

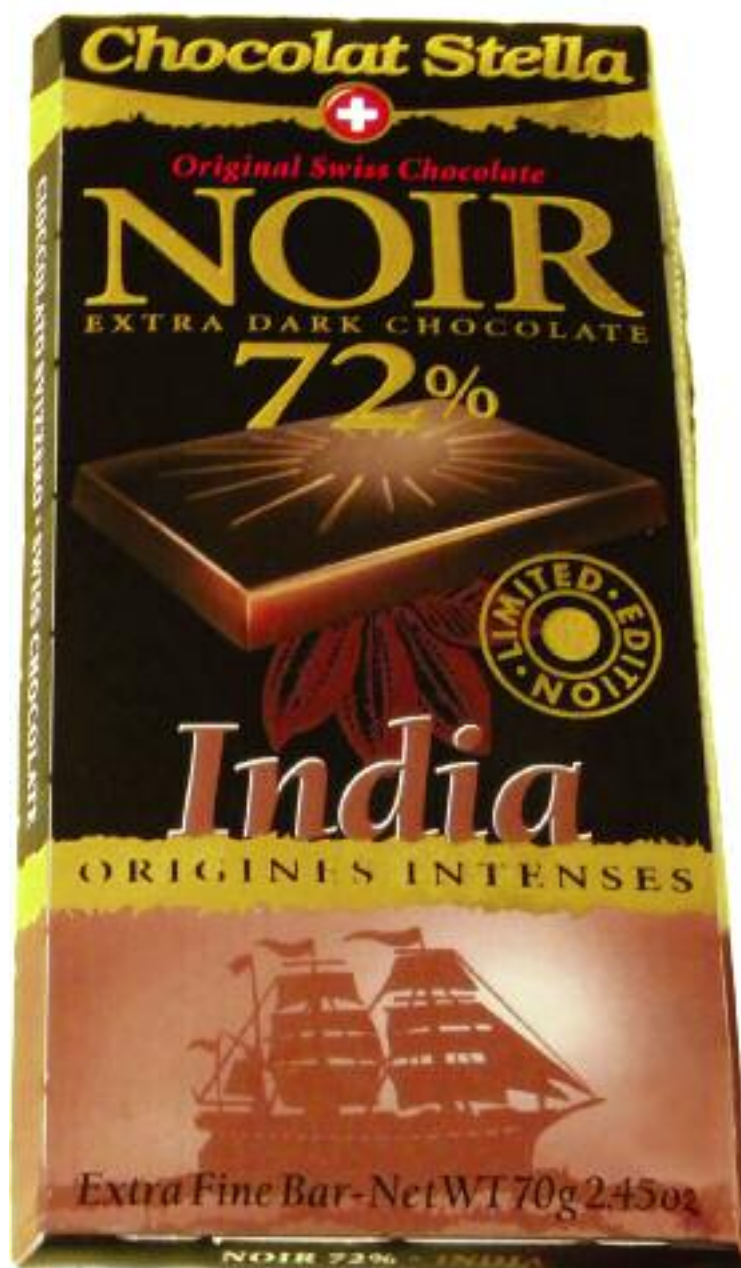
Civil Society



SWISS CHOCO BREAK



Chocolat Stella works with Indian farmers to make their cocoa world class



'GRIEVANCES BILL WILL GET WORK DONE'

Nikhil Dey on a draft law no one is tracking

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Naye AVASAR Nayee UMMEED Nayee DISHA

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Civil Society

READ US. WE READ YOU.

Another farm story

WE have done several stories on how close collaborations with farmers in the field have yielded interesting results. Our cover story this month is further proof of the benefits of these well-defined partnerships and the opportunities that await us in agriculture. The Swiss chocolate firm, Chocolat Stella, has worked with Indian farmers in the south to help them produce cocoa beans that can be used to produce high quality dark chocolate. The result is a chocolate brand with India emblazoned on it.

This success came out of an entirely commercial arrangement between the farmers and the Swiss company. We need more such arrangements. Indian agriculture with its vast biodiversity and intricate traditional practices is perfectly suited to a spirit of inventiveness. Instead it is stifled by antiquated policy and bad infrastructure.

Agriculturalists need a new framework to make them more competitive. They require help to overcome problems of the environment, technology, lack of finance and poor market access. It is the responsibility of governments at the Centre and in the states to create a sense of mission, which will then drive Indian agriculture in contemporary ways.

Our other big story in this issue is on the Bill to redress grievances with regard to government services. The focus so far has been on the Lokpal Bill. But if the Lokpal will deal with corruption, what about the huge number of complaints that people have about work that doesn't get done even though there is no corruption involved.

The Grievance Redressal Bill, from what we can see, has several excellent provisions. It seeks to build accountability with timeframes at the block and district levels. It creates an independent authority where ordinary folks can go with their complaints.

The Bill's strength is in its attempt to strengthen processes and deal with complaints where they exist. The Lokpal is all about crime and punishment. It is about sending people to jail. The Bill of grievances tries to get work done. It fixes accountability and makes it expensive for officials to dodge their responsibilities. It also recognizes human nature. People may prefer to lodge a complaint but not file an FIR.

It is a sign of our times that the grievances Bill has received little attention even though it holds greater promise for delivering better governance. The Lokpal Bill on the other hand has hogged the headlines, but its provisions are mired in controversy and the Bill itself, for all the sound and fury, seems a non-starter. Is there something that we need to learn from the low-key, uncontroversial way in which the grievances Bill has been put together and finally tabled in Parliament?

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IN THE LIGHT

by SAMITA RATHOR



LETTERS



Big retail

Your cover story, 'Big retail, small farmer' highlighted the dilemma small farmers face very effectively. The cost of production is rising but farmers are not getting remunerative returns for their produce. The farmer is confused about the contradictory messages he is getting about the entry of big retail. If farmers have a choice of buyers, prices could go up. Everything will depend on how well the government regulates

big retail so that the farmer can benefit from competition.

Shailender Singh

To my mind the entry of big players will not ruin farmers. It will help them diversify and get access to better technology and prices. As for local traders, they will give stiff competition to the big players. Weekly vegetable markets and roving vegetable vendors provide services that are cheaper, fresher and available at your doorstep. For big retail to compete with them will not be that easy. As long as the *mandi* survives no one will get hurt.

Shanti Mehta

Hall of Fame

History has witnessed many award ceremonies. We are also aware of various awards promoted by the government and NGOs to highlight the role of those who perform heroics. Come what may we confess that the award given by *Civil Society* magazine is a unique one not because our chairman, Bashir Ahmad Mir, was given one, but because no formalities at all had to be taken up by the recipients of the

award. Usually recipients have to go through cumbersome processes while receiving awards from agencies. Credit goes to your organization in general and your source in the Valley of Kashmir in particular who could identify and verify a person who happened to be invisible till now. Though we do not believe that awards can do miracles, they can however prove to be a way in leading to miracles. You have recognized the work we have done during the past 12 years.

All the awardees in the Hall of Fame are real heroes and really unnoticed in society.

Everybody knows the worsening state of Jammu and Kashmir and the pain of sufferers that has made living there quite uncomfortable. Hundreds and thousands of people were affected and at the same time no saviour was ready to serve society.

However the new century gave rise to many NGOs. In 1999 Human Aid Society was founded. The organization started its work in a low-key manner and has steadily increased its ambit.

When our chairman returned after receiving the Hall of Fame award he spoke at a colorful function at Human Aid Society's head office in

Baramulla on 5 December 2011. He spoke about the wonderful job *Civil Society* is doing in the country to promote social work. We hope to continue this relationship into the future.

Members and volunteers of Human Aid Society.

Civil Society is a wonderful magazine and the credit goes to the persons who conceived of the idea and the team that made it happen. It has brought into the limelight unknown persons and their contribution which would have otherwise gone unnoticed. Keep up the good work.

Simta Badia

HUDA

The interview with Praveen Kumar, the new chief of HUDA was very timely. He is indeed an honest and energetic officer who has become a role model for the bureaucracy. For the first time Gurgaon is seeing work being done. We just hope he stays in Gurgaon for a long time and does not get transferred. Most of the time honest officers like him end up annoying the corrupt. What follows we all know very well.

Deepak Lal Singh

INTERVIEW Nikhil Dey of NCPRI says it opens up 'Grievances Bill is designed to

LAKSHMAN ANAND

Civil Society News
New Delhi

THE Lokpal Bill has been in the spotlight for several months now. But is the dissatisfaction with government services only about corruption? Or is it more about innumerable delays and inefficiencies in the lower bureaucracy?

Far from the headlines, a strong and innovative law has been drafted to deal with the vast number of grievances that people have against the government. These grievances may in fact have very little to do with corruption. The draft law, which has been tabled and sent to a standing committee, for the first time creates a structure that enables an ordinary citizen to file a complaint and get it attended to. The Bill even seeks to impose penalties and fix accountability on officials right down to the district and block levels.

Called 'The Right of Citizens for Time Bound Delivery of Goods and Services and Redressal of their Grievances Bill, 2011', it was drafted in consultation with the National Campaign for the People's Right to Information (NCPRI).

Nikhil Dey of the NCPRI spoke to *Civil Society* on the strengths and weaknesses of the Bill. Excerpts from the interview:

What do you think are the strong points of the Redressal of Grievances Bill?

Overall, there will be a decentralized architecture for grievances and complaints. When this law gets passed, anyone in the country can make a complaint, get the issue examined in a definite time frame and get a written answer or a speaking order. At the district level you will be able to go to an independent authority to try and get your grievance redressed.

There are three basic issues that the grievance redressal mechanism addresses.

First, this Bill creates a vision for an information and facilitation centre that will register your complaint and track it – separate from the office at fault.

Second, the grievance redressal mechanism will involve the existing government machinery. It will not require the hiring of new grievance redressal officers. The Bill states that the supervisor will be the grievance redressal officer. It ties that supervisor into greater accountability. The supervisor is given one month to sort out the grievance. If he does not do so, he himself can be penalized along with the original person who did not provide the ration card or gas connection or whatever.

It incentivizes the supervisor, who can sort these things out. The block level supervisor is the one who can tell the cutting edge person to do it. He doesn't do it because he thinks it is a headache. But under this Bill if he doesn't do it he



Nikhil Dey

will be in trouble because he himself will be penalized by the independent authority.

The Bill uses the right to information (RTI) architecture. Under RTI a public information officer (PIO) was appointed from among the staff in each office. Under this Bill the grievance redressal officer (GRO) will be appointed in the same way. If the GRO does not attend to the complaint within a month, the complaint automatically escalates into an appeal.

Thirdly, and most importantly, it creates an independent designated authority at the district level. Today, an RTI applicant has to go to the state

level to reach an independent authority. That state commission can penalize and compensate. But it is also very heavily overloaded since it gathers all the RTI complaints in the state.

This Bill creates an authority at the district level with technical staff whose job it is to sort out complaints and grievances in a two-month period – one month for the GRO to sort it out and one additional month for the district authority to hold hearings and take a decision.

See, even a perfect Lokpal can only send someone to jail. It cannot get your work done. The grievance redressal law is designed to get your

opportunities to get accountability from officials get work done at lowest level'

work done and to use penalties and compensation wherever necessary to persuade the structure to respond.

The fact that you are sorting this out at the district level instead of taking it to the state level is also designed to meet the kind of grievances which are at the lower levels of the bureaucracy. Absolutely. That's why it is a decentralized mechanism. While there are these penalties and compensation it is basically designed to help bring about systemic reform. If the government finds it has to pay compensation and it is suffering penalties then it makes sure it puts in the response time etc.

Will the penalties and compensation come out of the government?

No. The penalties and compensation will come out of the official's pocket. Otherwise, the government will pay. The main thing is it gives an opening to every person to pursue entitlements and rights and this is important. The Bill incorporates rights, entitlements and obligations.

To give you an example, the question raised is: why do you need such a law when there are public service delivery laws? Delhi has passed one, so has Bihar. The point is that these laws enumerate certain rights – that you will get a new ration card within so many days etc. But by implication the delivery law may exclude other rights because what is not written in that Citizens Charter will be excluded.

In the Grievance Redressal Bill there are some good definitions. For instance, what is a public authority? It includes public-private-partnerships. It includes public utilities acting in the name of providing electricity or whatever. The definition of service includes the obligations of the officials. The service you get from a hospital, for example, includes the obligation of the doctor to be there for eight hours a day for four days a week etc. It includes Section 4 (of the RTI Act). If that is not properly done you can file a grievance redress against that also.

RTI was an exercise in transparency. This is an exercise in accountability. It opens up an opportunity for citizens to get accountability enforced.

Where does this bill fall short? Are there some things you would have preferred in the bill?

We feel that the first information and facilitation centre should be at block level and a single window. What they have said is that each public authority will set up one. We have been saying there should be a common service centre at the block level. For instance, if there aren't toilets for girls in a school, should the complainant go to the water department, the education department or the PWD? A single window would be able to trans-

fer the complaint within 24 hours. It can be easily brought in and it makes sense to do it.

Secondly, how you select the independent district level authority is going to be very crucial. If appointments are political, they will be a big problem. The Bill is silent on this aspect. We had recommended that selections be made by the UPSC in consultation with the state commissions, which are independent authorities. If the UPSC does the selection there would be a certain level of honesty in that. That has not been outlined one way or the other.

Thirdly, we said compensation in some issues should be automatic. So if I don't get my NREGA wage on time in 15 days, I should automatically get it. In this Bill the person will get compensation as long as there is penalty imposed on someone. It means you are extracting the penalty from someone's salary and giving it to me. Whereas in something like NREGA, many times it is the department's fault. Money has not come from the

RTI was an exercise in transparency. This is an exercise in accountability. It opens up opportunity for citizens to get accountability

Centre or the state, there aren't enough people to measure the work done. So why should people suffer? Automatic compensation even as a small amount is very important.

But overall it's a big step forward. It will take a lot to get this implemented. Like RTI, this too will open up opportunities to get accountability.

You seem to place more emphasis on the Grievance Redressal Bill than the Lokpal Bill. What is the reason for this?

Absolutely, because the Lokpal is basically a criminal investigating agency whereas people's anger and concern come out of a overall lack of accountability in the government's capacity to deliver.

To deal with a criminal investigating agency is a tedious process. It requires someone going and filing an FIR, witnesses, going to court...it's a long, tedious personal involvement. It's very unlikely that people who are angry will be that motivated to pursue a criminal complaint especially for day to day problems. Even if the police agency is functioning well, it is tedious.

At the end of it all, under the Lokpal you can only send somebody to jail. You don't get your ration card. In fact, in many cases where people

did not get their wages as soon as they made a criminal complaint, those records went off. So they did not even get their wages. Of course the Grievance Redressal Bill can't solve the 2G scam. But it can certainly work for you better at ground level than a Lokpal.

Everyone believes the Lokpal will fix everything. So do you also believe this grievance redressal mechanism will also fix everything?

Absolutely not. Grievance redressal actually requires people to get involved. The Lokpal expects someone else to sort everything out. Here people are going to make the complaint, then pursue it at their own local level and things will happen in front of them. It won't sort everything out but it will put pressure on the system to deliver. It involves the existing machinery and it does not create a new bureaucracy. It puts pressure on the bureaucracy to do its job or pay up. The biggest problem today is you don't get acknowledged in a government office, even you or me, if the guy says go to hell what do you do?

Other activists like those fighting for the right to education have also asked for grievance redressal mechanisms. Would those grievances also be tackled by this system?

Actually this offers a great opportunity for rationalization of grievance redressal mechanisms. NREGA has already set up a district ombudsman. Right to Food is planning to set up one. Right to Education is talking of setting up one. Right to Health is also talking of having one. So instead of having four or five systems for grievance redressal, you can have one competent well-staffed mechanism. So you actually reduce bureaucracy.

Does the bill add to the financial burden of the government?

There is already an office memorandum which says one per cent of all flagship programmes should be spent on transparency and accountability. Overall this works out to some ₹2,500 crores per year which is more than enough to set up the grievance redressal mechanism and do everything. Spend one rupee to save ₹99 is a good slogan.

Given the current situation in Parliament how soon will it take for this bill to become law?

I am hopeful. This is a bill which has received all round support. For MPs the biggest headache when they go to their constituencies is that people say birth certificates are not given, ration cards not made, People complain about not getting their entitlements under the Indra Awas Yojana. So, the MP is basically sorting out grievances. The grievance redressal mechanism can be a godsend for MPs. ■

Landfill poisons groundwater

Civil Society News
New Delhi

IN November 2002, people from 11 slums in Delhi were evicted and banished to the northeast fringes of the city. They were 'resettled' here in a place called Bhalaswa. They found their new locality was next to a landfill site belonging to the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD). Dotting the landscape were sundry sewage ponds. The place reeked of filth.

