

Civil Society

A SHOCKING MARKET IN CHILD LABOUR

DELHI'S SHAME



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Civil Society

READ US. WE READ YOU.

Put children in school, enforce the law

PEOPLE who take heart from growth figures and see Indian poverty levels going down should visit the sweatshops in the slums of Delhi under the direct gaze of both the state government and the Union government. They will see here the mismatch which exists between robust statistics and the foetid realities that engulf us. We decided to give you some idea of what is going on through this month's cover story, 'Delhi's Shame'. After all, if we can't get things right in Delhi, where will we?

The squalor of the slums apart, children in tens of thousands work in Delhi as slave labour, having been bought from their families in villages for a few hundred rupees. You can see children on the street at every traffic light and under flyovers. There is similarly a growing demand in double-income, middle-class homes for young girls who will work for a pittance in trying conditions.

This is the true picture of Indian poverty and the inadequate investment that we are making in our future generations. Growth without governance and a social agenda is merely a number. For growth to work for everyone, it has to come with equal opportunities under the law, affordable housing, access to water and health care. Children need to be in school.

In more than 20 years of liberalisation and reforms in India, we haven't come anywhere close to bridging the social deficit in the country. It can, in fact, be argued, with evidence on the ground, that growth has widened disparities. This is not to say we don't need rapid growth. But it must come with governance. Finding solutions has also become more complex as time passes because of policy confusions and muddled notions of public-private partnerships emanating out of the various limbs of the government.

Specifically on the subject of children, there are laws and policies which have long been in existence. But there has been no serious attempt to implement them. Clearly, our elected representatives are to blame. But empowered Indians must also ask themselves what they do to set priorities for themselves and the people whom they elect. Why is it that we can't see flagrant abuse of children right here in Delhi?

This month we once again walk you through the Lokpal debate. Many important suggestions are under discussion and they go much beyond the shotgun drafts that were produced by the Hazare brigade and the government's representatives on a joint committee with the rambunctious crusaders. We find much merit in the NCPRI's cautious approach and bring you proposals which have emerged from discussions it has anchored.

We are proud to begin two full pages on Ayurveda every month in our Living section. We believe that we have the best partner in the country for this effort – the Bangalore-based Foundation for the Revitalisation of Local Health Traditions.

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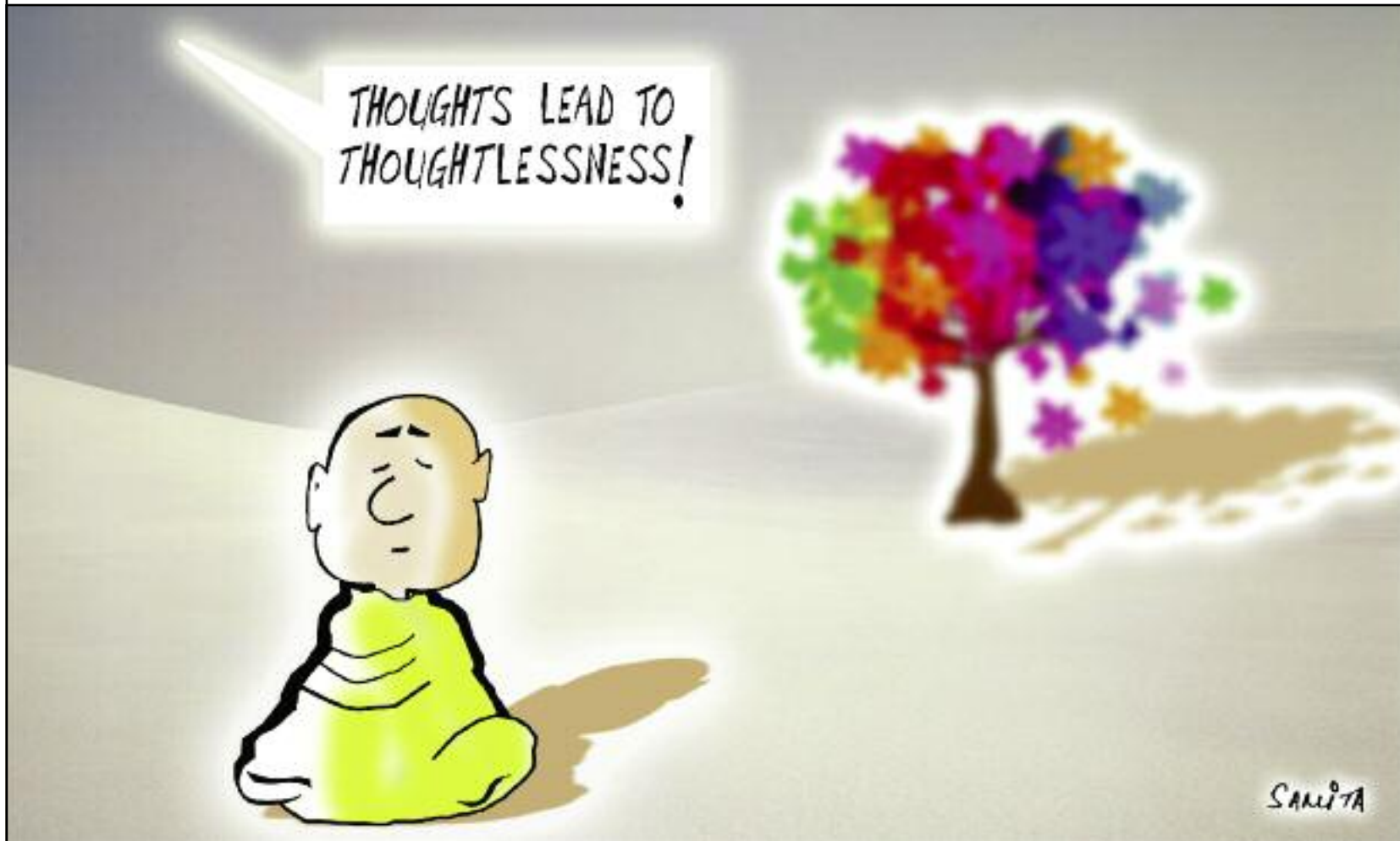
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IN THE LIGHT

by SAMITA RATHOR



LETTERS



Lokpal

Tackling corruption at the grass-roots requires vigilance and social pressure. At village level people know who is corrupt and who isn't. They can give you the complete picture, if you ask. Empower people to complain openly about corruption through public hearings and social audits and corruption will begin to die a natural death. Something should also be done about cumbersome government processes.

Asmita Kumari

The Lokpal to tackle corruption at the top will need to be a clever, honest and feared institution. It should make our political, bureaucratic and industrial elite quake. This is not an easy task but not impossible either. India has some very good people.

Shantanu Ghosh

Housing loans

Your article, 'The very small housing loan' was a really interesting read.

Saurav Sen

I was very glad to read this article. It is heartening to know that people who don't have documents can get a loan. I was searching for something like this for a long time. I also need a loan of Rs 5 to Rs 6 lakhs to buy a small house. But I don't any have documents since I earn money doing tuitions and my husband has his own business in the village. I was not able to get a loan from anywhere.

Shagufta Hasan Mulla

Mobile money

The story, 'Mobile Money', was very good. I guess the glamour of overseas remittances invariably overshadows the criticality of such great endeavours! Incidentally, I have also been following SBI's rural push in

Rajasthan, Haryana, Uttarakhand etc, which is done by small NGO-minded companies like A Little World (www.zero-mass.org). In this case, however, it's not just about remittances, but about extending access to finance and banking in rural areas. It's all done through an affiliate network who are given GPRS-wired online devices on commission basis. I am told it's growing at a reasonable pace.

Saurav Sen

Jackfruit

Thanks for the detailed article on jackfruit products and their promoters. Please keep giving more publicity to this sector.

R. Mohanakumaran Nair

It was very heartening to read about the jackfruit entrepreneurs. Best wishes to them and may their tribe increase.

Soumya

The story on the jackfruit festival was very informative. I happened to attend the festival and I learnt about its potential for food security. It was an event for the city. Some farmers also attended.

Sibypurayidam

The jackfruit festival was an innova-

tive and unique idea to link small farmers, business establishments and entrepreneurs so that they could work together. A newsworthy socio-economic initiative too!

Rahul Lahkar

An excellent article and nicely written. Jackfruit deserves all the recognition it can get.

Pritham D'Souza

Very informative article. Imagine finding jackfruit products in our supermarkets through the year!

Pejathaya S M

Funding

Thanks for the story on Naz Foundation and the declining funding for HIV/AIDs. The Union government must step up financing NGO projects in certain critical sectors. I think women and children should be given priority. The Union government can finance hostels for children and health infrastructure for women. Some hostels and hospitals could be run by NGOs. We have many reputable groups.

Asha Devi

Have a point of view? Write to editor@civilsocietyonline.com

INTERVIEW TISS will be hub for impartial choice of**‘PSU managers are to be judged on the CSR they do’**

Civil Society News
New Delhi

MANAGEMENTS of public sector companies have been asked to pay serious attention to social and environmental concerns. Top managers will see their performance judged on the basis of what their companies do by way of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and sustainable practices.

They have been told to spend between 0.5 and 2 per cent of their profits after tax – depending on the size of the company – on such initiatives. To help them do so without getting waylaid by political interests, the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) will serve as a CSR hub for the public sector. It will help define projects and choose social sector partners for the companies. A website will provide the status of projects.

Bhaskar Chatterjee, secretary in the department of public enterprises, spelt out the new guidelines and how they are to be implemented. Extracts from the interview:

What do you envisage public sector companies doing with the two per cent of their profits mandated for CSR? Since it is a large amount of money, it can do as much harm as good?

We do not want to impose a uniform two per cent expenditure on account of CSR. That is a proposal of the Ministry of Corporate Affairs. We have, in fact, a different sliding scale depending on the size of the organization. If you are a big company with a profit after tax approaching somewhere around Rs 5,000 crore, then a two per cent spend on CSR becomes a humungous amount. So, in that case, we have given the option of spending between 0.5 per cent and 1.5 per cent. But if you are a medium-sized company you have the option of spending between one per cent and two per cent.

A lot of social asset creation has already been done by the public sector companies in terms of building schools, hospitals and so on. How would you like to see CSR being defined in these companies today?

First, it is important for the public sector to have a clear understanding of what CSR is and isn't. We feel that CSR is not what you have done for your staff. It is not what you have done as part of your core business because in any case the public sector is for social good. For example, supplying electricity to villages is wonderful CSR, but if that is your core

business you are supposed to do it whether you want to or not. CSR has to be something other than your core business.

Then, anything that earns you revenue is not CSR. For instance, a tea company distributing tea sachets to rural consumers is looking at a wider rural clientele. Calling this CSR because it changes the lives of our rural folk is the kind of situation I want to avoid. A situation which is for the genuine benefit of the community is broadly what should translate into CSR. That's the concept we have for the public sector.

‘We have said in our guidelines that you must have every single CSR activity as a project, which means having a starting line, an ending line and a specific budget allocated to it.’

Companies are not forever. They are not meant to be. They are meant to be relevant to a point. Now when a company does things which really the government needs to do and tomorrow the company ceases to exist, who is going to do it?

The risk of doing things on a temporary basis and suddenly withdrawing from that activity actually hurts the community more. This is a real and present danger. We have said in our guidelines that you must have every single CSR activity as a project, which means having a starting line and an ending line and a specific budget allocated to that project.

When you go into a community or wherever you are doing your CSR, the community should know that you are starting on a particular date and ending on another. After that whatever assets you may have created, you hand over to the community. They should know well in advance that this is all there is to it: The project, the money to be spent and the good that it will do to that community. If you find that there is a pull from the community to do it one more time, you are welcome. But the temporariness of what you are doing must be well

known to both you and the community.

The staff of the companies by themselves should not do any CSR. If they do it, then it will be of a voluntary nature. You must engage an implementing agency to do it for you because you have not recruited your staff to do CSR work. For instance, in the Steel Authority of India there are people working in blast furnaces or on the assembly line. What do they know about CSR, what will they do CSR for? Companies will need to engage a professional agency to carry out the CSR activity.

Once that is established, the company will have a supervisory and a funding role and the community also understands that the staff are not doing this on a part-time basis. The activity will be monitored from day one to day end, it will be executed by a professional agency in direct touch with the community. Once that is clear, the whole role of CSR changes.

Is it a concern that being public sector companies you could be tied into the politics of the government of the day? Are you trying to address that concern by bringing in an outside agency?

I would not say it's a concern. I would say it's a very serious, lurking danger, an ever-present danger. With so much money sloshing around, we need to be careful. Therefore, what is the protection we are putting in place? If there is an implementing agency, it should not be the one selected by a political head. It has to be an empanelled agency of any central government department which has gone through the rigorous empanelment procedure.

The Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) in Mumbai will be the CSR hub for public sector companies. It has been empowered to empanel as per a very set, rigorous procedure organizations which public sector companies can work in tandem with. The moment there is political interference – usually it's some company floated by some dependent of a political person – the head of the public sector corporation has the option of referring it to TISS and there the proposal will die. Hence, we have created a circuit-breaker. TISS can just turn it down.

How much enthusiasm is there within the public sector?

You can see how little enthusiasm there has been from the fact that the total investment in CSR would be less than .0001 per cent of their annual income of companies. Things done for the commu-

projects, partners, says Bhaskar Chatterjee

SHAMIK BANERJEE



Bhaskar Chatterjee

nity have been afterthoughts, photo opportunities for the chairman and managing director or his wife.

A transition from charitable dispensation to a professional approach takes time, commitment and a bottom-up as well as a top-down approach. Therefore, we have tried to drive it both ways. We have said our guidelines are mandatory, which means you must, whether you like it or not, implement them. If you do not, you will be penalized.

The main idea is have every activity in the public domain. It means it will be uploaded on the TISS hub website. So one only needs to click to get the details of a project.

What are the incentives to do it? What's going to drive the enthusiasm?

There is no magic wand. So we have done a very simple thing. This department is responsible for setting targets for all 246 public sector enterprises. Those targets are set in the beginning of the year in a process called the memorandum of understanding (MoU), which every functional PSU, not a loss-making one, signs with a parent ministry but is driven by the department of public enterprises.

We set the targets. At the end of the year, we also review the performance. The review is a numerical review in which we award marks between one and five. There is no subjectivity here. It's a numerical exercise and the marks that you get between one and five determine two

things: One is your own service record as a public sector executive and 75 per cent of your personal ACR is on the marks that you get from here. Only 25 per cent is the subjective assessment of your boss. Two is that your take-home pay is determined by the marks you get (on the basis of) the MoU. You have the basic pay, but your performance related pay will depend on the marks you get in the MoU assessment and you can take home twice, thrice or four times your basic pay.

That assessment has two parts, financial and non-financial. In the non-financial part, a significant weightage of marks is given for CSR. Given the fact that the range is only one to five, if you slip up on CSR you can go from outstanding to very good in the blink of an eye and that makes the take-home pay diminish. Therefore, there is literally no escape. We thought that somewhere down the line there should be a bit of a bottom-line thing here. It can't be only an appeal.

Why can't CSR funds be used to meet higher environmental standards?

Environmental concerns are a solid chunk of what you want to do in CSR. In fact they are such a large chunk that we decided to give it a completely new set of guidelines. We have allotted separate marks for sustainability in which we have talked about the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), carbon footprint, pollution, water treatment, conservation of energy. And in the second

part of the MoU where CSR is a part, sustainable development is given equal weightage. We felt that these have to be complementary in nature.

Do you need a different kind of help from TISS?

TISS is only for CSR. For sustainable development we have not narrowed down on a choice and we are still looking. It could be a global benchmark. But certainly TISS can't be the adequate hub for sustainable development.

Whose idea was TISS?

We were looking for a good social science institute which had a national and an international reputation. There were only two which stood out. One was the Delhi School of Social Work and the other was TISS. TISS had the advantage of now being a deemed university, recognized by the UGC. A lot of students graduate every year. A certain element of research activity takes place and it has a reputed name. Thus TISS was selected.

Are you going to encourage more NGOs to get involved with the PSUs?

Of course. In the end I don't think any single sector or section of society can carry the torch. CSR is too big a canvas. Everybody has the right to paint on it. But synergies help. Storing responsibilities by yourself can't really get you too far. Therefore our idea was to try and bring in civil society, give them space and partnerships with PSUs.

NCPRI puts out five draft notes on

Civil Society News
New Delhi

THE Anna Hazare group has hogged the headlines with its draft Jan Lokpal Bill, but a low-key process by the National Campaign for People's Right to Information (NCPRI) has yielded proposals in the form of five draft concept notes which could, with further discussion, become the basis for a draft law.

