

Civil Society



ALL STREET NO GOVT?

Protest dents AAP image



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ALL STREET, NO GOVT?

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal declared himself an anarchist and took to the streets on the question of control over the Delhi Police. The result was chaos in the capital and no work done.

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Civil Society

READ US. WE READ YOU.

Kejriwal must be held accountable

THE Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has disappointed many Indians who put their faith in it. It has received wide support and people voted for it in Delhi in the hope that it would initiate change in politics and reform governance – raise the bar for behaviour in public life, so to speak. But the opposite has been happening.

The *dharna* led by Arvind Kejriwal and the antics of his Law Minister, Somnath Bharti, in particular, need to be roundly condemned. Kejriwal has said on record that he himself is an anarchist and that he wants to disrupt the parade on Republic Day. He has also given a call to policemen to come out on the streets and protest along with him. These are violations of his constitutional obligations as Chief Minister and he should be held accountable. There is a fit case for legal action against Kejriwal and his entire Cabinet because they occupy office on the basis of their allegiance to the Constitution. They are free to quit office and do as they please. But as long as they remain ministers, they have responsibilities and are bound by a certain code of conduct.

Kejriwal knows all too well that an amendment to the Constitution is required to bring the Delhi Police under the state government. Clearly this can't happen in the short term. AAP is therefore wrongly whipping up popular sentiments in the hope of making gains during the coming Lok Sabha elections.

It is amoral of AAP to denigrate the police like it has been doing for its own political ends. Police reforms are needed. But the first step in that direction is to energise the force and give it direction, not demoralise it. The station house officer the AAP government wanted suspended was right when he refused to enter a home at the dead of night without a warrant. He is also known by women's groups to be a good officer.

People elect politicians to lead. For AAP, or any other party, the opportunity is in attracting the best talent and turning Delhi into a model modern city with an administration that is accountable and provides its citizens with transparent processes that make their lives happier.

Activism is welcome because without passion little can be achieved. But successful activists know when to get down to the business of implementing their ideas and negotiating the much more complex terrain of consensus-building.

Many AAP members are seriously concerned about the recent events. They don't like the way Kejriwal and his ministers conduct themselves. It should also be noted that very few people heeded Kejriwal's call to join his *dharna*. It is sad but AAP's image has been seriously dented.

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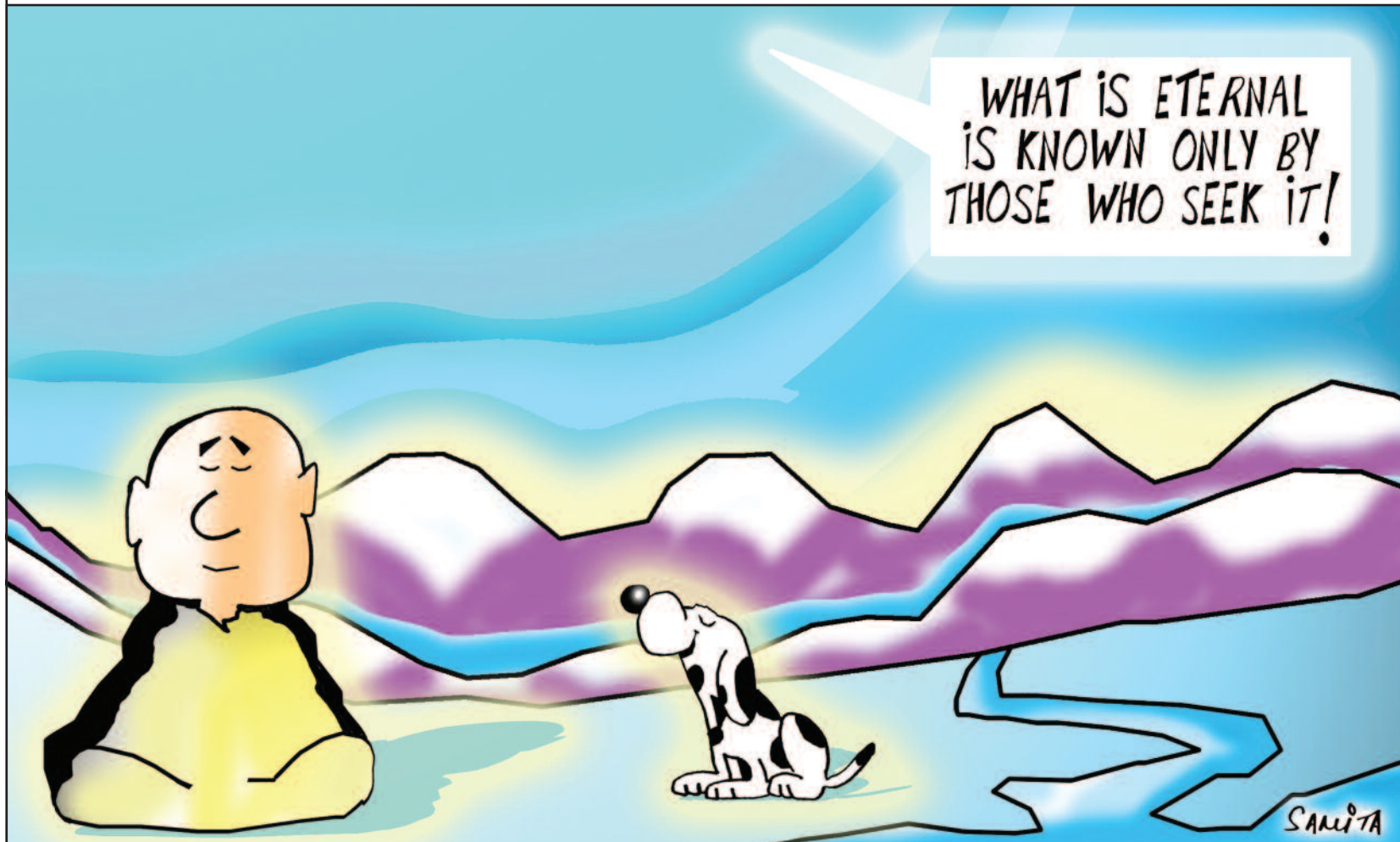
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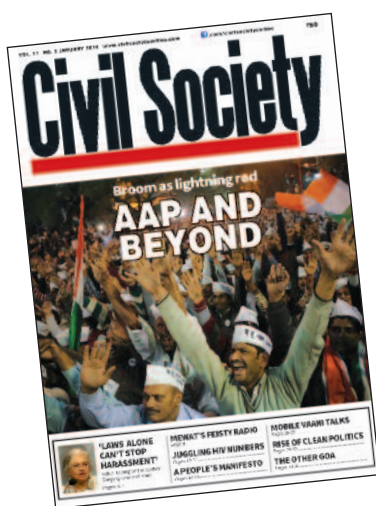
Chandigarh: The Browser.

IN THE LIGHT

by SAMITA RATHOR



LETTERS



Aam Aadmi

Your cover story, 'AAP and Beyond' was well-balanced. It captured the enthusiasm of AAP supporters and sounded a note of warning about what many consider to be the party's populist policies. But there is no doubt that the youth have wholly backed AAP and for the first time after independence, the young are once again interested in politics.

Ashish Mehra

We do need to change the political culture in India. A person should join politics to serve the nation and not just to fill his pockets. By underlining simplicity and honesty, AAP is trying to redefine the way politics is practised in India and attract only those who share its values. The party has already busted the biggest myth of all – that ordinary people can't stand for elections because you need big money.

Shehla Ansari

Today we all feel so empowered. This man has had the courage to go out and be there in the field, while most of us spoke only in our drawing rooms. In our own spaces we must do all we can to make sure that this revolution spreads without turning into anarchy. The manner in which the crowd managed itself at the Ramlila Ground was a grand statement of how disciplined we can be when we want. May God give these new leaders strength and health.

Navina Jafa

Farmers' plight

I would like to draw your attention to the fact that small farmers who visit Delhi on work have no place to stay. In the past, farmers could stay at the Dr Rajendra Prasad Farmers Hostel at the Pusa Institute campus. They used

to be charged only ₹2 per day per bed in a dormitory.

But now this facility is only for officers and staff members of the Pusa Institute. They can stay at the hostel by paying ₹50 per day per bed. But we village farmers are not permitted to stay there although we can furnish all kinds of proof that we are farmers. If, by some luck, we get permission to stay, we are charged ₹200 per bed.

The Rajendra Prasad Farmers Hostel was set up for farmers but, ironically, we are not allowed in.

The government should allot one or two flats in a central location in Delhi where farmers coming from over 400 km can stay. Or they should be permitted to stay in state government buildings. After all, we are coming here on work.

Mangal Singh

Gram Vaani

'Rural India knows its mind' by Chetna Verma was an excellent example of how information can be passed on to rural folk in an engaging and interactive manner. Undoubtedly, mobile phones are the new tools of empowerment for the masses. We need many more such enterprises to reach out to people, educate and inform them.

Anil Dewan

Gram Vaani is a major boost to development in rural India. This is one example that will go around the world. The Gram Vaani team must expand its horizons.

Babajide Bankolemanuel

A great example of how technology can make a social impact!

Vikas Guru

Mewat radio

Shayak Majumder's report, 'Radio speaks up for Mewat' was very interesting. Alfaz E Mewat is an excellent medium to reach out to the masses. Interestingly, none of their radio jockeys have any background in radio or any other media. Yet they have successfully connected with the audience since they themselves belong to the community.

Sharmili Dey

Goa film

Laxmikant Shetgaonkar's latest film, 'Baga Beach—A Season in Paradise,' sounds interesting and I am looking forward to seeing it. Your writer, Saibal Chatterjee, picks very unusual and contemporary films.

George Almeida

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'In 6 months projects worth

INTERVIEW

Anil Swarup

Industry often complains about the slow journey of files in government, but now it is singing the praises of a special cell set up under the Cabinet Committee on Investment. The cell's interventions have resulted in large projects collectively worth some ₹4,00,000 crore being cleared.

Many of these projects were caught up in minor procedural problems. Some of the delays were the result of decisions just not being taken. There were also projects that could not be passed and those decisions, too, were quickly taken and conveyed to the promoters.

Anil Swarup, Additional Secretary in the Cabinet Secretariat, heads the cell. Swarup is widely applauded for setting up the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY). As he did with RSBY, Swarup has used information technology to speed up processes and provide transparency. He also travels extensively to meet state governments.

Any company with a project of more than ₹1,000 crore can approach Swarup through a portal set up for this purpose. Minutes of meetings are posted on the portal without delay. Swarup's own desk is clean and reflects his working style.

Civil Society spoke at length with Swarup on what holds up projects, the systems he has put in place to remove hurdles and the prospects of replicating such a mechanism to redress grievances at the state level. Edited excerpts from a longer interview:

You have been given the responsibility of ensuring that decisions are taken on large projects in the country. What is the process being followed?

The government was very concerned about the delay in clearances being sought for various high-level projects. It set up a Cabinet Committee on Investment (CCI) in January 2013 to fast-track these projects. In six months they realised that although the CCI was doing its job, it needed a small cell to assist it.

Second, the objective was also to have a detailed understanding of delays and if something could be done about them. Given the sensitivities involved in clearing these projects, we felt we should have a very transparent mechanism of understanding and resolving these issues.

What I would like to clarify here is that this office does not clear anything. We are playing the role of facilitator. We set up a web portal where any industry that has a problem can log in, create its own user name and password, go to the site, briefly explain the details of the stalled project and indicate the issues they have with the sanctions and clearances pending in the ministries.

We did this to ensure that at the backend all such information would automatically flow to the joint secretaries of those ministries. We had asked the ministries to nominate a nodal officer, not below the rank of joint secretary in each ministry, to han-

dle issues that come to that ministry. On the portal itself, the joint secretary puts in his comments on the issues raised by industry. So his comments are openly visible.

Institutionally, we set up sub-groups for ministries where these problems exist, ministries that are responsible for giving these clearances, like the ministries for environment and forests, coal, roads, financial services...