Left with no choice people built their homes here from scratch. They fought for years to get basic facilities like electricity, schools, public toilets, subsidized basic provisions under the Public Distribution System and a skeletal bus service. More than 4,000 households exist here today.

But residents of Bhalaswa suffer from a variety of health problems, many of which can be traced to the quality of water they use.

There are no water supply lines, so they depend on tankers sent by the government. But the tankers are irregular and most households have been forced to install hand-pumps to draw on groundwater.

A study released on 14 January by the Bhalaswa Lok Shakti Manch and Hazards Centre, a Delhi-based NGO, shows that the groundwater is contaminated by pollutants that have leached from the landfill site.

The landfill is not scientifically lined. It has only got a layer of malba topped with soil instead of a plastic coating or a special type of clay layer for a secure landfill. It receives about 2,200 tonnes per day of waste out of which 700 tonnes goes to the compost plant. The landfill is now 22 metres height and it was supposed to close in November 2009.

A health survey of 877 residents revealed that 70 per cent suffered from gastrointestinal irritation, 19.8 per cent had diarrhoea and vomiting, 20.4 per cent suffered from skin irritation, 17.9 per cent from burning sensation in the eyes and 9.7 per cent from breathlessness.

The study revealed that the Total Dissolved Solids (TDS) in the groundwater were way beyond permissible levels defined by the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS). The concentration of TDS and lead in the groundwater samples decreased with increasing distance from the landfill.

The water was of different colours in different parts of Bhalaswa. At Shraddhanand colony, Mukundpur and Nathupura people said the water was yellow and sometimes brownish-black. The water also contained a layer of sediment.

Groundwater was salty in taste although according to the Central Groundwater Board and the Central Pollution Control Board, there is fresh water upto a depth of 60 metres. High chemical oxygen demand and the presence of faecal coliform were also observed. Poor sanitation could also be partly responsible. As the distance from the landfill increased, the quality of the water is observed to be better.

Residents have demanded piped water supply. Something also needs to be urgently done about the landfill so that it does not contaminate any more scarce groundwater. ■



A view of the Andamans

The Jarawa conundrum

Everyone is at sea

Zubair Ahmed
Port Blair

MUCH has been made of video footage released by a UK-based daily showing partly clothed Jarawa tribal women allegedly being made to dance before tourists by a uniform-clad person on the roadside in a reserved forest in the remote Andaman Islands.

The local administration has said that the video footage is "perhaps 10 years old", but all the predictable responses have been made including an inquiry at the prompting of the Union government. "It is deplorable. You cannot treat human beings like beasts for the sake of money. Whatever kind of tourism that is, I totally disapprove and it is being banned also." Union Tribal Affairs Minister V Kishore Chandra Deo told PTI in Delhi. Law and Minority Affairs minister Salman Khurshid has said that strict action should be taken against

those responsible. Union Home Minister P. Chidambaram promptly scheduled a visit to the Islands to discuss the issue.

But the present outcry and expressions of official concern do little to address the larger reality with which the Jarawas live or to protect their dignity.

A telling incident just a few weeks ago barely generated a stir, although it reflected the gravity of an old issue that has found no ready answers from administrators, experts or well-wishers.

On 7 January at about noon, a group of Jarawas ventured into the revenue villages of Tusnabad Gram Panchayat in South Andaman District. These aboriginal groups, locally referred to as Tirur Jarawas, simply walked out of the forest reserve, laden with baggage neatly packed in baskets on their backs and tied with woven creepers. Evidently prepared for a long stay away from their homes deep in the reserve forests, they also carried raw material to make

LAKSHMAN ANAND



terized by their dark skin and frizzy hair, is among the first migrants to have reached the Andaman Islands, many thousands of years ago. Today, the 400-odd surviving members of this tribe continue to be a unique community that uses its traditional wisdom to survive even while leaving the rich biodiversity of the fragile forests intact.

The reserve forest they know as home is the largest single contiguous stretch of untouched forests that remain in the Islands. It is believed that their understanding of nature and ability to read natural phenomena may have been the reason they moved to higher ground deep in the forest after they felt the first tremor of the earthquake that caused the devastating tsunami of 2005. No casualties were reported among these tribal groups, though thousands were killed elsewhere on the Islands.

The Jarawas resisted all contact with outsiders



ZUBAIR AHMED

till 1998-99, when they started coming into contact with the outside world on their own. Much of the disaster that followed is blamed on the construction of the Andaman Trunk Road (ATR), a controversial 343 km road that connects the four major islands of South Andaman, Baratang, Middle Andaman and North Andaman. A 35 km section of this road cuts through the restricted Jarawa Reserve Territory, truncating their habitat. Primarily hunters and gatherers, they are today confined to 765 sq km of reserve forest in the South and Middle Andaman Islands. The fallouts were inevitable.

Although the Supreme Court in 2002 ruled that the Andaman Trunk Road must be closed in the interests of the Jarawas, the Andaman administration has continued to defy the ruling by permitting traffic on the ATR in the larger interest of the communities originally hailing from Bengal, Tamil Nadu and other Indian states who have settled on the northern islands since Independence.

Recognizing the need to review the Jarawa Policy of 2004 in view of the alarming rise in interactions between the Jarawas and others, the court constituted an 'expert committee' to assess the perceptions of the Jarawas. The members of the committee maintain that the policy is well-conceived. Their report observes that rice has found its way into the lives of the Jarawas through clandestine barter between Jarawas and non-Jarawas. If rice becomes a preferred and sought after item, overtaking their traditional

indigenous food, the Jarawas would become not only dependent on others for their food but become victims of exploitation by unscrupulous non-Jarawas, hence there is an urgent need to control the inflow of rice among the Jarawas!

Manish Chandi, a research scholar working in these Islands since 1995 and a member of the committee, presents his own perspective on what has become a complex issue with no ready answers, "From what I understand, they come out and go back on occasion with varying regularity and irregularity at some places, and they do not do so because of any miseries that we assume afflict them. It is an opportunity that they are using ever since hostile stances from both colonizers and Jarawas transformed into spectacles of barter, negotiation and our perception of being capable of serving their needs through welfare."

The National Advisory Council headed by Sonia Gandhi had formed a Sub-Group of Experts to suggest an action plan for the "protection" and "preservation" of the Jarawas. Dr Syeda Hameed, Member, Planning Commission, was the Co-Chairman of the Committee along with Jairam Ramesh. Both have traveled extensively through the Jarawa Territory.

Several years later, the administration of the Islands continues to await "a new policy" and a decision in the matter. At a meeting held in June 2011, the Congress President indicated her preference for maintaining a protected regime for the tribe.

Chandi maintains that efforts to keep the Jarawas cloistered are increasingly futile. "Today fishermen and hunters of pig, boar and lobsters

camp in the Jarawa reserve and [give] gifts to stay on for brief periods. Closing of the road will not stop Jarawas from coming or going anywhere... I wonder if you have seen Jarawa households by the road, kids playing while their parents are out looking for food... One can elicit changes in their behaviour from bus drivers and tourist taxi wallahs."

The lone Member of Parliament from the Islands, Bishnupada Ray, maintains that the ATR should not be shut down because the road is the lifeline of communities living in the North and Middle Andaman Islands with essential goods being transported by trucks daily. Besides, he points out, the Jarawas want to come into the mainstream and the government needs to "welcome and support the Jarawa community to join the mainstream on humanitarian grounds."

While deliberations continue and reports are drafted, incidents like those in the video footage will remain mere headlines for brief periods in a society that neither understands nor really cares.

"Our intervention should be based on the least intervention in terms of 'welfare measures' or messing with other peoples affairs. The Jarawas and other hunter-gatherers have worked out their strategy – hunt and gather, forage and pillage where possible," says Chandi. "We have to be able to desist [from] the temptation to give them a strategy, but rather allow them to devise their own – henceforth and always." ■

Charkha Features

new baskets, unfinished bows and arrows and basic tools meant for hunting and fishing.

The 'protected' Jarawa group possessed, to the watching villagers' astonishment, one-litre PET bottles packed with rice grains, floats made of table-sized thermocol sheets and tightly capped empty plastic cans. On enquiry, the visibly pleased Jarawas explained how handy these innovative floats are when traversing crocodile-infested creeks!

The most disturbing aspect of this recent visit by the Jarawas into revenue villages was their bringing forest produce for barter with local residents living at the fringes of the forest. They brought crabs, honey and other products, lured by the offer of tobacco, old clothes, and more interestingly, *pepe*, or cash.

The sight of ₹10 or ₹100 changing hands between the Jarawas and the villagers is a far cry from the Jarawa Policy of 2004 laid down by the Calcutta High Court which aimed at "protecting the Jarawas from the harmful effects of exposure and contact with the outside world while they are not physically, socially and culturally prepared for such interface." Ironically, the employees of the Andaman Adim Janjati Vikas Samiti (AAJVS) were witness to these cash interactions. AAJVS is a quasi-government agency whose job it is to look after the welfare of the Jarawas and other tribes in the Islands.

Studies indicate that this Negrito race, charac-



Jubilant villagers who now have their rights

Former forest village enjoys its new status

Dafadaar Gaurhi sets records right, accesses govt schemes

Rakesh Agrawal
Bhraich (UP)

TILL a year ago, Dafadaar Gaurhi was just another impoverished forest village located on the fringes of the Kartaniaghat Wildlife Sanctuary, an extension of the famed Dudhwa National Park in Braich district of Uttar Pradesh. Villagers complained bitterly of harassment by the forest department. Despite living here for generations they were insultingly called encroachers.

Just like other forest villages in India, Dafadaar Gaurhi was very poor and bypassed by all development.

In April 2010, this unknown village suddenly found itself in the spotlight when it became one

of the first villages in the country to get land and forest rights under the historic Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act of 2006. It was officially recognized as a revenue village. This change in status came about due to the efforts of the Developmental Association for Human Advancement (DEHAT), a local NGO.

A year later, Dafadaar Gaurhi, also known as Gokulpur, has a school in the shape of a three-room single storied structure built in concrete and stone. "Not just a school, we also have an anganwadi (day-care centre) and space has been allotted for a primary health centre nearby," says Mauji Lal proudly. Lal is a Dalit and the pradhan of Beejha gram panchayat, under whose jurisdic-



Ram Lal and Bindra

tion Dafadaar Gaurhi village falls.

In 2010, for the first time ever, the villagers voted for the panchayat elections. "They have job cards for NREGA and ration cards," says Lal.

Dafadaar Gaurhi is also the only non-advasi village where the Forest Rights Act (FRA) has been implemented. The biggest roadblock for non-advasi villages is that they have to prove they lived there for over 75 years. Villagers, with the help of DEHAT, managed to overcome this clause. Most of them now have individual land rights and community rights over a very small patch of forest.

"We finally have an identity," says Ramrana Devi, 47, a resident. Villagers are accessing government schemes and entitlements like pensions for widows and the handicapped and subsidised solar lights. "I get widow's pension. I have a solar light to brighten my hut," says Badaki Devi, 56.

Getting the *adhikar patras* (land right deeds) has not only ensured a secure livelihood for 69



The village has its first school but attendance is yet to pick up



Women of the village display their land rights papers



Jitendra Chaturvedi

Dayal's son, got nothing.

DEHAT is planning to challenge rejection of land claims in the Uttar Pradesh High Court.

"This rejection by the BLC is unlawful since only the VLC has the right to do so as per the provisions of

the FRA," says Jitendra Chaturvedi of DEHAT.

The NGO, which has worked relentlessly to get the FRA implemented in five forest villages, admits it was tough to get a non-*adivasi* village like Dafadaar Gaurhi land and forest rights. "It required the village to prove its dependence on forests for 75 years. The forest department was determined to reject all our claims so we had to outwit them," says Chaturvedi.

The village found an ally in the then district magistrate of Bahraich, Ringzin Samphil. He made available to Dafaadar Gaurhi the decadal working plans of the West Bahraich Forest Division since 1930. Chaturvedi was given permission to photocopy these plans.

The forest department had claimed that Dafaadar Gaurhi did not exist before 1961. But right there in black and white in the decadal working plans of the West Bahraich Forest Division, Dafaadar Gaurhi's name popped up.

In early 2010, when photocopies of these working plans were presented to all forest officials, they were left speechless. RK Singh, the district forest officer (DFO), then asked for proof that the residents were the same.

He got a fitting reply from the villagers. They produced their land records that they had painstakingly kept safe and sound. Two elderly men in the village recount the meeting that followed with some humour and a few digs at the forest department.

"We showed them the receipts of land revenue that we possessed," says Ram Lal, 92. "We paid between six annas per bigha (about ₹0.36) in 1930 to ₹2 per bigha until 1970. We told them – if we could keep our land records safe and sound in our thatched huts, how come you couldn't keep your records safe in your concrete offices surrounded by an army of employees? And they had no answer," laughs Bindra, 90, another village elder.

The forest department had to accept the 1961 register of the Motipur Range with the names of the villagers as proof of residence. But it chose to ignore the oral evidence of 16 village elders.

Although the villagers proudly point to the facilities they now have, DEHAT is a little disappointed by their response. For one, not all children are attending the new primary school.

"The villagers find it more rewarding to send their children to graze livestock," complains Gajendra Singh, who came all the way from Meerut to teach the children here. "I put in so much effort," he says.

Chaturvedi has been urging the villagers to be more ambitious about their children's future.

"We got this school after a long struggle. You must treasure this gain. Be a role model for other villages," he urges them.

The villagers continue to have rather limited access to forest produce. "The forest department sells fuel-wood and thatch to *thekedars* (contractors). They, in turn, sell it to us at a much higher rate. Neither are we allowed to extract non-timber forest produce like honey from the forest," says Kaushlaya Devi, 45.

Also, wildlife attacks their crops and the forest department does not pay any compensation. "I grow crops with a lot of effort on our 18 bighas (about 1.4 ha). But it is often destroyed by wild boars and neelgais. No compensation is paid," says Shyam Kali.

A second forest village, Dhakia, also called Kailashnagar, has managed to get land rights for 98 out of 105 households. "At least we and our four children can lead a peaceful life now," says Putti Lal of the village.

Urmila, another farmer, is also relieved. "We never thought we would be free of the forest department's highhandedness until we got our land (around 2.5 ha)," she says.

But in Hatiya, alias Nai Basti village all 160 claims were rejected by the BLC. Villagers here are dejected. "They said our names don't appear in some 1961 list. But we had given them evidence that our village existed in 1950-1951," says Moolchand, a resident of Hatiya.

The problem, says Chaturvedi, is that the forest department insisted on using another name for their village to deny it existed then. In the case of Dafadaar Gaurhi, villagers with DEHAT's help, turned the tables on the forest department. ■

out of 90 households in the village, it has also put an end to the harassment the villagers suffered at the hands of the forest department. People here say they were forced to do free labour (*begar*) for the forest department. They allege they often gave officials free food grain, animal produce and even livestock.

"Now I grow enough food for my family on the land that I got," says Ram Lal, 43, a farmer.

Of course, not everything is perfect. Claims for land were rejected and some got much less land than what they had applied for. While the Village Level Committee (VLC) cleared all claims, the Block Level Committee (BLC) rejected many often without giving any reason.

Chandrika Prasad says his claim for 1.2 ha was rejected. No reason was cited. Radheshyam Yadav claimed 4 ha, but got only 0.8 ha. Raghuwar and Dayal, who are brothers, found that Gokul, Raghuwar's son got 0.8 ha, but Baijnath, who is

Art on 3 wheels

Satya Sivaraman
Bolpur

THE first sight that greets most visitors to Bolpur, in West Bengal, are the town's numerous cycle rickshaws. They are the main mode of transport in this historic place, pollution free, eco-friendly and ubiquitous.

But when it comes to the aesthetics of these vehicles the less said the better. Looking at them, no visitor would believe he has arrived at a place famous for producing top quality artists for many decades. After all, Bolpur is home to Rabindranath Tagore's Santiniketan, recognized around the world for art, ideas and mingling of various cultures.

On 26 December, the last day of the town's annual Pous Mela, a determined band of seven artists from India and abroad got together to paint five rickshaws with various themes ranging from idyllic village scenes to intricate decorative designs. The artists, mostly senior students from Vishwabharati's Kala Bhavan, also included well-known Thai artist Vasan Sittikhet, visiting Santiniketan over the New Year period.

"This is a good idea to paint cycle rickshaws here. In Thailand where I come from most vehicles used for public transport are painted with a lot of skill and artistic content," said Vasan, who is very actively involved in social causes in his country.

Bangkok's famous three-wheeler tuk-tuks and sundry modes of transport like buses and even many private cars regularly sport designs and images spray-painted on them by special shops in the city. In Pakistan too, trucks and buses are decked up, like a bride prettied up for her wedding, by their proud owners.

When it comes to painting rickshaws the global capital for such work is none other than Dhaka in neighbouring Bangladesh where this is an old tradition and even looked upon as an art in its own right. In West Bengal, for some reason, despite thousands of cycle rickshaws, the trend has not caught on so far.