The NCPRI draws on experience and its proposals emerge from discussions in which contrary views are frequently expressed. It includes groups like the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan, (MKSS), which work at the grassroots and have valuable insights into the functioning of institutions at ground level.

If the NCPRI has come to be seen as being slower than the Hazare group, it is because it approaches the creation of a draft law as a complex process.

The NCPRI's discussions on the Lokpal have included Justice A.P. Shah, Sailesh Gandhi, Usha Ramanathan, Annie Raja, Harsh Mander, Pratyush Sinha, Amitabh Mukhopadhyay, Aruna Roy, Shekhar Singh and Nikhil Dey among others. There have been conversations with Justice J.S. Verma, though he hasn't been formally involved.

While the Hazare group has proposed an all-powerful Lokpal/Lokayukta structure, the NCPRI has suggested a basket of measures which will tackle corruption in all its forms at various levels.

This is important since corruption has many manifestations. At the top it is secretive, complex and requires sophisticated investigation. At the grassroots, corruption is an open secret.

In NCPRI discussions, caution has been expressed against creating institutions outside the democratic process. The Indian Constitution delicately balances power between the executive, the legislature and the judiciary. The general view in the NCPRI has been that the basic framework of the Constitution should not be challenged.

There has been concern over concentrating too much power in a single institution. It may be too much to expect a Lokpal to tackle complaints against the Prime Minister, senior judges and MPs at the top as well as officials like junior engineers and block development officers at the bottom. The Union government alone employs some four million people.

"The Lokpal should not collapse under its own weight," Aruna Roy of the MKSS said at a two-day consultation held at the Teen Murti Library in Delhi in July.

It has also been felt that it is better to strengthen dysfunctional institutions by addressing their weaknesses and create new ones only wherever necessary. There is no point in replicating bad examples.

"We need to strengthen existing democratic institutions and not bypass them. We have laws. We need to implement old laws even as we draw



up new ones," said Shekhar Singh.

So, instead of one mighty Lokpal, the NCPRI has proposed institutions at different levels. These are:

- A Central Lokpal Anti-Corruption Commission to deal with corruption in high places. It would cover the Prime Minister, MPs, Class A officers. At state level, a Lokayukta Commission would cover the Chief Ministers, MLAs etc.
- A strengthened Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) to deal with the bureaucracy below Class A officers.
- A Grievance Redressal Commission (GRC) to register and resolve everyday complaints which ordinary citizens have against their local administrations.
- A Judicial Accountability and Standards law to tackle complaints against judges and improve the functioning of the judiciary.
- A law for the protection of whistleblowers who are key to the uncovering of corruption.

The debate over the Lokpal has thrown up differences among activist groups on certain key points.

The NCPRI's view on these points is as follows:

PRIME MINISTER: The NCPRI recommends that the Prime Minister should come under the Lokpal but with checks and balances. The PM cannot be questioned on decisions he has taken on security and defence. Investigations against the PM can only begin only if a full bench of the Lokpal recommends it and a full bench of the Supreme Court examines the evidence and agrees. To prevent the PM from becoming a 'lame duck', the draft bill says the PM will not be held responsible for decisions taken by other ministers in his government, and before starting such an investigation, a notice will need to be served to the ruling party.

INVESTIGATIVE POWERS: NCPRI members agreed the Lokpal should have the power to investigate and prosecute. But they suggested splitting the two functions for achieving greater balance and good sense. It was also proposed that the Prevention of Corruption Act be modified to cover companies as co accused.

The NCPRI also proposes a search committee to

Lokpal

LAKSHMAN ANAND



are appointed by their respective departments and are 'nameless and faceless.' The VO would be able to initiate investigation in the department if required and be answerable to the CVO.

The second model is to make the secretary of the department responsible for delays or inefficiencies in investigation. So the VO would report to the secretary. If the complainant is unhappy with the VO and the secretary, he can approach the CVC. NCPRI members felt the advantage with this model is that the autonomy of the department would remain and the secretary would be made accountable.

Prasanta Sen, a lawyer, said VOs should get security of tenure in the department so that they can pick up nuances and get specialisation in that area. Another suggestion was to draw up Standard Operating Procedures. Smooth processes were found to be very useful in investigation and for speeding things up.

Complaints against the CVC should go to the Lokpal and be investigated before being referred to the Supreme Court. The responsibility of finding candidates for the CVC would be entrusted to the Lokpal through a search committee.

'We need to strengthen existing democratic institutions and not bypass them,' said Shekhar Singh. So in keeping with India's democratic traditions, the NCPRI has proposed institutions at different levels to tackle corruption.

GRIEVANCES: The Lokshikayat Grievance Redress Commission proposed by the NCPRI would tackle day-to-day grievances and make every government department accountable and efficient. It was pointed out a healthy trend was already underway. Some states have made 'time-bound services' mandatory.

Every department would have to clearly inform people about the services or goods it is providing, how these can be accessed, who is eligible and who will be responsible for delivering those services. The quality of the department can be assessed by its output. Every public authority will have a Grievance Redressal Officer (GRO) for receiving and disposing of complaints within a specified time line.

At block level, a facilitation centre is proposed which will tell villages about the government's schemes and entitlements. It will file complaints and send them to the GRO. The centres would come under the Lokshikayat Grievance Redressal Commission. Computerisation would be necessary for tracking complaints and entitlements. The commission can, from time to time, order

social audits and assess how departments at the grassroots are functioning with people's participation.

Grievances would not just include ration cards and entitlements. If laws at the grassroots such as the Forest Rights Act were not being properly implemented, then that too would constitute a grievance, explained a member.

JUDICIARY: The most complex reform appears to be with regard to the judiciary.

The NCPRI suggests retaining the independence of the judiciary but seeks to make it accountable by strengthening the weak Judicial Standards and Accountability Bill, tabled in Parliament in December 2010.

The bill lays down standards of behaviour for judges of the Supreme Court and High Court. It establishes a mechanism for receiving and investigating complaints and a procedure for impeaching a judge. The bill proposes setting up a National Judicial Oversight Committee to deal with complaints against judges.

The NCPRI would like the National Judicial Oversight Committee to be strengthened. As per the government draft, the Oversight Committee has been crowded with members from the judiciary which makes it look like a charmed circle. The NCPRI recommends instead that members of the Oversight Committee be chosen through a collegium system, include two non-judicial members and be chaired by the Vice-President of India.

The NCPRI proposes making the Oversight Committee a permanent body. All serving judges on the committee should work full-time. The committee will come up with its own procedures. It will appoint an Investigation Committee with at least two serving members of its own committee, if a judge has to be investigated. Also, the Oversight Committee will define what exactly is meant by 'misbehaviour' by judges – technically even Parliament isn't empowered to define that.

The NCPRI has suggested that scrutiny of complaints against judges should be done in camera. The outcome of a complaint may not be serious enough to require a judge to be removed. Advisories and warnings can also be used as punishments.

Members also said that former judges of the Supreme Court should be prohibited from giving opinions or seeking arbitration except if the President or governor seeks it in the national or public interest.

A young lawyer from Bhopal pleaded that this new bill be used to improve the functioning of the judiciary and set higher standards. Corruption is not the only issue. At district level the judiciary was a complete mess with judges traipsing in and out of the court as and how they pleased. People sold their assets in an elusive search for justice. The quality of judgements and orders passed was pathetic.

"Let us use this opportunity to clean up the rot in the judiciary," he said. "Otherwise you may end up with a clean and hopelessly inefficient judiciary."

He recommended splitting the Judicial Standards and Accountability Bill into two: so a Judicial Standards Bill would ensure the judiciary improved its services and a Judicial Accountability Bill would make sure judges were not corrupt.

find people with good reputations to be on the Lokpal bench. The Lokpal should have financial and functional autonomy. A two-year deadline for all trials was not seen as a practical idea. Penalties for frivolous complaints has been opposed. Only those with malafide intention should be penalised.

CENTRAL VIGILANCE COMMISSION: With Group A officers coming under the Lokpal, the CVC could investigate complaints and grievances against Group B and other officials. A list can be worked out. The CVC currently receives nearly 15,000 complaints a year and investigates hardly any. But people are familiar with it. NCPRI recommends removing the 'single directive' by which the CVC has to seek the permission of the Union government before investigating an officer of the level of joint secretary and above.

The NCPRI is discussing two models for the CVC:

First, the CVC could be hived off as a separate investigative department with its own cadre. So Vigilance Officers (VOs) would report to the Chief Vigilance Officer (CVO) in the CVC. Currently VOs

Wardha meet decries evictions

GAUTAM SINGH

Gautam Singh
Wardha

INDIAN cities are changing fast. But in their aspiration to look world class, city governments are razing slums and dumping the poor in urban hinterlands. Peoples' movements have been searching for strategies to stop the poor from being evicted and deprived of their homes and livelihood.

The National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM) met at Wardha on 4 July to discuss such an urban strategy. It is keen to shape 'collective action' in the face of a 'renewed onslaught either in the name of urban renewal or development or in the name of making cities global' in which 'the rights of the working class in urban areas are being bulldozed and violated.'

"The urban planning process is excluding a lot of people. It needs to be examined how humane is the urban infrastructure and system, and whether it reflects and upholds our constitutional rights," said Medha Patkar of the NAPM.

It wasn't unusual that a meeting to discuss such a strategy took place in Wardha, a place which is synonymous with Mahatma Gandhi and India's freedom movement. Historically, Wardha has been the setting for many meetings and important decisions that shaped India's future. But it was a little ironical and sad that the meeting had much in common with the issues that preoccupied Gandhi and other leaders before India gained independence. The Government of India was accused of playing star villain across time and in an unnervingly similar way as the colonial rulers.

The 2011 Census figures reveal that almost a third of India's population now lives in an urban habitat. The number of towns rose by almost 54 per cent in the last decade. By 2050, the World Bank estimates that around 50 per cent of Indians will be based in urban areas. It considers this population shift from villages to cities to be 'natural and to be encouraged'. The pressure on urban infrastructure and living space is increasing, but policies being framed by the government are only serving to increase the disparities between rich and poor, feels the NAPM.

Patkar said that the increasing participation of the private sector in the planning process, like hiring McKinsey for Mumbai, "needs to be challenged as it is only increasing the disproportionate allocation of resources." More than 60 per cent of Mumbai's population lives in slums but occupies only seven to eight per cent of the land. And this too is being taken away from them in the guise of development plans that leave the poor



Protest over the redevelopment of Golibar slum

displaced in the absence of an effective rehabilitation policy, says the NAPM.

The recent uproar over the redevelopment of the Golibar slum area in Mumbai in which NAPM joined hands with protesting residents who were facing demolition revealed shortcomings in government policy in its hurry to turn Mumbai into Shanghai. The government's inaction over irregularities that RTI applications uncovered, like the forging of documents by the builder, the encroachment of defense land, the lack of any agreement with the residents and the slow pace of providing accommodation to the displaced – only around 550 of the 10,000 displaced in Golibar have received flats – was proof of a growing partnership

More than 60 per cent of Mumbai's population lives in slums but occupies only 7 to 8 per cent of the city's land. And this too is being taken away from them in the guise of development plans. There is no effective urban rehabilitation policy.

between a section of the corporate sector, politicians and bureaucrats, say NAPM activists.

"We want improvement in the living conditions of the slums," Patkar clarified. "But the slumless city is not only finishing off the slums, but also the people. Slums will remain unless basic inequity is mitigated."

Bhupendra Rawat, who has been working for the rights of the unorganized sector in New Delhi, spoke about the conditions of the people displaced due to urban development projects. "In Delhi people were made to move almost 30 or 35km from their workplace, making commuting costs for them prohibitive. Now most of them don't even earn minimum wages. They live on the streets and go back to their homes once in 15 or 20 days."

"The bias in infrastructure spending is in favour of private motorized vehicles," he said. "Such a policy is unfair to the majority who can afford only a cycle. Separate lanes need to be made for cyclists, and schemes like the BRTS should be encouraged. We will have to fight bulldozers unless we prevent the enactment of laws that are anti-poor. And this is possible only if we intervene at the planning stage."

His organization, Jan Sangharsh Vahini, staged dharnas and disrupted proceedings at the planning stage of the 2008 Rohini Master Plan which prompted officials to include their suggestions in the drafting of their plans.

Schemes like the JNNURM (Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission) also came in for criticism. Shaktiman Ghosh of the National Hawkers' Mission alleged that agencies like the

USAID (United States Agency for International Development) helped design JNNURM. "The lifestyle of the planners leaves no place for the poor," he said. "The rich have washing machines and vacuum cleaners and have no need for workers or hawkers because malls are there. In this concept, they have planned for such a lifestyle. There is no policy for rehabilitation for the urban displaced. Today they are sending people away from the cities. We have to come together and fight these policies."

The major reason for large-scale migration to cities has been displacement in rural areas. People who lose their fields, forests and pastures for 'development' projects have no choice but to migrate to the city in search of livelihood.

But look what happens to rural people when they make this move. Aradhna Bhargava of the Mahila Sangharsh Samiti in Chhindwara who has been involved with those displaced by the Pench Dam says: "The city doesn't want them. The poor live in unhygienic conditions, close to garbage dumps, near railway tracks. The women are worst off and face economic, mental and physical exploitation. The men become rickshaw drivers and the women work in houses where they are not given any respect. The police round them up as suspects whenever there is a crime. The reality is that once you lose your land, you have nothing."

Medha Patkar felt the urban development story in India is one of 'disparity, displacement and discrimination' and India's current policies are not going to improve the situation. Even now most of India's population lives in its villages, and any "development that has to be equitable must stop the exploitation that is happening there," said Vijay Jawandhia of the Shetkari Sanghathan.

"India is divided into India and Bharat. After 1947, the policy of exploiting the villages has continued. It is very difficult to survive in rural areas which is why people migrate to cities. We are making a Super India of India and an Ethiopia of Bharat," he said.

It's a comment which is uncannily similar to what Gandhi had said over six decades ago: "If the village perishes India will perish too. India will be no more India."

Disability report a cut-paste job?

Civil Society News
New Delhi

THE first draft of a Country Report on disabled persons in India, prepared by the Centre for Disability Studies, NALSAR Law University, Hyderabad, has irritated many NGOs working for the rights of the disabled.

"I think it is a comedy of errors," says Javed Abidi, chairperson of the National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP). "This should have been a national report on the progress India has achieved since it ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2007. But all that the Centre for Disability Studies has done is to copy-paste sundry information on disabled people from the Internet."

Information on this draft-report was accessed by NCPEDP through right to information (RTI) applications.

Abidi points out that a Country Report, logically, should examine what the government has done. "Instead the report is full of information about what the NGOs have done for the disabled of this country," he says.

The task of compiling such a report was entrusted to NALSAR by the Union Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. But NCPEDP points out that information should have been taken from various ministries on transportation, education, health, accessibility etc. Getting into all of them is, no doubt, difficult.

The first draft has proved to be a big disappointment to NGOs. It focuses on areas like accessibility, mobility, women, children, education, health, accommodation, employment and other basic amenities for the disabled persons. It talks about the law and its discrepancies for the disabled. But it is all about the work the NGO sector has been doing.

Abidi says Rs 23.43 lakhs has gone down the drain. "This Rs 23.43 lakhs is your money, my money and it has gone to waste because this draft doesn't come up with any substantial information.

Moreover, it is unethical to copy the information provided on websites without asking for any permission."

The NCPEDP has now demanded that a new inter-ministerial committee be set up to draw up a fresh Country Report on the disability sector in India.

A UN Committee meets twice a year to review progress made on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Country Reports are tabled so that the committee gets a

fair picture of what each country is doing.

"Disability is a global issue. It is very important to build up capacities in India to take on this issue. It is the responsibility of every ministry to implement the rights of the disabled," says Alex Cote, capacity building programme officer of the International Disability Alliance. India has an estimated 70 million disabled people who constitute around six to seven per cent of the population.

Abidi says the report should examine what the govt has done. 'Instead the report is full of information about what the NGOs have done for the disabled in India.'

SAMITA' S WORLD

by SAMITA RATHOR



SHAMIK BANERJEE



Children in slums take time off to play sports

The magic of sports

Sugandha Pathak
New Delhi

SEVERAL dusty lanes lead to a playground at Aali village in the south-western outskirts of Delhi. The playground bubbles over with laughter and cheer as children have a good time. But this is not the way it always used to be. Not long ago, the playground was well on its way to being a dumping ground and the children lived shattered lives, some of them on drugs.

Magic Bus, an NGO, reaches out to stressed out 35,000 children on the streets, giving them a few hours at playgrounds such as the one at Aali village. It helps the children take to sport, discover friends and find new meaning in life.