In all these ministries separate groups were constituted. For the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF), the Ministry of Coal and the Railway Ministry, we fixed a day and time each week for consideration of issues. So we meet every Tuesday at 11 am with the Railway Ministry, at 3 pm with the Environment Ministry and on Wednesday 3 pm with the Coal Ministry.

Who attends these meetings?

The joint secretary attends after having done all the ground work. There are around four sets of people. There is the recipient ministry where the problem is, the industry representative and the representative of the sponsoring ministry.

Each project has to be sponsored by a ministry. So, if it is a power project, irrespective of whether it is public or private, the joint secretary of the power ministry sponsoring that project pilots it.

How many pending projects have you managed to sort out?

We became effective in July. We initially had around 60 projects. Today, we have around 406 projects entailing an investment of ₹19,00,000 crore which is almost 23-24 per cent of GDP. This is the faith industry has shown by referring these projects to us.

So the number of stalled projects being cleared has really grown?

The mechanism we have put in place is interesting. Almost 50 per cent of issues being faced by industry related to state governments: land acquisition, water availability, law and order, forest clearance. Earlier, chief secretaries and senior officers were invited to Delhi to discuss these issues.

But we changed this completely. Learning from RSBY I thought it better to go to the states though it is tougher. So every Monday and Friday the central team travels to one of the states. We have travelled to 16 states.

The advantage is the chief secretary chairs the meeting and all deputies attend. In some places the commissioner is there or on video-conference. So issues are discussed across the table and timelines fixed by the state government. Seven states have taken a decision to set up their own group to monitor projects below ₹1,000 crore. They have concluded that this is a good system for them.

Which are these states?

Bihar and Rajasthan have issued orders. Gujarat, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand have decided to send their teams to Delhi to understand our software and use it for projects less than ₹1,000 crore. What this signals is



Anil Swarup: 'We have created a file-less office where everything is

that state governments have accepted this mechanism as a process for resolution of issues. For me, ownership among stakeholders was very important.

As a consequence, we have facilitated resolution of issues of 133 projects entailing an investment of ₹4,00,000 crore. This is quite an amount in the context of the way we are evolving. We have around ₹10,00,000 crore worth of projects still with us. Some of them are long-term projects like railways projects. We have timelines for them and probably by 2016 three rail projects will fructify and make India self-sufficient in coal.

Where are these three railway projects?

In Odisha, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh. India is not short of coal. Evacuation is a problem and this happens through railway lines. Fortunately, action has begun for all three. In the Jharsuguda railway line case, all clearances have been given and work has started.

How was the design of the portal created?

My experience in RSBY and as executive director of Udyog Bandhu in Uttar Pradesh, 20 years ago, helped. This is on a larger scale. We have managed to create a file-less office here. Everything is on the

₹ 4,00,000 crore cleared'

SANDEEPA VEERAMACHANENI



neur said he didn't have domestic gas allocation and hence his project was not moving. We discussed it here and found out that there is no surplus domestic gas available for any industry. When he came to the meeting I told him here is the joint secretary and there is no gas available. He went back happy, saying he wished he had known this earlier.

So this is clearly a process?

I am a great believer in process. Even in RSBY I was obsessed with processes. I have no control over results. If you get processes going in the correct manner you will get results.

But where do projects get stuck?

We have done a full analysis. Almost 40 per cent of issues are related to environment and forests. Next was coal but most of those have been resolved.

What is the reason?

Let me say one thing clearly. Environment is a very serious issue and we cannot ignore it. People say it is obstructing industry. I don't think so. Environment should be top priority. We have to be aware of environmental concerns but the process you have to go through to get environmental clearances should be streamlined so that the process itself does not delay things. But is there concern for the environment or for processes?

We are so obsessed with laws we hang on to them, but there is an objective behind those laws. Is that objective being fulfilled? Sometimes we become so obsessed with processes that we forget that they may adversely affect the environment, in a way.

A public sector oil company wanted to set up a pipeline. Now this is much less harmful to the environment than transporting oil through trucks and causing pollution. So, yes, please give environment clearance to the pipeline.

Also, in consultation with CII and FICCI we have set up a small group that is now looking into the processes of clearances. During these five or six months, while attempting to facilitate clearances, we have come to understand certain aspects we think really require a relook. Can a less circuitous path be taken for protection of the environment?

Did your office clear the Posco project?

They had just one issue with us. It is there on our portal. We don't decide clearances. We only asked them to give or not give a clearance. For us, Posco was like any other project. We don't have any priority list.

Activists and communities have complaints over Environment Impact Assessments (EIAs), public hearings and so on. Can they also approach your office for redress of grievances?

No, I have a different role to play. We tell industry to follow the process. We simply expedite the process. We do facilitate public hearings. We are in touch with district collectors. So industry can't say we want to hold the public hearing but we are not getting cooperation from the district authorities. We help to make the process work. If you listen to people genuinely, the quality of your public hearing will be better. ■

'Almost 50 per cent of the issues being faced by industry related to state governments. Officers used to come to Delhi. I thought it better to go to the states. Every Monday and Friday the central team travels.'

Internet and it is transparent. In fact, the minutes of each sub-group meeting are dictated during the meeting itself and posted on the portal, in real time. That is why the present President of CII has written to the Prime Minister, requesting him to bring down the threshold limit from ₹1,000 crore to ₹500 crore since this mechanism is working beautifully.

What are the kinds of projects?

The Aerocity project (near Delhi airport) was stuck for two years. The investment was around ₹12,000 crore. The reasons cited were security concerns about windows facing the airstrip. People in security felt the windows should be blocked because they were a threat to the airstrip. The matter came to us.

In the second meeting I jokingly said that this year on 15 August the Prime Minister would address the nation from a wall behind the ramparts of the Red Fort. They asked why. I said you feel no one is secure

behind a glass pane so how do you expect the PM to be safe? I asked them, why not instal the same glass on those windows? It will cost a bit more. The first hotel was inaugurated on November 26 and another one is getting ready to function.

What is holding up projects?

What we are trying to do is to give a different perspective to a discussion. So if there are two ministries and they have taken a stand and it's very difficult to break the ice, you sit with them and give them a perspective through a discussion mode.

Most of these problems can be solved with the right environment and a climate of trust. If they feel you have an axe to grind then expecting things to come through will be difficult. My only job was to get things moving, that's it. Saying no to a project is also a decision.

We had one complaint on our portal: an entrepre-

AAP's volunteers figure out what's wrong at govt schools in Delhi

Shayak Majumder
New Delhi

ONE of the signal achievements of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in the short time that it has been in power has been its campaign to improve the government school system that has been lying in a shambles for years. Poor children study in these schools and successive state governments never found the time to address their needs.

AAP has used its volunteer network to get a baseline document together on what the schools need beginning with infrastructure. Manish Sisodia, as the minister for education, showed that he was a man of action.

He had 140 AAP volunteers conduct, over three days from 7 January, a survey of about 700 government schools to assess them for availability of drinking water, clean toilets and basic infrastructure.

Officials were instructed to ensure that basic repairs were done before 16 January when the schools would reopen. Government schools haven't received such close scrutiny in years.

When he was approached by a visitor with the problem of unavailability of water in a local school, he instructed a Delhi Jal Board official to file a report by the next day on the availability of water in all the local schools. He said, "The school term will begin within a few days. I don't want children to stay without water in my schools."

The survey results showed that hygiene posed a major problem in government schools. Ranju Minhas, AAP's women's wing coordinator and a chief coordinator of the survey, says "During the visits, our volunteers came across school toilets which were in deplorable state. Most of them were choked with sewage and there was unavailability of water."

She says, "In some schools, we found out that there were no doors on girls' toilets. It was absolutely shocking. Who would want to study in these schools?"

Basic amenities like drinking water, clean water tanks, blackboards, bulbs and even windows were missing in many schools. According to Minhas, the principals are to blame for this neglect. They shy away from taking responsibility.

"When we asked about the reason behind the schools' conditions, the principals responded by saying that repair work was in progress, but we did-

n't notice any," says Minhas.

The survey yielded results. Under instructions from the ministry, schools are already undergoing basic repair. Anoop Tagore, an AAP volunteer who surveyed the schools in Chittaranjan Park, says, "When I visited the schools at first, there were no water taps and the windows were broken. After the survey, I personally revisited the schools a few days back and noted that there were new water taps. Even the windows have been fixed now."

The volunteers had to undergo training sessions at the Delhi Secretariat before they were authorised to go for the surveys. The volunteers were from all walks of life. There were chartered accountants, businessmen, shopkeepers and housewives.

Manish Sisodia got 140 AAP volunteers to conduct a survey for three days of about 700 government schools to assess availability of drinking water, clean toilets and infrastructure.

Anita Lakhra, a housewife from Malviya Nagar, was a part of the survey team. "I have been an AAP volunteer for a long time. I received a message from the education department saying that they needed people to help in the survey. I readily joined," she says.

During the training the volunteers were specifically asked not to be intrusive but to be helpful towards the teachers and school staff in any way possible. "We didn't want the school to think that we were barging in. We wanted to convey the message that we were here to help," says Minhas.

The school authorities were told in advance by the ministry and given a list of the volunteers' names.

Each volunteer carried a letter issued by Sisodia, authorising the volunteers to 'observe and report the state of affairs to the ministry.' The letter also stated that the volunteers were not allowed to issue any direction to any school official or authority.

Kailash Jain, a volunteer from Kasturba Nagar,



A twisted fan in a government school's classroom



Manish Sisodia interacting with citizens

NEWS

PICTURES BY SANDEEPA VEERAMACHANENI



Ranju Minhas, AAP school volunteer

The dilapidated state of a government school in south Delhi



Classrooms are dirty and dismal

Continued from page 9

says, "We didn't face any problems from most of the schools. In some cases the principals were happy to see that the ministry is sending help." Jain is a chartered accountant.

The volunteers are just happy to serve. Says Jain, "It was good to see that the government itself is sitting up and taking notice of what needs to be done for children. We are happy to do our part in the mission."

Now, monitoring teams will revisit the schools and see how much progress has been made. "Right now we are looking at rehabilitating the school infrastructure. We want to ensure a child gets proper care in school," says Minhas. Six volunteers will be assigned to each constituency for monitoring.

Such is the reputation of government schools that middle-class people don't send their children to them. Commenting on this, Sisodia says, "The sad truth is that my own child studies in a private school. But, when I became the minister for education, I told my wife that I would improve government schools to the extent that we would want to send our son to one."

Ashok Agarwal, advocate and member of the AAP National Executive, has been working for a long time on improving government and MCD schools. He worked closely with Sisodia for the survey and has also recommended volunteers from his own team for the AAP initiative.

Agarwal has proposed his own set of strategies to bring government schools on a par with the best private schools in the city. He says, "All government schools, Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) schools and other schools run by local bodies should be brought under the same banner of the Delhi government. This would ensure accountability and better infrastructure."

According to him, MCD schools only provide education till Class 5. After that students should be transferred to government schools for higher studies.

Agarwal says that most of the children in MCD schools can't even write their names in English, even after they pass out from fifth standard. Teachers are callous and the dropout rate is high.

"Eventually, the authorities of government and

MCD schools start blaming each other for non-deliverance. Bringing them all under one banner would resolve this issue."

According to Agarwal, almost 2.5 million children are studying in government schools in Delhi. Around 1.5 million children are out of school. "In order to accommodate all the children, we need to have more schools. That can be easily resolved by putting up multistoried buildings on the grounds which are already provided to government and MCD schools."

There is a total of 925 schools under the Delhi government. "Other than that, there are 1,700 MCD schools, 150 schools under New Delhi Municipal Council and 15 under the Cantonment board," says Agarwal.

"It is also necessary to have skilled teachers in the schools. Delhi's sanctioned strength of teachers in government schools is 40,000. There are 10,000 vacancies that have not been filled and absenteeism is rampant," says Agarwal. "We need teachers who can also look at the needs of disabled students in the school. In Delhi, there are 200,000 disabled children who don't go to school. Imagine the waste of so much human resource just because we don't have good teachers."