"The idea is simply to paint interesting designs and motifs on the cycle rickshaws and infuse some colour into the lives of everyone from rickshaw pullers to their clients," said Sanjay Mitra, originally from Kolkata but now living in Santiniketan and one of those behind the initiative.

The rickshaw painting was part of an initiative by a group of Santiniketan residents to remember the late social activist Shyamali Khastagir, a long-time resident of the town, who passed away in August 2011 due to a cerebral stroke. The daughter of Sudhir Khastagir, one of the founders of the modern Bengal school of art, Shyamali di, as she was popularly known, was the life-blood of civil society activism in Santiniketan and a great promoter of using art for social causes.



A rickshaw gets a colourful makeover



Painting a rickshaw can be intricate work

The initiative is part of an effort to put art back into public spaces and revive the original spirit with which Santiniketan was set up.

The initiative is also part of an effort to put art back into public spaces and revive some of the original spirit with which Rabindranath Tagore set up Santiniketan. Over the years the academic community, including both teachers and students, have become isolated from the residents of Bolpur town and from the large population of Santhals in villages nearby.

"There is a need for more such initiatives

whereby students of art can go out of their classrooms and engage directly with communities in and around Santiniketan," says Sunandita Malhotra, one of the participating artists and a senior student at Kala Bhavan.

The five colourful rickshaws currently doing their rounds in Bolpur will soon be joined by many more in the coming months as the event has generated considerable interest among both artists and rickshaw-pullers in Santiniketan.

"I have never seen my rickshaw look so pretty. After seeing my vehicle a lot of other rickshaw-pullers want to know how they can get theirs painted also," said Inder Sahu, a rickshaw-puller living in Bolpur since the last two decades.

The initiative will continue throughout 2012 with at least five new rickshaws painted every month. The organisers hope that apart from converting each rickshaw into a mobile art exhibition the enthusiasm for infusing art into mundane contexts will catch on not just in Santiniketan but well beyond too. ■



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Employers give deaf the thumbs-up

NGO trains young for jobs, changes their lives

SHAMIK BANERJEE

Kavita Charanji
New Delhi

If you are accustomed to your caffeine fix in one of Delhi's many Costa Coffee outlets, as we in this magazine are, chances are that you would have been served by bright young men and women who can't hear or speak but have an infectious enthusiasm that conveys much more than words.

Over several such visits we've learnt to order in their language – using our hands to ask for a large or small cup, enacting a shudder to ask for cold milk or flashing a thumbs-up to register satisfaction.

It may be difficult to believe, but we exaggerate not when we say that we have never been served badly. There is always a smile, a shine in the eyes and a huge eagerness to please. It is as though with the job has come a new identity and purpose in life.

Dinesh Chandra is one such young man. He is 23 and has some kind of a school degree. Had he been in his village in Haryana, he would have been performing some menial task for a pittance. But instead he now serves at a Costa Coffee outlet in Noida, in the periphery of Delhi.

"Though I cannot communicate verbally with hearing people, I am on the whole quite comfortable working here," he explains in sign language. "It helps that I have a grasp of lip movements and I can write orders. Customers assist by pointing to the menu board."

Dinesh joined Costa Coffee in May 2011 on a salary of ₹5,000. Today, he takes home ₹6,000 a month, an increase which is recognition of his hard work and perseverance.

Earlier he was employed in a factory that makes hairbrushes. He would pack brushes for long hours and earn just ₹3,000 a month. He would also have to walk two kilometres from the bus stop to the factory.

His life was really transformed when he discovered the Noida Deaf Society (NDS) where he formally learnt sign language and life skills and then got the job he enjoys doing at Costa Coffee.

NDS has trained and placed more than 300 young people with impaired hearing in jobs that have



All is well: Ruma Roka with her students

changed their lives dramatically. From being lost and unhappy, they have become earning members of their families and have respect.

Founded in 2005 by Ruma Roka, 50, a restless homemaker, NDS began with just a couple of youngsters in a tiny two-bedroom flat Noida. It is now a beehive of activity with a team of talented trainers and administrative staff.

Companies who believe in being inclusive in their recruitments come to NDS in search of candidates. They also get their other staff trained in the use of sign language.

NDS has made placements in WelcomeGroup, Mphasis, NIIT, Leela Kempinski, Shangrila, Taj, the Royal Bank of Scotland, BPOs and, of course, Costa Coffee, which is the biggest employer with as much as 17 per cent of the people who serve in its cafes being hearing impaired.

Employers find hearing-impaired people focused and diligent. At Costa Coffee, Dinesh works alongside Mohit Gautam Das, who is also hearing impaired and from NDS. Ruma Roka says it is their policy to try and place two people together so that they don't feel isolated among the rest of the employees who don't have impairments.

But in just the short while that they have been there, the opposite seems to be happening. The other employees have begun learning sign lan-

guage. There is also a growing acceptance of them being as good as the other employees. Dinesh, for instance is called "morning champ" by his co-workers. So, there is no charity going on here. They are part of a team and are as up and running and as accountable as the others.

Jitender, a shift manger, is very happy with Dinesh and Mohit. "They are very punctual and positive minded," he says. "I am trying to communicate better with them by increasing my vocabulary in sign language."

Old World Hospitality, which runs Habitat World at the India Habitat Centre and Epicentre in Gurgaon, has hired five youngsters from NDS for back-end jobs like banquet control, data entry and housekeeping. "They are very good at their work, diligent, and the attrition rate is low. Moreover, they sensitise other employees around them to the often underestimated capability of the hearing impaired," says a company spokesman. The management is now thinking of hiring another 15 to 20 students from NDS.

At NDS students are taught sign language in English, MS Office, the Internet, desktop publishing, graphic design, general knowledge, life skills and work ethics.

Many of NDS' students are from rural areas like Dausa in Rajasthan, Rewa in Madhya Pradesh and

SHAMIK BANERJEE



Dinesh Chandra at Costa Coffee

Ara in Bihar. Some are from towns like Meerut, Agra and Mathura in Uttar Pradesh. There are others who are from Chennai and Bhopal. There are also students from Mongolpuri, Sultanpuri and Jehangirpuri, which are slum areas in the Delhi region.

Many of these areas don't have education and skill training facilities for the hearing impaired. It is through the special environment at NDS that they get a chance to lead independent lives.

"Our students are told that they must not regard themselves as beneficiaries but as active participants in these companies," says Roka, who has the designation of NDS general secretary.

Roka's interest in the world of the deaf began with a Doordarshan news programme in sign language. "I was intrigued and wanted to know more," she says.

"There was a complete lack of information," she recalls. But over a year or so she figured out some of the basics about sign language. She enrolled for training at the Ali Yavar Jung National Institute for the Hearing Handicapped in Lajpat Nagar in Delhi.

Six months later she received a certificate, having topped her class.

NDS then began with five students in her flat. It now fills an entire building and there are 750 students on the rolls.

Students typically share rooms on rent in nearby villages and slums like Chhalera, Mamura Gaon and Nithari. Often parents pitch in with ₹2,000 to meet part of their children's expenses. Those who are unable to do so, are supported by sponsors.

The courses vary from six months to a year and then comes the time for placements. NDS networks industry well. It facilitates the screening process for employers and helps them with on-the-job training for the hearing impaired. It provides intensive pre-employment training as well.

But even after all this, it is not easy to place people. A batch of 350 students is completing their course and many have not found employment. "That is giving us sleepless nights. A lot of them are not ready for employment yet," says Roka.

She says it is her experience as a practising Buddhist which has helped her empathize with

those who can't hear. "I often felt that it was important for me to be happy to be able to spread a little happiness. We have so much and yet we are so insular and isolated in our own lives. This disables us from reaching out and seeing the reality of the handicapped."

To work with children who are hearing impaired at an early age, NDS started a primary school in 2009. Here 20 children are tutored in Hindi, English and Math through sign language and visual methods.

Roka's perseverance and contribution to the cause of the hearing impaired have been well recognised. In 2008, Noida Deaf Society received the NCPEDP-Shell Helen Keller Award for promoting employment among the disabled. In 2010, Roka received the IBN7 Award and the Bajaj Alliance 's Super Idols Award under the category of 'Idol Makers.'

"The awards give me a sense of achievement. They are a recognition that I haven't been barking up the wrong tree. However, I am careful not to let these achievements go to my head," she says.

In the absence of national strategies to help the hearing impaired, what NDS does is a drop in a vast ocean. But in much the same way, its success stories are the reason for cheer.

Take the example of Rattan Kumar, who works with the ITC Maurya in Delhi as a data entry operator. He joined the MS Office course at NDS in January 2009. Opportunity knocked when he was close to finishing his course in the form of a contract data entry job at Mobile Creches, an NGO in Delhi. They wanted a part-time data entry operator. Rattan worked hard and managed well to switch between his roles of a student and of a data entry operator.

After his contract got over he was placed in ITC Maurya in Delhi in August 2009. His performance there has been so good that ITC has asked for more candidates from NDS. Rattan has the responsibility of looking after all the deaf trainees at the hotel.

Anil Kumar works at Leela Kempinski in the F&B service department. He used to work in a papad factory, for just ₹1,500 for 10 hours. He enrolled for the English course at NDS in 2007. Eventually he got placed in Leela Kempinski in Gurgaon. "NDS is the one and only organization that helps the deaf and I wish them the very best always," he explains. ■

SAMITA' S WORLD

by SAMITA RATHOR



'Please, think about your shit'

It is necessary to realize flush and river are linked

SHAMIK BANERJEE



Sunita Narain

Civil Society News New Delhi

INDIAN cities are awash in their own filth. It is hardly a secret because the mess is there for anyone to see and smell. Sewer networks either don't exist or are too old to be effective. Municipalities lack the money for making big-time investments in infrastructure and where new cities are coming up, private developers are more focused on a quick killing than putting systems in place.

Gurgaon is an example. Its malls and shimmering office buildings sit on a sea of trapped sewage, which has nowhere to go because trunk sewer lines are not in place and often last-mile connections haven't been made.

But Gurgaon is just one tiny slice of the action. Much bigger problems relating to water and sewage exist in cities like Mumbai, Kolkata, Delhi and Bangalore.

There are also the older smaller cities like Lucknow, Ranchi, Kolhapur, Meerut, Kochi or Kanpur which are teeming and in need of services they can't afford.

The seventh edition of the State of India's Environment Report seeks to piece this sordid picture together. Sunita Narain, director of the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), pub-

'Gurgaon is a classic case of a city which has all the glitz that we dream of and yet none of the convenience that any modern city must have.'

lishers of the report, says the first step towards a solution is to "think about shit".

The State of India's Environment Report is a unique exercise in which information collected through citizens' initiatives is pieced together to provide a contemporary and living picture.

This one serves that purpose very well. It is the one-stop repository for information on water and waste in our cities. We have known all along that we are in a bind. But now we have the inside stories of 72 cities in two volumes. Excerpts from an interview with Ms Narain:

What is the message that comes out of the Seventh State of India's Environment Report?

India is growing, India will grow. Urbanization is happening, urbanization will happen. I think what this book clearly says is that it is a simplistic notion that India can urbanize without having to reinvent how we deal with sewage and water.

Urban India today is in fact a nightmare.

Gurgaon is a classic case of a city which has all the glitz that we dream of and yet none of the convenience that any modern city must have. I think the sewage and water story has to be understood in much greater detail because if we don't we will continue to come up with glib responses.

Putting this report together has shown us that even as environmentalists we have got a lot of things wrong.

What do the problems with sewage and water tell you about modern India?

They tell me that we haven't focused at all on some of our most essential needs of a growing and modern India – how to get clean water to every citizen and, more importantly, how to take back the excreta of every human being.

But this does not require a technological wonder? So why aren't we doing it? We are not doing it because it is a public convenience that we haven't planned for. The trouble with modern India is that we feel we can grow without thinking about how public systems will cope with that growth.

This book's message is that if you want to urbanize and not drown in your own excreta, you have to think about models of urbanization which reduce the cost of water supply so that you can reach water to everyone. And more importantly you need to make sure that you have the money and technology which allow you to take back the waste of each and every human being, clean it and put it into the hydrological cycle.

This book is pushing urban India to think about its shit.

But none of this should come as a surprise. Thirty years ago, Anil Agarwal (CSE's founder and visionary environmentalist) saw the urban mess looming over the future of India. We also have Charles Correa's extremely fat report on urbanization.

Anil was a visionary, always thinking ahead. As long ago as 1982-83, he did a roundtable on sustainable urban India. He was planning to bring out 'The state of India's urban environment'. It was a book he never completed.

The phrase I use today 'the political economy of India's defecation', where the rich are subsidized to defecate in convenience, was the phrase that Anil used to describe the Ganga Action Plan.

Building a sewage treatment plant is not the beginning and end of pollution control. That is possibly where we have all gone wrong.

'We need to reinvent what we mean by urbanization. Make it affordable, make it sustainable. You need to make sure that you have the money and technology to take back the waste of each and every human being, clean it and put it into the hydrological cycle.'



Environmentalists have gone wrong. City planners have gone wrong. We basically assume that we have the wherewithal to deal with the challenge of urbanization because the rest of the world has done it.

But we are not able to deal with the challenge of urbanization because our model still comes from a London, a New York, a Shanghai.

We need to reinvent what we mean by urbanization. Make it affordable, make it sustainable. I think the biggest lesson that I have learnt (from doing this citizens' report) is how important the challenge of equity is. Even if you can take back the shit of the rich, you will still have pollution from the shit of the poor.

It still does not answer why in places like Gurgaon where huge investments have been made nothing has been done, at a fraction of those investments, to put systems in place. There is a missing link.

The missing link is that we don't look at shit. How many times have you even read the word excreta? Our book's title is 'Excreta'. It would have been much politer to call it 'water and waste'. We had a lot of debate and I said no I want to put excreta there because I want Indians to think about shit. You cannot think about saving your rivers till you connect them to your flush toilets. I think that connection has never been made.

The bulk of the Indian urban population still lives in the big and old cities. What are the solutions you see as being applicable there?

Difficult. This book is not prescriptive in models. It is more prescriptive in principles.

I think the easier cities to deal with today are the smaller cities where the problem hasn't still reached a scale of not being able to do anything about it. The answer today should be that in all of those smaller cities we should be thinking about creative solutions by which we can take the waste, treat it with microbes or other systems and

recycle and reuse every drop of water. My excitement in this comes not out of what we can do in Delhi or Mumbai, but the places where a lot of possibilities exist and where we shouldn't go wrong.

Then of course you have places like Delhi and Mumbai. Or Bangalore, which was a shocker for me. We would be told that there are 19 sewage treatment plants and all capacity met. But what we found was that only 30 per cent of the waste actually reaches the sewage treatment plants because most of Bangalore doesn't have underground sewerage. Now if most of Bangalore doesn't have it, can you think of Agra, Mathura, Sholapur... ■

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Patha's path to water security

Bharat Dogra

Chitrakut (Uttar Pradesh)

EVERY year, the Patha region used to hit the headlines of local newspapers for only one reason – an acute shortage of water. Villages here became famous for being without it. Most of the time the impoverished Kol and Mavaiya tribals could not cultivate their small fields since there was no water.

Patha is the plateau region of Chitrakut district in Uttar Pradesh. It extends to Shankargarh block of Allahabad district.

Into this dismal situation, a voluntary organization, the Akhil Bhartiya Samaj Sewa Sansthaan (ABSSS) stepped in. It began several replicable projects to boost farming and provide water security. Their methods required very little money.

The ABSSS started building small well-like structures around flows of spring water so that people could have access to relatively clean water during the tortuous summer months. They followed up this effort by repairing old tanks, wells and other traditional water storages.

Gopalji, a senior and respected social activist of Bundelkhand and the founder of the ABSSS, has always been a big believer in the wisdom of traditional water works. With a keen eye on stretching their meagre resources, he and his team scouted around for those damaged water sources where a little repair work could achieve much.

His voluntary group started building check dams to conserve rainwater. In Tikariya Panchayat area ABSSS undertook a watershed project under the District Rural Development Authority (IDRDA). Sitaram Mavaiya, a tribal peasant graphically describes the results, "Earlier all the rain ran down the slopes without giving us any benefit. Now most of this water is retained by a series of four check dams and earthen dams. The irrigation benefits mostly poor peasants like me. The old tanks were badly damaged so most of the water was lost to seepage. Now these have also been repaired adding to the quantum of irrigation water and quenching the thirst of our cattle."

ABSSS made special efforts to ensure that the poorest tribals and Dalits would benefit from this effort. Their top most priority in the early phase of their work was to ensure land rights to tribals. It was only because of this struggle that the tribals actually managed to occupy the land allotted to them. Now they benefit from the check dams and watershed projects of the ABSSS.

