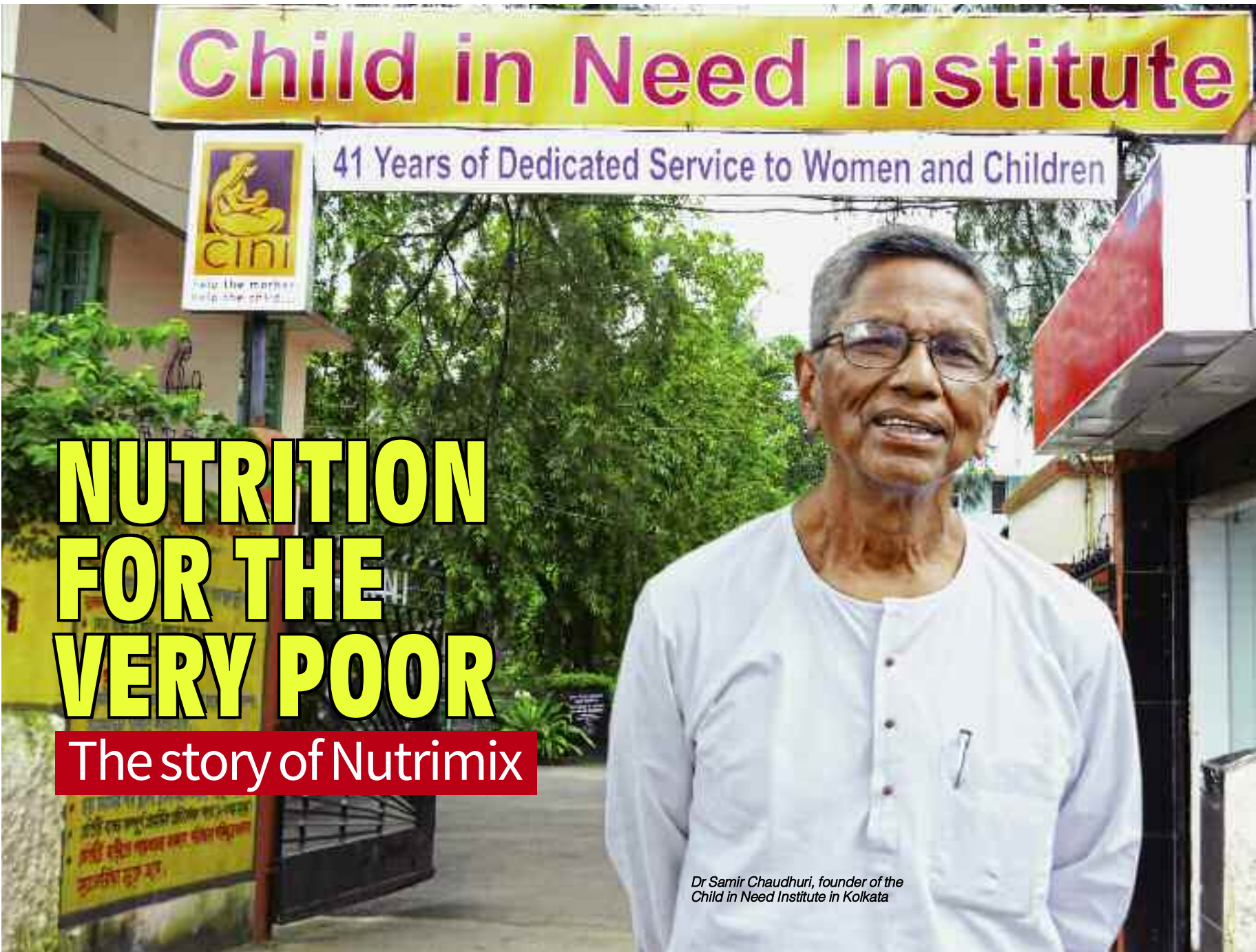


Civil Society



NUTRITION FOR THE VERY POOR

The story of Nutrimix

Dr Samir Chaudhuri, founder of the Child in Need Institute in Kolkata

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NUTRITION FOR THE POOR

Some 41 years ago the Child in Need Institute invented Nutrimix, a high-calorie, protein-based organic mix. It is now consumed by 100,000 children and is becoming a robust social enterprise.

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Civil Society

READ US. WE READ YOU.

A mob is a mob is a mob

THE lynching of Mohammad Akhlaq in Dadri by a mob of Hindus — on the mere suspicion that he and his family had killed a calf and had been eating beef — should make all Indians worry.

Violence can't be justified in the name of religion or political beliefs. It is also clear now that Akhlaq was targeted and killed in cold blood. There was no evidence that he had indeed killed a calf, but the mob frenzy was engineered. Chances are that what was played out in Dadri will have sequels elsewhere in the country. The RSS has said that killing a human being over cow slaughter is justified.

Communal episodes are not new to us. We've seen them happen all over the country. No political party's hands are clean. If the Gujarat riots can't be forgotten neither should the pogroms against the Sikhs in New Delhi under the Congress. And there are many other examples.

But to dismiss Dadri as just another incident would be foolish because Akhlaq was an innocent man who was targeted and killed in cold blood.

Mobs acting in the name of religion today will find other reasons, often covert, to assert themselves through violence and intimidation. By remaining silent and failing to protect our Constitutional rights we are laying ourselves open to anarchy of a kind that we will find difficult to control.

The law must be applied with an even hand. The Samajwadi Party and Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav owe the country an explanation. It was the duty of the state government to protect the life of Mohammad Akhlaq. We need to know why it failed. We particularly need to know because the Samajwadi Party lays claim to secular credentials.

The BJP under Prime Minister Narendra Modi is also answerable. It is in power at the Centre with a brute majority based on promises of development. A special responsibility devolves on it to carry along with it a nation consisting of diverse identities.

Inclusion is key to building a modern and globally competitive economy. Obscurantism of the kind now being witnessed can only sap contemporary India's many strengths.

Civil Society magazine has showcased in the past 12 years so many outstanding initiatives that solve complex problems and take our country forward. Our cover story in this issue on the Child in Need Institute (CINI) is an example. Peace, harmony and enlightened political leadership are needed so that more such initiatives can flourish.

We begin with this issue sections on Cities and Workplaces. We bring you a story on how Mohali is cleaning up its act, using a mobile phone application that instantly records civic grievances and supervises teams of municipal sweepers. Expect more from us on small cities. Under Workplaces we report on the plight of workers in ancillary units of the automobile industry. We also go to Odisha where the state government is implementing a range of benefits for workers in the construction industry.

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IN THE LIGHT

SAMITA RATHOR



LETTERS



I was really proud to read about the work of Applied Environment Research Foundation (AERF) in your article, "Guardians of the Ghats". I wish all success to the AERF team in their endeavour to preserve our ecology.

Vinayak Kulkarni

Your story on Dr Sudha Sinha, "The Caring Oncologist", is one that I was privileged to have witnessed. Children's cancer support groups must be encouraged in India. As a haematopathologist working in this specific field, I offer valuable support in diagnostics through the Haematology Foundation of Hyderabad.

K. Gayathri

Even though I got to work with Dr Sudha Sinha for only one week as part of our oncology training, it was clear that she is a person who really cares for her patients. It is great to see her work being recognised.

Samuel

Jackfruit products

I would like to thank Shree Padre for his wonderful write-up on jackfruit delicacies. People now get a chance to taste so many varieties of items made out of jackfruit.

C.K. Asari

Runaway children

Subir Roy's story on lost and runaway

children at Sealdah Station was very well reported. It is our duty to ensure a better life for such children, for they are the future of our country.

Shekhar Saha

In 2012 while I was member-in-charge of restoration and repatriation at All Bengal Women's Union, Childline had intercepted a group of 40 children while they were boarding a train to Maharashtra from Sealdah Station. On questioning, I found that most of the boys were from Katihar and Purnea in Bihar. Others were from Malda and a few from Jalpaiguri in West Bengal. Strangely, they had all been issued ID certificates by a panchayat pradhan of Purnea.

Sunanda Bose

Ek Aadmi

PM Narendra Modi in his promises talks about a tomorrow that never comes. Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal boasts of reducing electricity charges and providing free water supply. In reality, residents of Dwarka are paying ₹7.80 per unit of electricity plus ₹285 per month as fixed charges. For water, we have to pay ₹450 per month. Where is the reduction in electricity tariff and water charges? Kejriwal is clearly indulging in white lies. There is open loot by locals as there is no Registrar of Co-operative Societies or Vice-Chairman of Delhi Development Authority. Kejriwal's Aam Aadmi Party has vanished. Now it is Ek Aadmi Party where opponents to his authority have no right to exist.

H.D. Goyal

Letters should be sent to response@civilsocietyonline.com

Hall of Fame

Apropos your story, "Jhargram's first surgeon", in your annual Hall of Fame issue, I would like to thank you for writing such an inspiring article on Dr Sitanath De. He is definitely an unsung hero, of whom we knew nothing. There must be several others like him in our country. Only a handful of such committed and selfless people have the courage to say no to the lure of money and riches.

Pradip Majumdar

Sitanath De is not just a surgeon alone. He possesses other qualities too. He loves to play and watch football. He is an ardent lover of Rabindra Sangeet and Nazrul Geeti. Dr De collects his past through a regular column in a magazine brought out from Jhargram. He is our inspiration. I am proud of my elder brother.

Saumen De

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BEEF PLUS: DADRI AND A GROWING SENSE OF FEAR



Outside Akhlaq's home his relatives and friends gather to share grief and concern

Civil Society News
New Delhi

THE lynching of Mohammad Akhlaq on the mere suspicion that he had killed a calf and that he and his family had been eating beef has evoked widespread revulsion across the country.

It was a frightening display of brutality. A frenzied mob of Hindu neighbours overran Akhlaq's home, attacking the women of his family, and almost killing one of his sons as well. These are people who had known Akhlaq over the years. Till that fateful day he had lived with respect. His elder son serves in the Indian Air Force.

The episode took place on September 28 at Bisara village at Dadri in western Uttar Pradesh, where the Samajwadi Party is in power. The villagers have traditionally lived in peace and Muslims are merely

300 in a population of 15,000. The village is also next door to New Delhi and it is disconcerting that such a killing should have happened so close to the capital.

So, why was Akhlaq brutally and suddenly killed despite being an integrated member of his village and on good terms with his neighbours? What led to his killing on mere rumour?

Even as police investigations continue, there is concern that statements on Muslims and beef eating by senior Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders, among them ministers, have created a charged atmosphere on the issue.

That the Prime Minister remained silent after Akhlaq's killing and didn't act to stop his ministers immediately has also been reason for concern. He spoke up long after the episode and wasn't forceful enough.

But if the BJP is to be accused of taking commu-

nal positions in politics, so should the Congress and the Samajwadi Party. The Congress too wants a ban on cow slaughter and veteran Congressman Digvijay Singh thought nothing of articulating such a position even as the Dadri killing was in the headlines. The Samajwadi Party, on the other hand, has leaders who incite Muslims and prey on their insecurities in UP.

"What you can eat and what you can't should not be decided by the government," says Pushpesh Pant, a respected academician and an authority on Indian culinary traditions.

"I think that the Dadri incident, which was timed tragically and beautifully with the Bihar elections, reduces the whole debate to beef and Muslims and who eats beef," he says.

"But this is really the time to debate why the State has failed to protect the life and liberty of an individual called Akhlaq who was not a Hindu and who



The room where Mohammad Akhlaq (inset) was killed



Mohammad Sartaj, Akhlaq's son who is in the Indian Air Force

'The fringe is made possible by what the mainstream facilitates. The govt is responsible for ensuring that there is no space for collective violence.'

worried that this has happened when a Modi-led government is at the Centre," he says. "But the beef ban has been there from Congress' time. Digvijay Singh has come out with a statement, which I find quite crazy and unreasonable, that the Congress will support a beef ban."

"So if we are going to have political stances on a beef ban how can we have a reasonable debate on either the beef ban or meat eating in this country? Are we courageous enough to raise issues which are inconvenient but rational? Otherwise rationalists like Kalburgi will keep getting killed."

Pant argues that the place to begin is with the Constitution because the Directive Principles enjoin the State to protect the cow.

"To me what people should bluntly ask is, under what circumstances did the framers of our Constitution, secular, modern people like Nehru and Co. yield to the unreasonable demand (by Gandhi) and have no objections to cow protection being included as a Directive Principle in the Constitution," says Pant.

POLARISATION

Aruna Roy of the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) says: "We must stop hiding behind the smokescreen of an event being an exception or a fringe issue. The fringe is made possible by what the mainstream facilitates. The government is responsible for ensuring that there is no space for collective

violence. On the contrary, the ruling party has given space to a discourse of intolerance and makes weak noises every time an abhorrent event takes place."

Roy believes there is "a growing atmosphere of fear and polarisation" after the BJP came to power under Narendra Modi.

"The religious sentiments of all communities have to be respected. But the beef ban is being used by the fundamentalist right wing to whip up emotions to the extent that any individual group is given moral sanction to engage in policing," says Roy. "The ban on beef couched in legal and so-called 'rational' terms laid the grounds for providing a smokescreen for this kind of 'terror'. It is shocking that people who claim to protect an animal from killing should so brazenly kill a human being!"

Asked if she sees any difference between the Congress and BJP, Roy says: "The Congress has a stated objective to be secular, and often fails to take strong positions. The BJP seeks to build its defining identity on Hindutva and anti-secularism. There is an essential difference between a party that promotes a particular divisive agenda, because it wants the votes and support of the 'majority community', and a party that fails to live up to its secular ideals."

DELHI FORUM'S REPORT

Activists of the left-leaning Delhi Forum, known to be critical of the BJP, visited Dadri and filed a report. In the absence of a formal account of the tragedy by the Samajwadi Party government, the Delhi Forum's activists offer the only serious attempt to piece together events and assess the situation on the ground.

The activists found the lane leading to Akhlaq's house to be no more than four feet wide. It would be difficult for a mob of more than a thousand to rush through. By all accounts there was a large number of young men, but the murder was committed by a few from among them. Talk of a mob of a thousand or more, the activists say, seems to be designed to establish popular support and also make it difficult to establish identities.

The second observation is that Akhlaq's house was so close to those of his neighbours that it was impossible for him to have secretly killed a calf and carved up the carcass.

Thirdly, mob fury, when spontaneous, as is being suggested, is not selective. Akhlaq's house was ransacked, but his brother's house next door was spared. The activists observe that the attack was more likely the result of a planned conspiracy.

YOUNG MISLED

Dr Mehruddin Khan, a senior writer and poet living in the Dadri region, has always been known as a messenger of communal harmony. He says that now he feels threatened, even targeted, despite his background of serving in leading Hindi newspapers and the popularity his writings and verses have enjoyed.

He says that in areas of tension, women have never played an aggressive role on their own. Rather, they have been pushed into the forefront by aggressive elements wanting to protect themselves from the police.

Dr Khan says that statements made in favour of minorities by some prominent leaders have been propagated out of context among young people to

lost his life because a Hindu mob decided to kill him. They did not even wait to file a complaint about beef eating or illegal slaughter."

Pant argues that secular values and the rule of law have been eroded over the past 50 or 60 years to now invite a Hindu backlash.

He fears that incidents like the one at Dadri show "we are heading towards a murderous intolerance".

"Hindus think the Congress will never give them their due, nor the Samajwadi Party, so they want to align with a party that is on the rise, a party that can give them benefits apart from protecting their fundamental and religious rights."