"These children come from different backgrounds. They are addicts, orphans, from slums, rag-pickers.. So even among marginalized children there are various compartments. It is a challenge to break into their lives, but after the initial hesitation, they welcome you. After all they are children, they want to play," says N.Dhiraj Singha, district programme manager of Magic Bus. He is in charge of play sessions in South and Central Delhi which cater to 14,000 children.

After just a month of playing sports the children change noticeably, says Singha.

"They are no longer shy or quiet like they were initially. They are a lively bunch, waiting to be unleashed," he says.

Singha explains that child drug addicts from Chandni Chowk and Sadar Bazaar in the Walled City have been the most challenging to handle.

Since these children are extremely temperamental reigniting their childhood is difficult.

"Initially they used to play games which involved gambling like cards, marbles and gullidanda. When we first approached them they were hesitant and suspicious. They slowly opened up after weeks of constant interaction. Sport works as a self-realization technique for them. They begin to understand how weak their bodies have become. They assure us that for two hours they will not consume any drugs," says Singha.

Another hurdle was to find a safe place for the children to play. Most playgrounds in slums were unkempt. "The very idea of providing a park or a ground for children to play is not of concern for the authorities especially for this section of the society," says a member of Magic Bus.

The task of transforming huge dump yards into playgrounds and spreading awareness about cleanliness and hygiene was taken up by Magic Bus.

"This playground in Aali village, called the Baraatghar, was cleaner than most when we zeroed in. You should have seen the playground in Gautampuri. It was a garbage dump and a toilet for the locals. The one in Govindpuri was a gambling zone. Our members started cleaning it and then the locals also joined in. That's how we introduce community mobilization," explains Singha.

Magic Bus has over 1000 volunteers to cater to over 35,000 children.

"The volunteers are divided into trainers who are selected from the same area. The criterion to select these trainers is simple – they must be peo-

ple who love outdoor sports and can get along with the children," says Singha.

The trainers play a crucial role in bringing the children to the playground. A bond builds up between the trainers and the children who then speak to them without inhibitions. It was after interacting with the trainers, that children began talking about the different restrictions imposed by their parents.

"Some did not make any sense. For example, in the rag-picker community, the parents were reluctant to send their children to school or to our playground. They just wanted the child to work. Even bringing girls from their homes was difficult since most of them have to do household chores," says a trainer.

Rakhi, 21, who volunteers as a trainer has successfully

managed to get a lot of girls to playgrounds.

"I always liked sports," she says. "I played netball for four years while in school. Now I train these children in football, rugby, volley ball etc. If I had not got this opportunity, I would be sitting at home doing household chores. Convincing the parents of these girls was a difficult task. But slowly they came around. Now so many girls play here. It feels great," she says proudly.

When Magic Bus started its play sessions in Aali village six months ago, hardly any girls joined. But it now has several women trainers and a growing number of girls. Although children of all age groups are invited to play, the NGO makes a conscious effort to encourage children between seven to 14 years of age. Children below six are included in warm up sessions, singing songs and cheering the elder ones while they play.

"I play football," says eight-year-old Monica. "And I like the songs also, especially the *sabun lagao, keetano bhagao* (use soap and say goodbye to germs). This is more fun than school. I even learnt a new way of counting from one to 10 through a song: *Haathi ko ginti seekhai* (I taught an elephant to count). Initially I was scared and shy. Now I like coming here. I have even made a lot of friends. I don't mind the work I do at home if I get my playtime here."

Magic Bus tries to identify talented sports people who could train the children professionally for tournaments. "Recently one of our girls from a slum won a city-level 'cricket for change' award. A few children are being given specialized training in football. We are preparing them for tournaments," says Singha.

The NGO also helps children to get admission into government schools. "There are many migratory families in these slums. They don't have any birth certificates, so the children are denied education. After persuading the principal, we helped eight students recently to get admission in a government school," says Singha.

'Children are at risk in eastern India'

Kavita Charanji
New Delhi

A recent study by the SOS Children's Villages of India reveals that children in 100 districts of the country are at high risk of losing parental care and support due to poverty, social unrest, HIV/AIDS and disability. Sixty two of such districts fall in India's eastern zone in Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa and West Bengal.

Rakesh Jinsi, secretary-general of SOS Children's Villages of India explains in an interview to *Civil Society* how the findings of the study will enable SOS Children's Villages of India to plan its interventions and the implications of their findings for the government's plans to tackle malnutrition. Excerpts from the interview:



SHAMIK BANERJEE

Rakesh Jinsi

What is the objective of SOS India's new study?

The report is an internal exercise carried out by us so that we can plan our strategy for the next three to five years. This includes determining our targets in terms of the number of children, geographical areas and activities we would like to focus on as well as plan for resources.

We have given it the title of 'child vulnerability' because we seek to address the looming issue of vulnerable children in society in a preventive mode.

How do you measure child vulnerability?

There are different reasons why children run the risk of losing parental care in certain districts. These factors are social, political and economic. They include political unrest, casteism and violence. Health-related issues are part of the economic element.

We have therefore come up with a child vulnerability index which factors in all these variables. We then come up with a vulnerability index.

Which districts are the worst affected?

The eastern zone. In states like Orissa, Bihar and Chhattisgarh, child vulnerability is high due to social and political unrest and political violence. That is the reality. But if one were to analyse, I would say Bihar and eastern UP are very high on casteism. Caste violence often leads to the death of adults and consequently children get deprived of parental care and support.

Similarly, if you look at parts of Orissa, there are cases where parents have allegedly sold off their children for very small amounts of money.

'Koraput district in Orissa emerges as the most child vulnerable district followed by Balaghat district in Madhya Pradesh and Godda, Giridih, Pakur in Jharkhand.'

Poverty is extremely high here. There is a lot of violence in Naxalite affected areas such as Chhattisgarh, Orissa and Andhra Pradesh.

As per our ranking, Koraput district in Orissa emerges as the most child vulnerable district, followed by Balaghat district in Madhya Pradesh and Godda, Giridih and Pakur in Jharkhand. Children in rural areas are vulnerable. Parents move to cities in search of livelihood and sometimes children are left to fend for themselves.

What does SOS plan to do in such areas?

We have our well-known Family Based Care Programme where we provide children deprived of parental care with the security of a proper home. We also have a preventive Family Strengthening Programme which targets children identified at high risk of losing parental care. Our aim is to work with families for three to seven years so that they are able to take care of their children better.

The focus is on improving their income through

the formation of self-help groups, providing vocational training, entrepreneurial opportunities, getting homogenous groups together into some kind of business enterprise, providing marketing support, skills, access to micro finance etc. We also support the children of the family in education, health and nutrition.

How will you fund your programmes in child vulnerable districts?

The foremost challenge is generating resources. Though we are generously supported by our parent organisation, SOS International, there is increasing expectation from international donors that a country like India which is economically much better off than the rest of the world should be able to take control of its own social expenditure.

We are currently generating about 20 per cent of our requirement from within the country through small individual and corporate donors.

Eighty percent comes from similar small donors across the world, predominantly from Europe. The expectation is that India, or SOS India, should generate its own funds in the coming years. And that is the biggest challenge for us. The 'India Shining' story is, for once, going against us. Also, foreign funding agencies and donors would

prefer to give funds to more deserving underprivileged countries like Africa, Latin America or the erstwhile East European countries.

What role can the government play to help organisations such as yours?

I think in the Union budget funds were earmarked for supporting children through organisations like ours. The state social welfare departments or the central social welfare department have schemes. If the delivery mechanisms could be improved, more such programmes could be executed.

The Union Government is currently planning to tackle malnutrition in 200 of the poorest districts. What is your view on this?

It is a wonderful step. But, as we have seen, intent does not always get converted into actual delivery. We need to focus on the delivery aspect in a very expeditious manner so that the ultimate beneficiary receives what he is supposed to.

If, for example, an x number of beneficiaries are identified, they should be given access to bank accounts and all transactions should be made in those accounts. The ultimate beneficiary then has the power of money in his hands. What he does with it is a secondary issue. But at least he gets that money in his hands. Currently, the money doesn't reach the beneficiary. So, I think, if we are able to make this shift of getting money directly to the beneficiary a great part of the battle will be won.

The leakages in the system are currently quite large. We have to design systems and processes which are able to deliver despite all that is happening around. That is where the ingenuity lies.

Kashmir mulls over missing girls

Jehangir Rashid
Srinagar

JAMMU and Kashmir's declining sex ratio is making social activists in the state feel concerned that society is not doing enough to set the situation right.

According to the recent 2011 Census there are 883 females per 1,000 males in the state. In the 2001 Census the sex ratio was 892 females per 1,000 males. The decline is of nine females per 1,000 male.

While the adult male-female sex ratio is a matter of concern what is more worrying is the child sex ratio which is 859 females per 1,000 males. In the 2001 Census the figure was 941 females per 1,000 males.

According to some estimates over 100,000 people, mostly men, have died in the two decades of conflict in Kashmir. The number of women should have been more than men. But surprisingly that does not reflect in the male-female ratio.

"Every social issue has been buried under the carpet of turbulence," says Hafeeza Bano, a social activist. "There are many glaring social problems here – drug addiction, dowry and now this social problem of a declining sex ratio. Parents should stop thinking that a daughter is a burden on their shoulders. Girls must be encouraged to take up challenges in life. They should not be suppressed."

Hafeeza Bano says not many are concerned about this issue although the situation is becoming alarming. People should stop being so inhibited about discussing this problem.

"Right now Kashmiri society is indifferent. Males have borne the physical brunt of the conflict here. We ought to have a favourable sex ratio in Kashmir, but we don't. We need to understand why," says Hafeeza.

In urban areas the male-female sex ratio has actually improved. In Srinagar district in the 2001 Census the ratio was 841 females per 1,000 males. The 2011 Census shows that this has gone up to 879 females per 1,000 males. Shopian and Kulgam are leading with 951 females recorded for 1,000 males for each of these districts. Anantnag, Bandipora, Udhampur, Kishtwar, and Ranban too record an improvement.

But there are only 583 females for 1,000 males in Leh district. In the 2001 Census this figure was 823. However, social activists say this is due

to high female migration from Leh. Kupwara district is second followed by Kargil. Other regions which are doing badly are Poonch, Kathua, Rajouri, Samba, Badgam and Baramulla.

The child sex ratio is worst in Pulwama district, which has recorded 836 females per 1,000 male in the recent Census, followed by Budgam and Kupwara.

Dr Rubina Shaheen, who works as a health officer in the Srinagar Municipal Corporation (SMC), says that the declining sex ratio is primarily a social issue but there is also easy access to sex determination tests and abortion.

"Why do people carry out female foeticide? My opinion is that female children are seen as a burden by most members of our society. So couples are forced to go in for sex determination tests," says Dr Shaheen.

'Males have borne the physical brunt of the conflict here. We ought to have a favourable sex ratio in Kashmir, but we don't. We need to understand why.'

"Besides, there is no proper implementation of the Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PNDT) Act. There is laxity on the part of the health department. It has to be seen how many sonologists are registered and how many are working on their own. It is only after these tests that women go for abortion," she says.

Dr Saleem-ur-Rehman, Director, Health Services,

says that his department is going to launch action against radiologists involved in such practices. He laments that society is not tackling this issue. Government action can never be enough, he says.

"I have got reports that a radiologist works at five different places. How come they can do that? Is it true that they have been doing so? I have asked for complete information and I am not going to sleep over it. But alongside, other stakeholders like the police, district authorities, civil society groups, the social welfare department and above all the citizens have never informed my department that sex-selective sonography is going on in some place," said the director.

Dr Rehman believes that the girl child is not hated in Kashmir. It is just that the perception of people towards girls has to be changed, he says.

"The religion of Islam has given great status to women. If we follow Islam in its true letter and spirit there would be no problems. People are not seeking refuge in religion. Immoral and illegal activities like sex-determination tests need to be stopped. People have to change their lifestyle and attitude towards life," said Mohammad Yaqoob, a religious scholar.

Lanka pulls

The island is first in jackfruit consumption due to the spread of minimal processing

Shree Padre
Kasargod

JACKFRUIT curry has always been hugely popular in Sri Lanka. But now it is more popular than it has ever been because of a 'minimal processing' revolution that has swept the island.

"Earlier, most homes would make jackfruit curry only during weekends. Thanks to minimal processing, now we make it twice or thrice a week," says Dr Subha Heenkenda, a senior officer in the department of agriculture in Sri Lanka.

Minimal processing makes jackfruit ready to cook. The result is that consumption has shot up to five tonnes of tender jackfruit and 10 tonnes of the unripe variety in a day.

Sri Lanka now has more than 200 minimal processing units offering ready-to-cook polos (tender jackfruit) and kos (mature jackfruit).

Polos curry, of course, is like a signature recipe of Sri Lanka. It is available in most of the hotels and restaurants. In tinned form, it is exported to many countries.

Many people here in India still don't know that jackfruit is a versatile vegetable too. As a vegetable, it has four stages – tender, slightly grown, mature unripe and ripe. Sri Lanka has a tradition of using it not only as a vegetable, but as staple, in place of rice. The Sinhala name for the jackfruit tree – Baat Gasa – means 'tree of rice'.

Sri Lanka stands first in the world in consuming jackfruit as a vegetable. According to Dr Heenkenda, the country consumes about 25 to 30 per cent of its tender jackfruits as vegetable. This is a very positive step towards local food security. Probably no other country in the world matches this.

Minimal processing involves light preparatory operations like washing, trimming, peeling, slicing or chopping. The jackfruit becomes more consumer friendly, but remains close to its natural form.

The main problem with jackfruit is that it is big and difficult to consume in its entirety. It is also difficult to cut and separate the edible portion.

Ready-to-cook jackfruit always used to sell on the roadside in Sri Lanka. But eight years ago, the agriculture department saw an opportunity in

off jackfruit jackpot



A blooming jackfruit tree



In Sri Lanka minimal processing is encouraging consumption

making the ready to cook variety available on a large scale through organized minimal processing.

Recalls senior research officer, Senarath Ekanayake, "We saw fresh cut vegetables getting popular in US markets. Then we thought, why can't we make jackfruit also available in ready form."

The food research unit started a series of training programmes. But initially this didn't make much impact. It used radio and articles in newspapers and magazines to popularize the idea. "We did on-the-spot demonstrations at exhibitions too," recalls Ekanayake.



Packets of ready-to-cook jackfruit

But as with any other new technologies, it required catching hold of a few interested people and 'hand-holding' them for some time. It didn't take long for Sri Lankans to realize the employment and income generation potential of this simple process. Seeing the success of the pioneers, many others joined in.

Today, points out Dr Sarananda Hewage, head of the food research unit: "Kandy has 13 units doing minimal processing with jackfruit. There are 30 in Colombo."

With Colombo and Kandy leading the way, minimal processing has spread to other towns and urban centres. It has made it possible to earn more from jackfruit.

On roadsides, a 250 gm pack of tender jackfruit packet will be priced around 30 to 40 Sri Lankan Rupees. In super markets and shops, the price is slightly higher.

Small household enterprises abound, which is good but also a problem if standards of hygiene are not maintained

The investment is very small. "They require a few buckets, two good stainless-steel knives and a small sealing machine," points out Ekanayake. Most of them are units run by families.

Interestingly, half of these entrepreneurs are farmers themselves. Previously they weren't getting mentionworthy returns for their jackfruit. Now, with minimal processing, they are making in a day what they did during a season.

LESSON FOR INDIA: "A machine can be used for cutting jackfruit to make the task easier," says Dr Christin P. Robert, programme coordinator of CARD Krishi Vijnan Kendra, Pathnamthitta, Kerala. "The Sri Lankan model of minimal processing has tremendous scope for us in India. Take the case of a producer state like our Kerala. Though we have ample jackfruit production, we have considerable number of towns, cities and office-going women. People like jackfruit but don't always have the time to cut and cook it."

From Kerala, a huge quantity of tender jackfruit is sent to the northern Indian states. In jack season, every day, trucks carry about 400 tonnes of tender jack go from Kerala to north India. In states like Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, it is cut and sold in vegetable shops for Rs 30 a kilo.

Sri Lanka's success has great lessons for India. So far our efforts to provide jackfruit – both as a vegetable and a table fruit – in a consumer friendly form are next to nothing. Agriculture universities and research stations would do well to make minimal processing a priority.

Bundelkhand has best practices



Rainwater harvesting, collection of traditional seeds, wasteland revival are being done by villagers

Bharat Dogra
Bundelkhand (UP)

PREM Singh, a 47-year-old farmer, recalls that after graduating, he decided to return to his village, Badokhar Khurd, in Banda district, Bundelkhand, Uttar Pradesh (UP). He wanted to find a way out for distressed farmers. After some initial difficulties, he came up with an impressive mixed farming system by which organic fruit and indigenous trees are grown along with agricultural crops.