Says Kallu Prasad, a local farmer, "Earlier people here were not enthusiastic about bunding



Check dam built by the ABSSS



Traditional water tank being repaired

and water-conservation work. The reason is that they got few benefits out of it. Instead, they were served loan notices for the work done. But now the confidence of peasants has returned because of the quality of ABSSS' work. People can clearly see the benefits of moisture retention and the resulting rise in productivity."

In earlier days if a Kol tribal managed to get irrigation, he faced the risk of his land being grabbed by feudal landlords. But now in villages where ABSSS is working regularly, this is unlikely to happen and poor peasants, several of them first-generation landowners, can cultivate their land peacefully.

More recently the ABSSS managed to attract bigger allocations from NABARD (National Bank for Agricultural and Rural Development) and the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust for its watershed projects in Mangavaan and Itwa Panchayats in Manikpur

block. This work has combined repair of old water storages with construction of new check dams, planting of trees and other soil conservation works. Small ponds have been dug on farmers' fields to ensure water security. One pond can occupy about five percent of the total farm area.

In Mangavaan panchayat six check dams were constructed and about 50,000 trees were planted with a survival rate of about 70 per cent. After some time these trees – anvla, lemon, karonda – will start yielding a good income to villagers.

Farmers, particularly tribal farmers, are very pleased with the good crop their land, which had previously been barren, has yielded. In fact in the Gursarai area of this

panchayat, cultivation had been given up for several years due to dacoits and lack of water. Now with the growing potential of higher productivity farmers are ready to face all threats to improve their income and nutrition.

However the same region is also littered with the ruins of several disastrous water projects executed by local government agencies and contractors. How did the ABSSS get it right whereas the others failed?

Bhagwat Prasad, the director of ABSSS, is known for his meticulous and dedicated work. He says, "A significant part of our success came from our ability to involve the village communities. We had won their trust earlier by our land reform and other work. Also, by creating a transparent and community based system of implementing projects, we could strengthen this trust and secure even better participation of the people." ■



PRAHITA SONI
Dusgarpur, Rajasthan

Realizing the dream of self-reliance through Project Jyoti

Married at the tender age of 15, Prahita couldn't complete her 10th grade and got pulled into the responsibilities of family life. Her studies became a distant dream. 13 years on, marital discord left her emotionally dejected and forced her to return to her parents' home.

However, her dream to be self-reliant led her to Aide et Action, an NGO partnering with Project Jyoti, Microsoft India's digital literacy program. There, a course in Computer Fundamentals and Applications armed her with basic computer skills and spoken English. Moreover, it helped her regain confidence and equipped her to face the world. Today, she is a successful Client Servicing Representative for a leading satellite TV provider. Now, after work, she is often found in her father's tea shop, studying late into the night to make her dream of being a graduate come true.

The result – enhanced skills to pursue a career and renewed confidence for realizing ambitions.

GETTING CAREER READY Project Jyoti armed Prahita with: Documentation skills in Microsoft Office applications like Word, Excel, PowerPoint and Movie Maker

The knowledge to browse the Internet for research and data analysis

Basic computer knowledge and soft skills



ENABLING CHANGE

This is one of the stories of enabling change in India by equipping people with job-ready skills. Partnering with 14 NGOs across 27 states and Union Territories, Project Jyoti – Microsoft's Community Technology Skills Program – has set up more than 1400 learning centers, and trained around 400,000 people in IT skills.

To know more about Microsoft's initiatives, visit www.microsoft.com/india/msindia

SWISS CHOCO



At the Chocolat Stella factory Indian farmers learn about cocoa processing

Indian cocoa makes it really big

Shree Padre
Kasargod

AN iconic Swiss confectioner has for the first time made a dark chocolate from Indian cocoa and proudly acknowledged India as the source of the cocoa beans on the wrapper.

Chocolat Stella's dark chocolate was released globally in January at the International Confectionery Fair held in Cologne in Germany. The event was called 'Incredible India'. The chocolate is now also available in all Indian metropolitan cities.

The 70 gm bar is 72 per cent cocoa. In the past Indian cocoa has never been able to meet the exacting standards set by the Swiss for dark chocolate. But Chocolat Stella worked with farmers in Kerala for around five years to show them how to get the quality of the dry beans right.

Significantly, the Indian cocoa used is both organic and Fair Trade certified. The farmers eliminated all middlemen and dealt with the Swiss confectioner through their own producer-company, the Indian Organic Farmers' Producer Company Limited (IOFPCL) based in Aluva, in Kerala. IOFPCL is India's first producer-company.

The quantities being exported are very small, but Indian cocoa now enjoys a new status. This is a milestone. It raises the bar for Indian farmers and opens up international opportunities.

"It is an achievement to be proud of," exclaims Venkatesh N. Hubballi, Director of the Cashew Nut and Cocoa Directorate in Kochi.

"Other Swiss companies have now come forward to train Indian cocoa farmers in good agricultural practices, better post-harvest processing and to get their products organically certified."

The domestic consumption and production of cocoa and chocolate has

BREAK



Joykutty Vincent, Joshy V. Cherian, Vivek Mathew and P.J. Chakochoan at the factory

been increasing annually in India. But a significant global market lies untapped because Indian farmers haven't been able to make the grade.

Chocolat Stella showed a lot of patience. It became interested in India because of Antony Panakal, the export account manager. Panakal belongs to Kerala and has worked with Chocolat Stella for 30 years. It was he who drew the attention of the company to Indian cocoa.

Fifteen years ago, Chocolat Stella gave India a try. It imported semi-finished cocoa products from a Kerala company. "But the quality was not at all up to the mark. So we kept the project aside," recalls Panakal.

In 2006, the company made a second attempt. This time it decided to talk to IOFPCL. After several rounds of discussion, Chocolat Stella sent Markus Lutz, Chief Technologist, and Panakal to India in 2007. They visited cocoa plantations and studied the post-harvest processing methods used by farmers.

The team gave farmers hands-on tips for improving fermenting and drying of wet beans – both are important stages of post-harvest processing. Subsequently, IOFPCL exported two containers of dry beans to Switzerland. "Unfortunately, this consignment too didn't meet our quality standards. After extracting cocoa butter to salvage whatever we could, we had to abandon the product," says Panakal.

Most companies would perhaps have given up at this stage. But, interestingly, Chocolat Stella did not. It decided to make yet another attempt. This time the company invited a team of Kerala farmers to its factory in Switzerland for in-house training.

IOFPCL and their farmers agreed enthusiastically and in April 2009, four farmers arrived at the Chocolat Stella factory on a study tour. There was P.J. Chakochoan from Wayanad, Joykutty Vincent from Kannur, Dr Joshy V. Cherian from Coimbatore and Vivek Mathew from Mannarkad.

The one-week in-house training was very pur-



Chocolates being made at Chocolat Stella



Antony Panakal

Chocolat Stella showed a lot of patience. It became interested in India because of Antony Panakal, the export account manager. He drew the attention of the company to Indian cocoa.

poseful. The farmers were given the best dry beans from Ghana, Peru, Papua New Guinea, Sri Lanka and Indonesia for tasting. They began to understand the intricacies of making chocolate and the delicate nature of cocoa.

"Cocoa beans are very sensitive," says Chakochoan. "They absorb smell from their immediate surroundings. What makes a lot of difference is fermenting and drying your beans at the right temperature by using the right methods. If beans are not fermented, they acquire the flavor of fresh beans. Too much or too little fermentation also affects quality."

The beans have to be dried on a plastic sheet or on the cemented floor. If they are dried on soil, they begin to acquire an earthy smell. If you dry beans during rainy, humid days, they become moldy. By making the farmers from Kerala taste perfectly processed and wrongly done beans all these points were made crystal clear to them. Says

Vincent, "Although the company's team had explained all this to us earlier, we couldn't achieve their high standards of quality. But by visiting the factory we were able to realize the intricacies involved in post-harvest processing. We saw the care and concern the company takes to produce world-class chocolates. We then began to understand our lapses in fermentation and drying."

It still took several months for the farmers and IOFPCL to get to the levels that Chocolat Stella wanted. Finally, in 2009, 12 tonnes of dry beans were accepted. It was a historic achievement for the farmers. The chocolates now in the market were produced from this consignment.



"The reason why we Indian cocoa farmers did not take post-harvest processing seriously was that whichever way it was done, there were buyers," says Dr Cherian. "But both fermenting and drying need utmost care. By and large it is this stage that changes the quality of dry beans."

Generally, three types of chocolates are made with cocoa – milk chocolate, white chocolate and dark chocolate. Milk chocolate, which is very popular in India, has only around 15 per cent of cocoa. The rest consists of milk solids and sugar. But internationally, milk chocolates are not much liked.

White chocolate doesn't have milk solids. Its main ingredient is cocoa butter. That is why it lacks the characteristic aroma of chocolate. Internationally, white chocolates are also not much sought after.

It is dark or bitter chocolates that are favoured in the West. Taste apart, there are health reasons. Cocoa has antioxidants among other benefits. "In India, we eat chocolates as a sweet. But in the West, it is consumed as a food. They consider it a nutraceutical supplement," explains Chakochochan.

While the new 'India' chocolates by Chocolat Stella have 72 per cent of cocoa there are some chocolates that have 100 per cent cocoa. A fourth category, called dark milk chocolates, has 35 per cent cocoa.

"For milk chocolates, ingredients like milk solids and sugar mask minor defects of post-harvesting processes. But for dark chocolates the quality of cocoa has to be very good. Any lapse would reflect in the end product," says Cherian.

A FAMILY BUSINESS: Chocolat Stella is a family owned business with a rich tradition of producing quality chocolates. In 1947, Walter Muller and his wife Karin started the Chocolate Bernrain company from their 300-year-old ancestral home. Walter had years of experience working in different chocolate plants in Switzerland. The couple introduced an enrobed chocolate into the market and it became a success.

Walter and Karen's son, Adalbert, continued the tradition. In 1980, Chocolat Stella, another company, became part of Chocolate Bernrain. With Adalbert's sustained efforts, Chocolat Stella became a name to reckon with globally in the specialty chocolate segment. Monica Muller, Walter's granddaughter, now runs the business.

Chocolat Stella was the first chocolate company to embrace Fair Trade practices way back in 1980. Since the past 15 years the company has been producing organic chocolates. They have introduced chocolates made from cocoa grown in Brazil and Ecuador. Their specialty chocolates include those made with Baobab fruit, orange, vanilla, almond and even chillies. The company has 140 employees.

COCOA IN INDIA: India grows about 12,500 tonnes of dry cocoa beans on about 46,000 hectares. Annual domestic demand has risen. Therefore, around two-thirds of the cocoa required is imported from other countries in the form of dry beans and as semi-finished products like cocoa butter, cocoa powder etc.

In 2008-2009, India imported 12,022 tonnes of cocoa and its semi-finished products for ₹243.201 crores. In 2010-2011 we imported 4,348 tonnes at a total cost of ₹135.930 crores.

Kerala is the biggest producer of cocoa, followed by Karnataka. In recent years, cocoa production has spread to Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, but

yields are yet to stabilize in most of these plantations.

"Around 500 cocoa plants can be grown on one hectare of arecanut or coconut. At the rate of three kg of dry beans, one can earn an income of ₹200,000 after six years," says Venkatesh N. Hubballi, a farmer.

In India, commercial cultivation of cocoa started in the mid-sixties. Cocoa can't be grown as a mono-crop. It requires partial shade so it is mainly interspersed with coconut and arecanut. Idukki district in Kerala has emerged as a frontrunner in cocoa production. Here, cocoa is being grown in forested areas and productivity is high.

Till the 1980s farmers were assured of a fairly remunerative price for their cocoa. Cadbury India, the multinational, was the only big confectioner buying cocoa from farmers. Decent prices and large-scale distribution of planting materials led to the steady expansion of the area under cocoa cultivation to 29,000 hectares.

But in the early eighties a crisis hit the cocoa farmers. Cadbury's, the monopoly buyer, who popularized the crop, suddenly stopped procuring beans from farmers, leaving them high and dry. Farmers were compelled to convert beans worth millions of rupees into compost. Many farmers even cut their cocoa trees.

The creation of the Central Arecanut Marketing and Processing Co-operative, CAMPCO, a multi-state co-operative giant in the 1990s, helped but its procurement of cocoa was paltry. As a result, expansion of cocoa came to a standstill despite better pricing offered by CAMPCO.

At that time the impression created was that Indian cocoa was not good enough for making quality chocolates. At best it could be used for blending. Due to this perception it became difficult to get permission and finance to start the CAMPCO chocolate factory. Varanashi Subraya Bhat, then president of CAMPCO, wracked his brains to find a way out.

By chance, he met a French scientist who was touring India at that time. "I requested him to make a qualitative, verifiable analysis of our cocoa beans. He took samples to France. Luckily, he found that our cocoa was of good quality and suitable for making chocolate."

able for making chocolate."

Today CAMPCO produces a range of chocolates, cocoa beverages and exports semi-finished cocoa products. For a long time, CAMPCO was doing job work for Nestle too.

In 1997-1998 non-traditional cocoa regions in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu began showing an interest in cocoa. India's cocoa production of 12,500 tonnes is meagre compared to the total world production of 300,000 tonnes. But during the crisis years of the 1980s when there were no buyers for cocoa beans, CAMPCO salvaged the situation by launching a chocolate factory using local beans. Now, after two decades, a second breakthrough has been achieved – Indian cocoa beans have achieved Swiss chocolate standards.

KERALA'S COCOA MAP: "We never dreamed of ever being part of the world famous Swiss chocolate. This was not at all on our minds," says Chakochochan of Wayanad.

Farmers in this backward district were growing crops with heaps of chemical pesticides. Chakochochan says in 2005, a survey by school students of Tavinjal village in North Wayanad found 238 cases of cancer.

"These farmers were cultivating vegetables in wetlands. Traces of pesti-



Monica Muller

Chocolat Stella was the first chocolate company to embrace Fair Trade practices way back in 1980. Since the past 15 years the company has been producing organic chocolates.





Cocoa bean extraction from pods



Drying of fermented cocoa beans

cides sprayed on their crops found their way into the drinking water well," says Chakochoan. Organic farming was the only option left. Farmers began to explore ways and means of augmenting their income. Chakochoan grows organic coffee and vanilla, which he exports through IOFPCL.

After returning from Switzerland, it took IOFPCL and their members eight or nine months to master the intricacies of fermenting and drying. They set up a central processing centre at Thodupuzha where all the wet beans were fermented. After that the beans were transported to Tamil Nadu since drying facilities were better there.

"If we have to bargain for better prices, we should have quantity and quality. Most of our cocoa growers haven't bothered to add value to their cocoa crop. They are content selling their wet beans to the nearest buyer. When you sell like this, the returns are low. Many times, you don't get paid promptly," says Dr Mathew Mathew, an elderly farmer and former director of IOFPCL.

In 2000, a few Kerala farmers began searching for ways and means to market their produce for better prices. They came to know that organic products got better prices abroad. But they realized achieving such standards and prices would require an organized effort.

Therefore, IOFPCL was started. Small farmers joined hands and got organic certification. They came to know about Fair Trade certification too. IOFPCL got this certification done as well for its farmers.

Recalls Dr Mathew, "Earlier, we used to process wet cocoa beans individually. After drying we would pool all our beans together. What emerged was a blend of beans of different quality. Finally, the quality of the whole heap would stoop to the lowest quality beans produced by some farmer."

Earlier, fermenting was done in gunny bags. Now farmers use wooden boxes, a far superior method which makes it easy to turn the beans. IOFPCL is equipped with sufficient boxes and it can ferment 10 tonnes per day.

PRICEY COCOA: "Ours is not a very big company. Yet we have a reputation in specialty chocolates," explains Panakal. "We have received feedback from some chocolate companies in Switzerland about the India chocolate. They are quite positive."

But after buying the first consignment and launching this pioneering chocolate, Chocolat Stella is encountering problems. Last year, the price of cocoa beans in the domestic market was higher than the international price. So Chocolat Stella couldn't source cocoa beans from here.

Ninety per cent of Kerala's cocoa comes from the hilly district of Idukki. To prevent others from buying cocoa beans some companies offer a higher value only in Idukki.

"Convincing farmers about the merits of an international deal was pretty

hard even in 2007," recalls Panakal. "Perhaps this was because of their earlier bitter experiences with multinationals."

Subsequently, Chocolat Stella officers informed farmers about their 20-year-old pleasant relationship with South American farmers. They also pointed out that in the entire confectionery industry their company was the first to adopt Fair Trade practices. After much persuasion the cloud of suspicion finally lifted.

In 2008, IOFPCL started buying wet beans from farmers and processing them at their own facility. Says Shiny Mathew, Chief Executive of IOFPCL, "At that time, the price of wet beans was ₹16 per kg. Once we started procurement, big companies began competing with us. Prices went up to ₹26 and then ₹35. This competition continues even now."