POLITICAL STANCES

Pant is no admirer of the BJP or Modi but he does not believe that divisions have sharpened over the past year that the Modi government has been in office at the Centre.

"Right now we are all very agitated, ashamed and



Sangeet Som, BJP MLA, at Bisara village. Som said innocents had been arrested for the lynching

‘Communalism has increased rapidly in large parts of western Uttar Pradesh in recent years. This should be seen against the backdrop of an economic crisis as rapidly rising costs of farming have created problems for farmers.’



Mahesh Sharma, Union Minister for Culture, made inflammatory statements on beef eating

convince them that their rights will be endangered if they do not come forward aggressively. This has been backed by very provocative content on social media.

All this is being done very cleverly ultimately to get electoral benefits on the basis of polarisation on communal lines. It has worsened the communal situation very rapidly. The police obey the diktat of the parties in power.

Satya Prakash Bharat, a senior social worker from Bijnor district, says that efforts to associate the young (whether Hindu or Muslim) with social movements have almost completely dried up in western Uttar Pradesh. And this has created a vacuum in which communal thinking can spread easily.

Politicians of the BJP and the Samajwadi Party try to polarise communities for narrow gains, he says. Some time ago there was hope that the wave of

alternative politics spreading in Delhi would help to improve the situation in adjoining western Uttar Pradesh, but the Aam Aadmi Party has not lived up to its promises, he says. The vacuum in social mobilisation could not be filled in western Uttar Pradesh.

Women have generally not played a big part in politics but the pressure of competitive politics also pushes some of them into a more aggressive role. As far as the role of the police is concerned, it has been reduced only to serving the ruling dispensation and an upright police official trying to take an independent line against the dominant politicians of the area will find it difficult to continue his work for too long.

Manesh Gupta is a leading social activist of Muzaffarnagar district who has been involved with the RTI movement and opposing corruption in rural development and welfare schemes.

Gupta says that when there was some tension and violence between just one caste group and Muslims confined to a cluster of villages, it was unfortunately projected as a very widespread communal conflict. This sent out exaggerated signals, which were further misused by certain forces to create a wider divide.

Gupta feels that the Sangh Parivar has been trying to polarise communities for electoral benefits as was seen during the Lok Sabha polls. The Samajwadi Party has not been able to counter this at an ideological level. Instead, it has also resorted to vote bank politics and worsened the situation.

Gupta says ordinary people are generally peace-loving. But when a narrow agenda is set by politicians and spread through the media, ordinary people too get polarised.

K.N. Tiwari is a leading social activist of Saharanpur district who has been working for communal harmony as well as for the rights of weaker sections and women for over three decades.

He says, “Communalism has increased rapidly in large parts of western Uttar Pradesh in recent years. This should be seen against the backdrop of an economic crisis as rapidly rising costs of farming have created problems for farmers. Payments to many sugarcane farmers have not been made for a long time. Adverse weather has been increasingly creating more problems for farmers. Youth and teenagers face a bleak and uncertain future.”

Instead of addressing real economic issues, political parties have been inciting communal feelings and getting young people to turn to rituals and obscurantism. They particularly target the young with a feeling of majoritarianism. It doesn’t help that the Samajwadi Party responds in kind in whipping up the feelings of the minorities.

DIRECTION LACKING

Dunu Roy of the Hazards Centre has long years of experience in working with communities. He says what happened in Dadri is not a new phenomenon. It is an expression of the upper castes’ growing intolerance with the lower castes and minorities.

To him it is quite clear that the Sangh Parivar is behind the mobilisation of people for the kind of incident that took place in Dadri.

“The Constitution is there, the law is very much there. The State is bound to protect the interests of the people. What is lacking is political direction,” says Roy. “If they want, the Centre or the state government can put down these violations with a heavy hand. Instead, they are silently fomenting caste hatred. It serves their electoral interests. The same thing happened in Muzaffarpur too.” ■

Additional reporting by Bharat Dogra

'BAN TRUCKS. HARD DECISIONS ARE NEEDED IN DELHI'

WHEN it comes to an understanding of governance issues in New Delhi, at the state and municipal levels, Ajay Maken has many valuable insights. He is way ahead of other politicians. Fifteen years ago, as a minister in the Sheila Dikshit government, he had the grit to put the capital's entire fleet of buses on compressed natural gas (CNG). It meant international green awards for New Delhi. He was also involved in power reforms and has looked closely at the challenges in resettlement and rehabilitation in the urban context.

After three rapid-fire defeats of the Congress in New Delhi, Maken has been given the task of rebuilding the party from scratch. He spoke to *Civil Society* on his vision for an inclusive and globally competitive capital city.

You were the first politician to support the switchover to CNG fuel for buses in Delhi 15 years ago at a time when everyone else was against it. But Delhi is now once again the most polluted city in the world.

You know, I have an interesting answer to that. When the National Green Tribunal (NGT) recently ordered a ban on vehicles in Delhi older than 10 years it was opposed by the Centre and the Delhi government. I could immediately link it to what happened in 2002 when the Supreme Court ordered the switchover to CNG.

I agreed with the court's decision. Bus operators were after my life. Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit was completely against it. She and Pervez Hashmi said they would rather go to jail. Finally, they had to apologise before the Supreme Court.

When I took over (as Minister of Transport) within one month we started our phase-out policy for DTC buses. Eventually, I was able to win my election against Jagmohan because of the CNG conversion.

If I were in power I would ensure that the NGT's order on banning older vehicles is complied with. Yes, it would be an unpopular decision. But we need to take hard decisions.

So what should be done now?

We should make use of the court's orders. There may be some demonstrations against the government. But why oppose court orders?

The quality of diesel is really bad. So the government should pressurise the refineries to provide cleaner fuel. They can approach the court. There are many things that can be done. Fighting with the court or writing letters to the Lieutenant-Governor is not a solution.



AJIT KRISHNA

Ajay Maken: 'Delhi is the national capital and so you will have a multiplicity of authorities'

INTERVIEW Ajay Maken

The Congress also split the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) into three municipalities. Now there is confusion over jurisdiction and resident welfare associations (RWAs) are unhappy. Do you think it was a wrong decision?

First of all, the ills of the MCD are not because of trifurcation. The MCD, even as a single entity, failed to function effectively. What I understand is that the Delhi government and the Centre may join hands to rejoin the municipalities. But that won't resolve the problem.

State governments don't allow local bodies to function. The MLAs have conflicts with the councillors and gram panchayats for jurisdictional reasons. It is this which results in weakening of one or the other institution. But we do need to have accountable local bodies. I agree trifurcation should not have taken place but I support the smaller corporation wards.

So you are saying there should be smaller wards but you don't need to do trifurcation?

Yes. In the 74th Amendment to the Constitution we have the provision of ward committees. It is an ambiguous term. In Delhi, too, we have ward com-

mittees. In a zone all ward councillors come together and form a ward committee, which was perhaps not the idea in the Constitution.

It should be a committee within the ward and not a committee of the wards — and that is the *mohalla sabha* being talked about.

A committee within the ward means representatives from each RWA should all sit together and decide how to develop that particular ward. That is already there in the Constitution. The ward committee is the lowest unit, then the zonal committee and over that the municipal corporation. But, in Delhi, the zonal committee and ward committee become one.

There is talk of devolving budgets to that level. Is this practical? Are there limits to consultation?

And to allocation too. I have been an MLA and interacted with RWAs. They would ask for drains to be cleaned or constructed, roads, water supply, electricity...but they would not like to have a school next door or a police station. The traffic and children will disturb them in the morning.

The personal interest of those *mohallas* becomes so important that perhaps many long-term or bigger plans don't take place. That vision may not be there.

But such ward committees are required, especially to check the quality of work being done.

The other question is: how do we ensure that the right kind of people come into the *mohalla sabhas* or ward committees. Elections then become important and these elections would be very expensive. The Delhi Election Commission asked for ₹21 crore to conduct just 13 by-elections in the municipal corporations (out of 272). Besides, people who want to control the *mohalla sabhas* will spend a lot of money to get elected.

The idea of having consultation at the lowest level is good but unless you clear these issues, nothing much will be achieved.

What is your vision to make Delhi a globally competitive city?

Delhi is the national capital and so you will have a multiplicity of authorities. Kejriwal should understand that. He is the elected leader of the national capital, which is governed by the centre.

Nothing can be better for Delhi than the present structure. The Chief Minister of Delhi is not like the Chief Minister of Haryana or Uttar Pradesh. In no national capital in the world are police powers not vested with the central government.

Continued on page 10

Continued from page 9

I am proud to be living in the national capital. How will the people of Delhi benefit if the police are under Manish Sisodia and not under Rajnath Singh?

Is law and order better in Ghaziabad, Noida or Faridabad? No. Why? Because being a Union Territory (UT) and the capital, the central government spends much more money on it than any other UT or state. In last year's budget the central government allocated ₹5,200 crore for the Delhi Police alone. From where is the Delhi government going to get this money just for the Delhi Police?

Delhi has three central universities: Delhi University, Jamia Millia Islamia and JNU. They are funded by the UGC and the Union HRD. Is Lucknow University or Kolkata University similarly funded? Around ₹600 crore alone is spent on Delhi University.

Delhi has six super specialty hospitals on which the central government spends ₹3,000 crore. Which other UT has six hospitals funded by the centre? Around ₹10,000 crore is spent annually every year on these things. We have got a world-class Metro with the taxpayer paying only 16 per cent of the cost because we are the national capital.

So when AAP says they will seek the opinion of the people on Delhi's status and have a referendum, they should also tell people what they are getting now with Delhi being a UT and the national capital and what will be stopped.

But no informed discussion is taking place. They just want more and more powers for themselves, but at what cost?

But doesn't a multiplicity of authorities hamper development?

The biggest problem is the DDA. It has become planner, regulator and builder. One agency having all powers spells doom. So Delhi could never keep pace with the hordes of people coming in to settle. As a result, unauthorised colonies and slums came up.

If you want to make Delhi world-class we have to think how we can redevelop slums and unauthorised colonies. How do we make enabling provisions in the master plan and building bylaws so that people are motivated to redevelop and get extra FAR (floor area ratio). Instead of creating urban sprawl, we can build upwards. Then we can clear land for transport and more open spaces.

Delhi does not have a shortage of resources. Fifty-

five per cent of water that is pumped in seeps into the ground because of the poor pipe system. There is no shortage of power. Delhi has wider roads than any other city. You can have better public transport in Delhi.

There was also massive shifting of slums during the Congress rule in Delhi, especially before the Commonwealth Games. You have taken an interest in low-cost housing. What is your experience? Shifting of slums is not redevelopment or rehabilitation. It is uprooting. In 2004 we came to power in the centre and in Delhi because Jagmohan uprooted slums. That was a wrong move.

When I was housing minister we came up with an in situ rehabilitation policy. As Urban Development Minister I initiated five projects to resettle people in places where they were living. The projects did not succeed. I feel bad about it. In Kathputli colony we almost managed to do it. But the NGOs and other political interests frightened the slum-dwellers. They told people, 'the builder will make money and you will be left in the lurch'. They went to court. The NGOs could have played a more positive role and tried to bridge the gap between the slum dwellers and the government.

You have tried, though, to work with NGOs.

I have dealt with CSE, Hazards Centre, SEWA and NASVI. You know, we have two or three types of NGOs. There are those who work with us, help us draft laws and policies and make India a better place.

CSE was instrumental in bringing in CNG. Had it not been for Anil Agarwal and Sunita Narain, Delhi would have been an even worse place today. I interacted with NASVI and SEWA and we came up with a marvellous Street Vendor's Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending Act. On the other hand, we have NGOs who think by colliding with the government they will be able to achieve something. Those NGOs are regressive and because of them cities lose their pace of growth.

After the Congress' disastrous defeat what is your party now offering the people of Delhi?

We offer the people of Delhi a set of leaders who are experienced, honest, tried and tested. Contrast this with promises and dreams by AAP. Many of these promises and dreams are not good for Delhi's devel-

opment like free water and halving the tariff for electricity, using just subsidy. This is not a good governance model.

By giving a subsidy of ₹2,200 crore you can, for some time, satisfy a section of the people. But in the long run look at what people will be missing — a lower number of public transport buses, shortage of funds for the Metro's development, no PWD maintenance of roads and other planned development.

The revenue collection target they have given is unrealistic. Both AAP and the BJP lack in good governance and experienced people. We governed Delhi for 15 years. People repeatedly voted for us. While there may have been shortcomings we have done quite a lot for the city.

So you are promising better governance. Why didn't you advise your party when it was in power in Delhi?

Well, it's difficult to advise your party in an open manner. It is then seen as dissidence. In AAP when Yogendra Yadav and Prashant Bhushan gave advice it was called dissidence. I am asked this question repeatedly on social media. On the power issue I did advise the Sheila Dikshit government to put pressure on the regulatory body to ensure the tariff does not go up. Newspapers then wrote that I was on the same page as Arvind Kejriwal.

What is the learning from your defeat?

Our organisational structure was weak. Delhi has grown hugely in 15 years. People have broken into different segments, based on job and location. Punjabis don't always vote for Punjabis any more or Baniyas for Baniyas. Here slum-dwellers vote in one manner, resettlement colonies in another manner, government employees vote their own way and so on. We did not catch these segments and pick up their voices or issues. The party and government lost contact with the people.

Our traditional way of building organisations will no longer work. You have to organise the party in different chapters. Like we should have a pensioners' Congress. I have already announced a Delhi Traders Congress, Delhi Reri-Patri Congress and the Delhi Sanchetak Congress. We are going to tackle issues segment-wise, offer solutions and fight for those issues. So we will be playing the role of opposition also. ■

SAMITA'S WORLD

by SAMITA RATHOR



Mohali gets an app to clean up

Ajit Krishna
Mohali

MOHALI has been cleaning up its act. A toll-free helpline is available for citizens to lodge civic complaints. And now a mobile phone application makes it possible to report the exact location of garbage, potholes and fused streetlights. Additionally, the app allows for the monitoring of the work of sweepers on a daily basis — did they turn up for duty, how many are actually needed and where.

The Mohali Municipal Corporation, next door to Chandigarh in Punjab, launched the app in November 2013 and since then just 800 complaints have been lodged. It is a small number, but a beginning has been made. Mohali's population is just 146,213 and it is hoped that word will spread. The app not only takes in the complaint, but also passes it on to the relevant department and officer and simultaneously informs the complainant.

The result is that citizens' expectations in Mohali have begun rising. They want action. The Mohali Municipal Corporation has also been nudged into being more proactive. Its use of the app to monitor sweepers has resulted in a control room keeping live watch on sweepers as they go about their work.

The corporation's officials are already beginning to enjoy the rewards of these improvements in civic management. The corporation received the Order of Merit at the Skoch Good Governance Awards this year and it was at a stall at the India Habitat Centre that we first came across Sanjay Kanwar, SDO of Mohali, and Jaskirat Singh, CEO of Webrosoft Solutions.

Called CRAMAT or Citizens' Reporting and Mapping Tool, the app has revolutionised the way complaints are filed. All you need is a smart phone. You download the app, register yourself, select your location and from there on you are just a click away from the municipal corporation's office. The app allows you to take a picture of the problem and upload it on one of 10 categories. You can write a brief description, which is optional, as the picture and the GPS location are already recorded. You immediately get a confirmation SMS and email that your complaint has been received. Once it is verified that it is not spam, the complaint gets automatically assigned to the officer concerned through SMS and email with the complainant also getting the name and phone number of the officer.