Agarwal believes that the minimum standard for any government school must be equal to or better than that of Kendriya Vidyalaya. "The day that happens, I can guarantee that within 48 hours, 50 per cent of the city's parents will pull out their kids from private institutions and admit them to government schools."

Sisodia agrees better teachers will make all the difference. "In February, we are planning to invite interested people from Delhi, who have good educational background and a flair for teaching. They will provide free tuition to students of government schools." This will initially be for a month and then extended.

Sisodia believes that good schools will come out of a wider social effort. "Society has disconnected from education. Somehow, it has now become only the responsibility of the government. We need to bring the government and society together to improve the standard of education," he says. ■

'Define a

Civil Society News

New Delhi

THE mohalla sabha, or neighbourhood assembly, is a vital component of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government's promise of greater participatory democracy. AAP wants the people of Delhi to be consulted at the lowest level on development schemes and how money should be spent. It has therefore proposed to divide each of Delhi's 272 municipal wards into smaller units called mohallas.

The mohalla sabha, however, doesn't formally exist as an entity in decentralised governance. The smallest unit currently in Delhi is the ward and it is represented by an elected councillor. Currently, none of the councillors belong to AAP. So, it remains unclear what role mohallas can play.

Civil Society spoke to Mani Shankar Aiyar, of the Congress on AAP's mohalla sabha plans and whether they would be workable. As one of Rajiv Gandhi's key advisers, Aiyar was involved with the crafting of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments which ushered in decentralisation at the village and municipal levels.

He has also served as Union Minister of Panchayati Raj and is a staunch proponent of grassroots democracy. Irrepressible and brutally frank, Aiyar is known for his sharply erudite views on a range of issues.

Excerpts from an interview with the Congress MP at his Safdarjung Lane home in New Delhi.

What is your opinion of AAP's decision to divide Delhi's 272 wards into mohallas?

In principle I agree the lower you go, and the smaller the unit that holds the administration responsible, the better. But all this has to be structured properly. After all if you have 2,000 mohalla sabhas, no one knows who is responsible to them. I can't see what they can do seriously.

To begin with you have to recognise that the state exists and below it is the municipal corporation and below that are the wards. So I can understand ward sabhas because then the ward sabha can hold its councillor responsible only for those matters for which the ward councillor and the municipality have jurisdiction.

You have to first decide what is going to be devolved from the Centre to the states, from the states to the local government and then what is the role of the minders of the local government. Is it an executive role for only an executive can be held responsible for the action he takes? The legislature, yes, is held responsible when the elections come every five years. But on a daily basis it is the executive that the gram or the ward or the mohalla sabha can hold responsible.

Before that there has to be some role for the mohalla in electing the person concerned. If you

mohalla sabha's role first'

do not have a mohalla representative in a structured unit of local self-government and you do not know what is the jurisdiction of that unit of local self-governance, the mohalla sabha becomes a mob. This is what needs to be clearly understood.

You don't agree with AAP's idea?

As far as I am able to make out at the moment, AAP does not appear to have clear ideas on this. What they know is that they wish to have participatory democracy. But this is not a new idea.

gram sabhas prescribed in the Constitution apply to a panchayat irrespective of its population size. So in states like West Bengal and Kerala where the population of a gram sabha could go up to several thousands, they themselves took a step, not prescribed in the constitution but not proscribed either. In Bengal there is what is called the gram sadhans. I think in Kerala it's called the ward sabha or neighbourhood sabha. So within a panchayat area they take the hamlets or in a ward area they take the habitations and provide a unit there that legally

SANDEEPA VEERAMACHANENI



Mani Shankar Aiyar: 'Participatory democracy is not a new idea'

Participatory democracy has been with us as a concept at least since Mahatma Gandhi and you might stretch it a bit and say we have had it since Vedic times for the very word 'panchayat' derives from an old Indian tradition.

There is the 73rd Amendment which sets out the constitutional framework within which devolution can take place to urban local bodies. What is the relationship AAP proposes between its ideas and the prescribed constitutional framework? For, however independent they might be in their thoughts and actions, they cannot make themselves independent of the Constitution.

So the structure for devolution exists, but there seems to be a problem with delivery, with meeting people's expectations. What can be done?

What is necessary to do and it is easy to do it, is to legally empower the ward sabhas. The municipal corporation has come into existence as a result of legislation in the Delhi State Assembly. So they should be bringing forth legislation to empower the already extant ward sabhas.

Then they have a precedent, which is that the

exists and is legally empowered. The local administration, including the elected representatives, are supposed to be present at each of these ward sabha meetings which make up a gram sabha meeting.

So in that sense they just have to go to the drawing board, look at what the Constitution says, what the present law of the Delhi Assembly says, look at precedents that exist, put in their fresh ideas and structure it in such a way that the mohalla sabha becomes in some sense the equivalent of the ward sabha in states that have very large gram sabhas.

It is very simple to do. But to put the mohalla sabha in place as a unit of governance without structuring it upwards is to bring about chaos and anarchy and not an organised system of participatory democracy.

I have two rays of hope. In Yogendra Yadav they have a mentor in local governance. I know he is not innocent of constitutional and legal technical questions as many of his AAP colleagues are.

The second, is that they have inducted Sharad Chandra Behar, former secretary, Panchayati Raj, who helped Digvijaya Singh establish the first system of Constitutional Panchayati Raj in the coun-

try in 1993, as their expert to structure all this. So a combination of both should be able to prepare a rational system of devolution, which would effectively empower the mohalla sabha.

What are the challenges of having a mohalla sabha of that nature?

Two major challenges: One, issues that cut across all mohalla sabhas. What do you do if one set of mohalla sabhas has a different opinion to another set of mohalla sabhas?

Somewhere a decision has to be taken as to whether the mohalla sabhas are going to be units of decision-making or will they mobilise grievances, with redress being the responsibility of the elected authority assisted by the local civil service.

'To put the mohalla sabha in place without structuring it upwards is to bring about chaos and anarchy and not an organised system of participatory democracy.'

If you put it this way, mohalla sabhas begin to look like a less romantic body. Apart from conflict resolution in the present set-up in Delhi, there is need to necessarily look at the ward councillor because he is the lowest elected level of representation. None of the ward councillors belong to AAP.

Second, the municipal officers are required by law and practice to be responsible to the municipal commissioner and to the authorities that he has appointed between himself and the lowest levels.

This is all laid down in the law and you have to think in terms of changing that otherwise the ward councillor won't turn up and neither will the municipal commissioner. So who is going to turn up? Apparently, one of the six AAP ministers. How many mohalla meetings can a handful of AAP ministers attend?

So, to prioritise the mohalla sabhas, when there has not been a carefully worked out structure which is constitutionally compatible and which has the force of law behind it, is to put the cart before the horse.

Now they don't have a majority in the Delhi Assembly. That doesn't mean that they can't manufacture issue-based majority. But they will have to work on at least the eight Congress MLAs to agree to what they are saying before that legislation can be passed. But the ethos in which they emerged is hardly calculated to produce a legislative majority.

So the old law will remain in the statute book and it doesn't provide for mohalla sabhas. They

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have to tread carefully, warily, and be ready to move from their very dictatorial attitude that they inherited from Anna Hazare to a consensual democratic process.

Isn't there a crisis of governance?

Rajiv Gandhi said we need a responsive administration before he moved to saying that the administration has to be responsible to those who are being administered. He was confronted with a structure in which there are MPs and MLAs but elected from constituencies that range from a minimum of 100,000 persons for an MLA to a maximum of two and a half million for an MP. It is simply not feasible to expect these MLAs and MPs to be responsible on a daily basis to their respective constituents.

If they are to reach the bottom of the ladder, it is through the bureaucracy. By definition the bureaucracy is responsible upwards to those who have appointed them, given them orders and who determine their transfers. So a bureaucrat by definition is not and cannot be responsive to the people's demands. That has to be intermediated by an elected representative – thus the change that has already taken place in India from having only about 5,000 elected representatives to having some 3.2 million elected representatives who have to be empowered before we can become responsive.

In today's gram sabhas, whatever you say to the sarpanch, what else can he say beyond the assurance that he will convey your grievance to the authorities concerned? Unless he is empowered to the extent that he can be held responsible for acts of commission or omission, only then can you move to holding him accountable.

Notwithstanding 20 years of panchayati raj we do not have effective inclusive governance. But the infrastructure for all this in constitutional and legal terms exists. What the Delhi government should be advised to do is to look into the legal changes required to effectively empower the municipal councillors.

But this works with only small numbers?

Certainly it works more effectively with very small numbers which is why in principle I am a great supporter of mohalla sabhas. But you can't just have mohalla sabhas because you want a mohalla sabha.

You have to understand that there is a constitutional legal technical devolution of powers that takes place to units of governance. You have to separately decide what are the powers of advice and consent that a mohalla sabha has.

The PESA (Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas Act) of 1996 defines the panchayat area in a tribal location as being coterminous with the habitation and because tribes tend to be very homogenous the gram sabha of a panchayat located in the habitation tends to also be very homogenous. PESA says that no proposal made by a panchayat can be implemented without the consent of the panchayat and no utilisation certificate which is the fundamental document for financial responsibility can be issued without the authorisation of the gram sabha. Now this may be a bit difficult to implement in a gram sabha that has 50,000 members as some panchayats in Kerala have. It is entirely feasible to do in a mohalla sabha, as apparently being conceived by AAP, on the same lines as can be done in a PESA area. But I have not heard any voices of the AAP showing even a recognition of these factors. ■

Eviction drive on

Shayak Majumder

New Delhi

WHAT do you do if you have spent 16 years living on a patch of railway land in Delhi and suddenly find yourself evicted in the midst of a harsh winter? More than 200 families were asking themselves that question when bulldozers tore apart their homes on December 26.

As the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) assumed office in the state of Delhi, the first big *aam aadmi* issue that confronted the spunky party was what to do about the homeless and those living in shanties.

Women and children were thrown out into the cold because they had been squatters on the railway land at Mansarovar Park, near the Metro line, in northeast Delhi. Almost a generation had grown up in those hutments, but now they had been evicted and had nowhere to go.

Manish Sisodia, AAP's minister for PWD and Urban Development, visited the site with a team of AAP volunteers. He promised to put in place a humane relocation and rehabilitation policy. "We are trying to formulate a permanent solution. We are talking with various organisations and trying to figure out the best possible solution for resettlement."

People who pour into cities from rural areas earn a living by providing services, but they have nowhere to live and no civic amenities to speak of. In Delhi, finding shelter for around 1.5 lakh homeless people and permanent homes for 2 lakh families who have been evicted in the last eight years and sent off to resettlement colonies is one of the biggest challenges of urban governance.

Mangal Das was at the wholesale market of



Mangal Das at Mansarovar Park

Sadar Bazaar when he got a call on his mobile phone from his family. He was told that men with bulldozers were uprooting their home at Mansarovar Park. He rushed back home to find officials from the railways destroying shanties.

"We protested, saying that we had not received any notice. They didn't listen. We asked them to wait until we cleared our belongings. They didn't listen to that either. We were forced to place our little children in front of their bulldozers just to get some time to remove our belongings from our homes before they destroyed them," says

AAP gets support from

Civil Society News

New Delhi

THE Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) and some people's movements have decided to extend support to the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), saying that it stands for many of the ideological issues that they have been raising.

At a press conference in New Delhi, Prashant Bhushan, one of AAP's leaders, welcomed the new entrants into the party's fold. He said AAP would become stronger with people's movements joining it, and it would also learn from the rich experience of activists at the grassroots.

Alok Agarwal, a leader with the NBA, said both the Congress and the BJP have behaved in the most cruel and callous way with millions of people who have been displaced by dams in the Narmada

Valley. Thousands of houses, lands and villages have been repeatedly submerged without providing compensation, rehabilitation and resettlement to the oustees, he said.

"AAP is successfully putting political power in the hands of the people and bringing new light into their lives. In the short time it has been in power it has shown that it fulfils its promises and that it does what it says. That is why the NBA is fully supporting the AAP," said Agarwal.