For Chocolat Stella a steady supply of beans is necessary to keep producing the Indian chocolate. "We would like to maintain a long and sustainable relationship with farmers. That doesn't mean that we can keep hiking prices. The relationship should be worthwhile for both parties," says Panakal, who recently visited India to convince farmers.

Shiny Mathew says due to climate change the cocoa crop decreased last year. "Those who generally bought a tonne had to be satisfied with two quintals. Supplying to Chocolat Stella has become difficult. We are striving to supply 12 tonnes to them next January." IOFPCL hopes to procure 100 tonnes of cocoa next season and is optimistic about yields from the districts of Wayanad and Kannur. The total quantity of cocoa exported to Switzerland is miniscule. Yet, this exposure that Indian cocoa has received from a reputed Swiss chocolate company has opened a big international market for growers.

"We have a few more export orders in front of us. They are offering good prices too," says Shiny Mathew. IOFPCL has started building two centralized cocoa processing units one in Kannur and the other in Wayanad.

Of late cocoa farming has spread to some districts in Assam.

IOFPCL has about 300 to 400 organic cocoa farmers from three to four states under its umbrella.

From a modest price of ₹56.30 in 1997, the price of cocoa beans, as indicated on the website of the Directorate of Cashew nut and Cocoa Development, rose to ₹63.58 in 2006. This year it has risen to around ₹150. In the 1980s there were only one or two chocolate producers. Today there are 10 including Amul, Hindustan Lever, Britannia, Sathe, Nestle, Lotus and Morde.

According to Vivek Mathew, who was part of the team which went to the Chocolat Stella factory, the price of cocoa beans has doubled in the past five years. "Now it has reached a level that is viable for growers. Since consumption is rising domestically and globally, farmers can confidently grow cocoa on at least a part of their land." ■

Website of IOFPCL: www.iofpcl.com Website of Chocolat Stella: www.swisschocolate.ch

This year the price of cocoa has risen to around ₹150. In the 1980s there were only one or two chocolate producers. Today there are ten producers.

Business

□ Enterprise

□ Inclusion

□ CSR

□ ICT

□ Go Green

How Aakash changes the game

Low-cost tablet to revolutionise education

SHAMIK BANERJEE



Sunit Singh Tuli

Aarti Gupta
New Delhi

WHEN the World Bank invited Sunit Singh Tuli to speak on the revolutionary low-cost tablet Aakash in December 2011, he thought he would be addressing the Bank's ICT team. Instead, to his surprise he was the keynote speaker on "How to enable the next billion Internet users" at the 180-seat Preston auditorium in Washington DC with a live webcast, twitter feed and web conferencing.

For Tuli, 43, CEO of Datawind, manufacturer of Aakash, it turned out to be a fascinating session on how sustainable business models can be built to drive broad adoption of computing and Internet devices in the developing world. And more importantly, Tuli held forth on what was different this time: the tablet project was going to be profitable, despite being the cheapest.

Recall the hype that greeted earlier avatars such as the Simputer and the \$ 100 laptop (one laptop per child) project? Both proved to be duds. This was why Tuli's Powerpoint presentation focused on how a viable business can be created if products are priced right and if there is a demonstrable need. "Datawind is not about a \$35 tablet, as much as it is about enabling low-cost technology to fight poverty," he said at that forum. Education was identified as that one clear trigger.

Recounting that World Bank interaction, Tuli is a tad smug now that Aakash is being hailed as unleashing a new Internet revolution, "doing for educational computing what the mobile has done for personal communications over the past decade." At a subsidized ₹1,569.51 (\$35) for students and ₹2,690.58 (\$60) for the commercial version (this involves no subsidy), the objective according to Tuli, was to go for a mobile handset price tag that would attract bottom of the pyramid buyers.

Consider this. Amazon's newest tablet, Kindle Fire, which is one of the lowest-priced devices in the North American market retails for \$199. Datawind's offering is less than a quarter of that. "Our bid was 14 per cent lower than the lowest bid and we drove it down further by five per cent," says Tuli.

The National Mission on Technology through ICT (NME-ICT), whose brainchild Aakash is, says unequivocally on its Sakshat portal (www.sakshat.ac.in) that there is no other device in the world offering as much functionality at such a low cost. "The real paradigm shift Aakash brings to education is by enabling its delivery in any environment, anytime and anywhere with reduced dependence on uninterrupted power supply," says the portal.

Mission Director N.K. Sinha, in a letter to Vice Chancellors of all the

universities in the country said on 23 November: "Using Aakash, students can access the educational e-content that is getting created in a massive programme under NME-ICT for UG and PG courses in humanities, sciences, commerce, social science and engineering." In addition to the e-content that is already uploaded, "content will continue to increase and be made available to every Indian learner."

There is also the solid logic of numbers for taking higher education digital. Explaining the math, Tuli says there is a \$33 saving that would have otherwise gone into publishing books over a three-year period. The digital option is also environmentally better.

Much before the Aakash hoopla, Datawind had established its credentials as a developer of a series of low-cost wireless web access products.

Suneet Tuli and his brother Raja Tuli, after founding the company a decade ago, tasted success by first launching a flip form mobile device PocketSurfer and mini netbook UbiSurfer, both web-enabled, in the UK market.

"Low-cost portable Internet devices are the most crucial differentiator in bridging the digital divide," says Tuli, and for that reason it has been Datawind's focus area from the start.

The journey for Aakash has certainly been challenging. Somewhere in between the innumerable Toronto-Amritsar flights Tuli takes so frequently, he read a news item in the *Economic Times* about the Indian government extending the contract tender deadline for designing and manufacturing a "functional computing device at an ex-factory cost of around \$35." Part of a country-wide plan to link about 25,000 colleges and some 400 universities in an e-learning programme, the tendering authority, the Indian Institute of Technology, (IIT), Rajasthan, laid out specifications for procuring 100,000 of these devices in a pilot phase.

It now turns out that number is just a teaser. The HRD ministry in mid-January said that it will need to procure no less than 220 million additional units eventually. This is the size that Tuli had been predicting all along.

It was eerie that the specs mentioned in the original tendering were pretty close to the product that they had displayed at the Consumer Electronics Show at Las Vegas – the ultimate fair for everything electronic – in January 2011. It was impossible not to realize what the opportunity meant.

With more than 800 million mobile phone connections, India is rapidly signing up about 10 million subscribers every month. Yet, the number of Indians with access to the Internet is an estimated 100 million, indicating the huge potential.

Tuli pulls out a news item on his Aakash screen – he uses his company's products – to ridicule the estimate for tablets being put at 85,000 tablets a year.

Datawind had been a small player and was expecting to be asked to do no more than about 25,000 of those devices. It obviously assumed

there would be at least four vendors to the contract, but that did not happen. Biggies like Apple, Samsung and HCL backed out. One company that dropped out was in fact reported as saying that it did so because it did not see how it could make the product available at \$35 and earn a reasonable profit.



Datawind's other low cost products are UbiSurfer and PocketSurfer

Datawind has developed the technology – it has 18 US patents – that takes the burden of processing from the tablet to backend servers in the cloud, reducing the processing cost. Banking on this, Datawind is hoping to be able to deliver Internet to the masses.

But Datawind managed to do it. If the company's belief in low-cost devices triumphed in the form of Aakash, it is because of a proactive 'componentization' the company followed. So instead of the usual 50 components that most other manufacturers use, Datawind broke those down into a further 800, aggressively squeezing out the smallest of margins from every single component. To do this, it sources components from several manufacturers that offer the best price. Its earlier experience with PocketSurfers made it possible for it to design its own screens.

So instead of the \$15 to \$20 that tablet makers spend on one LED screen, Datawind bought semi-finished glass screens at \$8 a unit and did the remaining task of etching and gluing on its own. The board and touch panel were among several other components designed and integrated in-house.

There were two other ways by which it was possible to drive down costs. Datawind monetizes the operating system like Apple does at the high end. It sells applications for the device through its

own app store, the same way that Apple makes money on iTunes and other apps.

But, most importantly, Datawind has developed the technology – it has 18 US patents – that takes the burden of processing from the tablet to backend servers in the cloud, reducing the processing cost. Banking on this, Datawind is hoping to be

able to deliver Internet to the masses – even free at a later stage. This is how it's going to happen. Its breakthrough Internet delivery platform is powered by a disruptive technology that reduces network load and speed delivery of content by factors of 10x to 30x. So for a person consuming 600 MBs of data, Datawind will lower its usage significantly to say about 20 MB. Even that reduced data consumption cost can be recouped by toolbar carrying contextual advertising, says Tuli.

It was not without reason that when Datawind decided to put out a limited number of Aakash tablets in the market and invited people to book for it online, their website saw an astounding 100,000 pre-bookings in the first 24 hours alone. Despite the servers being constantly upgraded to cope with the upsurge in traffic, recalls a bemused Tuli, the website was continually down. The Internet Emergency Response Team in the DIT (Department of Information Technology) thought there was a spam attack, he adds. There were about 20,000 pre-bookings per day; the tally in the last count had toted a record 1.4 million!

Not surprisingly, Datawind is expanding its production facilities from one manufacturer at present to four by April next year. Contract production lines are being set up in Hyderabad, Cochin and Noida in addition to the existing one in Hyderabad. Tuli is also of the view that Aakash is not yet reaching the bottom of the pyramid users. So, he says, Datawind is going to experiment with forms and factors to drive down costs even lower.

Meanwhile, in addition to the imminent launch of the commercial version of UbliSlate in February, a 10-inch high-end version with 3G is at the drawing board stage. In fact, there will be more upgraded versions of the tablet later this year. Already, demand is pouring in from governments around the world – Thailand, Turkey, Egypt and Southeast Asian countries.

Around 30,000 Aakash tablets have been delivered and the challenge continues. There has been some talk that a series of faults were detected in the Aakash tablet and the government is planning to refuse extending the letter of credit which is due to expire at the end of January, and that the entire Aakash tablet project might be shelved altogether. Adding grist to the mill is that Reliance is reported to be mulling bringing out a competitively-priced 4G tablet later this year. Tuli however insists that the tablet is on track and is being improved. "To imply that product enhancements represent a failure of the initial product is not correct," he says.

The truly made-in-India product that has won accolades the world over must be allowed to break down the digital divide for good. ■

Govt job scheme a hit in Kashmir

PICTURES BY BILAL BHADUR

Jehangir Rashid
Srinagar

IN the aftermath of the summer turmoil that hit the Kashmir Valley in 2010, the Union government led by Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh, appointed a committee headed by former Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor, Dr C. Rangarajan. Its mandate was to reach out to the youth in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) and help them find employment.

Dr Rangarajan studied the situation and submitted a report which recommended skill-based training for youth in J&K so that they can get jobs in the public and private sector. The focus, he said, should be on school dropouts since their parents cannot afford to send them for higher studies.

Dr Rangarajan presented a blueprint of his plan to the Union and state government. A programme called Himayat, which in Urdu means 'support,' was drawn up. It aimed to train around 100,000 youth and help them get jobs in different sectors.

The first batch has now been trained. On 17 December they received formal appointment letters at a function held at the University of Kashmir. Dr Rangarajan attended along with ministers and officials from the Union and state government. This is the first step in the Himayat plan which will be completed in five years.

The main attraction at the function were the youth who got appointment letters and their happy parents. Some of their trainers also spoke about their experiences.

Farooq Ahmad Wagay, a physically challenged youngster from South Kashmir's Pulwama district, was all praise for the Himayat programme. He said it gave him the opportunity of joining the government as a data-entry operator.

"Due to my disability I thought of myself as a liability to my family. When I came to know about the government's Himayat programme, I decided to give it a try. I joined the hospitality course at the Don Bosco training centre. Following this, I got a job as a data-entry operator in the Sales Tax Department. I hope more youth join the programme and help their families come out of poverty," said Farooq.

Sajad Ahmad Misgar who now works at a Café Coffee Day outlet in Srinagar says the training provides employment opportunities to youth who have not been able to go to college. He was very grateful to the state and Union government.

"Due to poverty I could not join college after Class 12. I always wanted to help my family. I am lucky I received basic training. After that I got a job at Café Coffee Day. This programme is wonderful for youth like me," said Sajad.

Ishfaq Majeed who works as a sales executive at V-Mart retail shop in Srinagar said that in the past skill development programmes were always aimed at highly qualified youth who could find jobs anyway.

"Kudos to Dr. Rangarajan for framing this programme the right way. I hope it is taken to its logical conclusion so that 100,000 youth can con-



Chief Minister Omar Abdullah with Dr C. Rangarajan and Jairam Ramesh



Students got jobs in a range of sectors

tribute to the economic progress of their families," said Ishfaq.

Adeeba, a young Kashmiri girl, got a job in a BPO centre outside the state after completing her training under the Himayat programme. Says her mother, Nargis Begum, "I am glad that my daughter went to one of the training centres. I am even more glad that she is ready to work outside the state. I don't have any qualms about this. In fact, I would advise other parents to encourage their children to do the same."

The total cost of the Himayat project is estimated to be around ₹235 crores. The entire expense is being borne by the Union Ministry of Rural Development. The private sector, NGOs and charitable institutions are also being involved.

"Under the skill development component of the programme, candidates are given practical training in their respective fields. Basic computer skills are also taught. After training they will be employed in the public and private sector. The public-private-partnership mode means that training will be provided by private companies with the financial assistance of the government,"

said Dr Rangarajan.

Seventeen training centres have been set up under this programme in Srinagar, Jammu, Pulwama, Kupwara, Baramulla, Anantnag, Budgam, Doda, Rajouri and Poonch district. IL & FS and the Don Bosco Technical Institute have been selected as the first two training-cum-placement providers. The CAP Foundation and Technopak are likely to join later on.

The initial entry-level training is for three months and thereafter placements are done. The selected youth will be tracked for a three-year period after placement for further training and skill development. Placements have been offered in food retail chains, BPOs, retail marts and electricity projects in Srinagar, Jammu, Ludhiana, Chandigarh and Jalandhar.

Jairam Ramesh, Union Minister for Rural Development, said the government would soon launch a second scheme titled 'Udaan' for graduates and post-graduates. He said that 40,000 jobs would be created for youth with academic or professional degrees. He announced that the second batch of appointees under the 'Himayat' scheme would be handed appointment letters on 30 June.

Chief Minister of J&K, Omar Abdullah, said such schemes would really help Kashmiri youth if they are not subjected to suspicion outside the state. He said he has already spoken to Chief Ministers of some states to ensure that Kashmiris are not harassed.

"The state, especially the Kashmir Valley, is best suited for investment in the Information Technology (IT) sector. I hope this small step encourages people to invest here particularly in the IT sector. The appointees should remember that they have to put in extra effort to prove themselves as there is tremendous competition in the private sector," said Omar Abdullah. ■

Insights

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Plan for urban homeless

BHARAT DOGRA

EVERY winter Delhi witnesses a familiar scenario. The temperature plummets, the homeless shiver on the streets and NGOs begin pleading for more shelters. The Supreme Court rises to the occasion and orders recalcitrant officials of the Delhi government to provide shelter facilities. For a while everyone scurries around. After a few weeks all this action dies down.

We need to work for the urban poor throughout the year. More stable and long lasting efforts are required for the homeless. Winter is not the only season they are at risk. What about the monsoon months when torrents of rain make it impossible to sleep out in the open?

Delhi has about 150,000 homeless people. Since the past 10 years the government and voluntary organizations are providing shelter facilities to them. But such efforts are inadequate. In winter it is estimated that only about one-third of the homeless in Delhi availed of such facilities.

This failure has persisted despite the Delhi government's willingness to provide financial support and the active involvement of over 30 NGOs. Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit has taken personal interest in the welfare of the homeless.

Yet in real terms not that much has been achieved. Spending money alone will not alleviate the misery of the homeless. More and better shelters are certainly required. Delhi needs dedicated activists and mobilisation teams who can build relationships of trust and understanding with the homeless so that the facilities provided can match their needs.

Currently we have half empty shelters while the poor continue to sleep out in the bitter cold. This paradoxical situation will continue unless we think differently.

It is not enough to offer night-shelter accommodation to a rickshaw puller, handcart-puller or water-cart attendant. They have also to be assured a safe parking space for their rickshaws or carts. Then there are several homeless families. They cannot be accommodated in a shelter meant exclusively for men. The homeless face many problems and these are not confined to the winter chill.

Paramjit Kaur, Director of Ashray Adhikar



Homeless women and their children need shelters with better facilities

Abhiyan, an NGO which works for the homeless, says, "Clearly we need to think beyond tents and blankets for winter nights. Any comprehensive planning for the homeless has to factor in their many needs all through the year. While in winter the need for shelter is very important, can anyone

deny the need for a roof during the torrential monsoon rains?"

Paramjit Kaur's concerns cannot be ignored for she has spent countless nights looking after the problems of the homeless on Delhi's unfriendly roads. She says, "It is not enough to create temporary night shelters for a few weeks. We should have at least one permanent, well-equipped shelter for every 100,000 people. These shelters should become centres for providing much needed nutrition and health support to homeless people."