After the problem has been tackled, the complainant can mark it CLOSED or the officer RESOLVED. If the status is not changed after 15 days a reminder mail is sent to both complainant and the concerned officer. So CRAMAT is a fool-proof way of filing your complaint and getting it heard.

CRAMAT is one step better than a toll-free number because it provides a picture, a location and keeps the complainant in the loop. The traditional way of filing complaints at the municipal body's office stands nowhere in comparison.

Still, so far, more complaints are received through the toll-free number, but the Municipal



A field officer marks attendance of sweepers using the app



Jaskirat Singh, CEO of Webrosoft Solutions, developers of the app

Commissioner, Uma Shanker Gupta, says: "Applicability and convenience of this app is more. It's a 24x7 app as compared to a toll-free number available only between 9 am and 4 pm. We also get the photograph showing the exact problem and the exact location and as the complaint is automatically assigned to the officer, it's easier to keep track. It makes the officer more accountable."

Amandeep Kaur, the operator who handles both the toll-free number and CRAMAT, also finds the app more efficient. "Sometimes the caller is not able to tell us the exact location or describe the situation but with CRAMAT there is no such issue."

CRAMAT's early users have their share of disappointments. A complaint goes out in a matter of seconds, but there are delays in attending to it. One reason is that there are multiple agencies involved. Also, while the app raises expectations, standards of governance don't match.

Ishwar Babbar, a businessman, used CRAMAT to file a complaint about streetlights in his area not working. "My complaint was attended to twice. On

both occasions, the streetlight worked for just a day. I then visited the corporation's office personally and was told the power cable needed to be replaced and it would take time."

GP Singh and Karan Pal Singh, both retired government officials, feel the app is a step closer to improved services. They say: "The municipal corporation reacts quickly to the complaints but whenever there is the involvement of another agency the problem takes much longer to resolve."

Ramandeep Singh, a businessman, says, "The app is perfect but, you know, there should be someone sitting to deliver results also."

Commissioner Gupta says, "There is a time-frame for resolving every issue. For garbage its one day, for streetlights its two days, and so on. We maintain a data bank of all the complaints and we make sure that officers attend to complaints in the specified time. But there can be a genuine reason for delay. Also, there are some complaints that are not in our jurisdiction like horticulture."

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Control room for the sweeper-tracking system in the municipal corporation's office

Gupta says there are several issues that the corporation is working on. Complaints that go to other agencies tend to take time. There are also complaints on which the corporation can take only limited action. "For instance, we can only sterilise stray dogs. We can't keep them," he explains.

"Mohali has educated and aware citizens. In a short time they have adopted this technology to lodge complaints on a regular basis. In the corporation we have fixed responsibilities on departments. But there are constraints. Garbage and street lights get attended to quickly but fixing roads takes time," explained Kanwar, SDO of Mohali.

SWEeper-TRACKING SYSTEM

The app has worked very well for tracking of sweepers. In Mohali, at every kilometre you can find a sweeper in a blue uniform, equipped with a broom and international quality wheeled bins. Each one of them is monitored by a team sitting in the control room on the third floor of the municipal corporation's headquarters.

The sweeping of roads is outsourced to a company. The Commissioner insisted that the company ensure accountability by using the app. Earlier, it was impossible to track nearly 700 sweepers or to know which roads had been cleaned. Now both are easily done, resulting in savings and efficiency.

Jaskirat Singh explains: "Now the field officers of the company having the contract need to click the picture of the sweeper. The picture and the location of the sweeper is then with the control centre. The picture authenticates the location and also tells us whether the area is clean. This information is displayed on three screens. In the first you can see green and white balloons on the city map. Green means the attendance is marked. In the second you see a pink balloon and streets with different colours. The colour scheme is used to identify the area under the sweeper and by clicking on the balloon you can see his latest pictures with all details. In the third you can see live streaming of the photographs."

Dr J.P.S. Bakshi, Group Chairman and managing director of Lions Services, the company contracted for manual sweeping in Mohali, says, "We are a 40-



Uma Shanker Gupta, Commissioner of the municipality

year-old company and we are doing mechanised sweeping since 2003. The only reason we bid for manual sweeping in Mohali was the use of this technology."

Earlier, five to six sweepers used to be assigned to a sector. Now one sweeper is assigned to a stretch of road. It is more efficient. Earlier, two sweepers were used to pull the cart carrying the garbage and four would do the sweeping. Now the company has wheeled bins with only one sweeper for a stretch. The bins are handled by another team so all the sweepers are available for sweeping. Also as attendance is marked with a tracking system, and there is only one sweeper for a road, there is no scope for claiming more sweepers than are being actually deployed.

Bakshi elaborates: "It's not right to consider the tracking system only a tool for marking attendance. Assigning one sweeper one stretch of a road creates a feeling of ownership in the sweeper, making him more responsible. It's not out of fear that they are doing their job. A sweeper understands his area and its varying needs. Residents now also see a person in uniform coming daily to their area. This system has brought in stability."



Dr J.P.S. Bakshi endorses the sweeper tracking app



G.P. Singh, a user who complained about streetlights



Sanjay Kanwar, SDO, Mohali

THE DEVELOPERS

Webprosoft Solutions is a young company based in Ludhiana. Its CEO, Jaskirat Singh, tells us the idea originally was to create an application for identifying cancer patients across Punjab. It was needed for a study which intended to place cancer patients on a map of the state and correlate the prevalence of the diseases to specific conditions in those areas.

The app ensured accuracy as the researcher would establish the location via GPS and take a picture. But the government-funded study finally decided not to use the app — perhaps because it was too accurate and gave a worrisome picture of cancer in Punjab.

Webprosoft then converted the app into a tool for citizens to report civic grievances. R.S. Verma, the Commissioner of the Municipal Corporation in Jalandhar, was the first to show interest in it. Mohali followed when Commissioner Gupta heard about it. Verma has since been posted to Chandigarh and little seems to happen now with the app in Jalandhar.

The app also has wider uses. It can, for instance, be used for tracking large infrastructure projects, points out Jaskirat. ■

ODISHA LEADS ON LABOUR

Law gives bicycles, tools, rations, helmets...

Biswajit Padhi
Bhubaneswar

SAVITHRI, a poor and illiterate worker from Andhra Pradesh, was fatally injured while working on a construction site in Bhubaneswar. She died leaving behind two adolescent children, a boy, Srikant, and a girl.

The two children would have found it tough to survive had it not been for the compensation they received from the Odisha Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Board.

Fortunately, Savithri had enrolled herself as a *nirman shramik* (construction worker) with the board, persuaded by the labour contractor of her colony, Kharvel Nagar, in Bhubaneswar. The children were given ₹1 lakh as compensation and ₹20,000 to perform the last rites of their mother. Savithri's orphaned children have pieced their lives together since.

Odisha is probably the only state in India that is successfully implementing the Building and Other Construction Workers Act, 1996. The law, passed by Parliament after a lot of lobbying and agitation by NGOs and labour organisations in Delhi, remains just on paper even in the national capital.

Under this law, states are expected to set up a board to regulate work conditions of construction workers and deliver welfare measures for their health and safety. The board is to be financed by a one per cent cess levied on builders.

The Odisha board was set up in 2007 but its performance was lacklustre. Then, in 2013 the state government appointed Subash Singh, a radical trade union leader, as the board's chairperson.

The Odisha board has since managed to register an impressive number of construction workers, a tough job since they are scattered all over building sites.

"When I assumed office in 2013, the board was covering 39,208 beneficiaries. We have now enrolled 108,0536 workers under different schemes. We have an ambitious target of reaching 1.5 million



PICTURES BY BISWARANJAN ROUT

Women construction workers can get a maternity allowance of ₹4,000 for two children

workers ending this financial year," says Singh.

A construction worker pays ₹20 to register and ₹50 as annual subscription. A year after registration each worker receives ₹4,000 to buy working tools and ₹1,000 to buy protective gear like helmets and gloves. After three years of registration they are eligible to receive ₹3,000 to buy a bicycle. Each worker gets a health insurance cover of ₹1 lakh.


Several social welfare schemes have been included. Women construction workers can get a maternity benefit allowance of ₹4,000 for two children. There is also a marriage allowance of ₹20,000 for two girl children. Unmarried women can also avail of the marriage allowance. The board has set aside a stipend for children of workers keen on higher education. There is an

allowance of ₹200 for skill training as well. A functional skill-training centre for construction workers has been set up at Gopalpur in Cuttack district.

The Labour Department is the nodal agency for implementing the Act. The task of enrolment has been given to trade unions and authorised agents appointed by District Labour Officers. This is seen as a limitation. "Where the trade union movement is not strong as in remote and backward areas, enrolment has been slow," says Pabitra Pradhan, secretary of the Nuapada Zilla Motor Workers Union.

Khaturam Sunani, a labour rights activist, feels that if trade union leaders from remote districts in west and south Odisha are represented on the

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21st NATIONAL MEDIA AWARD PROGRAMME 2016

Giving Voice to the Unheard

FOR PRINT AND PHOTO JOURNALISTS

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Awards will be given to print and photo journalists interested in covering issues of adolescent health, child health and survival, elementary education, livelihood security, urban poverty, role of youth in development, adolescent girls, labour trafficking and bonded labour.

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Email: mini@nfi.org.in, info@nfi.org.in,
Website: www.nfi.org.in

'We plan to reach every worker'

AS Chairperson of the Odisha Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Board, Subash Singh has the rank of minister for state. Known as a firebrand trade union leader, Singh has been enthusiastic about implementing the law and ensuring workers get benefits. He spoke to *Civil Society*:

What is the most significant contribution of the board?

The most remarkable change is numbers. When I assumed office in 2013 the board was covering 39,208 beneficiaries. We have now enrolled around a million workers under different schemes. We have an ambitious target of reaching 1.5 million people ending this financial year.

Not just enrolment, the amount of compensation released to the beneficiaries has also expanded hugely. The board had given ₹10,000 to just one beneficiary in 2008.

Progress was very slow. In 2010-11 compensation of ₹89,060 had been disbursed to only 18 beneficiaries. But in 2013-14 we were able to cover 24,658 workers and release ₹71,41,941. The jump was dramatic in 2014-15 when we were able to release around ₹37 crore 53 lakh to 24 lakh people. We expect to disburse ₹250 crore by the end of this financial year.

Did you need to reinvigorate the board?

It would not have been possible to do all this without the effort of the entire department that has put its heart and soul into implementing the law. We have been able to reach people across all 30 districts of the state. The numbers, in terms of beneficiaries and the huge compensation, has been possible because of the enormous effort of all stakeholders.

What are the numbers you consider most significant?

The coverage. We have enrolled some 1.1 million members and collection from membership fees has risen to over ₹826 crore 36 lakh. We plan to reach every worker in Odisha.

Construction workers are mostly migrant. How does the board help them?

We have signed an MoU with four states — Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. All labour registered in Odisha is eligible to access the public distribution system in those states as well as social security schemes during their stay. This will benefit migrant workers immensely. We are also making necessary changes to the law so that if a worker who is not enrolled suffers an accident or injury at the workplace, the family can still get the compensation of ₹1 lakh in case of death and up to ₹50,000 in case of injury provided there is evidence like a police report.

The board offers more than a dozen schemes on social welfare, training and education, apart from compensation due to accidents and injuries.

Labour offices are understaffed and there is delay in releasing funds to workers. How are you going to address this?

It is true that with increasing numbers of workers getting registered our labour offices are overburdened and overstretched. Many of the District Labour Officers (DLOs) don't have vehicles which is why they are not able to conduct camps to distribute benefits to workers in the blocks. Some districts like Mayurbhanj are very big. We don't expect workers to travel that far to collect benefits.



Subash Singh: 'Labour can access ration shops in four states they migrate to'

'The central Act limits our administrative expenses to five per cent. This is why we are not able to increase our staff nor provide vehicles to DLOs. We have appealed to the Union Minister for Labour to allow states to fix administrative expenses so that we can address these issues.'

The central Act limits our administrative expenses to five per cent. This is why we are not able to increase our staff nor provide vehicles to DLOs. We have appealed to the Union Minister for Labour to allow states to fix administrative expenses so that we can address these issues. We are also carrying out special drives in bigger districts and remote districts to reach more workers. We hope to solve the problem shortly.

You have been leading an agitation for an ESI hospital in Odisha.

Odisha has around 900,000 families under ESI coverage. The total coverage is more than 10 million workers or *shramajeebis*. The former UPA government had decided to set up an ESI hospital in Odisha. At present, workers are referred to private hospitals which is a problem for them. The Odisha government promptly allotted 25 acres in Bhubaneswar and handed over the land after erecting a boundary.

The central government has already spent Rs 16 crore in constructing a building. But the present Union Minister of State for Labour and Employment, Bandaru Dattatreya, cancelled the ESI hospital project thereby denying more than 10 million workers a chance to get medical facilities. We will continue to demand a dedicated ESI hospital. ■

Continued from page 13

board, enrolment will pick up.

Sundargarh, a tribal-dominated district, has registered 80,000 workers so far, followed by Cuttack at 75,000. Other industrial districts like Jajpur and Sambalpur also have good enrolment figures.

In districts where the literacy rate is low, construction workers face problems renewing their registration cards. "Most of them don't know the date of renewal nor are there any support services," says Sunani.

"The District Labour Office in Bolangir, a remote district, has stopped holding camps to register workers in blocks," says Trilochan Punji, who heads the Shramika Adhikar Manch in Bolangir, a recognised trade union. Labour officials say they are inadequately staffed for such a gigantic task.

Most workers are also unaware of what their registration card entitles them to. "I have a card but I don't know what to do about it," confesses Taturam Sunani, a mason. "I was not able to register as I don't

have a job card," said Bhakalu Tandi, a construction worker, unaware that a job card is not required.

There is now discussion within the government to allow panchayats to register workers in their vicinity. Also, since women make up almost half the workforce in the construction sector, there is an urgent need to provide crèches at building sites, says Anuradha Mohanty of the People's Cultural Centre (PECUC), an organisation working on child labour. ■

The crushed auto worker

Civil Society News
New Delhi

EVERY year thousands of young men from villages and small towns in India make their way to Gurgaon to work in its auto industry — the fourth largest in India. The bigger companies can't absorb them so they invariably find work in smaller factories that make components for cars and bikes. Safety conditions are lax so workers, some as young as 19, at times lose fingers or an entire hand in crush injuries.

Supriya Sharma, a journalist, investigated crush injuries when she wrote a series on industrial safety in the Gurgaon-Manesar belt for scroll.in, a website.

Her stories caught the attention of citizens' groups in Gurgaon and SafeinIndia was formed to address the issue. Its three founders, Prabhat Agarwal, Ravi Gulati and Sandeep Sachdeva, have worked in companies. They are aware that companies tend to brush safety standards under the carpet to increase productivity and reduce costs.

SafeinIndia commissioned Agrasar, a non-profit, to study 20 cases of crush injuries. Agrasar, headed by Prerit Rana, skills disadvantaged youth and places them in jobs. Helped by Gurgaon First, an NGO that works on urban issues, SafeinIndia and Agrasar held a seminar in Gurgaon's Artemis Hospital to share the findings of their report and discuss what could be done to prevent such accidents.

Representatives of around 30 auto companies turned up along with NGOs, auto-workers and ordinary citizens. Among the speakers was M.M. Singh, Director, Maruti Centre of Excellence, Vinnie Mehta, Director-General of the Automotive Component Manufacturers Association of India (ACMA), and Rajiv Khandelwal, CEO of Aajeevika Bureau.