People displaced by the Indira Sagar, Maheshwar, Omkareshwar, Sardar Sarovar, Upper Beda, Man, Jobat and Bargi dams in the Khandwa, Khargone, Dewar, Dhar, Harda, Badwani, Alirajpur, Jabalpur and Seoni districts of Madhya Pradesh will now join AAP.

The people's movements joining AAP are a part of the National Alliance of People's Movements

Delhi's coldest day

PICTURES BY SANDEEPA VEERAMACHANENI



Thakur Das with several ID cards

Das. He got injured as he tried to salvage his meagre assets.

"We have been given blankets and plastic sheets," says Das. "But that is not enough. It is bitterly cold and we have our children to take care of in this community." Das' own children are seven and 12 years old.

Mainati, a 46-year-old housewife, showed her bandaged foot, which was injured during the demolition drive. "No medical help was provided to us. We were left to fend for ourselves."

Most of the inhabitants have borrowed money

from their friends and relatives to rebuild their shops and hutments on the same piece of land. But bulldozers have been used to dig long trenches so that no new dwellings can be built. "We had to cover up sections of the trenches to prevent our children from falling into them. We have also tried to rebuild our huts," says Thakur Das, who was one of the first settlers at this location.

"They razed places of worship. And they burnt and buried our belongings in the pond behind the settlement. We can't even recover most of them," he says.

Das shows a bagful of damaged silver utensils. "I sell these utensils for a living. These are the only ones I could recover from where they were buried. Look at them now. How am I supposed to earn a livelihood for my family?" he asks in despair.

Most of the residents of the Mansarovar Park squatter settlement hail from villages in Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Rajasthan. They work as daily wage labourers, rickshaw-pullers, ragpickers and domestic helps. They have Voter ID cards and Aadhar cards. Their children study in the local municipal schools. Relocating and starting life from scratch won't be easy for them.

This is not the first instance of a demolition drive by the railway authorities, says Dunu Roy, Director of Hazards Center, an NGO that works for rehabilitation of uprooted slum-dwellers. "There have been many similar cases in the past. However, as far as we know, in the last 20-odd years, no noticeable rehabilitation or relocation of people has been done," he says. "Since this ground belongs to the railway authority, it has to approach the Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (DUSIB) to facilitate the relocation."

DUSIB will carry out a survey to ascertain how many residents lived here prior to 2006, the cut-off year. "Once the survey is complete, DUSIB will collect funds from the Delhi government, the land-owning body, which in this case is the railways, and from the beneficiary which will be used for the relocation," says Roy.

But Amarnath, CEO of DUSIB, says he has not as yet been approached by the railways ministry. "We haven't yet received any notification or request from any ministry or government body for relocation," he says. DUSIB has, of its own accord, supplied blankets and plastic covers to the residents. It is some relief, but a long way from a solution. ■

people's movements

(NAPM) led by Medha Patkar. Not all constituents of the NAPM are, however, ready to support AAP.

"People's movements have found their issues and visions reflected in the position of the AAP," said a press release issued by the NAPM.

These common issues are:

- Decentralisation of power to gram sabhas and bastis.
- Rooting out corruption by legal means and through social and political processes.
- Giving due space to alternative economic policies and indigenous technological solutions.
- Rising above caste, religion and gender-based politics and discrimination while retaining reservation.
- Finding solutions to inequality, injustice, water and energy crisis.
- Working for an alternative political culture for the political class.

- Peaceful resolution of conflict between the state and people.

The people's movements joining AAP said they regard the new political party also as a movement, a fellow traveller who is bringing 'simplicity and selfless service' into politics.

"Arvind Kejriwal, his team of youngsters, Yogendra Yadav, Prashant Bhushan and their colleagues have made a dent in politics. Through innovative strategies, principles of transparency and accountability in governance they have raised hope for everyone," stated the people's movements.

Their parent body, the NAPM, will not merge with AAP. It will retain its identity and continue to function as before. But a mechanism is to be set up that will coordinate its links with the party.

The movements that have announced their sup-

port to AAP include Ghar Bachao, Ghar Banao Andolan (Maharashtra), Jan Sangharsh Vahini (Delhi), Lok Shakti Abhiyan (Odisha), Unorganised Sector Workers Federation in South India, Small Scale Industries and Traders Association (Punjab), the Adivasi Jameen Raksha Samiti in West Bengal and some others.

The people's movements that are part of the NAPM range from those fighting for forest rights, land rights and sustainable agriculture to NGOs working for the urban poor and federations of street hawkers.

But not all have joined. There are groups within the NAPM with very old ties with the Left and with regional parties. There are also a few people's movements that feel that staying apolitical will give them more credibility and enable them to negotiate with whichever political party comes to power. "We are waiting and watching the situation," confessed one leader of a large movement. "We are not in any hurry."

Although Medha Patkar, chairperson of the NAPM, has endorsed the AAP, she has not formally joined the party so far. ■

Villagers begin to use RTI

Jehangir Rashid
Srinagar

THE Right to Information (RTI) Act has done wonders for the country. More and more success stories of RTI activists from the grassroots are emerging and new heroes are being discovered. In Kashmir, too, ordinary people are filing RTI applications seeking information from the government. They are following in the footsteps of Dr Sheikh Ghulam Rasool and Dr Raja Muzaffar Bhat, noted RTI activists in Kashmir who made full use of information provided by the government to improve the lives of people.

Take Mohammad Akbar Bhat, a resident of Gund-I-Ibrahim village in Pattan area of North Kashmir's Baramulla district. He is now regarded as a pioneer of the RTI movement not only in his village but in neighbouring villages as well. This was not the case some years ago. At that time Akbar was not even aware of the RTI Act.

"I did not know such a law, that would empower people at the grassroots, existed. It was only after the intervention of the Indo-Global Social Service Society (IGSSS) that I came to know about RTI and its associated benefits. I joined an RTI programme in 2009 and began to understand the intricacies of the Act," said Akbar.

The first RTI application that Akbar filed enquired why the post office in his village was being shifted. He addressed the application to the Chief Postmaster-General, Jammu & Kashmir Circle, and also mentioned it was the branch manager who was facilitating the shutting down of the post office and its transfer to another location.

"It was a great experience," recalls Akbar. "There was swift action and the post office was shifted back to Gund-I-Ibrahim. This gave me confidence to proceed further. Over the past four years I have filed 70 applications, seeking information on various issues confronting our village and the adjacent ones. I want to be a socially responsible citizen and what better strategy than use of the RTI."

As president of the Village Welfare Committee, Akbar, who works as a farmer and as an embroidery worker, took the lead in ensuring that clean drinking water was made available to the people of his village and those in the vicinity. Along with the RTI law, he made wonderful use of the Public Services Guarantee Act (PSGA) to ensure that a dedicated water supply system was put in place for the people of Gund-I-Ibrahim, Zadi Mohalla and Trikolbal villages by getting a generator installed at the filtration plant.

"In November 2011, I filed an RTI application in the Power Development Department (PDD) to find out about the agreements they had made with people living below the poverty line (BPL) and above the poverty line (APL) in our village and the adjacent ones. I also put in an RTI application to the Consumer Affairs & Public Distribution (CAPD) Department enquiring about the quantity of rice being supplied to people categorised as BPL," said Akbar.

In 2013, Akbar filed an RTI application with the Animal Husbandry Department, asking them to

provide details about schemes being run for the benefit of people who owned livestock. The application turned out to be a boon for his village – eventually 156 families benefitted from the schemes once their details came to light.

"Panchayati Raj institutions are not functioning according to the aspirations of the people. It was due to their failure that Village Welfare Committees were formed. I have no personal interest in filing

said Shahnawaz.

Shahnawaz came to know from a friend that the Election Commission had directed district authorities to pay ₹20 to each voter who got his voter ID card prepared for the Assembly or Parliamentary elections. But, instead of getting money, his friend had paid ₹100 for his family's five voter cards.

"I asked the tehsildar to show me the documents as he had said that lakhs of rupees were paid to the

PICTURES BY BILAL BAHADUR



Shahnawaz Sultan



Mohammad Akbar Bhat



An RTI workshop in progress

RTI applications. I am doing this for the people of my village and those living nearby," said Akbar.

Like Akbar, Shahnawaz Sultan, a resident of Central Kashmir's Budgam district, has used RTI as a tool to extract information that was unthinkable before the enactment of this Act. Shahnawaz went a step further and made use of the Right to Inspection law to scan documents that were relevant to his RTI application.

"On 23 June 2011 I moved an RTI application with the tehsildar of Chadoora, asking him to provide details about the money disbursed to people who prepared electoral photo identity cards before the 2002 and 2008 Assembly elections. I was shocked when I received the reply. The information provided said that lakhs of rupees at the rate of ₹15 per person had been disbursed for this purpose,"

As president of the Village Welfare Committee, Akbar, who works as a farmer and as an embroidery worker, took the lead in ensuring that clean drinking water was made available to the people.

electorate for making their ID cards. I was shocked to see my father's thumb impression on one of the documents. My father worked as a head clerk in the Public Health Engineering Department. He is literate and he would never put his thumb impression," said Shahnawaz.

Shahnawaz said that fake names and fake signatures had been compiled in those documents. Eight to 10 names were bracketed in a single place with the same thumb impression or signature. He said that there was no provision for a single beneficiary to take the money on others behalf and then put their signatures or thumb impression.

"Some of the booth-level officers at that time have retired from service. So the status of the money is not known. I am also not sure if an audit of this money was carried out by the Chief Electoral Officer of Jammu & Kashmir. But, at the end of the day, I am satisfied since I could scan documents that one would never have dreamed of with the help of the RTI," said Shahnawaz. ■

5 winning social enterprises

Arjun Sen
New Delhi

FIVE social entrepreneurs were declared winners of the Silicon Valley Challenge programme at the Action for India's (AFI) Third Annual Forum held on 11 January in New Delhi. The social enterprises are Aakar Innovations, AquaSafi, Artoo, Axio Biosolutions and Grow-Trees.

AFI's mission is to help social innovators in India scale up and achieve greater impact at the bottom of the pyramid. The AFI Forum brings together 100 leading Indian social innovators with 100 donors, investors, IAS officers, technology leaders and policy analysts.

This year's winners were chosen by a jury comprising Sam Pitroda, Adviser to the Prime Minister and an Honorary Chairman of the AFI, Desh Deshpande, Adviser to US President Barack Obama and Founder of Deshpande Foundation, and Ronnie Screwvala, founder and CEO of the UTV Group.

The social entrepreneurs were judged mainly on the impact that their enterprises were making on underserved people by improving their quality of life, boosting incomes and creating jobs.

Aakar Innovations was selected for developing a low-cost technology that produced inexpensive sanitary napkins from farm waste. Self-help groups of women were trained to become entrepreneurs and set up factories that manufacture, sell and distribute sanitary napkins among women in villages.

AquaSafi provides clean water systems, training and services to underserved communities in developing countries. The social enterprise uses reverse osmosis technology to remove bacteria and chemicals and works with NGOs to reach out to communities.

Artoo has developed technology that empowers social enterprises to capture, analyse and process



Bikrant Tiwari of Grow-Trees receiving his certificate from Ronnie Screwvala

information remotely through smartphones and tablets for financial inclusion, healthcare, energy access and training to clients and employees of such social enterprises.

Axio Biosolutions has developed India's first emergency homeostatic dressing that helps to stop bleeding and save lives in remote areas where emergency medical services are not available in the immediate vicinity.

The fifth winner was Grow-Trees that has developed an innovative business model to enable corporates, organisations and individuals to plant trees on community or government-owned land and thereby create jobs and improve incomes for underserved communities. Tree planting also fights climate change and global warming. Grow-Trees has planted more than 640,000 trees. It is a web-enabled, cost-effective platform.