Paramjit, who has been a 'sister figure' for several homeless women, is particularly concerned about the tragic plight of these women. "The condition of homeless women can only be called pathetic. They have been neglected to an alarming extent. Just imagine how they survive on the streets with small children. Our estimate is that at least 10 percent of the homeless are women. We need well-equipped shelters for them where

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There are several homeless families. They cannot be accommodated in a shelter meant exclusively for men. The homeless face many problems and these are not confined to the winter chill.

India needs better EIAs

KANCHI KOHLI

LAST month my column informed readers that the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) and the Quality Council of India (QCI) had brought forth criteria for accreditation of consultants to carry out Environment Impact Assessments (EIA) of industrial and infrastructure projects. About 100 such agencies are now on the MoEF's 'green list' and another 101 are awaiting approval. With 31st January 2011 as the last date for extension, it is likely that a few more names would have been added to the list.

My last article also informed readers that some EIA consultants who were on the approved list had dubious track records. They have prepared EIAs which were biased, inadequate, incomplete and based on faulty baseline data. And in almost all these instances some highly controversial projects across the country have been approved. These projects are either under construction or have not taken off due to stiff opposition at the grassroots.

Such approvals have socio-political ramifications. Every EIA based environmental clearance allows diversion of land from its existing use or extraction of minerals and water to support such industrial activity. There is also relocation of people from the site where construction is to take place. When EIAs deliberately underplay these interactions they do so at a future cost which unfolds in unexpected scenarios.

Here I attempt to give readers some more examples of EIA consultants who have created "understated" EIAs or presented viewpoints that feign all impacts can either be set aside, controlled or mitigated. I am not trying to bring out the fallacy of this process but to indicate the huge implications such EIAs can have at ground level.

Consultant number six on MoEF's accredited list is B.S. Envitech Limited, based in Hyderabad which carried out the EIA for the 2640 MW Bhavanapadu Thermal Power Project in

Kakrapalli village, Santha Bomalli Mandal in Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh. On 28 February, 2011, when the people of the area protested against the construction of this thermal power plant, they faced police aggression leading to severe casualties. The main cause of concern was that the construction of the power plant and creation of bunds would impact inland fishing activities. A day later, the MoEF, which had granted environment clearance based on a grossly inadequate EIA, issued a statement in Parliament and an order asking East Coast Energy Private Ltd (ECEPL) to suspend work on the power project.

Ironically, this same site has been referred to as an "ecological entity of incomparable value requiring conservation and protection" and one with a strong livelihood connect by MoEF's own expert appraisal committee – which later approved the project with a long list of conditions to compensate for a bad EIA. The EIA was also strongly criticized by reputed organizations such as the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS). There was strong local opposition. Yet none of these criticisms acted as deterrents to stop the project.

Also on the MoEF's approved list is M. N. Dastur and Company (Pvt.) Ltd., based in Kolkata. M.N. Dastur carried out the EIA for the deeply contested POSCO steel plant and captive port in Jagatsinghpur in Odisha. According to the majority report of a committee set up in mid-2011 by the MoEF to review the various clearances of the POSCO project, the EIA for both the steel plant and port were inadequate.

The report states: "The MoEF should not have granted environment clearance on the basis of a rapid EIA for a port which was based on one season data. The data was collected from September to November 2005 which is the monsoon period. It should be noted that data collection during the monsoon is prohibited by the EIA Notification."

These findings, based on a survey of 16 locations in Mumbai, make it clear how due to the skewed priorities of our urban planners and municipalities, millions of poor people spend their entire lives without access to the most basic human needs for survival.

The situation in small towns is even bleaker. Support structures that exist to some extent in big cities like Mumbai and Delhi are practically absent. Activist friends living in the small towns of Bundelkhand confirm that deaths due to the cold wave had been reported from such areas.

Sanjay Kumar, a senior activist in Delhi who has pioneered several initiatives, such as a postal service for the homeless, says, "Whenever I go back to my home state of Bihar, I feel that there is an even greater need to work there for the homeless."

The POSCO project site has been one of India's biggest battlegrounds. It has pitched local people bitterly against the project due to its environment impacts. In 2005 when the South Korean Pohang Steel Company (POSCO) entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Odisha, the state government promised the company that it will keep the area free of all encumbrances and facilitate necessary approvals, the environment clearance being one of them.

Critiquing the EIA report, Mark Chernaik of the Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide (ELAW), a network of public interest attorneys, scientists and activists, states that the EIA report for the port has not looked at the impacts of the worst case spills that can be caused by large cargo vessels.

It has also glossed over the impacts of the 87 km pipeline that is to be constructed to draw 12,000 to 15,000 million litres of water by POSCO for its operations. Further, even the effect of the changes in the ambient air quality on the area have not been studied.

What is important to understand is that EIA processes in a country like India cannot be casual or purely technical exercises. Each project site where impacts are to be assessed and presented is not void of life.

There are thriving livelihoods, cultures which are interspersed with ecologically fragile landscapes, each undergoing changes when environment clearances are granted.

It is not just a mere illegality when bad assessments and studies precede this approval – it is a larger social and political impropriety. To hide the impacts of a project from those who will face the brunt of it is a severe transgression.

But to those who are party to this process...I once again rest my case. ■

Kanchi Kohli works and writes on environment, forest, and biodiversity governance issues. In her writing, she seeks to explore the interface between industrialisation and its impacts on both local communities and ecosystems.

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they can stay with their children. The centres must adopt a comprehensive approach and meet all their basic needs."

A survey of the homeless in Mumbai carried out by the Bombay Urban Industrial League for Development (BUILD) starkly exposed the injustices the homeless face. The citizens of Mumbai are supplied drinking water at ₹3.50 per 1000 litres. But homeless people, who also happen to be the poorest, have no choice but to buy water at ₹1000 for 1000 litres. They also have to pay on an average ₹3 every time they use a toilet. Most of Mumbai's homeless can't access hospitals. More than half of them have no identity documents. Fifty percent of homeless families in Mumbai have been living on the streets for near 20 years.

So what we need is a comprehensive and permanent plan for the homeless which is, first, not confined to winter months but provides facilities all through the year and secondly, the plan should be not just for Delhi and Mumbai but for all small towns and cities across India. Centres for the homeless must take care of nutrition, health, de-addiction and human rights, to mention just a few priorities. The special needs of the most vulnerable section among the homeless – women, children, old and disabled people – should be provided for.

"The human rights of the homeless are extremely important. As long as they face the threat of being taken away arbitrarily during anti-beggar drives, the homeless can never sleep in peace," says Susheel Kumar, a lawyer who has helped free many homeless people from such drives. ■

Send students to villages

RAJESH TANDON

IN India, where over 500 million people are under the age of 25, the key to the country's future truly lies in the hands of her young people. Tapping the potential of the youth for inclusive and sustainable development appears to be the best way forward. The direct means of achieving this is by orienting the youth through education, by making community engagement part of the curriculum. This is pertinent especially now, as estimates suggest that over 30 million Indians will be enrolled in some form of post-secondary education by the end of the next Five Year Plan. With this view, the Planning Commission recently constituted a task force to make recommendations to strengthen community engagement of higher education institutions for the 12th Five Year Plan.

This year I had the opportunity of being a member of the Planning Commission's task force on strengthening community engagement with higher education institutes. The recommendations, recently submitted, highlight the need for institutes of higher education to widen and deepen their role in societal development by engaging directly with communities. This will give students an opportunity to apply their knowledge to address real-life problems and in the process gain local knowledge and wisdom from communities. It will make theory in the classroom more useable and practice in the field more informed. If implemented, these recommendations will make existing and new curriculum and courses more appropriate to achieving the goals of national development.

In recent years, the institute-community linkage has been promoted by a few institutions of higher education in India, but these have largely been individual efforts of pioneers inside the institutes or initiatives supported by civil society actors. The most celebrated example of this is the Samarth Bharat Abhiyan by the University of Pune. It is a rural development programme under which each college has adopted one village. In all, 500 villages have been adopted and students and teachers are working directly with communities to bring about all-round socio-economic development.

Another step in this direction was taken by my organisation PRIA (Society for Participatory Research in Asia). PRIA works closely with communities on promotion of participation and democratic governance. In 2010, PRIA with the Centre for Dr. Ambedkar Studies of the Kurukshetra University organised a training programme for over 30 young Dalit women in Haryana. The faculty of Kurukshetra University shared with the young girls information about the benefits and schemes available to Dalits. Armed with this new knowledge, these girls returned to their communities and are now taking on the role of leaders working for Dalit rights.

There is immense need to upscale and encourage similar efforts through an institutional mech-



anism to promote and fund innovative community-university projects. This found resonance at the recently held seventh Higher Education Summit organized by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) in New Delhi, which held focused discussions on strengthening higher education linkages to socie-

The institute-community linkage has been promoted by a few institutions of higher education in India, but these have largely been individual efforts of pioneers inside institutes.

ty. Speaking at the summit, I emphasised the participation of post-secondary institutes in working with communities. Higher education must shorten the knowledge gap and widen the knowledge horizons of the common man. There is no doubt this will be enriching for both.

Globally, the support for these partnerships and co-creation of knowledge is also slowly gaining ground. GACER (Global Alliance on Community-Engaged Research), created by universities, networks and civil society organisations, has been one

of the main driving forces at the international level. It has been working to promote sharing of knowledge and information across countries and continents along with other members of the 'Big Tent' group. The 'Big Tent' group comprises international networks like Pascal International Observatory, Asia Pacific University Community Engagement Network, Association of Commonwealth Universities Extension and Engagement Network, CEBEM (Bolivia), Global Universities Network for Innovation, Living Knowledge Network, the Talloires Network and PRIA.

The 'Big Tent' group recently released a statement urging universities around the world to promote social responsibility in all its activities and develop structures to allow dialogue and collaboration between students and communities. It further advocated opening community-based research units and giving students opportunities for practical learning.

In India and globally, discussions on the future role of higher education have been set in motion. There is an increased understanding that the countless development challenges that face humanity require new knowledge, better human competencies and improved institutions. What is needed is forging of a strong partnership between communities and academia to allow a free-flow of knowledge. Alongside, harnessing the potential and enthusiasm of the youth, directing that energy towards sustainable development and nation-building is also required. Only then can there be hope of successfully addressing the issues of sustainability, poverty and social justice. ■

Dr. Rajesh Tandon is President of PRIA and Chairperson of GACER.

Ladakh's cultural transition

TASHI DOLMA



CHARKHA

A traditional Ladakhi dance performance

THE arid land of Ladakh truly reflects the age-old beliefs of Buddhism. You can see colourful prayer flags fluttering all over the vast expanse of this otherwise bland snow desert. Ladakh is a land of rich culture, traditional knowledge and natural wonders. The ability of local Ladakhis to tolerate this land's geographical and climatic extremities often leaves visitors flabbergasted. Ladakhis are the proud possessors of a mesmerizing heritage.

Yet the Ladakhi, instead of feeling proud, is more likely to feel sad and dismiss any discussion on Ladakhi heritage as yet another vacant promotional effort. For the tourism industry has, over the years, adversely affected the pristine land of Ladakh. Mass tourism has acted as a powerful catalyst for a kind of change that is unsustainable and seemingly irrevocable. Ladakh has received an overflow of appreciation and only a handful of criticism. To a sensitive onlooker, this raises an alarm about the future. Many fear that the coming years will be plagued by pollution and a crumbling traditional society, overrun by the intrusion of foreign culture.

In the past few years, this unique culture has suffered great losses. Indigenous communities, intentionally or unintentionally, have included themselves in the march of unchecked globalisation, further damaging their cultural wealth. The damage, however, is not irreversible and local communities themselves have taken a step forward to restore what has been lost and save what is vulnerable.

The most crucial role in protecting the traditional wisdom and environment heritage in the current environment of Ladakh is being played by the older generation. Young Ladakhis, the elders stoically maintain, are easily influenced by the glamour of the alien culture that overpowers the

austerity of their own culture. The elders understand the significance of the cultural and natural heritage of Ladakhis and want to make sure that they pass on this wisdom to the young.

Initially, the elders would perform folk dances on some occasions. But the startling rise in the number of travellers increased their concern. They began organising cultural gatherings more frequently. Along with traditional forms of song and dance, they chose theatre as a medium to reflect their concerns. This caught the imagination of the younger generation. It gave the youth a platform not only to understand and appreciate their deep rooted culture but to put forth their own ideas, thereby developing a better understanding within the community.

It is really commendable to see how culturally aware Ladakhis have found new and interesting ways to create an engaging space where people can share their experiences, keeping culture, tra-

dition and nature as the background. One such trend, seen during festive seasons, is where people from remote locations come to participate in the ethnic programmes organised in the town and perform diverse rituals. One gets to see an amalgamation of various local cultures of Ladakh which also depicts unity in diversity. This undoubtedly helps develop a sense of responsibility among community members to preserve this diversity.

The enthralled groups visit the Gompas and other heritage sites together. Discussions are organised later on how to maintain the serenity of these places. "We explore the hidden aspects of our historical places. Walking down the lanes of our ancestral villages along with our grandparents and their friends, helps us understand how things have changed since their youthful days. This, at times, makes us feel ashamed of how we have ignored our heritage, both cultural and natural," says Stanzing Kunzang Angmo, a young Ladakhi studying in Jammu, who took inspiration from the initiatives and is determined to play her role in safeguarding the legacy of her people.

The task of local communities in conserving their heritage is not limited to imparting knowledge. They have, in fact, designed a sustainable framework in which they focus on strengthening the leadership quality in select members of the community who have it in them to take on the onerous task of protecting their common wealth.

Sustainable growth demands mutual exchange of ideas. The elderly are open to new ideas and ventures. They accept feasible points and try to inculcate them in their traditional ideology, thus maintaining the unusual combination of the old and the new in their ancient heritage.

The tourism industry is crucial for Ladakh as a source of livelihood. At the same time, it is posing a colossal threat to its cultural and environment legacy. One cannot entirely reject the importance of tourism for the economic stability of the region. But neither can the natural and cultural ethnicity of Ladakh be compromised with. The situation demands a balanced solution. The answer lies in the warm hospitality offered by Ladakhis. A balance can be maintained by creating a healthy foundation based on humanity. It is the responsibility of everyone involved with the tourism sector to make tourists aware of how valuable – and special – the local heritage really is. For those who love and visit Ladakh for the peace it offers, being sensitive to its importance in the lives of the people is the least they can do in return.

No government or NGO can contribute to the conservation of society without the participation of local communities. They know their land, its strengths and weaknesses. More than anything else, they know that they owe their lives to this barren land. This alone is reason enough for community initiatives to be strengthened by locals and visitors alike. ■

Charkha Features

The most crucial role in protecting the traditional wisdom and environment heritage in the current environment of Ladakh is being played by the older generation.

Living

- Books
- Eco-tourism
- Film
- Theatre
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Araku Valley's many marvels

SUSHEELA NAIR



Stalactite formations in Borra Caves

Susheela Nair
Bangalore

OUR trip to Araku Valley began with an interesting train journey which is one of the main attractions of visiting this region. We passed through 52 tunnels and 84 bridges with the picturesque Araku Valley on one side and steep rocks on the other.

The 36th tunnel spanning 1.2 km is the longest. En route the train crawls through rural stations like Mallividu, Srungavarapukota, Boddavara, Shivalingapuram, Tyda, Chimidipalli, Borra Guhalu, and Shimiliguda, all lying in this vast stretch of the Eastern Ghats of which Araku is also a part.

On the way to Araku is Shimiliguda, a hill station perched at 997 metres above sea level. This used to be the first highest broad-gauge railway station in

India till the construction of Qazigund in Jammu and Kashmir. The train also passes above the Borra Caves. The tracks have been laid over a swathe of rocks 100 feet thick placed above the caves.

The Kottavalasa-Kirandul line on the Waltair Division of the East Coast Railway is an engineering marvel. This railway line has been primarily built to carry iron ore to Vishakapatnam from the mineral reserves of Chhattisgarh. Laid in associa-

SUSHEELA NAIR



Eco-friendly cottage in Jungle Bells, Tyda

SUSHEELA NAIR



Tribal Museum

tion with Japan in the 1960s to transport iron ore from Kirandule to Vishakapatnam from where it is shipped to Japan, the rail line is currently a life-line for tribes living in the region. As the train halted at each station, we got a glimpse of villagers rushing in with their vegetables, groceries and other essential goods, including firewood.

The road journey to Araku Valley is equally interesting, meandering as it does through the dense Anantagiri range. We bought the rail-cum-road package offered by the Andhra Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation (APTDC) from Visakhapatnam. Each route, whether by rail or road, has its own charms and offers a new experience.