Agrasar's research had revealed that:

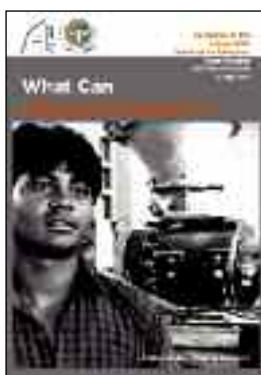
- Fifteen out of 20 workers were below 23 years of age.
 - Nineteen out of 20 accident victims were from tier 2-3 factories.
 - No training was provided to 16 out of 20 workers.
 - In eight out of 20 cases, there was no clear mechanism to assess safety measures. In four cases inspections were irregular and ad hoc.
 - Only 40 per cent of workers had ESI cards.
- If the employer was supportive, the injured worker received medical attention in ESI hospitals.
- Except for two cases, the injured worker was left jobless.

Several speakers emphasised the need to train workers and improve safety standards by regular inspection of tier 2-3 factories. Also, manufacturers of machines used by the auto sector must compulsorily ensure their machines are so safe that "even a half-asleep worker could use them".

However, workers did not feel the need for training, said Rana. They saw their work as a simple operation that could be learned on the job. Pradeep, 19, a helper, lost his hand while trying to clean one such machine which did not have a sensor. Also,

egged on by their supervisors, workers did double shifts to earn extra money or to fill in for an absent worker. The shift system altered the body clock, disturbing sleep patterns. Most accidents happened at night.

Raja Shah had made 500 components in an hour when the machine crashed on his hand. Visheshwar from Vaishali had worked 36 hours at a stretch when his accident occurred.



Secondly, fully equipped 24x7 ESI hospitals, set up on a Public-Private Partnership (PPP)



Workers need a facilitation centre for information on how to get an ESI card, the ESI hospital's location, ration cards and so on. They need a rehab centre too.

model were recommended.

Currently, there is no protocol when a worker gets injured. Workers don't have ESI cards and they don't know where the ESI hospital is. Raja Shah, who is fighting in court for compensation, said he spent four days trying to find the ESI hospital. He walked for one and a half hours, looking for it, and then stood in a queue for two hours to get his injured hand treated by an indifferent doctor.

But the ESI system is not dysfunctional. When the owner, manager or supervisor helps the worker, he does get swift medical attention. The problem is that 90 per cent of workers in the auto sector are on contract. They have no voice. After becoming disabled, they disappear home and new recruits don't get to know about their experience.

Thirdly, speakers said workers need a facilitation centre for information on how to get an ESI card, the ESI hospital's location, ration cards and so on. Also, a rehabilitation centre is required so that an injured worker can get training and an alternative job. An app was also suggested.

Another problem is that the mindset of the auto

sector is feudal and hierarchical, said Mehta. The bigger companies are always under pressure to cut prices – sales of passenger cars have stagnated for four years – and this message is passed on to the smaller units who cut costs by squeezing the hapless contract worker. Their pay is now only 30 per cent of what the permanent worker gets.

So, fourthly, it is important for the government to work out social security and insurance for workers and insist that companies ensure their entire supplier chain follows safety norms. This could be difficult because larger companies source their components from hundreds of suppliers.

Most important, the system of hiring needs to get

organised, said Rajeev Khandelwal of Aajeevika Bureau. Better pay and work conditions are vital.

He said his NGO had once trained tribal boys from Dungarpur in Rajasthan for a company in Gurgaon. But the boys returned in two months. Work conditions and living conditions were unbearable, they said. Skilling does not give a contract worker more money, said Khandelwal.

Right now the youthful worker has to contend with rapacious contractors and wages so miserable that he is forced to work overtime. The cost of living in the city is sky-high. The worker has no access to the public distribution system and he practically starves to send money home. There is no registration of workers. No identity card is provided. There is no legal recourse if wages are not paid or there is an accident.

The young man escaping rural distress ends up facing urban distress. He returns home at the age of 29 or 30 with his health in tatters and his pockets empty. ■

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Mankuva's wonder bean

Shree Padre
Kasargod

IN a field in Koruthode, a hilly agricultural area in Kottayam district of Kerala, George Mathew, 65, a farmer, is weighing his cocoa pods with glee. "Just three or four pods of this new cocoa plant weigh a whole kilo. In the usual variety, you needed at least eight to 10 pods to reach a kilo," he says.

Mathew has been growing the new variety for the past five years. It is called the Mankuva variety since its two mother trees are in Mankuva village in neighbouring Idukki district.

The discoverer of this high-yielding cocoa plant is Tomy Mataththikandam, 52, a freelance budding expert who has been disseminating it to farmers for 25 years. He says he chanced upon this fecund cocoa plant on Thomas Vettukunnel's farm.

At that time Mataththikandam had leased a plot from Vettukunnel to raise a nursery. Vettukunnel was cultivating cocoa in a big way. One day he called Mataththikandam to his house and showed him a heap of cocoa pods he had harvested.

"These pods are exceptionally high-yielding," he said. "They are from two mother trees. Each pod has more seeds by weight. See if you can bud these plants on normal varieties. It will help you and the farmers."

In those days, budding cocoa plants was unheard of. Mataththikandam decided to try, and succeeded. He then talked Parassery Denny, a local farmer, into planting his cocoa buds. A year later, the plants began to bear pods. Farmers came to take a look. They were taken aback by their size and weight. Word began to spread of Denny's fat cocoa pods.

"The first attempt itself gave a lot of publicity to the Mankuva variety for budding," recalls Mataththikandam. Every year, he would get orders from farmers near and far. In Idukki district, four more people have become cocoa budding experts, inspired by him.

The Mankuva cocoa variety has, over the years, spread to Idukki and Kottayam districts through budding methods and seedlings. Tom C. Antony, a nurseryman in Kottayam, learned about Mankuva cocoa five years ago. Till date, he has sold more than 5,000 seedlings and budded for a few clients, including Mathew.

Roughly 100,000 plants of the Mankuva variety are growing in Idukki and Kottayam districts. Mataththikandam buds about 3,000 plants every year which multiply into 60,000 plants on average. Through other budding experts and farmers, an equal number might have come up by now.

Idukki district is considered ideal for cocoa cultivation. Certain pockets within the district are considered better and companies pay an extra ₹5 for wet beans in those areas. Kottayam, with its fertile soil, comes a close second.

SIZE COUNTS

Madathaniyil Joseph Varki, 65, a farmer in Idukki district, has 300 cocoa trees. Mataththikandam has been using the Mankuva variety for budding here for four years. We harvested two pods randomly from a tree and weighed them. One had 300 gm of

PICTURES BY SHREE PADRE



George Mathew with his cocoa tree

wet beans and the other 310 gm. Each pod had 45 beans.

However, there are several unanswered questions. What is the average yield of a tree annually? How is it cultivated? How does the same variety perform in other districts?

Only a few farmers have weighed the beans from a single pod. Despite many enquiries we did not come across any farmer who had documented the yield of a single tree per annum. Such data is not available because cocoa is not a popular crop in Kerala.

Farmers too back the Mankuva variety. "There is no doubt that this variety easily yields double our local varieties," says Varki. About 60 per cent of the crop is planted and harvested from August to October. The second crop is grown in February and harvested in April. "Just three pods give one kilo of wet beans," says George A.V. Embayil, a farmer from Idukki district.

Mankuva pods have a thinner rind. When the pods are young, they are maroon. They turn green as they grow older and become yellow when they mature.

Thomas Vettukunnel is no more. But his two mother trees of the Mankuva variety still stand on his farm which has now been inherited by his son, Joby.

"The other old cocoa trees don't yield very much," says Joby. "But, surprisingly, these two trees are still fruiting." He also claims that the two mother trees are relatively immune to fungal black pod disease which attacks most other trees.

Jemini Thomas, Joby's elder brother, recalls: "In 1987, I brought a few cocoa plants from Cadbury's nursery at Adimali. These two mother trees were among the ones I brought from there."

Dr R. Vikraman Nair is an agriculture scientist who is an authority on cocoa in India. Before retiring as Director of Research, Kerala Agriculture University, he was associated with cocoa research for 25 years. "A single cocoa pod giving 300 gm of wet seeds is really promising. Generally, around eight to 10 pods make one kilo of seeds. But weight is only one criterion. The total yield from a single tree has to be taken into account," he says.

But B.T. Suresh, a cocoa farmer from Shimoga district, and his son, Shrinivasa Iyer, felt that Mankuva varieties were high-yielding because of environmental factors.

"As per international standards, you require 1,000 dry cocoa seeds to make a kilo. That means every seed should weigh one gramme. What is impressive is that in the Mankuva variety 600 seeds weigh a kilo, close to international standards. This is awesome," said Iyer. But the grey area that remains is the annual yield of a Mankuva tree.

RICH COCOA

Antony says the Mankuva variety is promising for farmers. "Getting ₹20 per pod is not bad income," he says. But there is

little awareness. Workshops to teach farmers about the Mankuva variety are needed.

"If farmers understand budding, they can convert their low-yielding cocoa plants into the high-yielding Mankuva variety without much investment," says Antony.

In fact, the Mankuva variety can be tried all over India's cocoa-growing belt. It has the potential to increase the country's overall production in the next five years.

Koodoor Ramachandra Bhat, an industrialist and noted cocoa farmer of Hosamutt in Karnataka, says, "When I saw it for the first time, I thought, What is so special about this? I have equally big pods on my farm. But once I cut the pod open, I was surprised. The pods were very big. Chances of getting pods of this size in our area are remote."

He selected the three biggest cocoa pods from his farm and compared their weight with the Mankuva ones. The average weight of his pods was 160 gm whereas the Mankuva ones were 260 gm.

Yet no research institute, agriculture scientist or any agriculture officer of Kerala's Krishi Bhavans has sniffed out this highly promising cocoa plant.

It seems likely that this new cocoa variety will be registered under the concerned farmers' names as per rules of the Protection of Plant Varieties & Farmers' Rights Authority, India (PPV & FRA). "This has come to our notice. We are considering facilitating the concerned farmers to register this variety in their names," says Dr Chowdappa, Director, Central Plantation Crops Research Institute (CPCRI), Kasargod. ■

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NUTRITION FOR THE VERY POOR

With Nutrimix CINI shows what is possible

Subir Roy
Kolkata

IT was in the early 1970s that Dr Samir Chaudhuri, then a young pediatrician, chose to work in the villages and slums of West Bengal. He soon found that he needed to go much beyond the confines of his specialisation to improve the health of the pregnant mothers and children who came to him as patients. Medical attention in itself was not the only answer. Malnutrition was the real problem. The first step, he realised, lay in awareness and a balanced diet.

In 1974 Dr Chaudhuri set up the Child In Need Institute (CINI) in Joka on the outskirts of Kolkata to train health workers and reach out to poor families. They needed to be told the importance of eating nutritious meals. It was sound advice but families eking out an existence in slums could hardly afford such meals.

What they really needed was a low-cost nutritional food through a high-calorie, protein-based organic mix. CINI began providing such a mix and out of that initiative 41 years ago has been born Nutrimix. It now touches the lives of nearly 100,000 children daily in West Bengal and Jharkhand.

Nutrimix has also morphed into CINCOMM, a social enterprise with immense potential. It is now available in six products, including a health drink. Nutrimix is all set to enter the Public Distribution System (PDS) and the commercial market with a slew of new products, including nutritious noodles and breakfast cereals.

"We want to enter the bottom of the pyramid market and target the poor, just like the multinationals do, so that they get nutritious food products," says Dr Chaudhuri. "There is no reason to subsidise these products and hopefully there will be marginal profits."

CINI works on the assumption that malnutrition is not always the result of the lack of food. Mothers and infants, especially girls, are not given the priority they should be given. Traditionally women eat last. Diet may be imbalanced due to lack of understanding of nutrition as much as the lack of food. CINI therefore focuses its nutrition project on informing and educating women especially those who are pregnant and



Prof. Sunit Mukherjee



A doctor checks babies to ascertain their nutritional status at CINI

lactating, to make the best of what is available.

CINI is one of the oldest and most well-known voluntary organisations in India working on mother and childcare and fighting India's endemic malnutrition. It works mostly in West Bengal and Jharkhand and has, till now, impacted the lives of five million people.

In the initial years Dr Chaudhuri collaborated with Sister Pauline Prince, an Australian Loreto nun and nutritionist, and Rev. Fr. J. Hendrichs, S.J. In 1998 CINI was recognised as a National Mother NGO under the Reproductive and

Child Health programme of the Government of India. The same year it was recognised as a training institute by the National Institute of Health and Family Planning.

It also has a disaster management global footprint and is supported by global organisations like Save the Children, UNICEF, Care and World Bank. With around 1,300 staffers and an annual budget of ₹29.3 crore (2013-14), it is also intensively into the training of development workers.

Two aspects of CINI stand out. One, it works closely with the government but political change in West Bengal has not affected it. Two, Dr Chaudhuri, who got his degree at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), has had a research mindset from day one. Hence, the evolution of CINI is based on learning from structured research by Dr Chaudhuri which has a reputational standing of its own in academics.

STEPPING STONE

Dr Chaudhuri recalls that, in the early '70s most of the nutritional products available in the market were unaffordable for the poor, costing almost a week's earnings of a daily wage



A Nutrimix production unit run by the Agrani SHG in Jharkali in the Sunderbans

CINI's health workers showed mothers how nutritional content could be improved by adding green leafy vegetables and cooking oil to fortify Nutrimix with iron and vitamin content.

labourer. Hence, he began searching for a low-cost food supplement which could be made out of locally available ingredients in the kitchen of a poor family.

In keeping with CINI's aim of using locally available material, Nutrimix initially consisted of rice and green gram (pulses) for a protein-rich, near-balanced food. In the beginning, milk powder was added but this was later discontinued as that reduced shelf life. Today, Nutrimix consists of wheat, green gram, iodine and iron to address the main deficiencies of protein, iodine, iron (causing anaemia) and Vitamin A.

A packet of Nutrimix has 400 gm of roasted wheat and 100 gm of green gram. It has 70 gm of protein and yields 1,700 kilocalories of energy.

A key person who gave the first stamp of professional approval to Nutrimix after analysing it was Prof. Sunit Mukherjee, then heading the department of food technology at Jadavpur University. Over the decades he has continued to play a key role in checking quality and in the evolution of the product, laying down its production path and, where necessary, designing machinery and working with fabricators.

In the first decade of its life Nutrimix was made in CINI clinics by the mothers who brought their children there by roasting rice, wheat and *dal* in cast iron *kadai*s, the same way *muri* (puffed rice) is made, and grinding the mix at the local *chakki* for grinding *atta*. This cottage industry operation was good for 200-300 kg of Nutrimix a year. It was distributed to women with malnourished children who were brought to the clinic. This phase can be described as one of conceptualisation, creating awareness and free distribution.

Having got a good thing going, CINI decided to make its product even more local and take it into the homes of the poor through its health workers. They showed mothers how Nutrimix could be prepared at home, using the much smaller home *kadai* and the *sil-batti* used to grind spices, and the many ways in which it could be used.

CINI's health workers also showed mothers how nutritional content could be improved by adding things like green leafy vegetables and cooking oil to fortify the product with iron and vitamin content, crucial for growing children. This



Women get advice on child nutrition

second decade could be called the phase of community-centric manual production and distribution.

CINI's surveys consistently show that the nutritional status of malnourished children improved after two months of eating foods prepared with Nutrimix. For instance, in areas covered by the Murshidabad field unit, weight increased in 265 children out of 394 and the nutritional grade of 79 children changed after two months. All the members of the SHG knew how to use Nutrimix.