Prem Singh's mixed farm provides fodder not only for his animals but for the animals of other villagers as well. His tree-farm fetches him decent returns apart from being ecologically sustainable. Prem Singh's success has attracted the attention of neighbouring villages. Many have started to imitate his methods.

In recent years Bundelkhand has become a symbol of agricultural distress and starvation. While this region has always suffered from feudal oppression and ecological ruin, climate change in the past 10 years has added to rural distress. It is being seen as the main culprit for the collapse of agriculture, resulting in large-scale hunger, malnutrition, water scarcity and migration of people.

But there are signs of hope. Rural communities, peasants and voluntary organizations have been implementing some innovative initiatives. At some places we find villagers getting together to harvest rainwater, at other places we find them experimenting with mixed cropping patterns which can work in drought conditions. Rural communities have also mobilized their meagre resources to start grain banks and seed banks to confront situations of stress.

In Piuthpur village in Jalaun district, 36-year old Brij Narain Pathak, a farmer, has embarked on an exciting quest to find and promote traditional seeds. On the advice of family elders, he collected whatever traditional seeds he could locate in

Tribal landless peasants of Bom panchayat got together under the leadership of Kalavati Devi to improve wasteland. These peasants are now able to grow two crops on this land.

neighbouring villages. Much to his delight, these seeds performed well in difficult drought situations. This success has sparked off a wider effort for collecting, preserving and sowing traditional seeds in his village.

Voluntary organisations of Bundelkhand and the Vindhyan region, have documented some of these efforts. Recently, as many as 16 such voluntary organisations got together to document 50 such 'best practices' and initiatives. The workshop was held in Lucknow by representatives of all the voluntary organisations who had contributed. This effort was coordinated by the Gorakhpur Environmental Action Group (GEAG) and supported by Oxfam India. The documentation has been done in Hindi making it easier to share the information with more villagers in the region.

What is most heartwarming about these initiatives is the contribution made by ordinary farmers and people in remote villages. According to Dr. Shiraz Wazih, Chairperson of GEAG, research confirmed that most adaptation efforts are initiated by rural communities themselves and outsiders at best provide limited help. However, quite often, the role of the outsiders gets highlighted while the silent contributions by villagers is overlooked completely.

Take one example from Bom panchayat in

Dudhi Block of Sonbhadra district where efforts were completely local. Here, several tribal landless peasants under the leadership of a woman, Kalavati Devi, got together to improve wasteland. Land levelling was followed by bunding and creation of irrigation ditches so that some protective irrigation could be available. These peasants are now able to grow two crops on this land and their dependence on migration has considerably reduced.

Another outstanding example is from Nagva panchayat also in Dudhi Block. Here the livelihood of tribals was badly disrupted when the forests which provided them a range of minor forest produce were cut down between 1978 and 1985. When their hardships became unbearable, the tribal communities embarked on a unique initiative to regenerate trees.

Using traditional knowledge of herbs and other healing materials, the tribals prepared a paste which was applied to whatever remained of these trees and then covered them with sack cloth. After some time, new tillers and leaves appeared. In this way, the tribals were able to regenerate a large number of trees. Over a longer period, regeneration of some trees led to the appearance of more plants and trees and the entire area became very green and lush once again.

The documentation of such silent contributions makes it possible to draw important lessons from the success of these efforts. It helps us to gain insights into what the real needs of villagers are and what kind of efforts can meet their needs. Hence, policy lessons can be drawn from such documentation.

For example, there is repeated reference to reducing the costs of cultivation, using drought resistant seeds and practices, protecting the natural fertility of land, the importance of organic farming and indigenous seeds.

Also, there is emphasis on mixed cropping patterns and mixed farming which combines agriculture, horticulture and animal husbandry with techniques taken from traditional wisdom.

Many of these initiatives emphasise community action, not just individual innovation. Successful initiatives for soil, water and moisture conservation, rainwater harvesting and afforestation do best when backed by the community.

Government policy should shift to low-cost, organic, ecologically protective and self-reliant farming practices which make optimum use of resources available within villages.

In the case of water-management, government policy should shift away from large dams and gigantic river-link projects, such as the Ken-Betwa link, to small scale irrigation and water-harvesting projects based on traditional wisdom. Repair and reclamation of traditional water sources must be part of policy.

The government should encourage the efforts of tribal communities to protect and regenerate forests and reclaim wastelands for farming. Efforts to create seed banks and grain banks should be encouraged.

Smiles that tell a thousand tales!

In our operations, we are blessed to bond with some very special people. People not daunted by odds, but with the passion and perseverance to overcome them. In doing so, they allow us to work with them to support livelihood generation and environment protection, to create education and health infrastructure.

Above all, they help us fulfill our goal to be a committed corporate citizen. True to the tradition of the Tata Group.

Miss Sonal Natwarbhai, from the Virpura Village in Sanand, Gujarat. Sonal used to sit on the floor and study. Today she and more than 250 other students benefit from the classroom facility upgradation initiative of Tata Motors. The Company has a holistic approach to improving the access to and quality of education. The company supplements its infrastructural support to schools with training of teachers and extra-curricular activities or students.



Mr. Sujit Soren of Gopalpur village in East Singhbhum district of Jharkhand. He was the first in the village to adopt water conservation techniques of the Gram Vikas Kendra society of Tata Motors. Today, the village boasts of perennial irrigation for about 100 acres and about 10,000 fruit and timber generating trees.



Mrs. Rohini Bhanudas Wadekar of Pune in Maharashtra. A widow with three children, she was trained to become self-dependent with technical skills by Tata Motors' Grihini Social Welfare Society.



Mr. Jowahar Ram Paswan of Baranimdih Mohalla of Chaibasa district in Jharkhand. Today, he is an employee of Nav Jagrat Manav Samaj. It became possible when the Nav Jagrat Manav Samaj, supported by Tata Motors, intervened to manage his leprosy and found him a job with a permanent income. Today, Mr. Paswan intervenes to bring comfort to others.

Mr. Man Singh Murmu of Baijnathdih village in East Singhbhum district of Jharkhand. With mostly infertile land holdings, Mr. Murmu and other residents found meeting both ends difficult. Tata Motors helped him lead change by beginning a tree plantation drive. Today, Baijnathdih has a forest of income-generating trees, and a Forest Protection Group to nurture its economic turnaround.



Mr. Vinod Pachpute of Vasuli village in Pune district of Maharashtra. A diploma holder in mechanical engineering, he is also a trustee and an alumni of the Bhamchandra High School in the village – the only one in the vicinity covering seven villages. Tata Motors helped set up the school and continues to support it. About 600 students have passed through its portals till date.



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No helping hand for Kali

PHOTOGRAPHS: SHAMIK BANERJEE

Sugandha Pathak
Meerut (UP)

THE house down a narrow brick lane in Jalalpur village is brightly painted. Peep into its spacious courtyard and you see the family busy with water. Children are splashing around under a hand pump, women are drinking water from another hand pump while men are quickly filling buckets.

Outside it looks like an ideal village setting until the stink of a narrow open drain suddenly hits you. Keep walking down the lane and the stench gets stronger, like from a mountain of garbage which has been rotting for decades.

The reek is from the Kali Nadi which flows next to Jalalpur village on the outskirts of Meerut in Uttar Pradesh (UP). Around 2,000 villagers have been living with this foul smell for many years.

"We have two options – stop drinking water and die in the next few days or keep drinking water and die maybe after a few years," says Mohammad Idris looking sadly at the river, holding his little boy's hand.

The Kali Nadi has become a river of sorrow. Its waters, once so pure, are black with filth. Years ago the river was worshipped. Now it stands for disease and death.

"In the 1970s, villagers used to directly drink water from the river. It was crystal clear," says Raman Kant, director of Neer Foundation, an NGO which has been working for water conservation, environment renewal and organic farming for almost 12 years now. "There are some 15 to 16 paper and sugar mills in and around villages close to the Kali in Meerut. Industrial waste which they discharge into the river every day contains a heavy load of chemicals and heavy metals. A slaughter house nearby adds to the filth. Then the sewage of the whole city of Meerut is thrown into this river."

Around 1,200 villages along the banks of the river and some 40 to 45 villages around Meerut are affected by the sorry state of the Kali Nadi. The rot begins in Khatoli where sugar mills discharge their toxic waste directly into the river changing the colour of its waters.

When the Kali reaches Jalalpur it becomes a thick dark stream with raw flesh floating in it. A local abattoir throws its waste into the river. Dogs with ferocious eyes hang around. Villagers say the dogs have become man-eaters after being fed raw flesh all day long.

"The intestines of cows and buffaloes and the kidneys, lungs and hearts of other animals are usually seen floating in the water. Crows, cranes, dogs and wild pigs, all feast on it. And on days the dogs don't get any raw meat, they eat up children from our village. In the last few months, there have been at least four to five cases of children



Factory disgorging untreated chemical waste into the river Kali



Mohd. Idris with his son and a bottle of Kali's yellow water

The rot begins in Khatoli where sugar mills discharge their toxic waste into the Kali changing the colour of its waters.

being eaten by the local dogs here," says Om Prakash, the pradhan of Jalalpur. After several trips to the District Magistrate (DM), Kant and his volunteers finally succeeded in convincing the official to pay a visit to the river, see its state and decide on an action plan.

"The villagers did not have a bridge, so they had to cross the dirty river putting their lives at risk. It has taken 15 years to finally get approval for a

bridge. A few government tanks were installed in some villages, but not in Jalalpur. Villagers are still drinking this dirty water," says Kant.

The only permanent solution is to stop the pollution from taking place. The Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) collected 266 water samples from the Kali Nadi. Their results showed that the river's water was a toxic mix of nitrate, manganese, iron, lead, cadmium, chromium, arsenic, cyanide etc. The CGWB finally sent notices to three sugar mills located near the river.

"But these industries are still working," says Tyagi. "They have water treatment plants which they don't use. To get even this much done is such a task here. It is a conflict between us and the rich industrialists with powerful political connections. It took us three years to reach this point – a bridge is being constructed and three industries have been given notices. The villagers are aware now, they know what is going on and why they are getting sick," says Kant.

"Near Meerut and Ghaziabad the water is extremely foul. Its colour turns from light yellow to deep yellow. After talking to the villagers of Asota, Jalalpur, Bachola, Gainspura, Jai Bhim Nagar and a few more, we found out that people are constantly falling ill. There has been an increase in stomach and skin diseases and a rise in cancer and infertility cases," according to the CGWB report.

Apart from educating villagers about water pollution, Neer Foundation has been planting trees and impressing upon the people the importance of preserving the historic ponds and tanks in the Meerut region which are now lying in a dilapidated state.

Civil Society

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Children rescued from a unit where toys were being packed

DELHI'S SHAME

CHILDREN FROM POORER STATES ARE LURED TO THE CAPITAL AND PUT TO WORK IN SWEATSHOPS

Civil Society News
New Delhi

In a long straight row, the boys walked slowly down a narrow lane in Seelampur market, in east Delhi's maze of congested neighbourhoods. There were some 21 of them between 10 and 14 years old. Passersby stopped and stared. The boys could have been schoolchildren following their teacher's instructions. Instead, they were victims of child labour just freed through a rescue operation.

"My brother brought me to Seelampur from Nepal," says a scared Tojib, only 10 years old. "He went back to our village. I have been working here since five or six months. I get ₹2,500 a month. I work from 9 am to 5 pm." Three rescued children nod in unison.

Seelampur market is dotted with small manufacturing units churning out toys, shoes and garments. The Bachpan Bachao Andolan (BBA), an NGO working since 1996 on child rights, led the rescue mission. Its activists had cautiously

scanned the area, spotted the child workers and then informed the Delhi police and the labour department. Operations like these are always dicey. There is the risk of getting beaten up, the children running away, news of the raid being leaked by officials, or the factory owner not turning up.

A worker of the BBA puts the children at ease, assuring them about their safety and promising they would be sent home very soon. Comforted by his words, the frightened children open up. The truth tumbles out. They were promised ₹2,500 a month but they hadn't got anything except ₹100 per week as pocket money.

"But we will get our promised money soon. I need that money. My family desperately wants money. If they send me back to my village, I will come back. I need money," says Alam, another one of the very small boys.

Tausif, 12, is from Barielly in Uttar Pradesh. He looks deeply troubled. "I thought they were here to take us to jail. None of us understood what was happening. When the officials asked me to pack my bags and began questioning me I did not know if telling the truth would save me or put me into more trouble."



Rescued children being taken to the office of the Sub-Divisional Magistrate in Seelampur

Most of the children employed in Seelampur are from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and the border villages of Nepal.

But Seelampur is just the tip of the iceberg. A shameful reality thrives in Delhi's underbelly. Fuelled by economic growth, the Indian capital has become a hub for cheap child labour. It is the prosperous middle-class which is driving this demand. Around half a million children are employed either in homes or in small factories that supply Delhi's markets with a variety of products.

Underfed and overworked the children slave in dingy factories crafting intricate zari saris, fancy slippers, shiny jewellery, plastic bags, leather purses and other such products. But perhaps the fastest growing demand is for cheap domestic workers, for young docile girls who can look after children while their upwardly mobile parents go to work, or to take care of the city's lonely, abandoned elderly. According to a study by Save the Children, there are an estimated 100,000 children working as domestic labour in Delhi, which is twice the number in other cities like Hyderabad and Kolkata.

Delhi's per capita income is three times the national average. But child labour is paid a pittance and the condition of the children is pitiable. Hiring an adult means paying around ₹200 a day, but a child comes for just ₹80 a day. Sometimes it is a one-off payment to the child's family in a distant village.

Junaid, 13, one of the children rescued from Seelampur has been working in a slipper factory since the past three months. He says he has been paid only Rs100 per week and has saved no money. He has seen only the area around his factory and doesn't know Delhi.

"I don't like it here. I even told my mother over the phone. She was quiet. When the rescuers said that I will be sent back to my village I was very happy. My only concern is that since they will ask my parents to come and get me, I don't know if they will be able to. My father has never been to Delhi. I also want to see the whole of Delhi before I go back," he says.

Life has been full of uncertainties for Junaid. "But I buy ice cream sometimes," he adds with a smile.

Seventeen children rescued from a slipper factory have much the same story. They worked from 11am to 11 pm which was stretched for a few more hours on



Toys lie in a pile and police question the owner of the premises



Children taken out of a slipper factory

most days. On Sundays they were let off at 4 pm only to resume work at 9 pm. Food was cooked by them with the help of the older boys employed in these factories. They slept on the factory floor itself.

While the children stand in one corner, scared and lost, their owner claims to be ignorant about child labour laws. "If I knew I would not have kept underage boys here," he says, rather embarrassed. But his son intervenes aggressively. "Why don't you first go and see the conditions they live in back home," he tells a labour department official. "At least here they don't sleep hungry. The government is doing nothing for them."

A raid in this area is not new, say members of BBA. The NGO workers have been attacked by locals in a rescue operation earlier. "They tried to topple our car in which we had all the rescued children. They don't like such raids because the whole market is full of small manufacturing units and little children through these factories. So they don't want us to come here," says Archana, a BBA activist.

A rescue operation takes four to five hours. The children are taken for a medical check-up and a meeting with the Child Welfare Committee (CWC) follows. If the child is under 14, the Child Labour Act is enforced. For children below 18, the Bonded Labour Act is applicable.

The rescued children are then sent to Mukti Ashram, BBA's welfare centre in Burari, in north Delhi. The parents of these children are informed and asked to take them back. Once the parents come they are handed ₹20,000 – the fine paid by the owner. The whole process takes around 15 days.

"We can keep the child in the welfare home (ashram) if the parent agrees," says Rakesh Sengar, Country Head of Rescue and Raid Operations, BBA.

Out of the 21 children rescued only one or two wanted to stay back in Delhi.

"The problem is we don't know how many rescued children are again pushed back into the city to work under the same horrific conditions. We have our local activists who try to keep a check on the children who return to their villages. But activists alone cannot do anything. Unless we take strict measures, the flooding of child labour into the city will never see an end," says an NGO worker.

THE LABOUR MARKET: Battling threats and physical violence is routine for workers of the BBA. Kailash Satyarthi, who heads this NGO, has been injured many times while trying to rescue children from the clutches of their employers. An armed guard sits outside his small office in south Delhi's Kalkaji colony.

