted and few key observations are summarized below:

1. The sample included a cross section of demographics and types of project which did not significantly alter the outcome. This indicates that they have no bearing on the topic of this research
2. The adoption of Health and Safety standards across sites is the highest a personnel / workers safety / lives is given utmost priority. Having said that, should H&S be considered benefit considering it is mostly mandatory by law
3. For most part owner / client is taking responsibility for the cost associated with labour welfare while discharging of the amenities lies with the contractor through various models of agreement.

4. Available government schemes not encashed to full potential which could be due to lack of awareness or accessibility and the complexity of registration, transfer and renewal.
5. Lack of incentives for any of the welfare initiatives may also be a cause of deterrent.

These observations led us to explore options for recommendations to resolve the issue at hand as a collective team and in the subsequent section we have listed a few suggestions that as a collective community we can adopt to further excel in this segment and “Leave no one behind”.

 Who is left behind?

MANAGEMENT IS DOING THINGS RIGHT AND LEADERSHIP IS DOING THE RIGHT THINGS

Conclusion

“You cannot get through a single day without having an impact on the world around you. What you do makes a difference and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make” - Jane Goodall.

While we hope to promote best practices and scalability, it is only possible when we work together with builders, contractors and the government as custodians of basic human rights of all workers employed for private/ public projects. There is also a sincere desire within the WiREnet community that our initiatives lead to new collaborations, cause ripples of change and become the new norm for the industry. Finally the belief is to grow into a significant body which could assist in the evolution of the public policy for improved living conditions for the labour at construction sites.

As more and more people are employed in this industry, the breakpoints, if not addressed now, can give way to a humanitarian crisis caused by further widening of the inequity gap.

We believe that addressing these issues will strongly impact:

People | It will make the labour settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable (SDG 11)

Planet | Cultivate practices for sustainable management of water and sanitation (SDG 6). Enable ways to form self-sustaining energy models (SDG 7).

Profit | It will result in a much more stable and robust industry with better quality of work being produced and better construction timelines (SDG 9)

Continued partnerships between all stakeholder will ensure a sustainable development (SDG 17)



Join hands!

ALONE WE CAN DO SO LITTLE TOGETHER WE CAN DO SO MUCH

References

- <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/>
- <https://karbwwb.karnataka.gov.in/en>
- <https://clc.gov.in/clc/>
- <https://watson.brown.edu/southasia/news/2021/no-count-ry-workers-latest-stranded-workers-action-network-report>

Acknowledgement

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We greatly appreciate all fraternity members who have kindly provided their insight in the survey conducted.

Along this long journey we have benefitted from the timely counsel of Devanshi Patel, Fancy George, Laila Khalil, and Renuka Rajagopal.

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Arathi Parigi is a professional with 20 years of experience in the field of design as an architect and a strong believer in conscious design.

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As there is a movement towards highly technical, intelligent solutions and finishes that find place in the built environment and she builds awareness in the fraternity through interactive design workshops and product learning sessions.

She is a strong believer in well thought out design solutions that further go on to build sustainable design solutions .

As an academician has been visiting faculty at BMS and Ramaiah college of architecture as well as been an associate professor at BMSCA in the year 2017-2018.

The mantra she stands by is “The ones who think they can change the world, they do“



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Aishwarya N has close to 20 years' of experience in real estate projects with primary focus in the field of Civil and Interior works in Bangalore, Mumbai and Hyderabad. Her experience encompasses a long tenure with CBRE South Asia Pvt. Ltd. managing projects for Developers, IT Sector, Networking and Banking Client's through various stages of a project and has been instrumental in many strategic

decisions and subsequently moving on to VMware Software India Pvt. Ltd. managing their projects across India. She advocates promoting an equitable and inclusive environment for all to work and live in and is actively engaged in pursuits towards the same.

She is a cauldron of energy with a bubbling spirit that simply won't die its natural death. High on enthusiasm and drive, for her no task is too minuscule to ignore nor too great to accomplish. Books are her companion, and the solitude of the mountains entice her spirit. An avid reader, traveler, trekker and a novice in the path of glory that one can only aim to attain through the ancient art of yoga.