A qualitative and quantitative jump came with the arrival of the World Bank, enabling CINI in 2010-11 to set up a mechanised Nutrimix plant at its headquarters off Diamond Harbour Road near Kolkata.

The other critical input came from the nearby Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Kolkata, two of whose faculty members, Sougata Ray and Kalyan Mandal, and an action researcher, Anjan Ghosh, came in during 2012 to conceptualise and



A group of women feeding a meal made of Nutrimix to their babies

CINI promotes community ownership. Nutrimix as a product has local avatars. At a production unit we visited in the Sundarbans, we found Nutrimix had acquired the name Pushti. Four more units have come up in Birbhum district of West Bengal.

roll out a social business venture around Nutrimix and also develop its supply chain. They participated for two reasons — Dr Chaudhuri's conviction that Nutrimix could be a social movement and the fact that the idea also matched their research interest in the transition of purely social effort into hybrid organisations.

The three scientists, so to speak — in basic sciences and management — all located near Kolkata, are members of the governing body of CINI.

Dr Chaudhuri was keen to involve the community in producing Nutrimix. So CINI began creating community production units which would buy ingredients needed for the mix locally and deliver locally while creating local employment. There was thus a product (Nutrimix) and a process "Community+" to empower a community.

This model conforms to guidelines laid down by the Supreme Court on the functioning of the midday meal and the government's Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS).

CINI promotes community ownership. Nutrimix as a product has local avatars. At a production unit we visited in the Sundarbans, we found Nutrimix had acquired the name Pushti.

The first community unit was set up in Jharkhali in the Sundarbans when World Vision India came in to support it. It was a kind of challenge. "If you can

do it there you can do it anywhere," says Bishan Mukherjee, CEO of CINCOMM. Four more units have come up in Birbhum district of West Bengal. The success of the model can be seen from the fact that there are now government orders for two more community units in Birbhum and one in Jharkhand. Further expansion will take place in Bihar, Odisha and Tripura.

THE TRANSITION

The biggest change that has taken place for Nutrimix is the creation of CINI Community Initiative or CINCOMM. It got going in 2013 as a sister company of CINI, as a non-profit Section 8 company under the Companies Act, which as a social business enterprise is seeking to take Nutrimix on a new path of growth and expansion.

"We wanted to provide a free hand to CINCOMM to expand, using business and management principles and to tap into the growing demand for low-cost nutritious foods for the ICDS and the Sabla programme of the department of women and child development in various states to reduce malnutrition," explains Dr Chaudhuri.

CINCOMM in its first year (2013-14) of proper functioning recorded a turnover of ₹1 crore and in the second year (2014-15) ₹1.7-1.8 crore. In the cur-



Dr Samir Chaudhuri: 'Nutrimix is a bottom of the pyramid enterprise'



Sougata Ray and (below) Anjan Ghosh helped roll out the business venture



rent year (2015-16) CINCOMM has the potential to get orders of ₹30 crore but finding working capital to execute orders of such magnitude would be an issue. Payment from government, the key buyer, takes a lot of time to come. So, despite having a good order book, CINCOMM is currently negotiating with the government so that some of the orders go to the community-run units. A community unit can produce three tonnes per month and five such units can take care of the needs of a block.

The community units, as part of the Community+ initiative, are a boon to the local women who run them by forming Self-Help Groups (SHGs), enabling more than 100 rural women to become entrepreneurs. They procure the cereals locally, sometimes from their farmer spouses. The benefit of eliminating the middleman goes to the farmer, that is, stays in the family which also gets the

price security implicit in having an in-house buyer for their grain. Also, when community plants meet local needs transportation costs are slashed. The aim is to work the mother plant only to meet shortages and take the number of community units to 15.

The foundation of the arrangement lies in a tripartite agreement — the government as buyer, the SHG as seller and CINCOMM as guarantor of quality and delivery schedules.

The SHGs form a pyramid structure. About 10 of them make a *sangh*, and a similar number of *sanghs* form a *maha sangh* which corresponds to an administrative block in a district and forms a cooperative to receive government orders. CINCOMM works with the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) in creating jobs at the community plants and with the ICDS for the distribution of Nutrimix.

Capital to start a community unit is not an issue for a *maha sangh* or cluster. With every member contributing a couple of hundred rupees or so they can easily raise around ₹5 lakh, with an equal amount coming from a bank. Virtually the entire output (9:10 ratio) is purchased by the government for distribution to *anganwadis* to feed children.

One-tenth is bought by gram panchayats from the SHGs. The latter pay the same price as the government and so SHGs, whose production (raw material) costs are lower than the mother plant's, make a higher margin.

The basic product plus micronutrients plus flavours costs the government Rs 80 per kg and the current cost works out to ₹72-76 per kg.

As demand for the entire output is assured, CINCOMM is not dependent on grants as CINI was earlier. The surplus generated by CINCOMM supports two entities: parent CINI and Dr Subhas Mukherjee Memorial Reproductive Biology Research Laboratory, out of which Dr Mukherjee works. (A bit of history: Sunit Mukherjee is sibling to Subhas Mukherjee who created India's first test tube baby in 1987.)

Nutrimix now comes as six basic products — wheat, rice and multi-grain based and their sugar added versions. Of these six there are six other variations, depending on the added micronutrients. The latter take care of vitamin deficiencies which is different from plain lack of adequate calorific intake. You can have it almost whichever way you like — as *barfi*, *pakora*, pancake, porridge or plain *sattu*. Or as a health drink with flavours like orange and lime.

The last is important. It came out of the need to give children something to eat when they came in early after the *anganwadi* centre timings were extended. For as little as 20 gm per drink, you can reach out to several times the number of children you could earlier. Nutrimix is sold as a powder, be it for the health drink or for malnutrition projects. In some cases Nutrimix is made into porridge and other recipes and fed to children at *sneho sibiras* (care centres). Nutrimix for malnutrition constituted 25 per cent of last year's total production and the health drink accounted for the remaining 75 per cent.

In keeping with changing tastes and incomes, Nutrimix has also been changing. It is projected as a ready-to-eat nutritious food at a time when there is demand for ready-to-eat stuff. In keeping with popular sensitivity towards taste, Prof. Mukherjee says variations of the product have been devised by adding salt, sugar and flour, as also flavours like orange and lime, all natural.

Two new products are being developed. One is an extruded product, like *kurkure*, which is about the same in content as Nutrimix but made with an extruder which works at high pressure and temperature. Developing new products sometimes needs developing new machinery. For example, while grinders are easily available, roasters have to be designed and put together by working with fabricators.

The other new product being developed is noodles which will be Nutrimix plus wheat flour. Noodles, which are popular among both children and busy working people, will be a vehicle with which to enter the commercial market.

There is a growing demand for low-cost nutritious foods to reduce malnutrition in the various schemes of the central government for women and children, corresponding state government schemes and NGOs working in the area. In fact, demand is increasing. CINCOMM's aim is to enter the Public Distribution System (PDS) and cater to the public demand for nutritious foods. "There is no reason to subsidise these products and hopefully there will be marginal profits," says Dr Chaudhuri.

There is scope for packaging and branding CINCOMM products in a mainstream commercial way and R&D work is going on in Prof. Mukherjee's lab to come up with not just *kurkure* but also breakfast cereals and health drinks to meet the needs of the middle class. "This will hopefully generate profits to start innovative projects at CINI or invest in other product ranges," says Dr Chaudhuri ■

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BUSINESS

ENTERPRISE | CSR | ICT | GREEN TECH

PICTURES BY SHREE PADRE



Artocarpus' factory at Taliparamb in Kerala. It is India's first formal jackfruit business venture

Jackfruit finds a company

Artocarpus gets going with 10 products

Shree Padre
Kannur

AFTER studying India's scattered jackfruit industry for more than a year, Subhash Koroth, 32, finally decided to take the plunge. This May, he invested ₹1 crore of his own money and started India's first formal jackfruit company, Artocarpus Foods Pvt. Ltd., at Taliparamb, near Kannur, in Kerala.

The company has 4,000 square feet of built-up area and employs 15 people. Ten jackfruit products are manufactured in its factory including dehydrated raw jackfruit, jackfruit juice and pulp, jackfruit *halwa*, jack seeds as a masala for chicken curry and powdered jackfruit seeds. These are sold under the brand name of Hebon after being packed in attractive containers with eye-catching labels.

The products are not being exported. Koroth believes we should consume the jackfruit we grow. "We need to develop jackfruit products with high market potential and market those strategically. We can then use all the jackfruit we grow and stop the criminal wastage taking place," he says.

Koroth, who is from Taliparamb itself, studied electrical engineering in Kottayam and for a while marketed electrical and electronic products. But he wanted to sell products that were unique. "I was longing to produce something different, something no one really had but would want, something aspirational. In my quest I chanced upon jackfruit," he says.

Last year he visited jackfruit value addition units, machinery producers and possible buyers of jackfruit products and concluded that jack seed powder and pulp would sell. The major drawback of jackfruit products, Koroth realised, was that they aren't

available throughout the year. So he decided to restrict distribution to a smaller region to ensure availability.

Not a week passes without a couple of people visiting Artocarpus Foods with dreams of starting a business like Koroth's. The reason is that a lot of awareness about the potential of jackfruit has been created in Kerala.

"Going by the enthusiasm, I think at least half-a-dozen jackfruit units will start next season," predicts Koroth, amused at the attention.

To top it all, Goa's Minister for Agriculture, Ramesh Tawadkar, recently visited Artocarpus with a large team of officials. He is keen to develop a jackfruit industry in Goa.

Koroth, who is managing director of his company, is not basking in all this attention. He is busy travelling all over Kerala, trying to introduce buyers

to his products and providing samples of his two pioneering products, jack seed powder and jackfruit pulp, to food industries to experiment with.

In the next one year, he believes, at least 10 innovative jackfruit products will hit the Kerala market. "Many micro-enterprises have been using jack seed powder or pulp to invent new products. Most of them are happy with the end product. They are *pucca* professionals. They won't plunge into production immediately. They need time to survey the market and to design labels and containers. They will then draw up a marketing strategy to launch their products. One example is the jackfruit muffins being made by a leading bakery group in Kerala," he says.

SEED & PULP

Artocarpus Foods is probably the first company in the world to market jack seed flour and jackfruit pulp. "A lot of consumers and people in the food industry are aware that *maida* (white flour) is not good for health. They are looking for an alternative and jack seed powder is ideal," says Koroth. "In collaboration with several food processing companies, we have successfully experimented with jack seed flour in a variety of bakery products. This has prompted us to produce jack seed powder in a big way." Unfortunately, no Indian seems to have seized the opportunity to export jackfruit flour as a gluten-free alternative to wheat flour.

Although a few companies in Maharashtra have started marketing jackfruit pulp on a trial basis, Artocarpus is selling this product more successfully and has managed to capture the Kerala market.

It was farmers and units in Maharashtra that processed the Alphonso mango into pulp who began pulping jackfruit in the last six or seven years. Now, around a dozen processors are producing an estimated 30 tonnes of jackfruit pulp every season. But they convert almost the entire produce into a sweet called *phanas poli*.

At least 70 per cent of jackfruit grown in India is wasted. Artocarpus is buying jackfruit from farmer groups for ₹5 per kg. Its factory processes both soft-fleshed and firm-fleshed jackfruit. Next year, Artocarpus will, according to its estimates, require 100,000 jackfruit including tender ones. This works out to around 10,00,000 kg. Families living near the factory take the leftover parts of the fruit to feed their cows. So there is no wastage.

QUALITY FOODS

Artocarpus has many valid reasons for not going down the beaten path taken by micro-enterprises. "There are practical difficulties," explains Koroth. "None of the products manufactured so far is properly standardised. This is because we don't have plantations that grow the same variety of jackfruit. Naturally there will be variations in colour, sweet-

ness and other parameters. Unlike end products, if semi-finished products have slight variations in different batches, food industry owners don't mind."

Jack seed powder can be used to make *chapattis*, *dosas*, cakes and bread. Jackfruit pulp can be used in ice-cream, cakes, toffee, *kheer*, *peda* and other delicacies. "Even if 10 per cent of our bakery industry accepts jack seed powder in place of *maida*, the requirement would be quite substantial," says Koroth.

To meet the estimated demand, gearing up production of jackfruit pulp and jack seed powder is essential. To scale up, Artocarpus is keen to follow



Subhash Koroth, Managing Director of Artocarpus: 'I wanted to sell a unique product'

To scale up, Artocarpus is keen to follow the franchise route and contract small units in different jackfruit-growing states and areas to process jack seed flour and jackfruit pulp.

the franchise route and contract small units in different jackfruit-growing states and areas to process jack seed flour and jackfruit pulp.

"At the most, the entrepreneur will need to invest around ₹5-6 lakh. We will provide training and machinery. They have to produce primary processed products as per our specifications. We will buy it all," says Koroth.

But Artocarpus doesn't intend to limit itself to manufacturing semi-finished products. It plans to produce two end products from next season – tender jackfruit preserved in retort pouches and vacuum fry jackfruit. Both will be marketed throughout India.

Koroth recently visited Vietnam to study its vacuum fry chips industry. He saw firsthand how four big companies there produce vacuum fry chips. Around 20 companies produce the chips in Vietnam and their daily production is one to two tonnes.

When jackfruit isn't in season, the manufacturing units produce chips from taro, lotus seed and sweet potato. Only eight companies are big while some of the smaller ones don't even have a name. They sell their products to bigger companies. With decades of experience, these units have mastered the technology and production systems required to make the chips.

Variation in raw material is a more serious issue in vacuum fry chips, says Koroth. However, he has a blueprint ready to start four production centres in collaboration with others in three jackfruit-growing

areas of Kerala — Kannur, Kochi and Calicut — and one in Mysore. "Our target is to manufacture 700 kg of tender jackfruit preserve per day and 200 kg of jackfruit vacuum fry chips," he says.

Kerala is witnessing a jackfruit renaissance in recent years. "Although this is a positive sign, some of the products like jams, jelly and squash do not have a bright future. The demand for these is very limited. There is also no training available on commercially marketable jackfruit products," says Koroth.

Another big hurdle for the nascent jackfruit industry is the pre-processing of the fruit. There is

no machinery available for cutting, peeling and cleaning it so the whole exercise is expensive. Wastage during long-distance transport is another headache.

Outsourcing the pre-production process is what made the Vietnamese industry successful. Koroth too plans to outsource cutting and peeling of jackfruit. The pre-processing centres will require ₹50,000-1,00,000 as capital. They have to harvest jackfruit from rural areas, bring the fruit to their shed and cut, peel and clean it. "The centres have to supply the peeled carpels to us on a daily basis against which we would pay ready cash." Koroth hopes that, due to his groundwork, at least four or five pre-processing centres will start shortly.

NOT SEASONAL

But, since jackfruit is seasonal, how can the pre-processing centres ensure supply round the year? Koroth laughs. "That is Kerala's uniqueness. Is October a good season for jackfruit? Everyone will say getting jackfruit from September to November is very difficult. But, look, this week we got two loads of jackfruit — a total of about 500 fruits. We paid the same price of ₹5 per kg of whole fruit that we were paying during the peak season. In Kerala, at least in some pockets, jackfruit is available 365 days. In the last two months, when everyone thought no jackfruit was available, we produced 1.5 tonnes of jackfruit pulp."

Farmers and horticulturists can step in and boost production. Selected off-season cultivars can be selected and propagated. Planting these in Kerala's high ranges would certainly boost production.

Another option is cold storage. It is time agricultural scientists studied the feasibility of this method.