It isn't only factories and households which employ children, he says. You can see children working in restaurants, dhabas, as rag-pickers, street vendors and beggars. "Of the 500,000 working children in Delhi, we estimate that 50,000 are street children. They are not regular child labourers as many of them don't have employers but they work as street vendors selling small items which don't belong to them. They work for someone else irregularly. These children have to feed themselves," says Satyarthi.

Young girls between 14 to 16 years of age are thrown into the flesh trade or to work in massage parlours and beauty parlours.

"If you go to the outskirts of the city you will find children working in hazardous industries. They are handling old, used batteries, computer parts, toxic chemicals, dyes, chemicals and so on," says Satyarthi. "The most disgraceful thing is that these children are being trafficked in a planned way from certain poorer parts of India. Most of them are lured from Jharkhand,



Rescued children at the SDM's office

Jharkhand is the main source of domestic child labour. Girls are trafficked for prostitution from Midnapore and the 24-Parganas in West Bengal and from Nepal.

West Bengal and Chhattisgarh."

All child labour is trafficked, he says. The decision to send a child to work is always taken by the parents. Vulnerable children have no choice but to obey.

Jharkhand is the main source of domestic child labour. Girls are trafficked for prostitution from Midnapore and the 24-Parganas in West Bengal and from parts of Nepal. Children who you see begging in Delhi are mainly brought from the Jodhpur-Jaisalmer belt in Rajasthan. The zari industry employs over 100,000 children from Bihar – from Madhupura, Samastipur, Darbhanga and Madhubani and some from West Bengal. Jewellers get children from West Bengal and leatherware units from UP, Bihar and Nepal. Children in the leather units are mostly from Dalit families.

"It's a very organized nexus," says Satyarthi, "there is the middleman, the contractor, the supplier. They have their own channels through which children can be easily brought in."

GOLD-DIGGERS: Another rescue mission is about to begin in Karol Bagh. "Making jewellery, polishing it and inserting stones are skills found among people in West Bengal," says Rakesh Sengar. "The jewellery industry is dominated by migrants from there. The poverty in the state works as an excuse to bring lit-



tle boys here and make them work since they are the cheapest option. We have found children as young as six and seven working in this industry.”

The building in Karol Bagh looks abandoned. But climb up a dark, crumbling stairway and suddenly you walk into a room packed with boys and men making artificial jewellery and polishing gold and silver ornaments.

Sitting quietly in cramped rooms, teenage boys and children keep working rigorously. They have no mothers to listen to their complaints, no fathers to protect them and no money to go back home.

“I came here three months ago. I work round the clock. Right now I don’t get any money since I am still learning the work. I haven’t gone home in these three months. Back in my village I used to go to school. Since the work timings are very long I don’t get any time to do anything else,” says 10-year-old Koken Mondal from a village in Hooghly in West Bengal. He looks lost. Unable to understand or speak much Hindi makes him stick to his ‘own people’. There are many like him. Some of them have been brought here by their relatives or friends of relatives.

These children are supposed to be “learning” and so they are not paid. “We provide them three meals a day, clothes and some pocket money. People back in their villages are starving to death. Once they learn the work we will start paying them money to send home or they can start their own work and earn enough money,” says one of the owners of a jewellery unit.

“You have not seen the kind of deplorable state they live in back home. The father is a farmer with a big family to feed. There is hardly enough to eat. And I at least give the boys ₹100 a week as pocket money. They don’t need more money since they are living here with me, eating free meals. I provide them with anything else they want. We should not be the ones to get arrested,” says another angry owner.

But BBA workers have a different story to tell. The children are sent from these villages under false promises of earning money and saving the family from acute poverty. But once the child comes here he is made to work for long hours and no wages.

Most of the rooms they work in have no ventilation. Their work spaces are congested, damp and unhygienic. “You just need to raise your hand to touch the ceiling. It is that low,” says Rizwan Ali, a worker with BBA. The factory floor is converted into a dormitory at night. Four to five people sleep here after a day of hard work.

“I don’t know if working in the city is good or bad. I want to earn money so that my parents have enough to eat. I used to go to school and I miss it sometimes. But I have come here to work. My mother told me that what I am doing is right, it will help the family,” says Sonu, fidgeting with the edge of his shirt. He claims to be 10 years old, but he looks frail and no more than eight.

According to Sengar, all the owners employing little children ask them to hide their age and the reason they have come to the city. They are taught to say they have just come for a vacation. This is drilled into them every day so that they don’t make a mistake when the authorities arrive for a raid.

“I don’t think it is right to hold us responsible. They are learning something new here. Back in their villages they would have become thieves and smugglers,” says the owner of the unit in which Sonu works.

FACT AND FICTION: But the excuses of the owners mask a bitter reality. Children are employed because they are much cheaper than hiring adults, more docile and easy to control. Keeping an adult means paying better salaries, giving a weekly holiday, arranging for food and so on. Little boys are the best bet.

Kailash Satyarthi works out the math. “It is estimated that Delhi’s 500,000 child workers collectively earn ₹1 crore a day or ₹20 per child per day. The most a child gets paid in a day is ₹20. You could say this is the upper limit. Some money is spent on clothes and food by the employers. But all in all, the cost of hiring 500,000 children is not more than ₹1 crore a day across different units.”

If adults had been hired in place of the children they would have had to be paid at least ₹120 a day, which is six times more. At ₹6 crore a day, hiring adults would mean a monthly expenditure of ₹180 crore or around ₹2,000 crore in a year.

That is still a conservative estimate of what the child labour market in Delhi is worth. Adults would also have bargained for better wages and working conditions, a weekly holiday and other benefits.

Satyarthi says hiring adults would increase the incomes of families. “We have been arguing that if you stop these children from working they will not become street children. Instead, their employers will have to hire their parents. Instead of Rs 1 crore, they will earn Rs 6 crores. This money will be a direct cash transfer to the poor. It will enhance their economic power and their purchasing power. They will send their children to school. It will change the entire job sce-

Death in Bindi Lane

MOIN Khan, 10, was beaten to death in the small room behind the door marked 280 in a slum in Bharat Nagar, in northwest Delhi. The room was used for making bindis, which are worn by women as a part of their makeup and have a ready demand in Delhi’s markets.

Small hands are needed to make bindis and Moin was one of several child workers packed into the tiny room. He was killed because the owner of the sweatshop lost his temper with Moin for not being fast enough.

Among the children who witnessed his brutal end in the room was Moin’s deaf and mute brother.

The room was just one of many in the lane where scores of children slaved away at making bindis. Till this grisly episode, it used to be known as the Bindi Lane. This is where traders came to make large purchases at cheap prices.

Everyone around the slum in Bharat Nagar knew about the children working in the Bindi Lane. But neither the police nor the labour department went to their rescue.

Moin and his brother were from Madhuban in Bihar. The owner of the small bindi unit was their maternal uncle, Kalimullah, who brought them to Delhi promising to send Rs 500 a month to their family in Bihar.

Moin’s murder was discovered by an alert cemetery manager. He became suspicious of the people who had come to bury the boy’s body.





Children sitting in the SDM's office after the raid at Seelampur

nario for adults," says Satyarthi.

Children who are employed at this tender age don't remain an asset to their employers for very long. Their health breaks down. They develop TB and kidney problems. They have poor eyesight. Malnutrition is common. The children don't grow into healthy citizens. Money has to be spent on their health.

PLACEMENT AGENCIES: Adults, for instance, could be easily employed in domestic work. Delhi has more than 2,400 illegally run placement agencies and the rise of nuclear families is fuelling demand for domestic servants. Yet it is children from Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Bihar and Orissa, whom placement agencies are luring to fill these vacancies.

We visited placement agencies saying we were potential customers. Laxmi Domestic Maid Placement Agency in the Sakoorpur Industrial Area caters to the rich residents of Punjabi Bagh. It gets girls from Jharkhand. In its earlier avatar the agency was called Bensa Manda Tribal Welfare Society. Inside, the two-storey house is silent, dark even during the day. The address and the name of the placement agency is frequently changed. Sunita, who runs the agency, is ready with a scripted dialogue if anybody asks for an under-age girl.

"We don't keep any minor girls. The police have become very strict about child labour issues so we only keep girls above the age of 18 years," says Sunita. Her boys, standing near her house, keep a check on every move of any visitor. Most placement agencies tend to change their address every three to four months.

Amit Domestic Servant Services is located in the bylanes of Chirag Delhi. The girls are brought from Orissa. The building looks like it would crumble. The board can be missed amidst many other boards. The agency is on the first floor but Amit, the owner, does not want to take any chances and quickly comes down to gauge his new clients.

"We used to keep under-age girls two months ago. But the police has increased its raids on placement agencies so we don't keep them anymore," says Amit.

After a few meetings, however, he begins to sing a different tune.

"Call me tomorrow. I will try to get the girl. We don't keep them here. I will ask the broker who gets them from villages for a minor girl. Don't worry, your deal may take time but it will be done," says Amit confidently on the phone.

Sunita, on the other hand, says she is ready to show the girls in a span of four days. The girls are not minors, she claims. "They look very young, but they are over 18. You can come and see them," she says on the phone.

You have to pay anything between ₹14,000 to ₹19,000 for registration first. The monthly salary for a single domestic worker starts from ₹1,000 and goes



Tojib being questioned by a BBA member

up to ₹8,000 a month.

"The ones who charge a high rate know all the work. The ones who charge less are newcomers. You have to teach them," says Sunita.

But the girl, away from her family, in the hope of earning money, does not get to see any of it. Her monthly wages have to be given to the agency.

"Both these placement agencies are notorious for selling young girls into sex slavery or for domestic work. These placement agencies have code words. The minute you use them in a conversation, they will open up immediately," says Rizwan of BBA. The Sakoorpur area itself boasts of over 200 placement agencies. Most of them cater to the affluent areas of West Delhi. There are many such agencies spread across the city, registered under the Society Registration Act, which makes them NGOs.

"Most of these girls are overworked and abused, physically and sexually. We have seen cases where the agency owner has been raping the girl and making her pregnant thrice. There have been instances of the girls being beaten up over minor issues. Sometimes parents don't even know the whereabouts of their daughter," says Rakesh Sengar. On paper, the placement agencies show that they are helping these tribal girls, but the reality is very different.

BANNING CHILD LABOUR: People who hire children are violating the Child Labour Act, the Bonded Labour Act and the Right to Education Act, 2009. For children below 18, the

Bonded Labour Act is applicable. For those under 14, the Child Labour Act applies. Child rights activists say there should be one law for children below 18 since the process of implementation of both laws is different.

In 2006, a campaign against child domestic labour undertaken by BBA resulted in the Delhi government declaring child domestic labour as a hazardous occupation under the Child Labour Act. There are Child Welfare Committees at state and district levels to lay down the law. There are even 'joint task forces' in Delhi set up under the orders of the Delhi High Court following a case filed by BBA.

But nobody implements the law and there is no accountability. If agencies responsible for implementation don't do their work, they are not taken to task. After a rescue mission, it is the owner of the factory who is booked as the culprit. But the police are well aware that the factory in their midst is hiring children. They turn a blind eye. The labour department doesn't scout the city to dig out child labour. It sits pretty.

And most NGOs do not get into the messy business of rescuing children and rehabilitating them. The political will too doesn't exist, says Satyarthi – after all children below 18 don't vote. It has been left to BBA to reach out to the middle-class. In 2006, the NGO did a campaign with Delhi's numerous Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) – 'My home is child labour free' – and it has launched one more campaign this year.

Attitudes are changing at snail's pace. Satyarthi says 10 years ago, keeping a young girl to take care of a smaller child was a status symbol. Middle-class families would take along the young domestic worker wherever they went. But now they know this is illegal. There is embarrassment at being discovered with a child domestic worker.

"The situation is worse because it has become hidden slavery," says Satyarthi. "But at least there is embarrassment."

Reporting by Sugandha Pathak

‘Child labour is a crime abetted by the middle-class’

KAILASH Satyarthi has spent his entire life battling the exploitation of children as cheap labour. As founder and head of Bachpan Bachao Andolan (BBA), he has consistently pointed out that children should not be forced to earn money slaving away in dank workshops. They should be in school.

The first historic battle against child labour was in the carpet industry. Thanks to international pressure the number of children employed in carpet weaving has now declined. But the nature of child labour has also changed. Today, it is the well-off middle class which is driving up demand for child workers.

Sitting in his modest office, Satyarthi spoke at length and with anger about Delhi’s booming child labour market.



Kailash Satyarthi

What is the status of child labour in Delhi?

It is really ironical that the worst forms of child labour prevail in Delhi in a very high magnitude. At least half a million children are working in full-time jobs here. Mostly they are trafficked from their native villages. Some accompany their migrant worker parents. They live in slums. The children either work as domestic labour, particularly girls, or in restaurants, *dhabas*, small workshops and so on.

Children are trafficked from all over India. But Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Orissa and the border villages of Nepal are the hotspots. The children become domestic workers or work in zari units, leather factories, shoe units, toy-making units etc. In the outskirts of Delhi you will find children in hazardous industries, handling used batteries, old computers, toxic chemicals and colours.

We estimate that 50,000 children are living on the streets. They work as street vendors selling small items that don’t belong to them. They work for someone else irregularly. These children have to feed themselves.

Rag-picking has been brought under the definition of a hazardous industry, but despite that 50,000 children are rag-pickers. Girls are trafficked to work as child prostitutes. A large number are working in massage parlors and beauty parlors. These girls are mostly adolescents, between 14 to 16 years old. They are put into sex slavery.

So, 500,000 children are working, including as rag-pickers.

Aren’t some of these children working of their own volition?

None of the work children do is voluntary, if the child is below 18.

In 1981 there was a Supreme Court judgment on voluntary labour versus contract or forced labour. It was explicitly pointed out that if somebody works in a situation where legal requirements have not been met, for instance, if a child is working due to economic compulsion or is below the minimum age, then that work can be defined as forced labour which is banned under the Indian Constitution.

Rag-pickers go to work due to some compulsion. There are layers of middlemen who profit from the child’s labour. It is forced labour under the legal definition.

Trafficked children are held in bondage and ill-treated. You go to Kalka Mandir, Hanuman Mandir or Jama Masjid, you will find disabled children begging. The children are mutilated. This is Delhi’s slumdog reality.

Which are the industries that employ child labour?

Unfortunately the child has become the cheapest commodity in India. Employers argue that if the child is not employed he or she will starve. They say work is a safety net.

This argument is a lie. Child labour is an organized crime.

Certain regions in India have been identified by traffickers who strengthen their nexus with local agents. They use caste and communal connections to bring children to the city. A man, may be from Bihar or West Bengal, settles in Delhi and starts a small business. He becomes a petty contractor or manufacturer and uses his links with his state to bring in child labour.

Young girls from Jharkhand, West Bengal and Chhattisgarh are brought to work as domestic child labour. Jharkhand is really the biggest source of domestic labour. Girls from the 24-Parganas, Midnapore and parts of Nepal are trafficked for prostitution. Forced beggar children are mostly from the Jodhpur-Jaisalmer belt of Rajasthan.

At least 100,000 children work in the zari industry. They come from Madhupura, Samastipur, Darbhanga and Madhubani in Bihar. Some are from West Bengal. Thousands of children are working in the artificial jewellery and ornament sector. Old houses in Karol Bagh, right till Paharganj, have been converted into jewellery workshops. Most of these children are from West Bengal.

Other small scale industries which are growing fast are plastic bags, plastic chappals, shoes and purses. Most of the children employed here are from UP, Bihar and Nepal. They are Muslims, Dalits and Adivasis. It’s all very organized. The middleman, contractor, suppliers have their own trail to bring in children.

‘The worst forms of child labour prevail in Delhi in a high magnitude. At least half a million children are working full-time.’

Why can’t child labour be stopped?

Society is hypocritical. They talk of values but they are corrupt. They find the easiest way to get things done is to use children. There is lack of accountability. Indian law does not hold the officers whose duty it is to enforce child labour laws accountable. It is the employer who is booked as the culprit. The factory inspector, labour inspector and other officials are not asked why they were not doing their jobs.

India has thousands of NGOs working on child labour and child rights. The Delhi government has projects on this issue. It received \$10 million from the US Department of Labour and other international organizations. You will find a lot of intelligentsia in Delhi.

But the key question is – how will this girl who has been trafficked by the mafia be taken back to her home? Who will dare to go inside and rescue children from the mafia? No one.

Nobody wants to get involved in such issues. Most of us prefer to remain ensconced in our comfort zones.

Business

- Enterprise
- Inclusion
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Making artisans owners

Rangсутra's unique business model

SHAMIK BANERJEE



Sumita Ghose

Aarti Gupta
New Delhi

EVERY year Chadaram, a weaver from Napasar village in Rajasthan, used to make the tedious journey to Jodhpur to sell his cloth for a meagre sum of money. Sometimes things were so bad he would work on construction sites as a labourer. But now he is a shareholder in Rangсутra, an

artisans' company. And he earns ₹10,000 a month.