The winners will travel to California during the summer or autumn of 2014 for an intensive two-week immersion programme right into the heart of the Silicon Valley Innovation Ecosystem. They will meet investors, entrepreneurs, executives at leading tech-

nology firms and industry thought leaders, including members of the AFI Silicon Valley Leadership Circle. They will be matched with Silicon Valley mentors to build lasting relationships to help in business development and strategy long after their return to India. They will also be engaging in learning exchanges at Silicon Valley's leading innovation accelerators, including StartX Stanford, SkyDeck Berkeley and TiE Launchpad.

At the panel discussion moderated by Pallavi Ghosh, deputy bureau chief at CNN-IBN, Sam Pitroda, Desh Deshpande and Ronnie Screwvala discussed various aspects of social entrepreneurship in India.

"India is leading in providing low-cost solutions to problems affecting people at the bottom of the pyramid,"

Deshpande said. He felt that while corporates were good at implementation, many lacked compassion. NGOs had compassion but often lacked execution skills. Social enterprises could bridge this gap and bring together both implementation and compassion. Such a fusion was necessary to bring about the kind of change that would really have an impact on poverty and the absence of basic amenities in many parts of the world, he said.

"Poverty affects us all. Social innovators and the investment community must be brought together so that the problem of poverty can be tackled. In the past the best brains only solved the problems of the rich who actually don't have problems. But now technology has democratised information and this is spurring social innovators to solve problems that really need a solution," said Sam Pitroda.

"Social enterprises face two challenges – self-motivation and overcoming the fear of failure. If young entrepreneurs take the risk, they can end up making more money than if they join an investment bank and, at the same time, they can make a major social contribution," said Ronnie Screwvala. ■

SAMITA'S WORLD

by SAMITA RATHOR



CONFLICT ZONE

Kargil's male bastion

Gizala Shabnam
Kargil

IN 2007, Zahra Bano became the first woman candidate to contest the Kargil council elections. But she knew she would not win. "I was a woman contesting against a male religious leader (*ulema*)," she says bluntly.

Governed by the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (LAHDC), Kargil district of Ladakh has come a long way since the Kargil war of 1999. With the formation of LAHDC and renewal of the panchayat system, Kargil took its first step towards development. The priorities, at that time, were improvement of the socio-economic condition of the people, political empowerment and education.

From a handful of government schools, Kargil now has 385 primary, middle and higher secondary schools. Society here has evolved from an orthodox "no education for girls" attitude to an immensely desirable "education for all" society. Women have emerged from the four walls of their homes and now do all kinds of jobs.

But Kargil isn't a feminist utopia. Women have yet to make a dent in politics. Decision-making bodies in Kargil have a skewed male-female ratio and women struggle to find their way up the hierarchical ladder.

India adopted bold affirmative action by seeking one-third reservation for women in all institutions of rural local governance through the 73rd Amendment. The primary objective was to encourage and enhance participation of women in decision-making bodies.

Yet, despite 33 per cent reservation for women in panchayats, block panchayats in Kargil continue to remain all-male preserves. LAHDC has so far offered only nominated positions to women. Out of a total of 30 seats, the council offers four nominated seats with two for minorities and two for women.

Kargil, being a Muslim dominated district, is the stronghold of two major religious institutions – the IKMT (Imam Khomeini Memorial Trust Kargil) and the ISK (Islamia School Kargil). These religious institutions influence local society. They also patronise the LAHDC. So most decisions in the LAHDC are taken under their supervision and cater to their demands.

The members of the LAHDC decide who will be nominated to the two seats meant for women. Nepotism makes a mockery of the entire process. These male leaders fear any dilution of their autonomy. So they prefer women who are happy to follow the rules prescribed by the men and their respective religious patrons. Thus, the status quo is maintained.

The rapport shared by LAHDC members and the Aghas and Sheikhs (Shia religious leaders), blocks out the voice of the subaltern. Intervention by conservative religious leaders leads to imposition and perpetuation



A Women's Welfare Committee

of age-old conservative religious and cultural beliefs and obligations. Even more disturbing, this ideological abduction influences young minds too.

One example of this kind of conservatism is the student union founded by 'well-educated' students to assist youth studying in cities like Delhi, Jammu and Srinagar. The union has just a few female members. They have no voice. The decisions of the union are guided by their schools or religious institutions. An initiative to include a girl representative in the union was turned down by male members.

In this conservative atmosphere it is unlikely that male members of the LAHDC will address the social or economic status of women. The two nominated women are given soft portfolios. They don't have much say in fund distribution or in framing policies and drawing up schemes. The women are not seen as efficient candidates, unlike the 'khyogha butsas' (efficient males) of Kargil.

Fida Hussain, Deputy Commissioner of Kargil district, blames the lack of a sense of collective identity amongst the women for their low level of participation. Zahra Bano cites social disapproval and unawareness as major impediments.

Fiza Bano, a resident of Akchamal village, refused to join her village panchayat since she feared her local community would harass her with their 'moral' harangues. Recalling her own experience, Zahra says: "Young boys used to pass lewd comments when they saw me around. And the grown ups denounced me for having stood for election against an Agha."

Yet she contested. And lost. But it doesn't matter to Zahra. She explains the reason she stood for elections was to pave the way for other women, to motivate them to participate and to help them cultivate a sense of collective identity.

The LAHDC draws up development programmes and implements centrally-sponsored schemes for the district. It also reviews the progress of plans and schemes. The LAHDC is responsible for employment generation, constitution of notified area committees, education, funding of small-scale cottage industries, vocational training, public health, sanitation and so on. Each councillor is granted a fund of ₹18 lakh. But, women say they do not receive their share of money.

"We are made to run from one office to the next with no positive response for funds sanctioned for our centres," says Zahra, who runs a Women's Welfare Committee.

Tired of their male leaders, women in Kargil have invented a 'women for women' jingle. In Kargil's patriarchal society, gender inclusion through reservation and its effective implementation emerge as the sole saviour. Political participation of women at all levels needs to be ensured. ■

Charkha Features

'In Brazil

Shobhan Saxena
São Paulo (Brazil)

IT'S hard to believe that a country three times the size of India and with just one-sixth its population has millions of landless, poor peasants. Brazil, with less than 16 per cent of its people living in rural areas, has a huge problem of land ownership and distribution. The Landless Rural Workers Movement (MST), a grassroots movement, has been fighting against the problem of landlessness and historic land inequities.

João Pedro Stedile, an economist by training, has been the national coordinator of the MST for three decades. According to Stedile, the agriculture sector in Brazil is in a state of crisis as large and medium landowners control 85 per cent of the land. They have turned Brazilian agriculture into an export-oriented business. On the other hand, there are 3.8 million families of poor farmers who produce mainly for subsistence. Most of them survive on government aid.

In an interview at the MST headquarters in Sao Paulo, Stedile spoke about the problem of land ownership in Brazil, the crisis in agriculture and global capitalism and the growing social movements and protests in emerging economies like Brazil and India. Excerpts:

MST has been active in Brazil for 30 years. What have you achieved through your struggle?

MST was born in the 1980s as a result of popular demonstrations against the army dictatorship in Brazil and the crisis created by industrial capitalism. We were born to fight for land and agrarian reforms – to distribute land to the landless. In the past 20 years or so, we have occupied a lot of land and made 800 settlements for 800,000 families. But more than that, we have built a peasant movement that has autonomy from the government and political parties.

What are the current challenges your movement faces?

In the 1990s, financial and globalised capitalism came to Brazil. Now, it has entered agriculture. This model is different from how agriculture was done in industrial capitalism. The new model is called agro-business. It is based on large tracts of land. There is extensive mechanisation and misuse of pesticides and all production is done for exports.

This has created a new ruling class. It is no longer the landowner who dominates agriculture. Now the class that dominates agriculture comprises transnational corporations like Monsanto and Cargill, which provide fertilis-

we need a new farm model'

ers, seeds and machines to the landowners. And banks too are part of this business. Now, financial capital controls agriculture. No farmer can grow anything without money from the bank. Most farm income goes to the banks and the transnational companies.

The fourth component of this dominant class is the corporate media: television, major magazines and big newspapers. They remind the people every day that agri-business is the only way for agriculture to survive. Today, the working poor believe that agri-business is the solution because that's what they hear and see on television every day.

How will MST take on this new ruling class?

Our struggle is no longer for land only. Today we need a new agricultural model that defeats agri-business. The landless peasants in Brazil alone can't do it. The rural population in Brazil is only 16 per cent. We must necessarily unite with the working class of the city.

Brazilian politics is dominated by big farmers, ranchers and businessmen. In such a scenario, how will you change the way agriculture is done in this country?

We've had 12 years of rule by the Workers' Party. The two governments of President Lula and President Dilma have implemented programmes for all classes. Our Dalits, who receive the Bolsa Família (direct cash transfer), identify with the government because they depend on this grant.

It has been a stable and successful government which has won three consecutive elections. But now social problems are worsening in Brazil. It is not possible to break this system through elections. Even the re-election of Dilma (in 2014) will mean the continuation of this policy. The Congress is held hostage to the companies that fund the deputies. A Congressman needs \$5 - \$10 million to be elected. That's a shame.

What is your strategy?

We must work in two directions to break this deadlock. First, there should be a return of the masses on the streets, which happened this year. It was a warning. We believe that in March 2014, the street protests would return. The young seek



João Pedro Stedile: 'Agriculture is now controlled by transnational corporations.'

structural changes. We'll join them. The second path we are taking is a fight for political reform in the country. Without political reform, our governments and parliamentarians will remain hostage to big capital. The next 3-4 years will see a mass

WORLD & INDIA

movement by young people. There will be an awareness to change the Brazilian political system.

The protests last June were triggered by the FIFA Confederations Cup. Do you think the World Cup in 2014 will get a similar response?

The protests will start in March, when our youth come back to the universities after the Carnival break. If the protests happen very close to the World Cup, it would be a move only against FIFA and against the money spent on football stadiums. But what is at stake is not the money spent on the FIFA event. From the point of view of the economy, it's a very small amount. We must strive for the

SHOBHAN SAXENA

protests to discuss bigger problems and not just the World Cup.

In countries like India, there are many social groups and people's movements. They are not united. Is it difficult to unite social movements?

It is very difficult to compare Brazil with India. But we argue that the working class must be organised in many different ways: trade unions, political parties and social movements. In Brazil, we have more than 1,000 social movements. The effort of the MST is to unite the social movements so that we can come up with national programmes to bring changes in society. If social movements are limited only to local claims and the interests of your industry and your business, they can't politicise their base for the political struggles that require national changes.

But the issues you are engaged with are international...

The MST was born as an internationalist organisation. We are guided by the example of Che Guevara. Since the beginning of MST, we have focussed on building links with peasant movements across Latin America. We have also partnered with the International Peasant Movement, through which we have links with peasant movements in more than 80 countries, including India.

Since the 2008 financial crisis, people all over the world have become suspicious of capitalism. Even in cities like London and New York, there have been Occupy movements. Do you see a new kind of global politics emerging from this crisis?

We are still not ready. Because of the crisis of financial capitalism, many capitalists decided to run to the emerging and developing countries to protect their capital by investing in natural resources. The returns from natural resources are much more robust than investments in the financial market. They bought land, hydroelectric plants, motorways and even water. The crisis of unemployment and GDP has not yet arrived in the South. It will take a while for the masses of the South to suffer the consequences that the people of the Northern Hemisphere are suffering.

But as a reaction to this, in all parts of the world there are social movements resisting such capitalist offensive: in Asia, in Africa, in Latin America. ■

AAP ALL STREET,

Delhi CM's protest turns off many

Civil Society News
New Delhi

Just three weeks into the job of governing the state of Delhi, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) took to the streets and clashed with the police, prompting many of its supporters to question the party's style of functioning and the ability of its leaders to serve in high office.

Declaring himself an anarchist and threatening to disrupt Republic Day, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal camped with his cabinet outside Rail Bhavan in the high security zone of Delhi to demand the suspension from service of five officers of the Delhi Police.

But even as Kejriwal protested with TV cameras rolling, many AAP supporters began having second thoughts about the party. If this was the approach to solving a relatively simple issue relating to police accountability, how could AAP's leaders be expected to cope with the bigger challenges of being in government?