"India badly needs a jackfruit development board if jackfruit has to become popular faster. The board should encourage jackfruit plantations to come up, provide training and incentives, help create supply chains, and assist jackfruit entrepreneurs to go to exhibitions near and far to market their produce. The kind of rural economy and employment opportunities we can create, then, would be unbelievable," says this enterprising young man. ■

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NIIT's learn and earn path

Kavita Charanji
New Delhi

VIVEKANANDA Camp is an urban slum located in the heart of the upmarket diplomatic zone of Chanakyapuri in New Delhi. A constant eyesore for privileged neighbours such as the British School and the American Embassy School, the camp lacks basic amenities like water and sanitation, and avenues for proper education and employment.

Yet, if life here is a constant grind, the children don't show it. When they are not busy going to government schools or fetching water, they delight in two sturdy 'Hole-in-the-Wall' Learning Stations where they play computer games, learn the basics of maths and English, use search engines, draw, paint, and even engage in quizzes that test their general knowledge. All without teachers or adult supervision.

These installations are run by the NIIT Foundation, a non-profit set up in 2004 by NIIT. The kiosks, which are opened and closed by a community member, usually operate from 9 am to 5 pm.

Young Ankush, one of the more digitally literate, manoeuvres the mouse expertly to play a game while eager children crowd around him. Yash, a Class 4 student in a government school on Malcha Marg, Chanakyapuri, says, "We do have computers in school but we can't even touch them. Our teachers use them to screen films." Another child complains that computers given to his schools by the government still lie unpacked because the teachers don't know how to use them.

"Hole-in-the-Wall stations offer what we call minimally invasive education. They are a stepping stone for underprivileged six to 14-year-olds who have never seen or touched a computer to be part of a connected world. In the process, the stations impact academic performance, engage children who might otherwise run amok and even prove a great leveller in places like Jaisalmer where the caste system is deeply entrenched," says software engineer Purnendu Hota who heads the Hole-in-the-Wall project.

The project was pioneered in 1999 by Dr Sugata Mitra, Chief Scientist Emeritus at NIIT in New Delhi. Currently a Professor of Educational Technology at the University of Newcastle, UK, Dr Mitra and NIIT have won multiple awards for the Hole-in-the-Wall Education Project (HiWEP) initiative.

Today 125 Hole-in-the-Wall Learning Stations which were initially set up in 23 experimental locations in India — all the way from Drass in Kargil to Jaisalmer in Rajasthan — can be found in Mumbai, Delhi, Bengaluru and all over Odisha, West Bengal, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Bihar and Assam. The stations are typically sponsored by corporates. The Ministry of External Affairs has replicated HiWEP stations in Bhutan, Cambodia and several African nations. So far, over 500 stations have been set up globally.

"Hole-in-the-Wall Learning Stations should be as common as bank ATMs," says Mitra, pointing out that what started as a small experiment has shown that "children in unsupervised groups can learn anything by themselves. We need to actualise

this in education."

The 132-member team of NIIT Foundation is steered by its director, Sapna Moudgil. "NIIT Foundation was started on a sole premise — that youth is the future of this nation. But are the youth adequately prepared to be future leaders, especially those belonging to the underserved sections of soci-

One obvious route has been the foundation's Career Development Centres (CDCs), set up in response to an ever-growing need in the service sector for entry-level employees.

So far, 26 CDCs have been set up and their number is growing. They offer certificate courses in showroom retail, BPO, food and beverage, data

AJIT KRISHNA



Tulika Mehra and Purnendu Hota at a Hole-in-the-Wall station in Vivekananda Camp

'The stations are a stepping stone for six to 14-year-olds who have never seen or touched a computer to be part of a connected world.'

ety? Interactions with these youth revealed that they had aspirations, but lacked confidence. They wanted to be gainfully employed but had limited skills. Initially we thought deeply about which skills and sectors we should consider, where underserved youth could be mainstreamed."

The foundation has found answers through strategies like Hole-in-the-Wall, Career Development Centres in urban slums and villages, District Learning Centres, N Reach (an NGO accreditation programme), IT education to community schools, and a programme for people with disabilities.

Core team member Tulika Mehra, Senior Manager (CSR and Sustainability), who is also a fundraiser, says, "We typically aim at youth who have passed out from government schools or are Class 10 dropouts looking for jobs to support their families. Sometimes they also want to study further but can't because they lack resources. We are bridge-building by connecting these youth to potential employment opportunities."

entry, in-store promoter, accountancy and so on. There are also foundation courses in IT and English.

The CDCs have been set up in urban slums and villages, making them accessible to girls. Post-training, all eligible and needy youth are given placement assistance.

Among the organisations that have placed the foundation's students are 24x7 Retail, Archies, Marks & Spencers, Bata, Vodafone, Xpert Hiring and India Family Mart.

"Our goal at NIIT Foundation was to create models that are replicable and scalable. In the last three years our CDC model has been replicated over 16 times," says Moudgil.

The foundation was roped in by Parijat Industries to set up a computer centre in Fatehgarh, a tiny village near Ambala, Haryana. "The company was very keen to address the issue of the skewed sex ratio in Haryana without sounding too preachy. They said that one of the best ways was to start a computer centre where the focus would be on digital literacy for girls," recalls Mehra.

So the foundation ran a computer centre in Fatehgarh to reach out to 200 youth of whom 80 per cent were girls. Initially, the courses did not focus on providing placement. The aim was to promote digital literacy and build a rapport with the community. However, as an experiment, four students of whom one was a boy, started interning in a Parijat factory as data entry operators. One of them is now working there full-time. Since then seven or eight more students have been placed. This year, more career-oriented courses have been added. ■

INSIGHTS

OPINION | ANALYSIS | RESEARCH | IDEAS

Potholes are killers



V. RAVICHANDAR

CITY LIFE

Smoking kills. Drunk driving kills. And so do potholes. In September 2015, a young married woman riding pillion in Bengaluru lost her life to one of

the thousands of potholes (one estimate put it at over 35,000) that dot the city roads. The tragic incident was made worse by the police booking a case against the husband who was driving the two-wheeler! Incompetence and corruption further tarnished by insensitivity.

The pothole menace in the city was earlier highlighted by a sculptor by installations of anacondas and crocodiles around the potholes, but clearly it did not move the powers that be to do anything.

Potholes are symptomatic of all that is wrong with the way we manage our cities. There are challenges around planning, governance, competence and implementation that envelop the pervasive corruption that defines our city corporations.

But first a quick primer on road design and construction. Water is the biggest enemy of asphalt and today's puddle is invariably tomorrow's pothole. So all design effort and implementation focus has to ensure that water flows away towards storm water drains.

Many roads do not have storm water drains. There are many instances where storm water drains abut properties rather than the road edge where the footpath begins. And road construction is often so shoddy that the thought of having planned slopes to lead the water into the storm water drains can perish. And if by chance it does drain towards the edge, chances are that the accumulated silt / garbage in the storm

water drains have reduced the carrying capacity of these drains significantly.

If one looks at the business model of road contracts, it would appear the system is set up to fail so that half-yearly re-asphalting contracts can be awarded to favoured contractors. And the contract 'leakages' in such projects are such that it is no surprise that, at the first sign of the rains, a fresh set of potholes emerges. For proof of vested interests, look no further than the pedestrian-friendly Tender SURE (Specifications for Urban Road Execution) roads that have been piloted in Bengaluru on seven roads.

These roads are based on a life cycle approach wherein one reduces the need for half-yearly asphaltting by planning for the long term – utilities under footpaths, cylindrical storm water drains, performance contracts and so on that will last over a decade sans major repairs. There was a hue and cry among the elected councillors who were over-eager to bury the project that threatened their business model.

There is a saying, never waste a good crisis. So it would seem with the pressure on the city administration to do something about fixing the potholes. It was similar a year ago with the garbage crisis. Urgent contracts are awarded, shoddy, hurried pothole-filling is done and while optically things look good on the surface for a few weeks (days?), it soon gives way to the usual potholes.

Some decades ago the foreign hand was suspect-

ed behind most sinister activities and the CIA was often trotted out as the prime culprit. It would appear that the CIA never left, except that it now stands for 'Corruption In Action'.

We do not have an accountability culture. The silos of our city and state governance and lack of empowerment in the third tier of city administration ensures that no one is held accountable. In the case of the woman who died in Bengaluru, the City Corporation blamed the City Development Authority, saying they built the road. The latter responded that maintenance was not their responsibility since they don't get the city taxes!

Earlier this year, in a PIL filed by two ladies for walkable footpaths, the judge said that in case of any pedestrian mishap he would pass a ruling making the concerned area engineer an accused in the FIR automatically. One has to wait and watch how this pans out and gets translated into action whereby the city authorities are made culpable for such accidents caused by their dereliction of duty.

So what is a possible roadmap to fix the pothole menace in our cities? For starters we have to get our road engineering design (including storm water drains) and implementation right. Embracing the idea of evaluating life cycle costs of a road and building them with the required higher capital investments upfront must be done at least for the major roads.

This will also require revisiting the standard rates (grossly low) specified by the state PWD which makes good project bids way over budget. While fixing the potholes we need to follow best practices in terms of sufficiently deep cuts that are properly filled and enough asphalt settling time allowed by planning traffic diversions.

Making engineers and their bosses responsible for any road condition-related mishaps with appropriate penal action could induce positive outcomes. Finally, greater transparency on contracts awarded and allowing for third party inspection by local citizen welfare communities could act as a check on the rampant corruption that is at the core of the many potholes that dot our city roads. ■

V. Ravichandrar, Urbanist



Water collects and creates potholes on poorly constructed roads

Learn from ageing Japan



MATHEW CHERIAN

GREY LINES

RECENTLY I had a chat with Professor Masahiro Fujiwara, President of a Japanese Foundation celebrating its 100th anniversary. He said that Japan's population consists of more than 30 per cent of the elderly and hence has adopted many schemes to cope with this demographic explosion. He said, "India is a young country and unless you prepare now itself you will be swamped by the grey tsunami." Prophetic words indeed.

Increasing life expectancy and an increasing number of older persons is becoming the norm today. The fastest growing aged segment in many countries is the 80-plus group. HelpAge India in its report, "State of Elderly 2014", has indicated that in the last decade the 80-plus group had grown by 500 per cent. In the 75-year period between 1950 and 2025, the average life expectancy for all people is likely to double while the birth rate is set to be halved. By 2025 grandparents will outnumber babies by two to one!

If India has to emerge unscathed from this future grey tsunami it has to begin work right now on its public policy and correct many of its social ills. A national policy for older persons announced in 1999 is still to be fully implemented. The new NDA government has launched the Atal Pension Yojana that provides a pension of ₹5,000 a month, depending on the contribution. Pension is very crucial for the future debate and in all probability this may be the very last measure to be implemented for lack of priority for the old. Look at our retired jawans fighting for "one rank one pension".

When family care is failing, community care is very much needed. Take, for example, Kerala where the ageing population is much higher than the rest of the country. No one is prepared to take care of the elderly, especially the dying ones. In Kerala, thanks to rampant migration, there are very few children left to look after their parents. In desperation, the government has initiated community care through palliative centres. Sadly, this is the plight of old people in one of the most developed states in the country.

Old age is not synonymous with disability, but frailty and disability are part of ageing. It is estimated that a minimum of five per cent of the total elderly population in the country suffers from one or the other disability — vision, hearing or mental. Since many are living in abject or relative poverty, it is essential to provide them some technical aids and devices so that they are not neglected and isolated. Though Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley has allocated ₹200 crore for disability aids and assistive devices in the last Budget, the scheme is yet to take off.

The Union Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment constituted a National Council for Older Persons in May 1999. The policy stipulates that state governments will take affirmative action to provide facilities, concessions and relief to senior citizens for improving their quality of life and to ensure that the existing public services are user-friendly and sensitive to older persons. The goal is the overall well-being of older persons. It aims to strengthen their legitimate place in society and help older persons to live the last phase of their lives with purpose, dignity and peace. Special attention will be

goods and services but also their producers. Opportunities and facilities need to be provided so that they can continue to contribute more effectively to the family, the community and society.

The policy firmly believes in the empowerment of older persons so that they can acquire better control over their lives and participate in decision-making on matters which affect them as well as on other issues as equal partners in the development process. The decision-making process will seek to involve them to a much larger extent, especially since they constitute 12 per cent of the electorate, a

PRASANTA BISWAS



When family care is failing, community care is very much needed. Take, for example, Kerala where the ageing population is much higher than the rest of the country.

necessary for women so that they do not become victims of triple neglect and discrimination on account of gender, widowhood and age.

The policy views the life cycle as a continuum, of which the post-60 phase of life is an integral part. It considers 60+ as a phase when the individual should have the choices and the opportunities to lead an active, creative, productive and satisfying life. An important thrust is therefore on active and productive involvement of older persons and not just their care. The policy recognises that older persons, too, are a resource. They render useful services to the family and outside. They are not just consumers of

proportion which will rise in the coming years.

The policy recognises that larger budgetary allocations from the states will be needed with special attention to the rural and urban poor. However, it is neither feasible nor desirable for the states alone to attain the objectives of the national policy. Individuals, families, communities and institutions of civil society have to join hands as partners.

According to the policy, voluntary groups will be encouraged and assisted to organise services such as day-care, multi-service citizen centres, reach-out services, supply of disability-related aids and appliances, assistance to old persons to learn to use them, short-term stay services and friendly home visits by social workers. Going by its implementation this year, 90 per cent of the policy is yet to be implemented. Moreover, there is very little budgetary support.

Japan has a scheme called 'Kaijo' which provides old age insurance for all illnesses, frailty and disability and a continuum of care supported by the state. Japan also has many assisted living homes in many areas for the old. There is much to learn from them. We can adopt and implement some of their practices. The land of the Rising Sun is likely to be our hope! ■

Mathew Cherian is CEO of HelpAge India

The upside of govt schools



DILEEP RANJEKAR

BACK TO SCHOOL

A few years ago, I had to visit a public hospital as my son met with an accident and the police, in order to file the FIR, referred him to a government hospital in the heart of Bengaluru city.

I was aghast to see the state of affairs in the hospital. There was no qualified doctor on duty. Dirt and garbage were strewn around everywhere. The surprise was that the trainee doctor on duty asked me to buy the bandage and thread for stitches on my son's lower lip from the medical shop inside the hospital and the shop did not have both the items.

So I went outside the hospital and bought the items. When I returned, I found the doctor had prepared to do the stitching with an old thread and a dirty tray...even the water in the tray was dirty. My son refused to get the stitches done.

I have been to several government offices and have observed the chaos that exists in them. Overall, they fail to extend even minimum respect to citizens and the bare essential services expected from them — leave aside providing the expected services. Yes, there are some exceptions but, by and large there is disappointment.

Contrast this with an average government school even in some of the remotest areas of our country.

Over 98 per cent of our villages have a school building — which is one of the better buildings in the village. Most schools are painted nicely with a cheerful horizontal pencil drawn on the top of the building. In most schools, there is a playground, drinking water facility, separate toilets for girls and boys, science kits, sports equipment and musical instruments. Almost all schools serve freshly cooked decent meals for the children every day. The schools are kind enough to allow even the younger siblings of students to join them for the midday meal.

The most commonly levelled charges against the public schools are (a) the teachers don't come to the school or don't teach (b) children in public schools don't learn (c) the government hardly spends any money on public education.

The reality on the ground reveals the following:

TEACHERS: More than 80 per cent of schools have at least two teachers regularly reporting and attempting to do something meaningful with the children — despite the fact that the country has not prepared them well enough through any rigorous education or in-service academic support.