In Delhi to attend his company's annual general meeting with around 1,200 shareholders, all small artisans like himself, Chadaram said they were deeply grateful. "No one has given us a share of profits before," he said. His fellow artisans, who had never heard of entrepreneurship or having a stake in a company, feel a sense of pride and dignity.

Rangсутra is giving that unusual taste of entrepreneurship to some of the most disadvantaged artisans of Rajasthan, Assam and Uttarakhand by successfully engaging them and giving them a sustainable livelihood.

"Profit is not a dirty word," says Sumita Ghose, 51, who is behind this innovative business. Started five years ago, Rangсутra is now a ₹7 crore

Continued on next page

Continued from previous page company. This year it is giving out a 25 per cent dividend – its third – to its shareholders. With share value having appreciated four times, raising an enterprise couldn't have been more rewarding. Next on the cards is to open up that shareholding to outsiders.

Rangсутra has received investment from Fabindia, the leading chain of handcrafted apparel and furnishings and Aavishkar, the venture capital fund which typically invests in enterprises at the bottom of the pyramid.

Most attempts to work with artisans have largely been restricted to charity, says Sumita. That invariably means seeking the aid of agencies such as Oxfam and Action Aid. What Sumita has instead done is to inculcate in artisans a sense of ownership and a belief in their skills. She has converted an artisans' cooperative into a for-profit company with each one of them having a stake in it.

Sumita's experiment has been inspired by her wide experience in the development sector. During the 1980s and 1990s she worked with URMUL (Uttari Rajasthan Milk Union Trust) in Bikaner district, Rajasthan, with her husband, the inspirational Sanjoy Ghose. The trust which was working for the health and education needs of the community ran up against a roadblock in its second year in 1987 – a severe drought made the milk business, the mainstay of the people, go bust.

It then struck Sumita that livelihoods could be created with the rich craft skills which local people had. A short stint of more development work in Majuli, a river island in Assam, turned painfully tragic when Sanjoy was abducted by ULFA. Sumita returned to Gurgaon. This was in 1997 when the buying power of the middle-class was growing manifold. While there was a great demand for handcrafted products, weavers and artisans had not begun to reap its benefits.

Since Sumita had worked closely with craft-worker groups in Rajasthan and Assam and had gained an insight into the issues they had to grapple with, working with a cooperative of these artisans was her first tentative move. But this model was beset with problems. As funding continued to remain a crunch, she decided to convert the cooperative into a producer-company in December 2004 with NGOs such as the Pan Himalayan Grassroots Development Foundation

and the Action North-East Trust, with a paid-up capital of ₹1 lakh. But partnering with NGOs was not without pitfalls. Accustomed to receiving grants, the NGO producer-groups ran it more like a social venture than a business.

Sumita realized that it was the artisans who should have a stake in the company. So Rangсутra was registered as a private limited company in 2006. Around 1,000 artisans put in Rs 1,000 each, while Sumita made a matching investment.

In the first year itself, the company did ₹30 lakh



This year Rangсутra is giving out a 25 per cent dividend to its shareholders. The company's share value has appreciated four times.

worth of business. That small success encouraged Aavishkar, a social venture fund, to come on board with an investment of ₹23 lakhs and Fabindia with another ₹30 lakhs, considerably strengthening the paid-up capital to ₹60 lakhs. Rangсутra Crafts in its newest avatar is owned by the four stakeholders – artisans, Sumita Ghose and the two private investors – in almost similar proportions with equal representation to all on

the board of directors.

In 2007, when investments poured into the company and Fabindia came on board as a captive customer, it became possible for Rangсутra to expand work and reap the economies of the high-volume low-margin business. Operational breakeven was accomplished in the second year of the company and the very next year it was giving out a dividend of 10 per cent. Last year, there was a 15 per cent payout. There's more. Its operating profit margins are a robust 15 to 20 per cent.

But numbers is not the only reason Rangсутra is being talked about. The company is changing the mindset of the weaver from that of a worker to an entrepreneur. "Initially, we had started Rangсутra for market access so that the rural artisan is ensured work all the year through, but our biggest issue right now is to deliver orders on time," says Sumita. In fact, such issues are going to be taken up at the next annual general meeting. The artisans have to understand how crucial it is to deliver on time.

Today, with a strong market and design linkages, the company is able to farm out work to an increasing numbers of artisans. Currently, it is working with about 30 NGOs, self-help groups and individual entrepreneurs, mostly in Churu, Bikaner, Jaisalmer, Barmer and Jodhpur. Once its designers do the sampling, its 2,000 artisans – grouped into producer units – take up the process in modules.

One unit creates the fabric, another tailors it, and yet another does the embroidery and so on, undergoing quality checks at each stage. Having produced apparel, home furnishings and accessories till now, Rangсутra is now expanding into leather products and khadi offerings. Tie-ups for both are in place. There are plans to look at the entire chain of wool-yarn products and organic foods. The target for the next year is to take Rangсутra to the ₹12 crore mark in turnover.

Although Fabindia buys 90 per cent of Rangсутra's merchandise, the company has been creating a few ripples of its own, overseas. UK-based Monsoon, an ethical fashion brand, has begun to source from Rangсутra. So has Dutch brand, Good For All, a fair trade label. Rangсутra is partnering with Axis Bank to open no-frills accounts for its artisans and five learning centres are being set up in the villages of Bikaner.

Sumita is making sure that Rangсутra continues to be a success story, full of colour.

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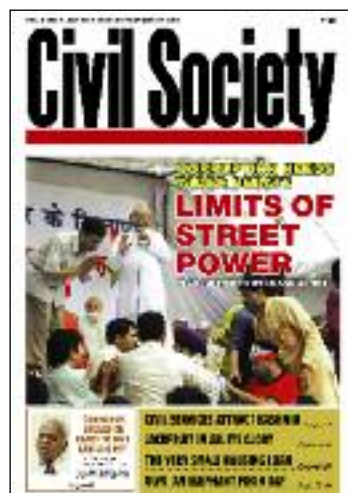
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Build unions for NREGA

N. S. BEDI

THE Mahatma Gandhi National Right to Employment Guarantee Act, (MGNREGA) can only succeed if it is implemented as a rights-driven programme. It has to become a law in which rural households are active participants who demand work when they need it instead of it being a state welfare programme.

In order for this Act to succeed, rural households need to know their rights. It is only logical to assume that unless the rural poor are informed of their rights, are trained in how to demand and receive those rights, they will remain passive, uninformed beneficiaries.

In 2005, when India legislated NREGA, the rural poor for the first time got the right to demand and receive employment. While the right is limited to 100 days of work per family, per year, the implementation of MGNREGA by the Union Government was an innovative approach to providing rural households with a safety net when they could not find work elsewhere.

In addition to the right to demand work, this Act gave a number of other rights for the first time to the poor including unemployment compensation if work was not provided and compensation for injury on the job. Every State was required to legislate its own NREGA Act with the stipulation that all rights given by the Central Act were to be included in the State Act.

Yet, the legislation of rights does not mean that rural workers – the majority being illiterate – will start exercising their own rights automatically. Empowerment of rural workers goes beyond mere legislation. Empowerment means the creation of power, based on information on what these rights mean and how they can be accessed. Furthermore, empowerment means power based on the united strength of workers in the form of



Women workers at a NREGA worksite

The legislation of rights does not mean that rural workers – mostly illiterate – will start exercising their own rights. Empowerment goes beyond legislation. It means the creation of power.

federations who can demand and protect their rights when these rights are not recognised.

Unfortunately, the government never thought it necessary to either inform MGNREGA workers of their rights or assist them to organise themselves. While committing over ₹40,000 crores to MGNREGA, the government did not make any attempt to inform the workers of their rights. There are nearly 2.5 crore families in this country who are entitled to participate in MGNREGA but who have no knowledge of the rights this Act has given them.

In the last three years, in interviews with over 15,000 job card holders in Anantapur District, Andhra Pradesh, when asked if they know what

Continued on next page

rights NREGA entitles them to, the majority responded that no one has ever talked to them about their rights and how they can access these rights. The result of this has been recurring frauds and the denial of the very rights that workers are entitled to under this Act.

Through empowering workers with their rights and creating channels through which they can ensure these rights are upheld, the government will be creating an important checks and balances system to prevent corruption – a system that is much more powerful than the current approach of using social audits to expose corruption. Social audits have been a useful mechanism to highlight and unearth corruption, but not necessarily to prevent corruption nor punish those who have committed corrupt acts.

In 2006, NGOs based in Anantapur district were asked by the government to conduct the first social audit in the State. Twenty five NGOs, with support from Aruna Roy's MKSS and the Ministry of Rural Development, carried out an intensive audit of works undertaken and the amount spent over six months in 40 selected mandals. In two mandals, major frauds were exposed while a number of minor frauds were uncovered in the other mandals.

While the minor frauds were dealt with successfully through public meetings in each mandal and the funds were recovered, the major frauds were buried. The NGOs who conducted the social audits were never informed if the funds were recovered or if the culprits were punished. Furthermore, after the first audit, under pressure from political parties, the Andhra Pradesh government created its own social audit division eliminating NGOs from future audits.

But the tragedy is that the very first audit exposed not only fraud but other grave shortcomings in the implementation of MGNREGA. Some examples: none of the MGNREGA workers were aware of the rights given to them by the Act. They did not have any federations to demand their rights. In the first six months they had been receiving work without demanding it, in contravention of the Act. No unemployment compensation had been given to those who needed work



What is very obvious is that social audits can expose fraud but not prevent it. The people who can prevent fraud are the MGNREGA groups whose rights and interests are threatened by misuse of funds.

but hadn't got work. Medical compensation was not received. There were delays in receiving payments. Wages below minimum wages were being given to many groups. And the list goes on.

These points, which are fundamental to the proper working of the Act, were totally ignored by the government. Even the newspapers have found it a lot more sensational to expose minor and major frauds, instead of finding out whether job card holders know about the rights given by MGNREGA and were organized sufficiently to demand and receive them. The government was

implementing MGNREGA as a target-oriented programme, which it is not. Any government which refuses to invest in the rights and organisational training of MGNREGA groups must be held responsible for continuing occurrences of fraud and other problems in MGNREGA today.

Four years have gone by since the start of MGNREGA and what is very obvious is that social audits can expose fraud but not prevent it. The people who can prevent it if given a chance are the MGNREGA groups whose rights and interests are threatened by the misuse of MGNREGA funds.

With government support, the Young India Project, an NGO working in Anantapur has been carrying out training for workers on their rights under MGNREGA and how they can uphold these rights. To date over 1000 job card holders and 200 mandal leaders have been trained. In these areas, as a result of this work 25 MGNREGA Rights Mandal Unions have been formed. Written demands are being submitted for work, delay in payments are being challenged, mandal workers are participating in work selection and the mandal unions are taking up the problems of the job card holders.

MGNREGA should have started by first informing the workers of the rights they were given under the Act. If today there is fraud and wrong selection of works it is because the workers are uninformed. Yet, there is still time to remedy this. It is up to the government to decide on whether they are ready to change their approach and ensure that job card holders become active partners in this Act.

The state government of Andhra Pradesh has finally started training MGNREGA job cards holders on their rights and organizing them to enable them to demand and receive their rights.

This was started in April this year. The Andhra Pradesh government has created a partnership with NGOs called the AP-NGO Alliance (APNA). Every state government must do this for MGNREGA to become effective.

N. S. Bedi was appointed by the Union Ministry of Rural Development to monitor MGNREGA in Karnataka. He is a member of APNA. E-mail: youngindiaproject@yahoo.co.in

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Bamboo is the new currency

SHAIENDRA SINHA

FOR years the adivasis of Jharkhand have migrated seasonally to Punjab, Assam and Bengal in search of livelihoods. They make these regions their home for three months. The rest of the year is spent farming their own fields. The last two years have been particularly bad with drought making farming unprofitable. This has triggered migration at a heightened pace.

But something is now changing for the adivasis in the forests of Jharkhand. They have found a homegrown answer to the cycle of unemployment or under-employment that a typical agrarian economy invariably throws up. This answer has come from another homegrown item – bamboo. The slender, green shoots of bamboo with its delicate, artistic leaves grows in abundance in these forests, a part of the natural environment that every adivasi grows up and lives in. Adivasis are looking at this tree afresh. Bamboo is spawning a new cottage industry which the adivasis can easily be a part of and earn cash income, which they need direly to supplement their earnings from cultivation and seasonal migration.

Ever since she can remember, Basanti Tuddu living in Lavadih village, Shikaripada block, Dumka district, used to break large stones into smaller and still finer ones in stone quarries. So did her husband, Subhash Honsda. Over time, the fine dust they inhaled took its toll on their lungs and Basanti developed TB, forcing her to stop work.

With the loss of their only source of income and failing health, the couple faced a frightening future. The shift to bamboo work was a boon. The handicraft industry in the area has been driven by organizations such as the Evangelical Social Action Forum (ESAF). It turned out to be a lucky break for Subhash Honsda. ESAF spotted him and sent him for training to faraway Thrissur in Kerala. Honsda has shown exceptional talent and was awarded for his craftsmanship by Chief Minister Arjun Munda.

After two months, Subhash became a master trainer and once he returned to his home in the forests of Jharkhand, he turned his energies into training a small group of local villagers. Lal Tuddu, a member of the group, says that he can make many different items with one bamboo. Danial Mohli too nods enthusiastically. Urmila Mohli is buoyed by the appreciation she gets for her craft. It simply makes her day! Often there is more than one member from the family involved, bringing considerable income into the household. Today, some 200 men and women in 20 groups are involved in making products from bam-



boo in Shikharipada, Dumka district.

Bamboo work has transformed the lives of adivasis in areas in and around Ghasipur, Rampur, Lakhikundi, Pipra, Bargachi and Kendua. Over a period of time this has effectively stopped adivasis from migrating to other parts of the country by providing them an alternative livelihood close to their homes and fields.

Laundry bins, dustbins, decorative items and

furniture are created which find ready markets in urban centres. The appeal and charm of eco-friendly products has captured the imagination of international markets. The carefully laid network of marketing and sales by ESAF is putting these items on the shelves of classy, elite outlets like Fabindia in Chennai, Jharcraft in Ranchi and other shops in Kolkata. Craft exhibitions routinely held in cities also provide an excellent outlet for these products.

Across the state, in Giridih, Goda, Dumka, Pakud, Sahebganj and Jamtada, training-cum-production centres have opened up, providing livelihoods for some 2,000 families. Crafts persons get compensated for their labour and are unconcerned with the marketing chain. This is quite different from local traditional crafts where craft persons often directly deal with the markets through middlemen who lop off a major portion of their earnings.

What is marvelous is how a natural forest produce like bamboo which has been part of the lives of tribals for centuries, has found new use. Today when livelihood options can open up through linking with markets, this activity has enabled tribal communities to move from traditional sources of income to modern market-based ones.

Recently, the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) took the historic step of including bamboo as a minor forest produce, allowing forest dwelling communities and adivasis unhindered access to bamboo. Jharkhand has bamboo growing in abundance. ESAF has converted this natural wealth and human resource into new wealth of a different kind.

If this can happen at Shikarpada, then why not in other areas of Jharkhand which has 23,605 square km of forests of which 843 square km is bamboo? It could be a big idea waiting to happen.

Of course, there is no denying the social commitment in the initiative. This is amply evident not only in the larger mission of providing livelihoods but also in smaller steps to improve the quality of the lives of the community. One will find a medley of children playing and studying in Bal Shiksha Kendras established near the production centres. This has prompted NABARD to come forward to support the initiative through SHG groups set up by ESAF. Clearly all this takes the bamboo initiative well beyond the contours of a commercial success, actually touching and changing lives.

Sudhir Kumar, Manager, Business Development, ESAF sums it up succinctly "The success of the initiative can be gleaned from the smiles on the faces of the adivasis."

Charkha



Medak awaits biodiversity tag

KANCHI KOHLI

EVERY year, on 22 May, the world celebrates the International Day for Biodiversity. But even as awareness programmes, meetings and events took place across the globe, biodiverse farmers from 20 villages in four mandals of the Zaheerabad region of Andhra Pradesh, invoked this day to express their deep disappointment.

They wanted to draw the attention of their Chief Minister, N Kiran Kumar Reddy, to the fact that their proposal asking for recognition of their farming ecosystems as a Biodiversity Heritage Site (BHS) was still awaiting a decision in the corridors of the Andhra Pradesh State Biodiversity Board (APSBB). It had been over a year since they first submitted their request in April 2010.