"I didn't join the party for this. I wanted AAP to reform politics not be like any other party," said an important functionary from a southern state. "I agree there is a need to deal with corruption in the police. But surely there are better ways of doing it."

This functionary worried about the impact Kejriwal's protest would have on middle-class support that had been built up in the south. "People don't want anarchy. They want the system to be reformed," he said.

"He won't get my vote again," said a well-known academician in south Delhi who voted for AAP in the Assembly elections. "For a party with national ambitions, AAP is making crude choices. It is sad, but I don't see the middle class opting for it again. AAP needs to be much more nuanced in its politics. It was given a chance to run Delhi and it should have focussed on improving water supply, electricity, transportation, housing and so on."

The Kejriwal protest was preceded by the Law Minister, Somnath Bharti, insisting that the police arrest, late at night, Africans living in a south Delhi neighbourhood, saying they were involved in prostitution and drug-running. Bharti also prompted beat constables to shut a 24x7 convenience store. Walking into the store at night, the minister wanted the store's attendant to produce its licence.

The Women and Child Minister, Rakhi Birla, ordered the police to arrest members of a family where a woman had allegedly been burnt alive for dowry. As with Bharti, the police said they needed legal sanction to act.

Using drugs, prostitution and the safety of women as issues, AAP then took to the streets in what many see as a calculated gambit to keep the party in the news before the parliamentary elections that are due in a few months.

AAP has some successes to show for the short time it has been office. It has conducted a detailed survey of 700 government schools (see Pages 8,9, 10) for which it deployed its volunteers. It has also ordered the removal of a transport depot from the banks of the Yamuna. Environmental activists for long have been demanding that the riverbed be freed of encroachments. It has been examining what it can do for improving state-run hospitals as well. Teams of volunteers are going to government hospitals to assess their functioning. There was prompt action to provide shelters for the homeless freezing in Delhi's bitter winter chill.

Using drugs, prostitution and women's safety as issues, AAP took to the streets in what many see as a gambit to keep the party in the news.



NO GOV'T?

PICTURES BY SANDEEPA VEERAMACHANENI



COVER





These are good initiatives capable of providing dividends in the long run.

But AAP is clearly in a hurry. After its success in the Delhi Assembly elections, it believes it is capable of striking it big at the national level. There is talk of Kejriwal being a candidate for Prime Minister.

The protest in Delhi was intended to keep the party in the news on the sensational issue of police corruption, which is a huge problem in the north where AAP hopes to win seats.

AAP also needs to deflect public attention from serious promises the party made during the Assembly elections. The promises of free water and reduction of electricity charges by 50 per cent are going to be very difficult to fulfil.

Kejriwal issued orders on water and electricity soon after assuming office. He has also got the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) to audit the private power distribution companies to see if they have been inflating their costs. But electricity can only be cheaper with a subsidy and that needs the approval of the Delhi Assembly. It is yet to happen.

With water the challenges are of distribution and availability. AAP does not seem to have done the groundwork for its promise of free water and it could be a long time before it is implemented.

Kejriwal had also said he had evidence of corruption against Sheila Dikshit and her government. But it is not yet known what the wrongdoing is and whether there is indeed solid proof.

AAP has made mohalla sabhas or neighbourhood councils in Delhi the cornerstone of its strategy for better governance. It has said it will go to the people for all its decisions. How public money is to be spent will be decided at the lowest local level. But the mohalla sabha is yet to be defined in legal terms. It is not known how it will fit in with the current constitutional structure of local self-governance. (See 'Define mohalla sabhas first' on Pages 10-12).

The government's first effort at implementing its ideas on direct democracy was a Janata Durbar or public hearing outside the secretariat on 11 January. It ended in a fiasco because Kejriwal and his ministers were inundated with complaints. Kejriwal himself had to beat a hasty retreat. Using police protection he sequestered himself in the secretariat while large crowds thronged the gates demanding to be heard. The Janata Durbar idea was then dropped.

Many of AAP's good ideas regarding clean politics, accountability, transparency and local governance come from social movements and NGOs. The party's success is, in fact, seen as the culmination of multiple efforts over the years across the country, mostly at the grassroots. Kejriwal ran an NGO and took help from the MKSS. He was part of the NCPRI.

There is concern among activists that AAP's populist measures to bring in votes will result in hopes that it cannot meet and result in a backlash that will tarnish all good efforts in the social sector.

"If AAP raises expectations and lets down people it will be a blow to the movement for a new politics. We don't want to wreck the system. We want to improve it. We all realise that democracy is not perfect, but it is better than totalitarianism. Everyone wants AAP to succeed because if it fails as a result of reckless behaviour, people in their search for stability will turn to the older parties, which may reform themselves somewhat but will essentially represent the old order," says a leading activist who made the crossover to formal politics much before. ■



BUSINESS

ENTERPRISE | CSR | ICT | GREEN TECH

Homely health service

TriBeCa offers care to the elderly and ailing

Subir Roy
Kolkata

FIVE professionals of Indian origin with roots in eastern India have come together to start an uncommon venture, TriBeCa Care, in Kolkata to deliver professional healthcare at home. The service is available round the clock to address geriatric and post-operative needs. The plight of NRI children who have no one to look after their aging parents back home or people who are simply too ill to take care of themselves presented the opportunity that gave rise to the business.

Should you need a doctor to visit you at home or the services of a nurse, physiotherapist or maid, or medical equipment at home, TriBeCa Care will arrange it for you. Collecting diagnostic samples and delivering reports, fetching medicines, calling an ambulance to be taken to hospital, fixing up with a hospital – all will be tied up. Even non-medical care like running errands for you when you are laid up or recovering after a hospital stay will be organised.

TriBeCa Care began in May last year and now has around 20 staff. It has, so far, helped over 500 patients. “This is our command centre,” says Prateep Sen, one of the company’s two managing directors, as we talk in a meeting room after getting there by climbing ancient narrow stairs in an old building which is being renovated to meet the needs of a modern startup. A family property has been roped in to make do.

The firm’s name comes from a neighbourhood in New York where some of the founders worked. Its plus is it has substantially gentrified and so is a symbol of getting better. Besides, having an unusual name helps you stand out. The firm’s core function is to manage a network of partners and caregivers. It delivers by developing a rapport with its customers and being in constant touch with them through care managers. Customer needs vary greatly and help can extend to even giving advice on redesigning living spaces to make it safer for the elderly.

What is distinctive is that just one of TriBeCa’s five founders, all in their early forties, is a doctor. Sen has skills in sales, marketing, banking and



Prateep Sen and Shibaji Saha at their office in Kolkata

finance. Fellow managing director Tamojit Dutta comes from the world of investment banking, retail finance and the pharmaceutical industry. The only medical professional, Shibaji Saha, clinical director, is a consultant physician and has been with the National Health Service of Britain. Ritendra Roy, finance director, has been in investment banking and venture capital. Elina Dutta, chief strategy officer, is a communications specialist who has worked on leading pharma brands. Their CVs bear some of the leading global names in investment finance, banking and pharmaceuticals.

Should you need a doctor to visit you at home or the services of a nurse, physiotherapist or maid, or medical equipment at home, TriBeCa Care will arrange it for you.

“We want to make a successful business delivering health at home. We wish to stabilise in one metro, make the model work, and then expand to others like Delhi and Mumbai. Three of us have left our jobs and two of us are here full-time. We are personally invested,” elaborates Sen. The clock is ticking and they have given themselves around three years to see their money coming back and more.

TriBeCa Care offers packages priced between ₹250 and ₹4,000 a month. These are currently, *Chobbish Ghanta*, a 24-hour emergency service, *Nischinto*, which offers medical care services including home visits by doctors, and *Jotno*, or medical and non-medical home care for the elderly.

These are designed to provide ongoing medical services, security and emergency response and also social companionship.

TriBeCa Care has on its panel of doctors general practitioners and specialists, some of the latter are in geriatrics and passionate about providing holistic treatment to their patients. Importantly, this includes both medical and non-medical well-being. TriBeCa Care also partners with dementia care experts for non-medical care.

The HAH or ‘health at home’ industry is fledgling



A nurse from TriBeCa checks a patient's blood pressure at his home

and fragmented in India, having sprouted in metros like Delhi, Chennai and Kolkata. But it is well established in developed countries. Golden Living in the US has a revenue of \$2.5 billion and Health At Home in the UK a revenue of 800 million pounds. So it is a mature and developed business model which has to be reengineered for Indian conditions.

The market is enormous because the number of the elderly in India is increasing, the quality of care is very poor and can only be had through stiff out-of-pocket expenses. There is little by way of medical insurance products for the aged at a time when the old practice of the extended family taking care of the elderly is declining.

TriBeCa Care being in the services business, the

biggest issue before it is people quality – the level of skills it can access. It accesses caregivers both through agencies and on its own. Its aim is to get good people, treat them well, try to ensure that they have proper working conditions, including the physical space they get at patient homes. Social attitudes to caregivers (sometimes they are treated almost like untouchables) as also the quality of caregivers are important.

Sen says that it has been a learning process for the group. It began on a high. After three to four months the company hit a low, then figured out what it wasn't doing right, changed processes and has seen them work in the last four months. "We are ramping up and are very optimistic. We don't make

undue promises to our customers. Our aim is to work through oversight and transparent processes. There are no black boxes for us."

Sen narrated some anecdotal highs and lows. He spoke of an 86-year-old man who is nationally known, living by himself in his apartment. He is hugely 'grumpy' and has his quota of depression and anxiety. Initially, they were apprehensive and decided to consult psychological and geriatric experts to devise a strategy for engaging him. Then they got to work on building his trust. Today, he sometimes offers the visiting care manager a drink or even a meal. "The key is to build trust," emphasises Sen.

And the low? It comes when a caregiver is asked to take a bath by an elderly person who remains fixed on earlier notions of personal purity and looks at caregiving as intrinsically dirty.

It is still early days for TriBeCa Care in terms of using technology. Now that top hospitals want to get patients out of hospital as soon as possible (a bed should be occupied only during a pre and post procedure high-paying period), the days of remote monitoring of patients' vital signs should come sometime soon. For example, a hospital should be able to monitor a cardiac arrest in a patient at home remotely and respond to it. This obviates the need to post a nurse round the clock. What TriBeCa probably needs is an IT person in the top team who can devise solutions to offer intensive care at home with proper remote monitoring (via a portal at the command centre) at low nursing and real estate (hospital versus home) costs.

Right now it is led by managers who understand finance and the healthcare industry. For them the first challenge will be to standardise a range of service offerings according to well-defined processes. The second challenge will be to remain ahead in the race between quality and cost. The third will be to keep using more and more technology to tackle cost and quality. The founders see themselves committed to the 'health at home' business, one segment or the other, because it has such enormous potential. ■

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PICTURES BY SANDEEPA VEERAMACHANENI



Children at a Padho Aur Badho centre in Kumhar Basti

Bridge to school

Shayak Majumder
New Delhi

THERE is nothing fancy about the little classrooms of Padho Aur Badho centres located in the narrow streets of slums. But once you look at the bright smiles on the faces of their students, you know there's something special going on here.

Launched in 2009, the Padho Aur Badho (PAB) campaign is an initiative by AROH Foundation in partnership with GAIL (Gas Authority of India Ltd.). It aims at providing free preparatory education to children between six to 14 years of age living in the slums of Delhi-NCR and helping them enroll in regular schools. Operating from 250 centres, PAB has so far helped around 30,000 children get into mainstream education.

Neelam Gupta, Founder-President and CEO of AROH, says, "We started in 2009 when we spotted children not going to school because they had to work in tea stalls or as ragpickers. We launched a pilot project with 30 such children in Noida."

The pilot achieved 100 per cent success. "All 30 children were mainstreamed into municipal corporation schools and government schools," says Gupta. She approached GAIL for assistance. After seeing the results of their pilot project, GAIL agreed to fund 50 centres in Noida and East Delhi. At present, GAIL provides operational funding and support to all the PAB centres.