JUNGLE BELLS: We checked into the Jungle Bells Nature Camp perched on a hillock by the road at Tyda village, 75 km from Visakhapatnam en route to Araku. Located at the foothills of the Eastern

Ghats, it is quiet, serene and an amazing weekend getaway.

Engulfed by lush foliage, the sprawling five-acre Nature Camp run by APTDC has 18 cottages which include air-conditioned cottages – Igloo, Bridge and Wooden – apart from Log Huts, Aerocon Huts and dormitories. The package includes breakfast for two. A multi-cuisine restaurant is connected to the cottages by a narrow cobblestone path. The cottages, huts and bridges are all made of wood and bamboo. Each cottage has a balcony overlooking the dense greenery and the valley.

The resort is eco-friendly without television, telephones and mobile connectivity. A small billboard indicates all the do's and don'ts. Plastic is banned, liquor is not served and tourists are warned not to play music but to listen to the sounds of nature. Only BSNL cell phones have connectivity here.

You can enjoy trekking in the hills here. As you walk you will pass through several tribal hamlets. You can indulge in bird-watching as well. There are other interesting outdoor activities to do like spider web climbing and rope walking which are organized by trained personnel with safety measures in place. One can also practice archery with the tribals, do the Dhimsa dance with tribal women to the beat of drums and savour local cuisine. Above all, you can set off on a morning walk with mist hovering over the woods nearby and listen to the chirping of the birds.

TRIBAL MUSEUM: The Tribal Museum, in the heart of the Araku Valley Township, is worth a visit. Housed in a charming red-roof bungalow built with clay and mud, the circular two-tier museum exudes rustic charm.

The museum offers a glimpse into the lifestyle of various tribes inhabiting the Eastern Ghats and their rich tradition in folklore. On display are clay figurines of tribals going about their daily chores. Tribal jewellery, hunting tools, kitchen tools, garments, agricultural implements etc form a large part of this fascinating museum. The wooden bowls, toys and other woodcraft by tribal artisans are simply awesome. Some life-size exhibits of tribal activities are captivating.

To promote tribal art, workshops and exhibitions are held regularly in the Tribal Art & Crafts Centre located in the same premises. You can pick up indigenous souvenirs, local honey, organic soaps and other handicraft items from the museum's gift shop. We visited the weekly market called 'shandy' which assumes the air of a local mela. The villagers from surrounding hamlets congregate here to sell their wares and make purchases.

We culminated our trip with a visit to the Borra Caves. We marvelled at the surreal underworld of stalactite and stalagmite formations lit by halogen lamps. These awesome formations were created millions of years ago by the flow of the Gosthani river through these limestone hills. According to legend, a cowherd discovered these caves when his cow fell 200 feet deep into the hidden caves. Peering inside the cavern, he was awestruck by the dark, deep connecting chambers and strange formations with grotesque shapes and sizes. Ever since, the tribals have held the Borra Caves in deep reverence.

Another version attributes the discovery of the caves to William King George of the Geological Survey of India when he conducted a geological survey in 1807. The stalactite and stalagmite formations have led to a breathtaking array of naturally hewn shapes like Shiva and Parvati, Nandi, the sacred bull, and a Shivlinga which is a major draw during Shivratri.

Coming down from the hills, I realized we have a lot to learn from Araku's tribals who love their jungles and conserve them with insight and great wisdom bequeathed to them by their ancestors. ■

FACT FILE

How to get there: Araku Valley is 120 km from Vishakapatnam. It can be reached either by road (three hours) or rail (five hours).

Where to stay: There are a number of hotels in Araku. The APTDC has three resorts at Araku, Anantagiri and Tyda. Log on to www.aptdc.in for details

Best time to visit: Between November to February.

Visit a meadow in Kashmir

PICTURES BY MEHRAJ BHAT

Jehangir Rashid
Srinagar

MOST tourists go to Kashmir on a programmed vacation. There is the Dal Lake, Gulmarg and Pahalgam. This limited itinerary has satisfied everybody for a long time. But now travel agents have woken up to the vast, untapped potential of the Valley. They want the government to develop Kashmir as a hub of eco-tourism and village tourism.

"Kashmir is known for its tall mountains, expansive forest cover, breathtaking landscape, refreshing lakes and water bodies. All these constitute the all important ecology of this place. We should take steps for their conservation," says Rauf Ahmad Trambo, President, Travel Agents Association of Kashmir (TAAK) who is an ardent trekker and now runs a hiking travel agency.

People associated with the tourism trade know the importance of preserving forests and wildlife. Travel agents have now become staunch environmentalists. Eco-tourism is the new buzzword. The state government is chipping in. Travel agents are asking for unusual landscapes to be developed so that they can bring a wider basket of tourists to enjoy their beauty.

The TAAK President says construction at world famous tourist spots like Gulmarg and Sonamarg should be stopped so that no further tampering with natural resources takes place.

"We have already plundered our natural resources. We should put a bar on such activities. There is no need to construct high rise hotels and concrete guest houses for tourists in Gulmarg and Sonamarg. We can develop villages in the vicinity of these places so that the residents of these villages get involved in tourism," says Rauf.

He suggested that Tangmarg and Gagangeer villages should be developed en route to Gulmarg and Sonamarg. Tourists would get a taste of village life in Kashmir. They would experience a part of Kashmir's grassroots culture. "We can ferry tourists from these villages to the tourist resorts. Transporters would benefit and villagers would also earn an income when tourists stay in their villages," said Rauf.

When Mufti Mohammad Sayeed was the Chief Minister of Jammu & Kashmir, his tourism minister, Ghulam Hassan Mir, had suggested development of Tangmarg village to reduce pressure on Gulmarg. However, Mir's plan could not take off.

The Omar Abdullah government seems to be heading in the right direction as far as promotion of eco-tourism is concerned. The forest ministry has already prepared a blueprint and if things go along expected lines, eco-tourism is likely to boom.



Travel agents are asking for unusual landscapes to be developed

The state's Minister for Forests, Environment and Ecology, Mian Altaf Ahmad, says that places of tourist importance like Dera Gali, Poonch and Peer ki Gali on the historic Mughal Road are going to be developed on the pattern of eco-tourism. He says groundwork for this project started two years ago.



"The pastures along the Mughal Road can be developed for eco-tourism. No tampering with the forest cover will take place and these places will be developed along traditional lines. Nobody will be allowed to construct hotels and guest houses. Everything will be natural. We want people to enjoy the beauty that the entire Mughal Road offers, its green cover and lovely meadows," said Altaf.

The minister mentioned other spots on his

radar. He said the Bungus valley in the Wadder foothills along with the Gurez area would also be developed with a gentle ecological footprint.

"We have already sanctioned ₹63 lakhs for development of eco-tourist spots in the state. But this amount is less since we intend to develop jungle resorts in Kitchpara-Tangmarg, Gangbal-Sonamarg and Sedaw-Shopian areas. This would give a fillip to eco-tourism," says Altaf.

Sensing the rising interest in eco-tourism, the Eco-Tourism Society of India (ESOI) has set up its chapter in Jammu and Kashmir. A few workshops have taken place.

"Eco-tourism is very relevant to the state. We have made a beginning by holding workshops in Jammu, Srinagar and Leh this year. The overwhelming participation of people involved with the tourist trade in these workshops has given us hope that people want to preserve their ecological assets," said Peerzada Faiyaz Ahmad, state representative of ESOI.

He said more workshops and programmes would be organized, especially mass awareness campaigns. He suggested a ban on the use of polythene bags.

"In Tamil Nadu there is a blanket ban on the use of polythene. That should be done here as well. Our water bodies get choked due to the deposition of polythene. People's participation in large numbers is the need of the hour," said Peerzada Faiyaz. ■

Forests in peril

Civil Society News
New Delhi

A National Mission for a Green India is on the cards promoted by the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF). With a budget of ₹46,000 crores it has ambitious plans to increase forests and trees on some 10 million hectares. The Green India Mission (GIM), as it is called, claims it will improve the income of three million forest people.

Read this slim book, 'Banking on Forests: Assets for a Climate Cure?' to find out the pitfalls of such a programme. In five neat chapters the authors, Kanchi Kohli and Manju Menon, cogently dissect the Green India Mission.

First of all, the authors point out, the Green India Mission globalizes our forests. India is a signatory to the 1992 UN Framework Convention on Climate Change that has recognized the role of forests in climate mitigation. Forests are seen as carbon sinks. So a polluting unit in a developed country is permitted to mitigate its emissions by paying for conservation of forests in a developing country. Such exchanges are done through global carbon markets.

India has successfully argued at climate change meetings that developing countries should be paid for not just reducing deforestation but for conserving forests, increasing forest cover and managing forests sustainably. Hence a global plan called Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) has come into being. The Green India Mission has been dovetailed with this plan. Funds from the Compensatory Afforestation Planning and Management Authority (CAMPA) and the National Afforestation and Eco-Development Board (NAEB) will also be used.

The Green India Mission hopes to massively increase forest cover and thereby increase carbon stocks for the government to trade in global carbon markets. The mission does talk of commu-

nity participation. But the authors say this is really a smokescreen. The plan is essentially carbon compliant.

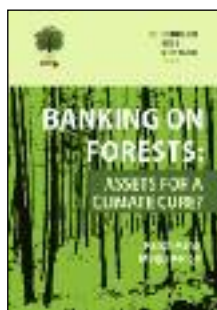
Turning India's forests into a global tradable commodity could change the way forests are grown, used and managed to favour the international carbon trade market and decimate the rights of local communities. Forest rights activists have bitterly opposed the REDD+ plan since it conflicts with the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, a law that clearly provides rights over forests to communities.

In reality, as the books points out, communities have very little say on how India's forests are used. Decisions are taken by the Union govern-

ment and the state governments and carried out by forest departments. There is also the Supreme Court whose orders decide the fate of forests. India's forests are a contested terrain.

Domestically, the book points out, forests are already rather clumsily used as tradable commodities under the Forest Conservation Act (FCA), 1980, that lays down set procedures for valuation of forests and payment of compensation.

The mechanics of how this is done is full of holes. If a project, whether for infrastructure or mining, requires forestland, the implementer has



BANKING ON FORESTS: ASSETS FOR A CLIMATE CURE?

Kanchi Kohli & Manju Menon
Heinrich Boll Stiftung & Kalpavriksh
On request

to pay for compensatory afforestation through CAMPA. Once the money is paid, there is no monitoring and large amounts of unspent money lie unused. The authors point out that a CAG report of 17 forest territorial divisions in Madhya Pradesh revealed that in 10 years forestland

was diverted for 96 projects. Around ₹38.37 crores were collected for compensatory afforestation. Only ₹2.31 crores was actually used. Domestically, compensatory afforestation has been a failure. It is strange how forests are valued. The Supreme Court has put in place a system of Net Present Value (NPV) for forests. Though it includes both tangible and non-tangible benefits, the NPV is basically based on the number of trees the forest supports.

The authors point out this calculation is illogical. Kinnaur in Himachal Pradesh is an ecologically fragile area, above the tree line. It is a cold desert so the tree density is not high. The NPV is therefore lower. But forests here once ruined, cannot be raised again. The NPV of such a region

should be much higher though the number of trees may be fewer. Such regions need careful assessments.

While measuring NPV for national parks and sanctuaries, the CEC has accorded monetary value to seven aspects from timber, to bio-prospecting, to carbon sequestration. But currently there is no agreed method by which carbon absorption in forests can be measured.

Regulation is not taken seriously. The authors point to the numerous ways and purposes for which NPV is quietly set aside – as in the case of coal.

There is no guarantee really that REDD+ will mitigate climate change or that India's forests will blossom. On one hand forestland will be given

for industries, increasing emissions. The government will make money by calculating the NPV of lost forestland. Then it will grow forests elsewhere, to offset international emissions, by trading in carbon. Both ways the government makes money. Meanwhile polluting Indian industries could also be scouting for REDD+ programmes in other countries to offset their emissions.

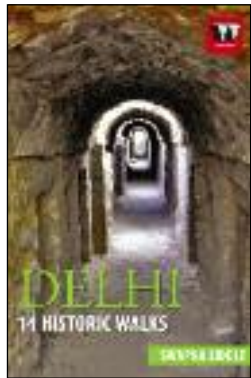
The authors point out that in the final count the government and forest departments will get richer and not communities. The Green India Mission could end up fencing forests, creating plantations and not natural forests, and enable forest departments to expand into more areas, including common lands. Even when communities replant forests there is no guarantee that these will not be diverted for some industrial or infrastructure project.

The Union government needs to carefully spell out how it intends to involve communities in the Green India Mission. Money has never been an issue. But devolving real power to the grassroots has. All the same, throwing open India's forests to global carbon traders will always be opposed by forest rights activists since it is not in sync with the rights of communities. Forests cannot be treated as the government's special economic zones.

Read this book for the detail and perspective it gives on India's forests, which appear to be in peril today. ■

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Down memory lane



**DELHI: 14
HISTORIC WALKS**

Westland Ltd
Published in 2011

₹ 495

Kamali. We start with Balban's tomb which lies close to the main gate leading to a park on the Mehrauli-Gurgaon road. We enter the gate and walk up the path to a ruined stone entrance. In her book, Liddle writes that this area has some distinctive features of early Sultanate architecture. She describes the material of the structure which is quartzite, the arches, believed to be one of the true arches in India, and then as we talk, we finally come to the tomb of Balban, the slave of the emperor Iltutmish.

Other attractions here are a Mughal settlement and the tranquil environs of the mosque of Maulana Jamali, a Sufi saint and poet who lived

aces, pavilions and water courses – which remain an attraction for the few visitors to the park today.

Liddle's book gives a simple and detailed explanation of the architecture, history and finer points of the park. Other chapters are dedicated to well known historical attractions like the Qutub Minar, Lodi Gardens, Purana Qila, Humayun's Tomb, Red Fort and Kashmiri Gate. But there are also chapters devoted to historical structures off the beaten track such as Tughlaqabad, Satpula and Khirki.

Liddle's book is a fascinating read for people who want to understand this great city. In fact, anyone with a love for history would enjoy Liddle's book. It is a walker's delight.

"I love taking school children on visits to the historic sites of Delhi. I have taken children studying in government schools on walks too," says Liddle. "School children are often taken to the Qutub Minar or Red Fort without gaining anything. Taking them on walks makes the subject of history taught in classrooms come alive – explaining to them the historic significance of the building, its different components and architecture."

Conservation is obviously a passion for Liddle. "I love these historic buildings therefore the desire to conserve them. I honestly believe that people will only start caring for Delhi's heritage when they know about it," says Liddle.

Conservation is not a commercial enterprise for her. She doesn't charge money for the walks she does for the India Habitat Centre and INTACH while these organisations charge a nominal sum from prospective walkers.

Liddle believes INTACH, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and the Delhi Government are doing a good job of conservation in Delhi. INTACH has been consistent in its conservation efforts. Ten years ago the Delhi Chapter of INTACH began listing the city's heritage structures. It has noted down 1,200 heritage sites as worthy of preservation. ASI, she points out, is not a well-funded body and therefore can protect only a fraction of such buildings.

"Things do move. But the initiative has to come from people like us. I tell my friends I wrote this book so that if they can't join my walks they can do it at their own leisure," says Liddle.

In December, Liddle led a walk to Shahjahanabad focusing on the 'Muzaffar Jang' book series written by her sister Madhulika Liddle about a fictional 17th century Mughal detective.

Of course, the average reader of Liddle's books would have liked a few more anecdotes about some of these heritage structures. But, warns Liddle, the authenticity of such stories is doubtful. She laughingly recounts that a tourist guide had told some of her lawyer friends that the crypts of Humayun's Tomb housed the bodies of 100 workers who had been buried there after the tomb was constructed.