India's Biological Diversity Act came into existence in 2002. Amongst other provisions, it put forth a framework under which access to biological resources and related knowledge could, from then on, be regulated. Any such access, said the Act, would need to go hand-in-hand with an equitable sharing of benefits for which procedures and guidelines needed to be developed.

What is also important is that the Biological Diversity Act contains broad clauses that have mandated central and state governments to take measures towards the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. One such conservation measure, proposed in Section 37 of the Act, relates to the declaration of Biodiversity Heritage Sites by the state government.

This declaration has to be done in consultation with local bodies, which can include panchayats, district councils, urban wards or even the Biodiversity Management Committee (BMC) as proposed to be set up under the Act. This provision of the Biological Diversity Act can be critiqued on several grounds – for instance it gives local communities limited space to take decisions on whether or not areas can be regarded as Biodiversity Heritage Sites. Further, Section 37 also has a tentative clause on compensation and relocation which advises caution even as the declaration of such heritage sites is beginning to be explored in a few instances around the country.

The National Biodiversity Authority (NBA) through two expert committees has finalised a set of guidelines for the declaration of Biological Heritage Sites. Such guidelines do attempt to overcome the limitations of the Act and prod the state governments to rise above the limitations of institutionalized power hierarchies.

But guidelines can only do that much. This is primarily because they cannot entirely change the requirements of the parent legislation which gives only minimal powers to village level institutions and therefore creates only a limited space for the

participation of local communities. Moreover, the NBA guidelines are not binding. They can at best suggest a process to state level authorities.

Despite such limitations, the declaration of an area as a Biodiversity Heritage Site is being seen as an opportunity by many communities to protect both wild and cultivated biodiverse areas from external threats and land use conversion, so that



What these ecological and biodiverse farmers seek to protect is over 59,759 acres of farmland where they regularly plant over 100 varieties of crops every year on their marginal lands.

all that has been built assiduously over generations is not lost in one policy sweep.

At the same time declaration of an area as a Biodiversity Heritage Site also bestows recognition of the conservation efforts that farming, forest dwelling, coastal and even urban communities have carried out over decades.

Hence, in April 2010, 20 villages from Zaheerabad region had sought to explore the BHS route. What these ecological and biodiverse farmers seek to protect is over 59,759 acres of farmland where they regularly plant over 100 varieties of crops every year on their marginal lands and also preserve over 80 seed varieties.

Their proposal was preceded by several village level discussions where the farmers had debated on what the Biodiversity Heritage Site declaration

can or cannot do for their farming cultures and knowledge. They also held gram sabha meetings where such a concept was explained. Only after that, was consent given to go ahead with the proposal. The well-known NGO, Deccan Development Society, working with the farmers was key to this process.

The farmers have clearly stated: "The very reason for proposing this location as an Agro-Biodiversity Heritage Site is due to its location in a semi-arid region with richness in species and crop genetic diversity and the prevalence of traditional knowledge concerning sustainable management of fragile dry-land ecosystem and sustenance in such a resource scarce region."

While stating their concerns, women farmers especially observed that over the years there have been many changes in landscape and agriculture as observed by the community. The one significant change they pointed to was the introduction of hybrid seeds.

The second important threat to their agro-biodiverse practices was the establishment of a sugarcane factory in the area which lead to major changes in farming practices and local attitudes toward the environment.

The availability of only rice in the ration shop was another issue they had to reckon with. The Biodiversity Heritage Site for them was a step to encourage biodiversity on their farms and be able to deal with these multiple challenges.

At the outset the APSBB welcomed the idea and accepted the proposal of the 20 villages in principle. The farmers were assured that the status of biodiversity sites would be conferred on their area as soon as the administrative and technical processes were completed.

Following this, an Expert Committee constituted by the APSBB, consisting of three specialists visited these communities and interacted with them on their conservation efforts. They were Dr Anisetty Murthy, a former senior officer of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, Dr Varaprasad of the National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources (NBPGR) and Dr Hampaiiah, Chair, APSBB. According to the farmers, the specialists appreciated the great efforts that the farmers had put in to secure the biodiversity on their farms and fields.

It has been eight months since the committee's visit, and the proposal continues to be stuck. No one knows the real reasons. Even the May 2011 submission to the chief minister does not appear to have worked for the farmers, a baffling situation for them since there didn't appear to be any resistance to the idea.

The farmers wait and wonder why.

The author is a member of Kalpavriksh Environmental Action Group and is based in Delhi

Living

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Life in the Dead Sea

Rejuvenate with healing mud and salty water

Susheela Nair
Jordan/Israel

AS we drove along the Dead Sea Highway, we were treated to a stunning coastal view with mountains flanking on one side and the glistening Dead Sea on the other. We could see salt formations lining the rocks and cliffs around the Dead Sea and the silhouette of Israel glistening in sunlit haze in the distance.

It was evening when we arrived at the Movenpick Resort and Spa Dead Sea. Subtly designed with décor reflecting the heritage of the region and the architecture of old Jerusalem, the resort blends ingeniously into its astonishing surroundings. We were ushered into the rooms sprin-

kled in a two-storey village traditionally designed and built with local stone and set in expansive tropical gardens. From the private balcony or terrace of our rooms, we could enjoy the garden view while some rooms had stunning views of the sea or mountains.

The next morning we headed to the Dead Sea for a therapeutic indulgence. It is 1,240 ft deep, the deepest salt lake in the world with 34 per cent salinity. Additionally, it is almost nine times saltier than the ocean, creating an environment where animal and plant life cannot survive, hence its slightly morose name. The sea has long attracted people because of its unique properties. Famous historical figures such as King Herod the Great and Cleopatra arrived to take a dip. Aristotle was moved to write

about its remarkable waters. Biblically, it was a place of refuge for King David. The Egyptian mummies were embalmed with the Dead Sea mud, which is laden with minerals and nutrients. It was this mud that gave Cleopatra that famed porcelain sheen.

The Dead Sea is the lowest spot on the earth's surface – the shores of Dead Sea sit at 1,388 ft below sea level. That's where all of the Dead Sea's wonders really stem from – the sea's waters maintain nearly 34 per cent salinity; the River Jordan tapers off into the Dead Sea and its water evaporates and leaves behind vast beds of salt and minerals. Then consider the UVB rays – the barometric pressure and high oxygen levels on the sea's shores dilute the sun's harmful rays more than any other place on earth.

SUSHEELA NAIR

Staying afloat in the Dead Sea can be fun



I slathered myself with the dark brown mud – a signature element of the Dead Sea – from the clay pots lining the shores of the beach in touristy areas. I found the mud at the Dead Sea unlike the mud we dig up in our backyard. It is full of healing minerals. It is the natural essence of brine which gives the water its curative powers. Indulging in black mud wrap is said to cleanse and stimulate the skin, relieve muscles, improve blood circulation and ease rheumatic pain. The mineral salts are believed to alleviate the symptoms of ailments ranging from skin problems to rheumatic diseases. The waters are rich with minerals and salts such as magnesium, sodium, potassium, bromine and more. At 34 per cent salinity, sinking into the Dead Sea is almost impossible.

I waited for 20 minutes till the mud dried in the warm, dry sunlight and then lounged in the mineral-rich salt waters. We were forewarned about splashing in the waters and to stay only afloat. I

hotel strip. Fresh (but undrinkable) water runs down its narrow canyon – ideal for washing afterwards. There's little privacy here so dress modestly.

On my return journey, I ruminated over the plight of the Dead Sea. I was disturbed to hear that it has shrunk by a third over the past 50 years and faces total evaporation. At stake is the area's delicate ecology and a tourist industry that attracts 100,000 Britons each year. It is said that the reduction of the Dead Sea has been caused by the diversion of the River Jordan which feeds the Dead Sea, for irrigation and drinking water – mostly by Israel, but also by Jordan and Syria. Today, less than seven per cent of the river's original flow reaches the sea.

Currently there is growing concern over the drop in the water levels of the Dead Sea. The proposal is to pump salt water from the Red Sea to the Dead Sea via a proposed 120-mile Red-Dead canal, a multi-billion project that the Jordanian

SUSHEELA NAIR



Movenpick Resort and Spa

couldn't stand up though I tried. It was fun staying afloat on the surface, like a cork with waves bobbing you up and down. I could see sculpted rocks embellished with crusted salt at the shore, creating some stunning colors. The high salinity of the water helped us to stay buoyant. I dipped into the sea and soaked off the mud. It was a spa-like experience, cleansing and restoring the skin's natural minerals. I wished I could stay afloat longer but I had to stick to the 20-minute time limit – the salty sea is so corrosive that staying longer is not advisable.

After emerging from the salty water, I indulged in some of the many fun activities at the Dead Sea: clicking classic pictures of some tourists floating in the water reading the newspaper or magazine while others sipped martini. If you are not staying in one of the upmarket resorts, then you can head for Amman Beach, a clean public beach with good facilities, 2 km south of the hotels. A free alternative is the popular Herodus Spring, about 10 km south of the

government is pursuing with international donors. Water would be desalinated along the route to provide fresh water to Jordan, with the brine discharge sent to the Dead Sea for replenishment.

But environmentalists have warned that mixing water from the Red Sea with the unique chemical soup of the Dead Sea could create a natural catastrophe. Friends of the Earth, Middle East, have started a campaign entitled, 'Let the Dead Sea Live.' Dead Sea's mix of bromide, potash, magnesium and salt is like no other body of water on the planet. They are apprehensive that by bringing in marine water, this composition will be changed. There is also concern about algae growth. According to Nayef H. Fayez, Managing Director of Jordan Tourism Board, "An Environment Impact Assessment study has been initiated by the government. Whatever may be the concerns the race is on to save the Dead Sea, one of the world's cultural and ecological treasures."

Solar food at Roots



Sugandha Pathak
Gurgaon (Haryana)

IN the midst of the Rajiv Gandhi Renewable Energy Park (RGREP) in Gurgaon, there is a solar café called Roots. Built with bamboo and thatch, the café was started last year and has been attracting a growing number of people. The place is adorned with paper lamps, minimal decor and simple wood work. On crisp summer mornings, the smell of mowed grass and tea can really make your day.

"The café is usually visited in the morning by joggers in the park. Schoolchildren who come for an educational trip to the RGREP have also spread the word. On pleasant summer evenings, the place is packed," says Mathangi R. Programme Manager, Advit Foundation.

Advit, an NGO which works for environmental conservation and livelihood enhancement, manages the RGREP, a Haryana Renewable Energy Development Agency (HAREDA) initiative. RGREP promotes alternative energy and green living. It runs wholly on solar power. The renewable energy park also promotes healthy eating habits, stressing on organic and low carbon foods.

The menu, though not elaborate, has snacks



which are light, nutritious and reasonably priced. "Since it's been more than a year, we are still experimenting with the menu. Though we want to stick to snacks, there are a few substantial meals we offer like platters, biryanis and curries. But these meals are not served in the morning," says Mathangi.

The menu's specialties include sattu juice, bel juice, sandwiches, cinnamon rolls, coffee and a range of teas – jasmine, masala, lemon, mint and green tea. The portion sizes are quite large. The price of the teas are between ₹30 to ₹40. The

SHAMIK BANERJEE



most preferred foods are upma, poha and chilla. Lemonade is a favourite.

The pizzas and pastas which at ₹150 are the most expensive items on the menu are a big hit with children. "Children can eat the entire pizza. The crust is thin and very light," says Mathangi.

"We use whole wheat to make the pizza base. We make whole wheat lasagna but penne and arbiata pasta has to be bought from the market. We toss it with a lot of vegetables and freshly made sauces. The cheese is specially made for us and is relatively low fat and easily digestible," says the chef, Vinod.

Meals are also mercifully lightly oiled. Olive oil, sunflower oil and rice bran oil are used. "Children love fries. Instead of frying potatoes, we bake them," explains Vinod.

Most foodstuff is sourced from various NGOs producing and promoting organic products. The teas and oils come from Chirag, an NGO based in Uttarakhand. Vegetables are sourced from Farmers First, an NGO which markets organic produce in the National Capital Region.

"On some days we buy vegetables from a commercial establishment called Live Organic. But we try to stick to organic vegetables. The coffee beans are selected by our staff and are bought from Chennai's coffee plantations," says Vinod.

In summer, the café is open from 7 am to 11 am and then from 4 pm to 10 pm. People don't step out in the afternoon due to the heat. "Winter is a good time for us," says Vinod. "On pleasant sunny days the place is so crowded that there is a 'waiting line.' In fact, towards the end of winter we even organised candlelight dinners," says Mathangi.

In winter a more elaborate menu is offered. There is a Nepali platter which includes red stew, steamed bread and chutni. It was a big hit last winter. Conventional winter delicacies like s arson-ka-saag, makki-ki-roti, stuffed paranthas, kheer and moong dal halwa are also rustled up.

According to members of Advit, awareness about healthy lifestyle and good food is catching on in Gurgaon. "For food you go to the mall, for outings you go to the mall, for gymning you go to the mall. After emerging from your office cubicle you go to a cluttered coffee shop and then reach home after battling traffic. It saps your energy. This is your green escape," says Guru Rao, a merchandiser with a retail outlet in Gurgaon and a regular at the café.

The platform child

Sugandha Pathak

New Delhi

IN an attempt to explore the hidden world of street children, C. Vanaja, an acclaimed journalist and filmmaker based in Hyderabad, tries unravelling their lives in her documentary, Platform No. 5.

Vanaja's 26-minute film is engaging, powerful and sensitively handled. The film centres around three children who earn their livelihood by collecting plastic bottles strewn around the Secunderabad railway station. How such children come up with their own concept of love, respect, fear, money, in the absence of a home or school, is aptly woven into the story.

"Since the past seven years I have been involved with street children. This bunch at the railway station immediately attracted me. They were more independent and liberated than the rest I interacted with," says Vanaja.

The film revolves around Wajid, the protagonist, and Sandeep and Vinay. All three are between 10 to 12 years old. They have their own reasons for being on the railway platform despite constant efforts by NGOs to put them in shelters and rescue homes.

"All three were sent to rescue homes several times but they ran away in a couple of days. After finishing the film I also put two of them in school but they left in two days. They are bubbly, independent children who don't really know what could happen to them if they keep living off the streets like this. They are enjoying their freedom right now. They don't want to follow the rules of rescue homes and schools," says Vanaja.

The film tries to understand why children run away from these formal institutions and are content with the meagre ₹40 or ₹50 they earn. The parents of two of the children are alive but they prefer to sleep on the street than go back home.

"They feel independent. They can play anytime, go watch a movie, eat anywhere and they don't have to ask for money. This shows that somewhere they want to be treated like adults. That is where the whole problem lies," explains Vanaja.

All three are runaway cases. The mischievous Wajid used to get beaten up by his parents, Vinay's father was forcing him to join a barber's shop and Sandeep's parents are no more. "We know that each one of us is motherless and we have to stick together," says Sandeep in the film.

It took Vanaja almost six months to make the boys comfortable and open up. They used to often come to her place and chat with her.

"For six months everyday I used to go spend time with them on Platform No. 5. They would come around 5 am to the station and they would be there till 10 pm. I used to meet them at 6 am

and stay with them till they wrapped up. I invited them to my house also. We used to have coffee together. That's how I built connections with them and got to know the personal details of their lives," says Vanaja.

But in their desire for a free, reckless life, the children are unaware of looming dangers. The experts interviewed say that after the age of 16 the children disappear from the area. They are either kidnapped for organ smuggling or are picked up by ganglords who turn them into gangsters, burglars, drug addicts or pimps.

"It is scary, when I got to know that these kids



Wajid, left, with Vinay and Sandeep



C. Vanaja

are not seen in the area once they grow up a little. I tried sending Wajid back to his parents. He ran away and came to me. I called his parents again to take him. He is still with his parents but I don't for how long he will stay with them. Also, I have sent Sandeep to stay at a friend's place. He is learning welding," says Vanaja.

Platform No. 5 has been selected for the Short Documentary Competition Section in the Fourth International Documentary and Short Film Festival to be held in Kerala from 31 July to 4 August. The film is supported by the Public Service Broadcasting Trust (PSBT), UNESCO, the Ford Foundation and Doordarshan.

PSBT has been supporting independent films and filmmakers since several years. Empowering the filmmaker and mainstreaming the movie are its two aims. "Our project themes are fairly broad in scope and encourage filmmakers to explore imaginative, powerful and creative films that move them the most. We commission all types of documentaries that include experimental films, theme-based films, animation and personal expressions, among others," says Rajiv Mehrotra, managing trustee of PSBT.