"We at GAIL wanted to work in the field of education. We decided to target children for whom general education is out of reach," says Vandana Chanana, General Manager and Head of CSRCC, GAIL. "We are now focusing on the current 250 centres, ensuring proper educational content and quality. We would rather be intensive than extensive."

GAIL also encourages its employees and their family members to volunteer in PAB centres. "Many of the children of our employees and their wives regularly volunteer for PAB activities," says Chanana.

In Kumhar Basti of Garoli village, the PAB centre has been operating for almost two and a half years. Like any typical PAB centre, it comprises one small classroom with walls covered with charts, drawings by children, and a blackboard.

Rachana, the instructor, asks the students a question. All of them answer in unison. The PAB instructors use practical projects to teach children English, Hindi, arithmetic and environment science. "A practical approach helps them get a better understanding



Neelam Gupta: 'We have mainstreamed 16,000 children.'

of the subject. It is more effective than bookish knowledge," says Rachana. The study modules are designed by consultants and experts at AROH and follow the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) curriculum.

For each centre instructors are selected from the surrounding locality. AROH discovered that children and parents trusted an instructor from the community more easily than a teacher from another locality.

The instructors are chosen after they clear an oral interview where their skills and willingness to teach are tested. Most of the instructors are women. Only one centre has a male instructor.

In the initial years it was not easy to persuade parents to send their children to PAB centres. Gupta says, "We had to overcome three barriers. First, these families think of their children as working hands. Second, since slum families have migrated into Delhi, they didn't have any knowledge about schools and admission procedures. And third, the parents argued that their kids were already earning, so what's the use of going to school and learning when they are already earning?"

In order to sensitise parents, AROH looked for alternative solutions. They started the Garima programme that offers vocational training to the mothers of out-of-school children. The courses include tailoring, beauty parlour training and maid training so that they could look for jobs with better salaries.

The Garima project helped the mothers to become self-employed or start small enterprises. "Mothers generally don't want their children to work. That is why we selected them as soft targets. Once the family income increases, they happily send their kids for learning," she says. The Garima programme is currently dovetailed with PAB.

As PAB centres grow every year, strategies and modules are redesigned to increase effectiveness.

Besides mainstreaming children, PAB now looks at retention and learning outcomes among its students.

Says Gupta, "We found out that most children who joined government schools didn't find their classes interesting. They said they had more fun and learnt more in PAB centres than in municipal or government schools where teachers don't even turn up at times." In order to address this issue, PAB started remedial education classes which provide tuition to students facing problems in their schools, help them understand subjects better and thereby prevent them from dropping out.

"The Right To Education Act mandates all children to be admitted into schools. Unfortunately, it doesn't give a thorough look at how much children are learning," says Gupta. "All the children are supposed to be promoted until they reach Class 8. Most government schools wouldn't release the students' marksheets until they appear for their board exams. The parents are also unaware that their children are not really learning much. As long as the children are promoted, they are satisfied. Our remedial classes help tackle this problem."

Twelve-year-old Prachi used to study at a PAB centre. She is now enrolled in a local government school in Garoli. "I love learning," she says. "It's fun and will help me become a big person when I grow up."

Gupta says, "Surveys reveal that at present there are 1,25,000 children who are out of school. PAB has so far been able to reach out to 30,000 children and mainstream 16,000. We would like to help many more." ■

INSIGHTS

OPINION | ANALYSIS | RESEARCH | IDEAS

When cities guzzle water

HIMANSHU THAKKAR &
PARINEETA DANDEKAR

MORE than 50 people, including tribal groups, social activists, water experts, ecologists, wildlife experts and academics, came together for a brainstorming workshop on 'Dams coming up for Mumbai Region.' The meeting was organised by the South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People, Shramik Mukti Sangathana, and Jalbiradari.

About 12 dams are planned or are under construction to satisfy the increasing thirst of the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR). All these dams fall in the eco-sensitive region of the Western Ghats. Together they will submerge more than 22,000 hectares, including nearly 7,000 hectares of forests, millions of trees and more than 750 hectares of the Tansa Sanctuary. The dams will affect a minimum of 100,000 tribals who depend on the forests and their ancestral lands for their livelihoods. These dams include the Kalu, Shai, Balganga, Susari, Khargihill, Bhugad, Pinjal, Gargai, Middle Vaitarna, Barvi and Poshir, among others. These are in addition to the dams already constructed for water supply to the MMR.

Tribals and other affected groups of the Thane and Raigad region have been strongly opposing these projects. Most people in Mumbai seem unaware of their struggles or the impacts of these projects.

Most of these dams are escaping social and environmental impact assessments and management plans, environment clearance requirements, environmental monitoring or public consultations due to blunders in the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification of September 2006, which excludes domestic and industrial water supply projects from the environmental clearance process. The notification signifies the environmental illiteracy of officials and ministers at the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF). In spite of repeated letters and acknowledging that this makes no sense, they have refused to change it.

MMR has not undertaken an assessment of options before pushing these projects. A cursory review shows that many options exist. Currently at the city or region level, there is no shortfall in water supply. The existing problems are due to inequitable, non-transparent, non-participatory and wasteful water governance in MMR.

Municipal corporations under the MMR which are pushing for new dams do not treat even 15 per cent of their sewage. The Bhiwandi Nizampur and Vasai Virar Corporations do not treat any of their sewage. The Mumbai Region has no estimate of its rainwater harvesting potential, and there is little effective action in this direction despite high rain-



A dam being dug in Maharashtra

About 12 dams are planned or are under construction to satisfy the thirst of the Mumbai Metropolitan Region. All these dams fall in the eco-sensitive region of the Western Ghats.

fall. Water supply and distribution losses are over 30 per cent. Local water sources like rivers, lakes and wells are being destroyed by pollution and encroachments. There is no interest in democratising governance of the MMR water sector.

The workshop's resolution urged the MMR region to address these issues first. This would lead to sustainable water supply to the city and its suburbs. The Konkan Irrigation Department, which is constructing most of these projects, has violated several laws related to tribal and forest rights, environment, forests and resettlement. It has been mostly favouring a single contractor, illegally.

The meeting also strongly urged the MMRDA, MCGM, Municipal Corporations of MMR, Maharashtra government, MoEF, the Maharashtra Forest Department, the National Board of Wildlife

and all others concerned to ensure that the following steps are taken up urgently and in a credible way:

- Undertake thorough options assessment for Mumbai's (and other cities of the MMR) water needs which includes groundwater recharge and sustainable use, protection and use of local water sources, rainwater harvesting, sewage treatment and reuse, plugging leakages, improving water supply efficiency, taking up systematic demand side management measures etc.
- Undertake Environmental and Social Impact Assessments for all the dams coming up for the Mumbai Region.
- Take immediate action against the Konkan Irrigation Development Corporation for violating multiple laws while bulldozing ahead with projects and the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA) for funding projects in the absence of clearances.
- Respect people's protests and gram sabha resolutions against displacement, deforestation and their refusal to give permission for these projects.
- Take strong penal action against the officers and contractors who have displaced Adivasis illegally.
- Not resume any work or plan for any project before the above is done. Stop work on projects in the meantime.
- Change the EIA notification to ensure that all large dams are included for environment clearance,

Continued on page 26

Continued from page 25

public hearings and EIA requirements.

- Immediately institute a credible Cumulative Impact Assessment of the projects already constructed and advanced in implementation.
- Institutionalise decentralised, democratic governance of the water sector in MMR from bottom to top.

Forests in the Western Ghats are Mumbai and MMR's lungs. They are the watersheds of rivers and water sources for the Tansa and Bhatsa lakes. Forests naturally purify Mumbai and MMR's drinking water. The rich tribal culture of Thane and Raigad is a shared heritage of Mumbai. We have no right to displace the tribals or destroy their livelihoods. This destruction in Mumbai's backyard must be stopped.

However, Mumbai and MMR are not the only urban areas guilty of destroying the environment, forests, biodiversity and livelihoods of millions of poor people. Delhi, which already has more per capita water than European cities like Paris, Amsterdam or Bonn, is asking for the Renuka, Lakhwar and Kishau dams in the upstream Yamuna basin, while destroying the Yamuna river for all downstream areas. Ahmedabad is using water from the Sardar Sarovar dam that was meant for the people of Kutch and Saurashtra and which has led to the displacement of over 200,000 people. Jaipur is taking water from the Bisalpur dam. Farmers, for whom it was made, are not getting the water and some lost their lives in police firing while demanding that water. A massive diversion of Nethrawathi water is proposed for Bangalore and other areas, destroying the pristine forests of the Western Ghats. Three farmers died in police firing near Pune when a huge farmers rally was protesting against diversion of water from the Pawna Dam to the Corporation of Pimpri-Chinchwad.

As Planning Commission member Mihir Shah recently wrote, the 12th Five Year Plan proposes a paradigm shift in the urban sector. "Each city must consider, as the first source of supply, its local waterbodies. Therefore, cities must only get funds for water projects when they have accounted for water supply from local waterbodies and have protected these waterbodies and their catchments. This precondition will force protection and build the infrastructure which will supply locally and then take back sewage also locally."

The trouble with this urban water sector reform agenda is that, close to two years into the 12th Plan, we still do not see it being implemented anywhere. We do not see any roadmap for its implementation. And yet the UPA government continues to fund solutions catering to only long-distance supply-side measures like big dam projects for urban areas under the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM). In fact, of the first ₹60,000 crore sanctioned for JNNURM, about 70 per cent was for the urban water sector, but do we see any progress in democratisation or even improvement of urban water governance?

In that respect, there is hope that the Aam Aadmi Party now governing Delhi will take effective steps in this direction as its manifesto includes a detailed agenda in this regard. Let us hope it will show the way to the nation. ■

Himanshu Thakkar (ht.sandrp@gmail.com), Parineeta Dandekar (parineeta.dandekar@gmail.com), SANDRP

The plight of child



KAJOL MENON

WHEN I followed the election campaign on TV I was appalled to see images of many resettled colonies near urban landfills on the fringes of New Delhi – the abject poverty, the dehumanised surroundings, the squalor and most of all the plight of young children rummaging through trash in a haze. As one young boy remarked to a TV reporter: "You need the aid of inhalants."

In juxtaposition we have the move of the government to amend the current Juvenile Justice law and create a waiver whereby juveniles between 16-18 years of age who commit serious crimes be tried as adults, a move that will affect millions of children. It begs the question tellingly put by a colleague: "Why are we so quick to take away childhood before ensuring a protective environment for our children?"

It is in this context that I draw attention to one of the most marginalised of children even amongst child workers – the waste-picker child. One of the best-kept secrets of India's urban growth story is its foundation on the backs of one of the most disempowered communities. Waste-picking is rarely recognised or integrated in the official waste management system despite its large contribution to it. According to Chintan, a Delhi-based NGO, "rag-pickers are unrecognised and have almost no rights at work, despite the fact that they save almost 14 per cent of the municipal budget annually. In Delhi, the army of almost 80,000 estimated waste-pickers save the city at least ₹6 lakh daily through their work."

Despite the large numbers employed, waste-picking ranks lowest in the hierarchy of urban

informal occupations and many of those drawn to this occupation are those with the least negotiating powers – women and children, illiterate, unskilled migrants, the lowest in the caste hierarchy and the poorest of the poor. Children form a large percentage of this population. A study conducted by PRIA (Participatory Research Institute Asia) in Patna and Raipur observed that almost a quarter of all waste-pickers in the city are children between five and 14 years of age while 40 per cent of waste-pickers at dumpsites are children. This data can be extrapolated to most cities in India.

There are two categories of child waste-pickers: the street pickers who collect garbage in street bins or residential areas, and dump-pickers who work at dumping grounds. While the former share many characteristics with mobile street children and are therefore difficult to reach, the latter live in specific dumpsites along with their families and are hence easier to target for supportive intervention.

Child waste-pickers live on the margins of society. Denied all their basic entitlements, most do not have access to education. If there is a local school, they are rarely enrolled. Instead, they help their families earn a meagre existence. When they do enroll, it has been found they are often discriminated against by teachers for their migrant status, lack of identity, lower caste and of course the nature of their work, leading them to drop out of school.