Many of the teachers travel dozens of kilometres each day, from the place of their residence, despite poor public transport system. Survey after survey has brought home the fact that the average absenteeism of government school teachers is no different than



AJIT KRISHNA

Over 98 per cent of our villages have a school building — which is one of the better buildings in the village. Most schools are painted nicely with a cheerful horizontal pencil drawn on the top of the building.

the absenteeism in any other government department. Thousands of headmasters are fighting the battle sincerely despite no respect and support from the system. If an ordinary citizen enters a government school, he feels welcomed by the people there.

LEARNING: Research carried out during the past 15 years has repeatedly brought home the fact that the learning levels of students in government schools are no inferior than those in the so-called 'smart private schools' that have mushroomed primarily for 'commercial interest'.

In fact, there is enough evidence to establish that the learning levels in the average government school are marginally better than in the average private school. And this is despite the fact that they are dealing with children coming from homes that are socio-economically the most disadvantaged. Many of the parents of children in government schools are either illiterate or first-generation literates. The children have had no early childhood support.

Further, during harvest time, the children are regularly sent by their parents to earn some quick money in the fields. Girl children often miss school for several reasons ranging from sibling care to puberty-related issues. All this creates discontinuity for these children.

As such, rural government schools have to deal with a much under-prepared child whose continuity in attendance is not guaranteed as compared to private schools where children are selectively admitted based on their preparedness. The private

schools would normally expel students for absence from school for similar reasons.

FUNDS: The total expenditure on education is in the range of ₹3,24,000 crore per annum. The average per child expenditure in the government school ranges from ₹25,000 to ₹36,000 per annum, whereas the average expenditure in private schools is a fraction of such expenditure. The government surely needs to double the current expenditure.

In the above circumstances, the 'value' that the government school adds to each child is significantly higher than that in a school where children of well-to-do parents study. This value addition is often ignored by society. The moment the parents are able to afford the fees, the first thing they do is to seek admission for their child in a private school that creates an illusion of being a 'smart school' where the parents have to spend much more on their children to look smart with ties, shoes, uniforms and school bags.

Yes, many things have failed government schools.

The political masters who ruled the country since Independence took a good 39 years to come up with a decent National Policy for Education (1986). They took close to 45 years to launch a comprehensive programme (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan) for infrastructure and 50 years to define the kind of quality education that needs to happen in our schools (National Curriculum Framework 2005).

Even today, the politicians have failed to invest in

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No easy answers to farm problems

RAJIV Kumar in his article titled, “Wake up call on rural poverty”, in *Civil Society’s* August issue, argues that a paradigm shift in development and agricultural policies would mean focusing on making Indian farming “a modern knowledge-intensive, tech-savvy, entrepreneurial activity. This, combined with a focus on rural skill development to wean labour away from agriculture, will transform Bharat and bring it closer to India”.

By themselves, his recommendations are very logical. But they are coloured by his support for free market neoliberal ideology. Therefore, his recommendations cannot be seen as direct action against poverty and inequality, be it rural or urban. Since Rajiv Kumar is concerned about rural poverty, and he looks at it from a free market capitalist ideology, his thoughts are vague and sometimes he contradicts himself.

How can we treat agriculture as a modern, knowledge-intensive, tech-savvy, entrepreneurial activity? Rajiv Kumar is profoundly wrong if he believes that farmers are not knowledgeable. Knowledge about modern agriculture and use of modern technology is at the disposal of rich farmers.

Rajiv Kumar wants the Green Revolution to take place in the eastern parts of India, including Madhya Pradesh. Why is the Green Revolution in reverse mode, particularly in pockets where it was initiated? There is ample evidence pointing to the failure of the Green Revolution. The Green Revolution has been discredited. Rajiv Kumar should know that modern farming with the use of chemical fertilisers, pesticides and hybrid seeds has landed agriculture in a crisis and we are currently facing a rise in farmers’ suicides.

Many scholars have pointed out that the problem of rural poverty would have been greatly minimised if the government had implemented land reforms. When the government of the day did not have the political will to implement land reforms, how could the Green Revolution solve the problem of rural poverty and inequality? Initiating the Green Revolution in the eastern parts of India might be an exercise in futility. The problem is Rajiv Kumar is looking at the rural situation through the prism of his free market capitalist ideology.

However, when he proposes organic farming he

redeems himself by acknowledging the importance of traditional farming. The wisdom of traditional farmers is very relevant and needs to be revived. Organic farming has become even more relevant today. We hope Rajiv Kumar’s modern agriculture and Green Revolution will not defeat organic farming.

He might be right in stating that 30 per cent of the rural population is engaged in agriculture and 50 per cent are wage labourers. It should be noted that a majority of this 50 per cent are working as farm labourers without whom the remaining 30 per cent would not be able to engage in agriculture. While there are transformations taking place, the share of the absolutely landless is not more than 25 per cent of the rural population. The vast majority of the rural population is in the category of small farmers who also work as agricultural labourers. They are an essential part of the rural economy.

We would very much like to share Rajiv Kumar’s dream of weaning manual workers to higher productivity employment in the manufacturing and service sectors. But this may well remain a dream. The vast majority of ITIs in semi-urban areas have produced a lot of skilled youth. But their skills are not matching the highly sophisticated industries of today. The ITIs have produced only an industrial reserved army. Many farmers who were promised employment after their lands were acquired for industries are left high and dry. Do we not have a huge population of youth who are supposed to be skilled and are still hunting for jobs and quite often settle down with menial jobs?

When Rajiv Kumar terms MGNREGA a dole he should accept that till such time he weans rural manual labourers to higher productive manufacturing jobs, they have a right to work. MGNREGA gives them this right. When the legislation finally came in 2005 as NREGA, it was not a policy decision of the government, nor was it another rural development employment scheme. It was a right conceded under pressure from the rural poor because their survival with dignity was being threatened by the prevailing economy. In a democracy when the economy threatens basic needs such as food, healthcare, education, employment and pension of a large segment of the population, political intervention becomes necessary

have miserably failed to ensure quality implementation of various policies and programmes evolved from time to time. Illustratively, they needed to have taken stands with their political masters to provide the appropriate teacher-pupil ratio in each school. Or ensured implementation of the National Policy for Education and implemented the RTE in letter and spirit.

They needed to have ensured that institutions like the SCERT, the DIET and the block and cluster level academic structures were fully resourced with competent people and quality infrastructure. They should have ensured that the spirit of various programmes was carefully preserved rather than converting everything into ‘number of posts’ and ‘bud-

gets to be spent.

A teacher or a head teacher is helpless if teachers are not appointed and allocated for the sanctioned positions in the school or repeated requests for school repairs are ignored or if the total budget available for teaching-learning material for the entire year is ₹500 per teacher.

There are many outstanding and spirited people in government schools who are trying their best to engage with the education of our children.

It is not that the schools have failed us — it is the political and bureaucratic system that has failed our schools. ■

in the form of legislation in order to enable the affected population to satisfy their needs. We call this a political imperative.

We must emphasise that under MGNREGA the people are not digging holes and filling them. They are creating assets in rural areas. They are doing precisely what the author wants to see happen, i.e., setting up water harvesting check dams, restoring water bodies, creating horticulture farms, apart from laying rural roads and strengthening infrastructure.

Rajiv Kumar’s recommendation to review procurement policy and its linkage to promote agriculture in eastern states is not clear. What does the author mean by ‘review procurement policy’? We have seen that procurement is slowly going into private hands, into big companies. This could be a threat to food security.

Currently, procurement has not only encouraged food production, it has also built a reserve of food grains which are used for the Public Distribution System (PDS) and midday meals in schools. In times of drought, Food Corporation of India’s foodgrains have gone a long way in mitigating the sufferings of people. Food procurement has given farmers a fair price for their products. However, we have a strange situation where farmers are committing suicide despite a rise in prices of agricultural products.

The Minimum Support Price (MSP) is seen as a negative factor and Rajiv Kumar wants to promote high value addition and labour-intensive crops. What are these crops? Wheat, rice and maize are essential crops and there have been instances when these crops, particularly wheat, have failed or produced less. We have been importing these foodgrains. The MSP would be essential to maintain the optimum production of these foodgrains. These are very costly in the market but the farmers get very low prices for these crops.

Water management, water harvesting and restoration of water bodies are absolutely essential. This cannot be overlooked. The greatest contribution to this work is made by MGNREGA. We cannot agree more with the author on his eighth point: “Instead of subsidies invest in irrigation, water management”.

The fifth suggestion, we would call it promoting cooperative ventures in agriculture, is very positive. Vergheese Kurien’s Anand Milk Cooperative has been a great success. There is no reason why this cannot be extended, particularly to small and middle farmers.

Online marketing facilities for agro products should be linked to agricultural cooperatives. It will create more employment opportunities for rural youth, provided they are given necessary skills and training. To begin with, skills training should mainly focus on the agrarian economy. ■

Rejoinder by Alex Tuscano of Praxis along with Ganesh Iyer and Narinder Bedi of Young India Project.

Dileep Ranjekar is CEO of the Azim Premji Foundation

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establishing institutions of excellence that could develop top-class educationists in our country to support the largest education system in the world that India has. They have seen education in a fragmented manner — such as school-college-university education systems that has done a huge disservice to us. They have not even implemented the National Policy for Education in its true spirit. Successive governments have failed in providing the necessary budgets that are needed to provide education to a vast majority of masses who were hitherto illiterate.

The bureaucrats — who had the constitutional responsibility to provide ‘quality education to all’ —

LIVING

BOOKS | ECO-TOURISM | FILM | THEATRE | AYURVEDA



He Named Me Malala is on Malala's father, Ziauddin

Four films on true stories

South Asian documentaries at Toronto

Saibal Chatterjee
Toronto

REMARKABLE individuals and groups from four nations of the Indian subcontinent — Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan — figured prominently in the documentary lineup of the 40th Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) in September.

A quartet of films set in South Asia addressed themes ranging from Nobel laureate Malala Yousafzai's crusade for girls' education, *He Named Me Malala*, to the painstaking efforts of a handful of intrepid archivists to save Afghanistan's endangered

cinema heritage, *A Flickering Truth*.

TIFF Docs 2015 also showcased Geeta Gandbhir and Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy's *A Journey of a Thousand Miles: Peacekeepers*, a film about a platoon of Bangladeshi policewomen sent on a UN peacekeeping mission to faraway Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

The Nepal-themed documentary in the selection was Australian filmmaker Jennifer Peedom's *Sherpa*, which turns the spotlight on the culture of the Himalayan country's hardworking ethnic community and the growing tension between them and foreign mountaineers.

Besides the fact that these four films are all set in

the subcontinent, what makes them similar is that each narrates a specific story to paint a bigger social picture. None of these feature-length documentaries is overtly political in nature, but they highlight issues of global import.

In *He Named Me Malala*, Oscar-winning American documentarian Davis Guggenheim (*An Inconvenient Truth*) profiles the spirited Swat Valley girl who stood up to the Taliban and survived a bullet in the head to emerge as an iconic champion of girls' education worldwide.

The inspirational film throws light on Malala's father, Ziauddin's role in shaping the 18-year-old

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A Journey of a Thousand Miles: Peacekeepers is about a platoon of Bangladeshi women soldiers on a peace mission



A Flickering Truth is on the earnest efforts to save Afghanistan's cinema heritage



Sherpa turns the spotlight on Nepal's hardworking ethnic community

activist's personal beliefs and public persona.

He Named Me Malala had its international premiere in Toronto before opening commercially in North America and Europe. The Fox Searchlight-backed film is slated to air in 171 countries in 45 languages on National Geographic Channel next year.

Guggenheim follows Malala and her father on their trips to countries such as Kenya and Nigeria in support of projects aimed at empowering women.

The film provides glimpses into the personal life of an ordinary teenager who has slipped into the extraordinary role of a global campaigner with impressive maturity and poise.

Guggenheim, whose 2006 climate change documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth*, was about former US Vice-President Al Gore's lecture tours to spread awareness about the dangers of global warming, touches upon the larger issues that Malala's fight represents — religious tolerance, gender equality and social liberation.

"I like my movies," says Guggenheim, "to be not just movies. They're a part of participating in something."

Pretty much the same spirit drives Pietra

Brett Kelly's *A Flickering Truth*, which journeys to Kabul to report on the revival of the Afghan Films Archive under the watchful eyes of expatriate actor-filmmaker Ibrahim Arify.

The archive came under violent attack during Taliban rule at the turn of the millennium. Many of the celluloid films stored there were either completely destroyed or severely damaged.

Since the return of a semblance of democracy in Kabul, work has been on to salvage the country's cinema history, but the Taliban threat still looms large over the archive.

Brett Kelly's timely film, for which she had to visit Afghanistan seven times over a period of two and a half years, captures an arduous preservation effort caught at the crossroads. "No country should let memories of its past be wiped out," she says. "Cinema is the greatest vessel of history."

A Flickering Truth germinated in 2006, when New Zealand's Brett Kelly travelled to Afghanistan to work on another film. "I heard of this mythical place in Kabul where thousands of hours of film was stored and about which even the locals knew little," she says.

She returned to Kabul just after Arify took over as the head of Afghan Films Archive in 2012 and, with her cameraman, Jacob Bryant, filmed the archivists at work as the latter went restoring what was left.

A Flickering Truth is interspersed with priceless footage from old fiction films, documentaries and newsreels recovered and cleaned up for circulation by Arify and his team.

A Flickering Truth captures the passing of Isaaq Yousif, a former soldier for whom the archive was home for 31 years. On his death, Arify pays him a succinct tribute: "His memory was the archive."

As a filmmaker, Brett Kelly is drawn by conflict zones because, in her words, she is "fascinated by people who live, work, make films, write poetry and survive in a life-threatening environment".

A Flickering Truth records the past and present of Afghan history through the story of the rescue and restoration of over 8,000 hours of film. Says Brett Kelly: "The overarching question the film asks is: how can any country move forward without knowing itself and understanding its past?"

She took care to keep as low a profile as possible in Afghanistan. "There were only two of us, me and my cameraman, and we travelled incognito, staying in private homes rather than in hotels," says Brett Kelly, who has in the past filmed in places like Sudan, Libya and the Amazonian forests.

For the Bangladeshis at the heart of *A Journey of a Thousand Miles: Peacekeepers*, the year long all-female mission in an earthquake-ravaged country in the grip of political instability and lawlessness, was fraught with danger.

Not only did they have to brace themselves for perils on the ground, they — equally important — also had to constantly negotiate with a conservative Muslim society that saw them only in the roles of daughters, wives and mothers.

The project to explore this little-known but compelling story from Bangladesh saw Indian-American filmmaker Geeta Gandbhir and Pakistan's sole Oscar-winner Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy (*Saving Face*) pooling their talent and resources.

The Bangladeshi policewomen's unit that travelled to Haiti was 140-strong. The film focuses on three individuals — sub-inspector Mousumi and assistant sub-inspectors Farida and Rehana — to gauge the magnitude of the challenge that the UN stabilisation mission was for them and their families back home.

"The idea originated four years ago", reveals Gandbhir. "I read a report in The New York Times about Indian women peacekeepers in Liberia and

thought it would be a fascinating subject for a documentary.”

Gandbhir shared the idea with Obaid-Chinoy, with whom her professional paths cross frequently, and the two decided to collaborate on the film. “As I started talking to the UN, I heard about a Bangladeshi women’s unit headed for Haiti. It instantly struck me as even more interesting,” says Gandbhir.