To reach the masses, PSBT does not target one kind of audience. PSBT Films are telecast on DD I and DD News every week and reach millions of people, representing 52 independent voices a year. They are also telecast on the Lok Sabha channel and are often part of the NDTV Documentary Series.

GREEN CURES

Defeating diabetes

Dr G G GANGADHARAN

DIABETES mellitus (DM) in general is a chronic metabolic disorder in which the body is unable to make proper use of glucose which results in hyperglycemia (increase in blood sugar level) and glycosuria (increase in sugar levels in urine). In particular, Type I DM is characterized by loss of insulin producing beta cells in the pancreas leading to deficiency of insulin in the body. Type II DM is characterized by insulin resistance or reduced insulin sensitivity. Both lead to hyperglycemia, which largely causes acute signs of diabetes; excess urine production, compensatory thirst and increased fluid intake, blurred vision, unexplained weight loss, lethargy, change in energy metabolism etc.

The symptoms of diabetes can be correlated to the symptoms of Prameha. Prameha is a metabolic disorder explained extensively in Ayurveda literature. Prameha, holds the twin meanings of "Prabhutha mutratha" or excessive urination and "Avilmutratha" or turbid urine.

Etiological factors of Prameha:

- Consumption of food with excessive sweet taste.
- Intake of newly harvested (within one year) crops like new rice, grains.
- Frequent intake of aquatic plants and meat.
- Excessive usage of milk and milk products.
- Lack of exercise.
- Excessive sleeping, day dreaming, night awakening.
- Mental strain and stress.

Common features of diabetes mellitus and Prameha:

- *Prabhutavilamootrata* (polyuria): Increased urinary output with turbidity.
- *Madhuratva in mutra*: Glycosuria.
- *Dantadeenam mala sanchaya*: Deposits/ tartar accumulation on teeth are seen.
- *Panipada daha*: Presence of glucose is seen in the blood. It causes disturbance in the equilibrium of dhatus and



doshas in the body exposing body to further complications like padapani daha (burning sensation of feet and palm).

• *Chikkanaata*: Stickiness of the body. Trishna (Thirst and Polydipsia): In the process of lypolysis, more water is utilized which results in the activation of the

thirst centre in the brain.

• *Swadu asyata*: Sweetness is experienced in the mouth due to increase in sugar level.

Making a few changes in lifestyle will help an individual to combat diabetes/prameha. Here are a few tips which you can follow to avoid diabetes.

- A well balanced diet intake is a must. Avoid excessive sweet, fatty, spicy food.
- Avoid regular consumption of non-vegetarian food.
- Avoid alcohol.
- Consumption of food at regular intervals is a must.
- Regular exercise is a must to maintain an ideal weight. It also helps in proper blood circulation and metabolism.
- Practicing yoga will also help to a great extent.
- Avoid day sleeping and night awakening.
- A stress free mind will keep you at optimal health. It would benefit you to a great extent.

Some herbs useful in Prameha:

- Triphala – Terminalia chebula, Terminalia belerica, Emblica officinalis.
- Guduchi – Tinospora cordifolia
- Jambu - Eugenia jambolana
- Shilajit - Asphaltum (mineral pitch)
- Turmeric – Curcuma longa.

Diet: Use barley, green gram, horse gram, chickpeas, old rice, bitter gourd and bottle gourd in your food intake. Roasted rice and wheat are useful. Include 'Tikta ras' (bitter), Kashaya (astringent) items in your diet.



LOOK GOOD

Glowing skin

AS the outermost layer of the body, the skin is a psycho-physiological expression of the being. Skin texture, tone and appearance indicate the health status of the individual. The nutrients ingested by a person ultimately end up giving lustre to the skin. The skin is the most sensitive part of the external body. To maintain the health of the skin, the right kind of food, external atmosphere and balanced mental state are important.

TIPS:

- Always consume freshly prepared unpolished wholesome grains and pulses suitable to your eating habits. This means that a balanced south Indian diet may be different from a balanced north Indian diet. Red rice, boiled rice and light rice are suitable for south Indians, whereas whole wheat and bajra are suitable for north Indians. Each region-specific and eco-specific diet should be consumed for healthy skin. Foods that are universally good for the skin are fruits like grapes, pomegranate and small banana (kadali).
- Shoot vegetables which are green in colour.
- Dry fruits and nuts soaked in water.
- All sprouted pulses should be steamed before consumption.
- Use very mild spices like cumin seed, turmeric, coriander, which are also helpful for digestion.

Avoid:

- Deep fried and bakery foodstuff.
- Non-fibrous grains and pulses.
- Regular use of sesame oil for internal consumption – not good for skin.
- Curd/ yoghurt. But buttermilk is good. Buttermilk is different from curd due to its different therapeutic action in the body.

Home cure:

- For normal skin, take a small orange or tomato, make juice out of it and mix it with one or two teaspoons of curd. Massage it gently on the face in an upward direction. Allow it to dry and then wash with cold water and pat dry. This gives a nice glow to the skin.
- For oily skin, take two spoons of curd or honey and lightly massage in an upward direction, leaving it to dry for about 15 minutes. Then wash your face with cold water. This will remove excess oil and dark spots on your skin and give a glowing skin.
- For dry skin, mix two spoons of rose water and two spoons of milk and cleanse your face and neck with this mixture daily. This will act as a natural moisturizer.
- Egg yolk mixed with honey makes a very good face mask. Put it on your skin, leave on for 20 minutes, and rinse it off. It is excellent for sensitive skin.
- Apply mint leaves juice regularly to remove tan on your skin.
- Use fresh fruits like papaya, peach, carrot, tomato paste for face packs. You can use each fruit once a month.
- Use natural face scrubs like green gram powder for washing your face.
- Avoid makeup – it spoils the texture of the skin.

WONDER PLANT

Mighty tulsi

THE tulsi is an inseparable part of the Indian household. Our tradition accords great importance to the tulsi. This plant is an integral part of our lives due to its immense use besides its religious importance.

There are several species of tulsi under the same genus, Ocimum, belonging to the botanical family Lamiaceae, (referred to as the tulsi family or the family of aroma!). In English, tulsi is commonly known as basil. There is the holy tulsi (Ocimum tenuiflorum, earlier name Ocimum sanctum), camphor tulsi (Ocimum kilimandscharicum), purple tulsi, Vishnu tulsi etc.

The hedges of the camphor tulsi give a stunning wild look to path-

INVENTION

Copper Gyan



AYURVEDIC texts recommend the use of metals like gold, silver and copper for purification of water. Water stored in clean copper pots overnight and consumed the next morning is believed to impart health benefits.

Studies conducted at the Institute of Ayurveda and Integrative Medicine (I-AIM), Bangalore, found that water contaminated with diarrhoea causing bacteria were not recovered after storing the water in copper pots for 16 hours overnight. The levels of copper required to completely kill the bacteria in water was about 180 ± 20 ppb,

which is far below the permissible limits (2000 ppb) of WHO (1993). The chemical constituents such as hardness, turbidity, alkalinity and pH of the water remained mostly undisturbed.

As copper pots are expensive, a copper device has been invented by the institute that is less expensive, is durable, does not require electricity or fuel, can be used in any container and can be reused.

The study substantiates the ancient claim by Ayurvedic texts that water stored in copper vessels can promote health. However, the study does not address such parameters as turbidity and chemical purification or the effect of copper on turbid or chemically impure water which are required to meet WHO criteria for safe drinking water. The copper containers/devices do not soften the water or get rid of heavy metals and pesticides in water. As studies are underway on the effect of copper on waterborne diarrhoea causing protozoa, it is at this stage not possible to claim that copper containers or the copper device will clear protozoan contamination.

*Preethi Sudha VB and Padma Venkatasubramanian
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ORGANIC CHEF

Recipes

BOTTLE GOURD SOUP

Ingredients:

Bottle gourd: 2 cups, peeled and chopped

Cloves: 2

Garlic: 2 cloves, chopped fine

Green gram flour: 1 tsp

Cow's milk: ½ cup

Pepper powder: a pinch

Powdered rock salt: to taste

Coriander leaves: to garnish

Cow's ghee: ½ tsp

METHOD: Pressure-cook the chopped gourd in one cup water until soft. Churn in a blender, strain and set aside.

Make a smooth paste of green gram flour in ¼ cup of water and set aside. In a thick bottomed pan heat ghee. Add cloves and garlic and sauté for one minute. Add the wheat flour paste, 1 ½ cups of water, bottle gourd puree and milk. Bring to a boil and allow to simmer for 5-6 minutes. Season with salt and pepper.

Garnish with chopped coriander leaves.

This dish is very soothing for the stomach and relieves cramps.

BITTERGOURD CURRY IN COCONUT MILK

Ingredients:

Medium sized bitter gourd: 1

Ghee: 1 tbs

Mustard seed: ½ tsp

Urad dal: ½ tsp

Turmeric powder: ¼ tsp

Cumin powder: ¼ tsp

Thick coconut milk: 1/2 cup

Water: 1/2 cup

Rock salt: to taste

Curry leaves: 6 to 8 sprigs

METHOD: Cut the bitter gourd into two and deseed it. Slice it thinly. Mix the coconut milk with water to make it thin and keep aside. Boil some water with salt and blanch the bitter gourd in it. Take it out and drain. In a heavy bottomed pot, heat the ghee until it becomes clear.

Add the urad dal and mustard seeds to this. Saute till the dal turns golden brown and the mustard seeds start popping. When ready add the gourd, turmeric powder, cumin powder and salt. Mix well.

Now to this add the coconut milk. Also, crush the curry leaves and add to this. Simmer till heated enough and serve hot.

This dish is very good for diabetic people and easy to digest.

ways. Its long spike-like inflorescence with petite but numerous white flowers is a pretty sight. Planting camphor tulsi near windows brings in pleasant aroma! Bruising the leaves of vana tulsi/ ban tulsi (*Ocimum gratissimum*) emits the aroma of cinnamon, and is hence known as Lavang tulsi. Another interesting tulsi which has the smell of lemon is popularly known as lemon-scented tulsi, is used in the preparation of tea. Tulsi beds in gardens keep the atmosphere pure and healthy and present a blessed look! There is also the practice of planting tulsi to repel mosquitoes.

Plant tulsis in your garden and drive away the messengers of disease!

MEDICINE MIX

For fever: Consume the extract of tulsi leaves in fresh water every two or three hours. The powder of tulsi leaves added with saunth (dried ginger) and sugar when taken with hot water is a well-known remedy for fever. A classic Ayurvedic recipe advocates mixing tulsi, black pepper, ginger and honey to prevent infection and to control high fevers.

For respiratory disorders: Tulsi is not only effective against simple ailments

like cough and cold, but also against asthma, bronchitis and influenza. Decoction of the black variety of tulsi with honey and ginger to be consumed every couple of hours. Gargling with tulsi decoction will reduce pain and irritation in the throat. Tulsi leaves have a warming effect on the body; they induce perspiration and help expel the toxins from the system.

For digestive ailments: Tulsi makes an excellent home remedy for diarrhoea, vomiting and nausea. It is also effective against indigestion, intestinal worms and mouth ulcers. Chewing a few leaves of tulsi everyday can strengthen the gastro-intestinal system.

N M Ganesh Babu



The power of Om

SAMITA RATHOR

THE word Om is powerfully embossed not only in the Indian psyche, but worldwide. It is the underlying foundation of the Santana Dharma or the Universal Dharma, known as Hinduism. One does not even think twice about its purity and sacredness – it is that strongly embedded in each one of us. With the popularity of yoga rising in the West, the word Om is gaining more and more devotees.

No one knows about the exact origin of Om except that it was handed over by our ancient rishis or sages in the Himalayas. Aum is also called the Pranava, a Sanskrit word which means controller of life force (prana) and life-giver (infuser of prana). "That which causes all the pranas or vital energies to prostrate themselves before and get merged in the Parmataman, so as to attain identity with Him, is for that reason known as the Pranava." – Atharvashikha Upanishad 1:10a

Om or AUM is the universal sound. Om chanting is prevalent around the world but very few of us know its relevance, power and background. Om is the mysterious cosmic energy that is the foundation of the entire creation. What does Om really connote?

ABOUT OM : "The goal which all the Vedas declare, which all austerities aim at, and which men desire when they lead the life of continence is Om. This syllable Om is indeed Brahman. Whosoever knows this syllable obtains all that he desires. This is the best support; this is the highest support.

SOUL VALUE

Whosoever knows this support is adored in the world of Brahma. – Katha Upanishad I.

Om encompasses the entire cosmos and beyond. Om is anything and everything our perception covers, uncovers and exists. Om is not just a resonance or pulsation. Neither is it a symbol.

Om occurs in various ancient and modern civilizations. It exists in Hinduism, Christianity and Islam (Aum, Amen and Amin). In Arabic, the first alphabet is pronounced as aliph. In Greek, it is alpha, in the Roman script it is A. Thus in many languages the first letter in the alphabet has the syllable A, with which the word AUM or OM begins with.

The relevance of Om is mentioned in all the sacred texts like the Bhagwad Gita, Upanishads and the Yoga Sutras. By chanting Om regularly one begins a process of purification.

OM CHANT: Om is made up of three syllables – A-U-M. Aum is pronounced in three sounds - A (aaa), U (oooo) and M (mmmm). While chanting, the lips are slightly apart with A, then slowly start closing with U and with the M sound the lips completely close. In fact the sound Aaah is the most natural sound which exists in the universe, originating from the throat. It's the first sound of a newborn's cry.

- The resonance of A can be felt in the abdomen.

- The resonance of U can be felt in the throat.
- The resonance of M can be felt in the chest.

The Mandukya Upanishad states that the AUM syllables represent different realms of experience, such as A is jagrat or waking state, U is swapna or dream state, M is shushupti or deep sleep state. The silence after AUM chanting is the spiritually awakened state which is beyond the other three states.

Om also symbolizes the vibration of the ultimate or Supreme Energy. The Absolute Truth and the murmur of the universe lies in Om. It shows us freedom and the way to it.

OM PLUS : Om chanting has numerous physical mental and spiritual benefits. By regular practice of AUM chanting, transformations at various levels can be seen. Regular practice is an essential pre-requisite for beneficial results. Om connects the finite to the infinite. Neuroscience has also proved how Om chanting brings about a balance between the sympathetic and the parasympathetic nervous system. Physically, it also helps clearing a lot of sinus problems and improves the quality of voice. It detoxifies the body. Mentally, it improves concentration and the ability to focus. It calms the mind and reduces stress levels. Spiritually, it awakens consciousness. Om chanting helps us come closer to our true nature which is peace and there is no human on this earth that does not yearn for peace.

Email samitarathor@gmail.com

PRODUCTS

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எப்பொழுதும்
தோசைமாவு
கிடைக்கும்.
தரமான
கடல்மீன்
கிடைக்கும்.
மீன் விற்கும் இடம்

POVERTY ALLEVIATION THROUGH AUGMENTED INCOME GENERATION

Mrs. S. Selvi of Srivaikundam in Thoothukudi district of Tamil Nadu hails from a poor family. Her family consists of four members, Mrs. Selvi, S. Sudalai Kannu (Husband) and two male Children's S. Shankarapondy, and S. Chinnathambi Studying 10th and 9th STD respectively. Mrs. S. Selvi's family was literally struggling to meet their daily requirements with the meager income they earned. Her husband Mr. Sudalai Kannu, a daily wage earner (Wood Cutter) with an income of Rs. 4,000 per month supported the family. With such a small income she could not manage to pay rent for her house, pay school fees to the children, and buy provisions and other family requirements.

SST and Fisheries College, Thoothukudi jointly provided Pisciculture training to the SHG's during last year as a part of additional income generation program. After undergoing this training program Mrs. S. Selvi a member of Sri Sidhi Vinayaga self help group decided to take up fish culture through SHG loan. SST facilitated a loan from the bank for Mrs. S. Selvi to indulge in a new income generation activity. Now Mrs. S. Selvi is successfully practicing fish culture and fish like thelli, katla are grown in tank in her house campus. Mrs. Selvi is thus getting an average income of Rs. 15,000 per month by sale of fish cultivated. Her husband has purchased a two wheeler with which he transports the fish daily to the market.



Changing Lives

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Activities

Self help group formed	Nos	2669
Families enrolled in SHG	Nos	41955
Results		
Families income increased through IGP	Nos	40275
Additional income ranging per month / person	Rs.	Rs. 1000 to Rs. 2500

Activities

Veterinary camps conducted	Nos	584
Number of animals treated	Nos	204979

Results

Number of animals increase by milk yield	Nos	47310
Increase in income from milk yield	Rs	Rs. 2000

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