Liddle is not stopping with her latest book on Delhi's walks. She now wants to convert her thesis on 19th century Delhi into a book that would not be an academic exercise but a work that "anyone would like to read and enjoy." ■

Kavita Charanji
New Delhi

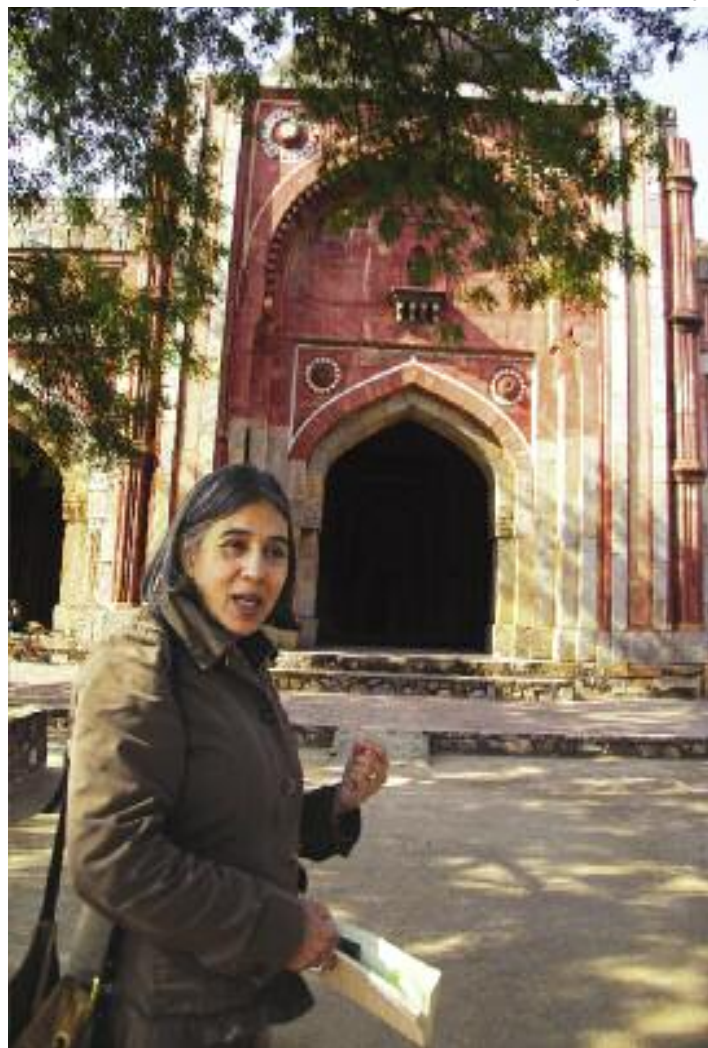
A "student of history" is how 44-year-old Swapna Liddle describes herself. Her modest appraisal belies the enormous wealth of historical knowledge that she has gleaned over the years as an historian and passionate conservationist.

Her interest in history germinated during her student days at St Stephen's College in Delhi. A graduate of history from this prestigious institution, she went on to do her Master's and M.Phil in history from Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), and finally received a doctorate for her thesis on 19th century Delhi.

Going back in time, Liddle recalls how as a student she would frequently visit heritage sites in Delhi long before conservation acquired a fashionable connotation. She read a lot on heritage, did research and signed up for walks organised by heritage experts. Today, she is much in demand herself as an organiser and heritage walk leader for the India Habitat Centre and the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH). As a volunteer with INTACH she is closely involved with the organisation's heritage protection and public awareness programmes.

Liddle's deep and enduring love for walking through historic areas of Delhi has culminated in a very readable book, "Delhi: 14 Historic Walks". "My book is based on walks I had undertaken for the last decade. So it was all there in my head. I got detailed information from the books I mostly had at home. The writing did not take too long. Actually, it was difficult to decide which walks I would include and which I would leave out because Delhi has a large number of walking routes. So I picked them carefully and then just sat and wrote the book," says Liddle as we sit by the famous step well Rajon ki Bain/Baoli located in the fascinating Mehrauli Archaeological Park, better known as Jamali-Kamali.

Liddle has offered to show me around Jamali-



Swapna Liddle

during the reign of the Lodi and Mughal dynasties. The tomb of Jamali is next to the grave of an unknown person which popular lore describes as 'Kamali.' Also, well worth visiting is a domed stone canopy built in the 1840s by Thomas Metcalfe, the highest British administrative official in Delhi. Another of Metcalfe's invention's was the Kabutar Khana or pigeon house. Metcalfe was clearly no conservationist because he converted Quli Khan's tomb into a house by adding rooms on all sides and renamed it Dilkusha or 'delightful.' This structure was surrounded by a garden landscaped with ter-

SHAMIK BANERJEE

Healing depression with Ayurveda

Dr G. G. GANGADHARAN

GREEN CURES



MENTAL disorders are explained in great detail in Ayurveda classics. The mind or manas of each individual is unique. According to Ayurveda, the person should dwell in an atmosphere of pleasantness appropriate to one's mental constitution. Ayurveda recognizes three main mental constitutions or manasika prakruti - the saatvika, raajsika and taamasika. Any disturbance in the normal functioning of the mind manifests as illness – either psychic or physical.

Depression is a serious mental condition that alters the mind's equilibrium with its environment.



There are basically three types of treatments for mental illnesses.

- Oral medication including Panchakarma.
- Psychotherapy (counselling)
- Daivavyaprasharaya chikitsa (spiritual therapy) - prayers, performing yajna, charity, yoga, meditation, visiting holy places and penance.
- A combination of all the above.

Milder forms of depression get relief from psychotherapy itself. But it is generally felt that a combination of therapies work best. Treatment is given as per the severity of the condition. Certain medications as well as some medical conditions can cause symptoms of depression. The physician should not confuse these symptoms as depression.

The causative factors of depression are a sudden shock to the mind by incidents such as death of a beloved or break-up of a close relationship. It can also be a symptom of a medical condition like a stroke, heart attack, cancer, Parkinson's disease or hormonal disorders. A person appears normal throughout the day but feels depressed only at a certain time of the day. A depressed child may pretend to be sick, refuse to go to school, cling to a parent or worry that the parent may die. Teenagers may sulk, get into trouble at school or college and be negative and grouchy. Because normal behaviour varies from one childhood stage to another, it can be difficult to tell whether the child is just going through a temporary phase or is suffering from depression.

Women experience depression about twice as often as men. Hormonal factors may contribute to the increased rate of depression in women particularly factors such as menstrual cycle changes (associated with pre-menstrual syndrome) pregnancy, abortion, the post-partum, pre-menopause and menopause periods in life. Stress at work, additional responsibilities at home and marital discord are also leading factors.

Men rarely admit to being depressed. Depression in men is often associated with increased risk of heart disorders. Male depression is often masked by

alcohol or drugs, or by the socially accepted habit of working excessively long hours. Depression typically shows up in men, not as feeling hopeless and helpless, but as irritation, anger etc. Therefore it is quite difficult to recognize the signs and symptoms of depression in men. Even when a man realizes that he is suffering from depression, he is twice as reluctant to disclose it to his family doctor or even to his wife.

From an Ayurveda point of view, most depression can be explained as a kapha imbalance. Initially, the brain's electrochemistry has an erratic overreaction (vata imbalance), which triggers a loss of enzymatic activity in the metabolism (pitta imbalance). Kapha responds by trying to keep everything down, bringing about heaviness, darkness and stagnation, which the mind-body interprets as the negative message of hopelessness and depression.

In Vata-depression, the pranavayu in the brain and heart is provoked by a variety of factors, including terrifying experiences, especially when they occur during childhood, excessive travel, an irregular lifestyle, lack of sleep, excess talking, excess use of the telephone, habitual consumption of foods

which are dried or frozen or foods which are microwaved, living or working in an air-conditioned room. Both recreational and prescription drugs provoke the pranavayu, particularly cocaine, amphetamines, speed weight-loss drugs, caffeine, and antihistamines (including ephedrine). Working night shifts is another cause of vata depression.

The symptoms of vata depressions are tremendous anxiety, guilt, paranoia and catastrophic ideation. Insomnia or restless sleep is a classic feature. The speech becomes incoherent, the person is easily distracted, restless, unable to concentrate, forgetful and spaced-out. The depressed person will not deliberately try to harm himself or herself but may forget to eat – indeed the main hazard in treatment is that they will be unable to take their herbs regularly and so will fail to improve.

Vata depression should be treated using brahmi tea, brahmi ghee, and brahmi oil massage. Saraswatarishtam should be given 20 ml daily after lunch and dinner. Oiling and sweating using brahmi oil will help calm the

pranavayu, as will shirodhara or shirobasti. Nourishing oil basti using a brahmi decoction and sesame oil is also valuable in calming the vata dosha.

Pitta depression is characterized by anger and irritability. In some cases, the person is not aware of being depressed, but is obviously angry and very easily irritated, irrational, and perhaps violent. There may be extreme self-criticism and low self-esteem; or the critical judgmental tendencies may be directed outwards. Suicidal ideation is a frequent symptom. Pitta depression is the most dangerous type of depression since in severe cases suicide is a distinct possibility. In more chronic forms of pitta depression, self-destructive behaviour such as abuse of alcohol and drugs are a common symptom. Even those with pitta depression that are not overtly suicidal often commit



Kapha responds by trying to keep everything down, bringing about heaviness, darkness and stagnation, which the mind-body interprets as the negative message of hopelessness.

slow suicide by inducing conditions such as hepatic cirrhosis. Insomnia is a symptom of pitta depression but is different from vata insomnia.

Treatment for pitta depression also consists of brahmi tea, brahmi ghee and brahmi oil massage. Saraswatharishtam can be used, combined with herbs that are used in sadhaka pitta. These include shankapushpi, rose, sandalwood and lotus. If there is a history of drug or alcohol abuse, shankapushpi will be tremendously useful in healing the liver as well as in calming the mind and balancing the sadhaka pitta. For overall balancing of pitta, a pitta diet should be taken, avoiding sour, pungent, salty and oily foods. Amalaki should be taken at bedtime, half a teaspoon steeped for ten minutes in a cup of hot water.

The causes of kapha-depression are a vitiation of the tarpaka kapha in the brain by lack of stimulus. Sleeping in the daytime, excessive sleeping, overeating and excess consumption of oily, heavy foods can contribute to the provocation of tarpak kapha. Watching TV in excess and lack of exercise are other important factors. Frequently, kapha depression originates in homes where parents themselves have some degree of kapha-type depression. For example, the child who overeats resulting in overweight. There is an overwhelming atmosphere of heaviness, emotional denial and holding onto things. Parents often give food or material objects instead of genuine love. The child learns to become greedy, lazy and attached to food, money and possessions. These tendencies, passed on through the family tree, cause tarpaka kapha to become increasingly provoked. The use of downers such as sleeping pills, sedatives, tranquilizers and alcohol further serve to exacerbate kapha type depression within the entire family unit.

Patients with kapha-type depression rarely approach an Ayurveda practitioner complaining of depression; in fact they deny accepting their ailment in the first place. However, face-reading and pulse reveal depression, deep-seated grief and attachment and other obesity-related problems.

In kapha-type depression coupled with obesity, triphala guggulu can be used. Otherwise, trikatu can be added to the saraswatharishtam mixture for a more stimulating effect. Refraining from sleep during the day and vigorous exercise is essential for the treatment of kapha-type depression. Vamana or removal of excessive kapha by forced vomiting is an excellent remedy for this condition.

Ayurveda elaborates treatment for depression not only with medicine but also with counselling and touching one's spiritual base. According to the person's culture and attitude different methods are used to send positive thoughts to one's self. There is an element of self-healing in this process, where the things one does for spiritual elevation help to remove the negative vibes from one's thoughts and assist in healing.

Food – pure, uncontaminated, fresh with all tastes and easily digestible and non-provoking is a very useful supplement for treating depression. ■

Email: vaidya.ganga@frhnt.org.in

LOOK GOOD

For a strong back

MANY of us suffer from back pain. But to alleviate such pain it is essential to know what caused it in the first place. We need to get to the root of the problem. Here are some suggestions on how you can prevent backache from happening.

- Wake up early and sleep early. Get adequate rest. Sleep on a firm mattress and find a comfortable position.
- Make a strong effort to exercise regularly. Yoga postures help the body to be supple and thereby balanced.
- Avoid activities that can hurt the back like lifting heavy weights. Always wear only low heeled shoes.
- Do not sit or stand in one position for long. Get up periodically and walk for a while. Don't be glued to a chair. Stand up, walk around, stretch yourself forward, backward and to the side once every 30 minutes. Shift positions and take frequent hourly breaks to move your back.
- Lose weight if you are overweight. Never bend at the waist or stoop to pick up an object. Instead,

lower the body to the level of the object by bending your knees. Grasp the item, hold it close to the body and raise yourself with your legs while keeping your back straight.

- Be choosy about your chair. Sit on a comfortable chair that supports the curve of the lower back. If the chair doesn't offer such support, place a cushion to support your back. Avoid slouching forward or leaning back too far. While sitting for long hours rest your feet on a low stool so that your knees are above your hips.
- De-stress by practicing meditation and pranayama.
- Eat healthy food which is rich in fiber. Avoid sweets, oil, soft drinks and overeating. Drink adequate water daily.
- An oil massage with Dhanwantharam Thailam regularly is helpful. Make sure to have regular bowel and bladder habits. ■

Dr Rekha R, RMO, IHC.

ORGANIC CHEF

Dessert & salad



COCONUT PAAYASAM

Ingredients:

Tender coconut pulp: 1 cup
Water: 1 cup
Milk: 500 ml
Sugar: To taste
Cardamom powder: 2 pinches

Method: Scrape tender coconut pulp. Add water to the coconut pulp and cook over low flame until the coconut becomes soft and the water evaporates.

Boil milk over low flame. While boiling, keep stirring. When the milk reduces by one-fourth its quantity add sugar and continue stirring. Boil until it reduces to half its quantity. Now add the cooked tender coconut pulp. Keep stirring. Remove from the flame after two minutes. Add cardamom powder and mix well.

Tips: Use tender coconut pulp. Add sugar to the

milk when it has reduced to one-fourth its quantity.

Benefits: Paayasam is sweet, tasty, nourishing and suitable for summer.

Contra-indications: This preparation is not suitable for people who are diabetic, have high cholesterol or are obese.

CHICKPEA SALAD

Ingredients:

Chickpeas: 1 cup
Cumin seeds: 1/4 teaspoon
Mustard seeds: 1/4 teaspoon
Pepper powder: To taste
Salt: To taste
Cooking oil/clarified butter: 1 teaspoon

Method: Wash chickpeas and soak in hot water overnight or for eight hours. Place a deep pan over a low flame. Add oil to it. When the oil begins bubbling, put in mustard seeds. When the mustard seeds start crackling, add cumin seeds. Immediately, add soaked chickpeas. Add pepper powder and salt to taste. Cook over low flame until the chickpeas are very tender.

Garnish with finely cut onions and coriander.

Tips: Soak chickpeas in hot water for at least eight hours. Cook over low flame.

Benefits: This is a tasty dish which promotes strength. It is especially liked by children.

Contra-indications: This recipe is not suitable for those with gastro-intestinal problems such as flatulence, constipation and low appetite. ■

(Dr. Jayanthi S, Research Associate, I-AIM)

PRODUCTS

NAMDAAH VENTURE

AFTER working with the Craft Development Institute (CDI) in Srinagar to redesign and revive namdahs, Arifa Jan has now branched out to start her own namdah business. Arifa, a post-graduate in craft management, creatively developed 300 namdahs while working with CDI. The National Institute of Design provided the blueprint. Artisans were at that time abandoning namdah making since they couldn't find any buyers for their fusty old designs.

"But now with new designs the market has completely changed," says Arifa. "We are getting a very good response. In fact, buyers are confused about which design to choose." Arifa has introduced two innovations — embroidered namdahs in merino wool so you can wash namdahs at home and namdahs with non-carcinogenic colours for the export market.

Twelve namdah artisans work with Arifa. Her company, called Incredible Kashmiri Crafts, has three partners. She started with an investment of only ₹50,000 and has made a net profit of ₹600,000 in one year. ■



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SHAMIK BANERJEE



LAKSHMAN ANAND



TRENDY TERRA COTTA

RAJESH Roy and his wife Monali design trendy jewellery made from eco-friendly terracotta in Kolkata. There are earrings and necklaces in lovely colours and traditional designs. The jewellery is artistically hand painted. "The colours don't run," assures Rajesh Roy, whose micro business is called Just Terracotta. "We have a small workforce which makes the moulds, bakes them, and then we paint." Monali studied chemistry and you can see the jewellery is a harmonious blend of science and art. The Roys say they love to design terracotta jewellery.

The trinkets are very reasonably priced. But Just Terracotta does not take bulk orders. The jewellery is hand made and needs attention to detail. ■

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Changing Lives



General health care in rural villages by SST

Mrs. Nagama, 70 yrs, a poor widow from Padavedu, has been suffering from headache for months together. Whenever she suffered an episode of headache she was almost blinded, accompanied with vomiting, she used to isolate herself for hours together not able to do any other activities.

Left to fend for herself, she could not find a guardian to take her to any Government hospital, since she had to travel for more than 20 kms, let alone meet the expense of the traveling, She was anguished and helpless. She came to know from some SHG members of the village about the TVS-SST's sub centre in the close vicinity

A routine check up at the hospital revealed that she was

suffering from Hypertension. All other parameters were normal. She was first given a brief account of the nature of her illness and advised about DASH (Dieting Approaches to Stop Hypertension) diet, and prescribed anti hypertensive.

On following a strict dietary regime (cutting down of salt, intake of fatty foods and increasing the intake of fresh vegetables), and medication, Mrs. Nagama has been relieved of her headache. Now she is full of life. She is continually getting antihypertensive drugs from TVS SST hospital every fortnight. In case she hasn't turn up for her routine check up, SHG members in her local area are alerted by SST. They help her to come for treatment regularly.

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