The observational documentary records the women’s training regimen in Dhaka prior to departure and the day-to-day challenges that they faced on the ground in an unstable Haiti vulnerable to violent political agitations and gender crimes.

“When we got to Haiti, it became clear that the women were rather poorly equipped in terms of weapons training, and this became a part of the film,” says Gandbhir.

Although separated by geography, culture and language, there are many things in common between Bangladesh and Haiti. “For one, both places are repeatedly affected by natural calamities and women everywhere are sensitive to setbacks,” says Gandbhir.

Nepal is no stranger to natural disasters, a fact that is brought out in bold relief in *Sherpa*, made by high-altitude filmmaking specialist Jennifer Peedom, who has been a regular visitor to the small Himalayan country for a decade.

Many a film has been made over the years on Everest expeditions, including an acclaimed 2007 series, *Everest — Beyond the Limit*, and 2008’s *Miracle on Everest*, both made by Peedom, but never before has the mountaineering story been told from the point of view of the unsung Sherpas.

The visually stunning new documentary from Peedom is essentially a film about workers demanding their rights. It probes the mounting unrest among the Sherpas, who are increasingly unhappy with their employment conditions.

Sherpa is a cinematic essay on Sherpa culture, but it is also a cautionary tale about the repercussions of the indiscriminate commercialisation of Everest.

The key figure in the film is Purba Tashi, an Everest veteran who has been on the peak 22 times and is an old friend of the filmmaker’s. Tashi’s voice reflects the principal conflict revealed by *Sherpa*: between the pressure to climb to make money and the need to make common cause with the Sherpas’ decision to boycott Everest expeditions in protest against the shabby treatment meted out to them.

A violent confrontation between local Sherpa guides and European mountaineers brought matters to a head in April 2013. It forms a key part of the film.

Peedom was already gearing up to pitch for this film when the “Everest brawl” erupted. She instantly knew that she was on the right path.

She and a small crew were at Base Camp to begin filming the 2014 climbing season when disaster struck. An avalanche claimed 16 Sherpa lives and set the community on a collision course with the visiting mountaineers.

The thrust of Peedom’s film changed completely in the light of these developments and yielded a dramatic documentary that goes well beyond the scope of an average Everest film.

And that indeed is the hallmark of a great documentary film: it goes from the particular to the general and from the individual to the collective in one seamless arc. ■

SHELF HELP



Integrating the 7 sisters

Amit Dasgupta
Mumbai

THONGKHOLAL Haokip’s book, *India’s Look East Policy and the Northeast*, is refreshingly timely. The government has expressed renewed interest in implementing a Look East policy. Haokip makes a strong argument for the need to see the Northeastern states as providing the critical link to East and Southeast Asia, and thereby integrating India with its eastern neighbourhood, particularly ASEAN.

Haokip’s argument is that such an approach is win-win not only for India but also for a region that has suffered decades of neglect and lip service, as a consequence of which it has fallen victim to a self-serving bureaucracy, vested interests, corruption and the high-handedness of security and military personnel. Indeed, for the Delhi durbar, poor connectivity has alienated the Northeastern states so considerably that even today people from the Northeast are rarely perceived as Indians. On the development and infrastructure index they rank low and, as a result, tribal customs, norms and mores continue to constitute an integral part of the region’s system of governance. For Haokip, this distancing, and thus non-integration of the Northeastern states with the rest of India, can only be prejudicial to India’s long-term interests, whether economic, security or strategic.

A possible shift in India’s foreign policy orientation from the West to the East through its Look East advocacy brought considerable cheer in the Northeast. They believed that this would result in allocation of resources and concerted interventions that would enable the region to ‘catchup’ with the rest of India. Haokip demonstrates that this, unfortunately, never happened. Performance and actual implementation never kept pace with promises or good intentions. Substantial allocation of funds did

indeed take place but expenditure only lined the pockets of the ruling elite. Yet again, Haokip laments, the region missed the development bus.

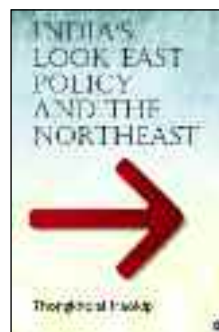
There were several reasons behind this policy and governance failure, principal among which was Delhi’s preoccupation with Delhi itself. This Delhi-centric mindset, Haokip argues, is reflective of colonial rule, where masters believe they know what is best for the natives. Unless there is a fundamental policy shift and Delhi co-opts the Northeast into a consultative process that enables the latter to determine their future, transformational change in the region would be elusive.

This, most certainly, is a book worth reading, especially in the context of the new government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. But let us first begin with the linkage between the Northeastern region and the Look East policy, which was first introduced as a major foreign policy shift under Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao in the early nineties.

For India, the rapid progress the South East economies had made was an inspiration. In 1993, the Prime Minister gave a clear indication of the compulsions that drove India to look eastwards. In a speech at Singapore, Rao said that the Asia-Pacific would be the springboard for India’s leap into the global market. Despite such a claim, it is interesting to note that the term — ‘look east policy’ — was mentioned, in passing, for the first time, in an MEA Annual Report only in 1996 and, further that there has been no clear elucidation, to date, of what precisely constitutes the contours of such an engagement and thus, a ‘policy’.

This distinct lack of clarity contributed in significant measure to the ‘policy’ not ever having fully taken off. Beijing’s apathy towards India engaging an area it considered its backyard naturally delayed the process of economic linkages with ASEAN as a

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Thongkhola Haokip
Sage ₹ 795

For the Delhi durbar, poor connectivity has alienated the Northeastern states so considerably that even today people from the Northeast are rarely perceived as Indians.

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whole and with individual member countries of the grouping. Insurgency movements further complicated India's relationship with Myanmar, for instance, and even Indonesia and Thailand, where terrorist groups sought refuge. SAARC had, by then, demonstrated sufficiently that it was a non-starter and Beijing assiduously built relations that strategically encircled and hemmed India.

Within India, however, the long-neglected Northeastern states misinterpreted 'look east' as meaning New Delhi was [finally] looking towards them rather than India looking eastwards. Never having engaged the individual states of the Northeastern region with any measure of seriousness or consistency, New Delhi remained mired in policy paralysis on what might be the best developmental model to pursue in the region. Consequently, despite public pronouncements, the 'look east policy' failed to take off and provide any significant benefits, despite its enormous potential.

Regrettably, despite some measure of acceleration in India-ASEAN ties and with a few member-states of the grouping, even the current government has not initiated any tangible project, so far, in the Northeast to fast-track engagement with ASEAN. Haokip realistically laments *déjà vu*.

Tragically, it is a reality that for many Indians, the Northeast is an alien culture and almost a separate entity. Racist attacks against persons from the Northeast are common. I recall accompanying Purno Sangma several years ago to Vigyan Bhawan for a labour conference. Sangma was then the Labour Minister of India. Known for not being fussy, he was not accompanied by an entourage of officials or security, as is customary. He and I walked up the stairs of the main entrance, where a security guard refused entry to Sangma on the grounds that this was a national labour conference and not an international one!

Discrimination against persons of the Northeast is ingrained in the majority of Indians. Because they look different, talk different, eat different, behave different, in our mind they are different. Unless there is a dramatic transformation in the way we perceive the Northeast, 'act east' would drift along the 'look east' way.

Haokip's book is timely. As he gently reminds us, "the government of India needs strong political will in the form of a robust policy, which also involves the people of the northeastern region. Without the participation of the people of the region, the policy would falter into another failed lexicon of India's Northeast policy". ■

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Wild Woods Resort



The cottages are elegant and comfortable

With a dense, man-made jungle

Susheela Nair
Bengaluru

THE route to our destination was very picturesque. There was a reserve forest on one side and the paddy fields of Toodalli village on the other. We caught a glimpse of a waterfall hurtling down the rocky face of the Western Ghats mountain range in the distance. When we finally reached Wild Woods Resort at nightfall, we felt a perceptible drop in temperature. A symphony of sounds made by birds and insects greeted us. The gurgling of a gushing river meandering its way at the periphery of the resort added its own rhythm to nature's orchestra.

Wild Woods Resort, spread over 22 acres, consists of a cluster of 30 cottages and villas. The cottages are fashioned out of wood and laterite in a distinctive architectural style with Mangalore-tiled roofs. Each cottage is simple but elegant with a patio, a living area and a bedroom with a king-sized bed. Overlooking the river are stone benches for rest and contemplation, and inhaling fresh and clean air. Bamboo platforms have been erected at strategic places for yoga practice.

The resort's masterstroke is its sprawling dining area with a live kitchen. And the restaurant's spe-

cialty is its ethnic food. After an arduous road journey, a piping hot dinner awaited us. We relished the local traditional fare of Kundapur – chicken curry with *rotis*, ghee roast chicken, fried eggplant and bamboo shoot pickle. We rounded off our meal with freshly prepared *kashaya* for digestion. Many of the locally grown vitamin-rich vegetables and fruits, which formed part of the menu, were refreshing. The next morning we enjoyed a rustic breakfast of local foods like hibiscus leaf *idlis* steamed in jackfruit leaves, and *neer dosas*.

We then went to see Wild Woods' wonderful man-made forest accompanied by K.P. Shetty, the resort's managing director. The fresh flower-scented air assailed our senses as we careened our way through the jungle. This botanical paradise includes plants, some native and wild and some transplanted and tended to by local gardeners. The forest teems with more than 6,000 varieties of trees, herbs, rare medicinal plants, ferns and creepers. It hosts a myriad insects, butterflies and birds that flutter around tufts of blooming wild flowers. Some of the plants have been collected from Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Africa and other parts of the world. We found a profusion of fruit-bearing plants and more than 300

is a breath of fresh air

SUSHEELA NAIR



A river meanders through Wild Woods

SUSHEELA NAIR

SUSHEELA NAIR



The cuisine is ethnic and outstanding

SUSHEELA NAIR



K.P. Shetty, Managing Director of Wild Woods Resort

varieties of flowering and tropical plants introduced in this landscape from Southeast Asia. Included in this profusion of greenery is an amazing collection of orchids, more than 600 varieties of medicinal plants and other rare botanical specimens.

“My acquaintance with nature started in my childhood,” explains Shetty. “Living in close proximity to the foothills of the Western Ghats, I was familiar with the flora and fauna of the region. But what inspired my vision of developing a project close to my heart were my frequent sojourns to various destinations in India and abroad. I dreamed of developing a unique resort in a natural setting without disturbing the natural habitat where humans could co-exist in harmony with birds, butterflies and other creatures.”

It took Shetty several years to create a beautiful forest park of high botanical value on what was once just a stretch of dry wasteland. He embarked on a planting spree to accomplish his long-cherished dream. Apart from planting local varieties, he spent years scouting the world for plants that would make his the only property with a cornucopia of plants. So you can find a Rambutan growing alongside a plum from Nepal or a Sour Sop or Star fruit fruiting in profusion.

Other rare plants include the Rafflesia and pitcher plants from Malaysia and *arnoldii*, the biggest flower of the world, sourced from Indonesia. Among the 280 varieties of fruit plants found in the resort there

are rare fruits like macadamia, santool, salam, salak and so on. This arboreal paradise also hosts some endangered species from the Western Ghats, an orchid tree called *Monodora grandiflora* from Africa, *Adansonia digitata* (baobab tree), a Madagascar tree, and *Ginkgo biloba* from the Himalaya.

After a few years, the plants grew to a certain height and attracted birds who then dropped more seeds, initiating a cyclical process. Nature took charge. Birds, butterflies and other varieties of arboreal creatures as well as the giant Malabar squirrel started colonising the nascent man-made forest.

“Our resort is home to many birds like the Malabar grey hornbill, pied hornbill, treepie, rare pygmy woodpecker, the flameback woodpecker, Asian fairy bluebird, paradise flycatcher, kingfishers, Himalayan pitta and the ruby-throated bulbul. Our resort hosts a mindboggling variety of butterflies and moths like the Atlas moth, moon moths, butterflies like the southern bird wing, oak leaf and blue mormon. Most of the medicinal plants and nectar-bearing flowers endemic to our area attract birds and butterflies, particularly syzygium varieties which are commonly found in our resort,” said Shetty, with detailed explanations of each.

“Many varieties of indigenous and exotic plants were sourced from every nook and corner of India and from other tropical countries. We also got involved in exchanging plants with other collectors

to multiply our collection. Our sole intention is to attract more butterflies and birds by planting many varieties of plants. I want my customers to breathe fresh, fragrant air during their rambles in this arboreal paradise and return relaxed, refreshed and rejuvenated,” explains a contented Shetty.

The resort is also an excellent base for tourists to explore the delights of the coastal town of Bhatkal and Someshwar Beach from Ottinene Sunset Point. The beaches of Malpe, Maravanthe and Murudeshwar and the temple town of Udupi are within driving distance. ■

FACT FILE

Address: Wild Woods Spa & Resort, Toodalli Village, Yedthare Post, Shirur Checkpost Deviation, Baidur, Kundapura Taluka, Udupi, Karnataka – 576214

Nearest Airport: Mangalore Airport (140 km from the resort)

Bus stop: Shiroor bus stop (6 km) or Bhatkal bus stop (15 km)

Railway Station: Baidur Mookambika Road (13 km)

For bookings contact: +91 7760976680

Email: info@wildwoodsspa.com

Kitchen art

ADD a touch of art to your kitchen with rolling pins and spoons from a dusty village in Kutch. The intricate designs and lovely colours make these cooking tools a great buy. The rolling pins come in different sizes. Large ones roll out bigger chapattis and the slimmer ones are useful for making smaller, thinner breads. The wooden spoons include salad spoons and serving spoons and make your dining table look inviting.

The spoons and rolling pins are made of wood from the babool tree (*Acacia nilotica*). "We buy the wood from the market," explains Jayantibhai. "The lacquer work is hand painted by my mother. The colours don't fade or leach. Ours is a traditional family enterprise."

Jayantibhai also manufactures tables, chairs, sofa sets, boxes and bangle stands made of wood with his trademark lacquer work. He says he was discovered by Dastkar around 15 years ago. "They appreciated my work and I was happy to join their network of craftspeople. I have travelled all over India to various exhibitions to sell my products, thanks to Dastkar and the Government of India. We also sell to exporters. But Delhi is our best market because people in the north like their chapattis," says Jayantibhai. ■



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Safe light

ONE Child, One Light Mission is an earnest effort by Thrive Solar Energy, a company based in Hyderabad, to ensure that every child living in a village or on the periphery of a town, has a safe light he or she can read with.

Thrive has invented the Accendo Study Light, a solar-powered LED Light and Mini LED Solar, which the company describes as being "the world's most inexpensive solar LED light". Both lights are economical, safe, portable and easily rechargeable.

Children of any age can handle these lights.

In India millions of children continue to study under the flickering glow of a kerosene

lamp. Toxic fumes released by kerosene adversely affect the eyes and lungs of children. In Bihar and Jharkhand the number of homes without access to electricity is staggering. Thrive Solar seeks to spread the light of learning and promote children's health.

One Child, One Light Mission has been going to government schools in the villages of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana and distributing solar lights. Children are delighted with the lights.

Thrive Solar also offers inexpensive solar streetlights for villages. The company has invented a Hawkers Light, Fisherman's Light, Torch Light and Flood Light. All their products are reasonably priced.

Founded in 2001 by Dr Ranganayakulu Bodavala, a Harvard alumnus and public health management specialist, Thrive Solar started off as an NGO. But it couldn't find a company to manufacture its innovative lighting solutions. So Thrive metamorphosed into a company. ■

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