Their insecure existence is further aggravated by their impermanent tenements that are vulnerable to the natural elements and to the whims of municipal authorities. They work 10-12 hours a day across shifts in unhygienic surroundings and are subjected to intense health risks such as musculo-skeletal problems, respiratory and gastro-intestinal ailments

ragpickers in the city

apart from nicks and cuts and animal bites as they jostle to collect, sort and sell trash. They also face regular harassment and extortion from the police and the municipal authorities. People abuse them. They are even sexually assaulted as they are commonly perceived to be thieves, drug addicts, hoodlums and not disadvantaged and poor children.

Sadly, the environment they operate in makes them vulnerable to violence, abuse and ill treatment, which may drive them to indulge in delinquent behaviour. Exposure to alcohol, drugs and commercial sex remains a constant threat.

While waste-picking was banned in 2001 under the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, it merits only a brief mention and is otherwise ignored in other legislation regarding child labour. Contrary to most child labourers, waste-pickers are self-employed or working with their parents and therefore not answerable to any employer! The issue of child waste-pickers is embedded in the lack of a clear policy for the sector as a whole. Activists have been advocating a holistic solid waste management policy with the right to access waste that gives due recognition and protection to the waste-picker. But such legislation is yet to emerge.

All is not dark in this dismal scenario. Several initiatives across urban India, from Ahmedabad, Lucknow and Pune to Mumbai and Delhi, are addressing this issue with innovative programming and garnering some positive results in mainstreaming the child waste-picker.

Some NGOs support waste-pickers to gain access to basic services such as healthcare, health insurance, education, vocational training, legal support, counselling sessions and help them form unions to speak up for their rights. In Pune, for example, thanks to the scrap-collectors union, Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat's sustained effort of over 20 years, the municipal corporation now issues identity cards to ragpickers and offers a limited health insurance plan, recognising their contribution to recycling waste in the city. This acknowledgement has had a positive impact in reducing the number of child



Child waste-pickers live on the margins of society. Denied all their basic entitlements, most do not have access to education. If there is a local school they are rarely enrolled.

waste-pickers by increasing the income of their parents thereby reducing their dependence on the money their children earn.

Pratham's intervention in Govandi and Deonar, the largest dumping ground in Mumbai, through educational opportunities to child ragpickers has been well received. Pratham also conducts joint initiatives with the government such as Transitional Educational Centres (TEC) under its INDUS programme. Eleven TECs around the Deonar dumping ground cater to around 450 child waste-pickers. Pratham's relentless efforts to convince the parents to send their children to school despite loss of revenue have begun to yield some results. Pratham hails its 'Drop in Centre' model as a non-controversial entry point and a gamechanger. It observes, "this safe point of contact for children is key to their reintegration into education and vocational training, and a first step towards a better future."

Chintan's No Child in Trash project in Delhi's Ghazipur landfill seeks to ensure that there is no Gen Next of waste-pickers and that every waste-picker child and every child from a waste-picker family is provided an opportunity to reject a life in trash. As Chintan provocatively asks, 'What is green about recycling run on child labour?'

Various best practices suggest that the key to tackling the issue of child waste-pickers is to have a 360-degree approach – at the level of the child, his/her employer, the community, the government and the public. The issue of the child

waste-picker is ultimately a problem rooted in urban poverty, an area that continues to suffer persistent neglect in public policy. It cannot be solved with a magic scheme or legislation. It requires working with a number of agencies on a range of interventions. Fundamentally, it is about building inclusive cities.

So the next time we are quick to fix blame on a juvenile offender, we may wish to pause and reflect on our own culpability. As part of the privileged middle-class, the choice is ours – do we stand as bystanders or overcome our apathy to give our children a fighting chance? ■

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Arriving at a decision

KANCHI KOHLI

IT is tumultuous times in the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF). With speculation rife about why Jayanthi Natarajan resigned as minister, every step of Veerappa Moily, the new minister, is being watched closely.

The ministry has also been at the receiving end of federal ire with many state governments opposing its move to declare parts of the Western Ghats as Ecologically Sensitive Areas (ESAs). The suggestions of the Kasturirangan Committee, which replaced the recommendations of the Madhav Gadgil Committee, now have been rejected point-blank by states such as Kerala. In response, one of the first tasks of the new environment minister has been to withdraw MoEF's directions under the Kasturirangan Committee.

At the same time, pressure to approve high investment industrial and infrastructure projects carries on. Alongside, affected communities continue to organise themselves to challenge clearances on the streets or through the courts.

And now the Supreme Court has begun the new year by directing the MoEF to set up a new independent regulator. The court has observed that the current manner in which projects are being appraised and monitored under the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) notification, is not satisfactory.

It is debatable whether a new regulator will be able to resolve the legacy of problems that the design and implementation of the EIA notification has assembled around itself. Even as the MoEF builds its response to the court – to be submitted before its Green Bench on 31 March – there continues to be news about its everyday regulatory functioning in environmental decision-making that merits scrutiny.

The 13 December 2013 judgment of the Southern Zone of the National Green Tribunal (NGT) made some important observations and indicated some ways forward for the appraisal and decision-making processes for environment clearances. The judgment, by the two-member bench of Justice M. Chockalingam (Judicial Member) and Dr R. Nagendran (Expert Member), suspended the environment clearance of a project and affirmed that the appraisal of this project under the EIA notification required independent evaluation and better application of mind before environmental clearance could be given.

Some of these crucial issues, reiterated by the tribunal, have a bearing on the implementation of the EIA notification, no matter which system operates in future.

The case being heard at the NGT's Chennai bench related to the environment clearance of 15 March 2010 of a coal-based thermal power plant by Alfa Infraprop Pvt. Ltd near Komarada village in Vizianagaram district of Andhra Pradesh. It was filed by Samata, an NGO working on social justice and environment issues, and argued by Ritwick Dutta. The land required for the thermal power project is recorded to be 1,675 acres (678 ha).



The judgment signals the need for a clear and explicit description of how a decision has been arrived at, especially when a point has not been decided unanimously.

Imported coal from Indonesia would be used as fuel for the plant. The Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) of the project, which was part of the challenge before the NGT, was carried out by Vimta Labs Limited. The consultant is known for its faulty EIA report in the famous Niyamgiri mining project in Odisha.

While the above judgment deals with three critical issues related to this particular project, it is relevant to many others which come within the same category.

First, who can be the aggrieved person to bring such cases to the NGT, a much used tool by project authorities often used to discredit the applicants even before the case is argued on merit.

Second, whether the public hearing of the project was conducted as per due legal procedure.

Third, the application of mind and detailed scrutiny carried out by the ministry's Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC) while recommending the project for approval.

The judgment further stated that scrutiny by an expert body needs to include critical observations or an examination of all the available material including those related to the mandatory public hearing. Only then should a recommendation of the

project be arrived at.

In the present case, the concerned EAC had not carried out its duty, especially in recording the reasons why all objections raised at the public hearing were negative. Objections and suggestions raised at public hearings are critical to decision-making under the EIA notification since this is the one instance where the project authorities, EIA consultants and affected people come face to face on an official and legally mandated platform. It is perhaps for this reason that the NGT bench stated that not responding to the objections raised at the public hearing in the EAC meeting was a "...thorough failure on the part of the EAC..."

The judgment makes two other points that would also be important for regulatory decision-making, regardless of what system is put in place in future. First, the fact that EACs cannot carry out their job in a " cursory and arbitrary manner" as in the above case, and second, that the word of the project proponent cannot be taken as "gospel truth," while responding to concerns raised at a public hearing.

Detailed recording of reasons cannot take place without an equally detailed consideration of those reasons. This would mean giving each appraisal far more time than it is being given today. This is something project authorities wanting quick decisions or expert bodies playing along with quick-fix approvals, are unlikely to appreciate.

If the observations of the NGT are taken on board by those involved in EIA-related decision-making, it would lead to an infusion of good practices, which should have been part of administrative functioning in any case.

The judgment signals the need for a clear and explicit description of how a decision has been arrived at, especially when a point has not been decided unanimously. This is a process that all decision-making bodies should imbibe. ■

Kanchi Kohli is an independent researcher and writer based in New Delhi

LIVING

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Walk into a plural past

Ahmedabad's heritage offers many surprises

Susheela Nair
Ahmedabad

OUR Heritage Walk, organised by the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation and the CRUDA Foundation, began with a slideshow at the Swaminarayan Mandir in Kalupur. Built in 1822, this colourful shrine is India's first Swaminarayan temple. After a round of the temple, we saw devotees strolling in with garlands and pooja *thalis*. They bought vegetables and fruits from the stalls lining the temple's grand entrance.

Walking through Lambeshwarni Pol, we felt we had been caught in a time warp. The walk led us to the bronze statue of the Gujarati poet, Dalpatram Kavi, and his humble abode. Dalpatram's statue is placed on the porch of a replica of his original home which once stood at the same spot. A magistrate in Ahmedabad, Dalpatram developed Gujarati literature and founded the Gujarat Vernacular Society.

We then walked into the last remnants of the city's textile era. The Calico Dome took us back to Ahmedabad's glorious textile era when the city was known as the Manchester of India. The walk covered several *pols*, *havelis*, secret passages, *chabutaras*, ornamental facades and workplaces of artisans. We saw Gujarati, Mughal, Marathi, English and Persian influences outside the houses of *pols*. Their beauty truly leaves one spellbound.

It is said that the real Ahmedabad still lives in its *pols*. The word *pol* is derived from the Sanskrit word *pratoli* which means gate or entrance. *Pols* were India's original gated communities. A typical *pol* would have only one or two entrances and a few secret entrances known only to people residing in the *pol*. Some *pols* contain old, beautiful houses. They have courtyards with intricate wooden carved facades with columns and fresco work patterned around court walls or ceilings. *Maharut Pol* was the first *pol* in Ahmedabad.

Pols are housing clusters that comprise many families of a particular group primarily connected by religion and caste. These *pols* were protected by gates, cul-de-sacs, and secret passages. Such neighbourhoods are both the backbone and the heartbeat of the old city of Ahmedabad. They are self-contained micro neighbourhoods connecting a street with houses flanked on either side. Each *pol* has its own temples, community wells, and *chabutaras*.

As we walked along we passed many types of *chabutaras* constructed in the *pols*. The *chabutara* is a tower-like structure with octagonal or pentagonal shaped enclosures at the top. These raised covered platforms are large enough for someone to step in and put bird feed into the bowls that hang around them. In the upper enclosure are several holes for birds to make their nests. The need

SUSHEELA NAIR



Take a stroll in Jumma Masjid

SUSHEELA NAIR



Art students at work

SUSHEELA NAIR



The Jumma Masjid

for these arose because of deforestation. There was no place for birds to nest. Some of the houses even provided dugouts for the birds to rest. We saw some residents of the *pol* climb up and replenish grain and water for the birds in the *chabutara*.

Proceeding further down narrow streets, we stopped by the Kala Ram Mandir in the Haja Patel Ni Pol which houses a unique idol of Lord Rama in a dark colour in a sitting posture. It is said that the idol resurfaced on its own post independence – hundreds of years after the temple's priest had hidden it to protect it during the Mughal period. Another interesting temple is the Shanthinathji Mandir in Haja Patel Ni Pol. It flaunts an octagonal dome, brackets and pillars carved with musical instruments.

The walk then took us through Doshiwadani Pol, Zaveri Vad to Chaumukhjini Pol. These areas have ornate temples with fascinating wooden carvings camouflaged under plain exteriors. At Kuala Khanda, there are houses that depict British, Mughal, Gujarati and Maratha architecture.

Continued on page 30

SUSHEELA NAIR



The Swaminarayan temple in Kalapur

SUSHEELA NAIR



The courtyard of the Sambhavnath Ni Khadki dominated by domes

SUSHEELA NAIR



A chabutra for the birds

Continued from page 29

The Sambhavnath Ni Khadki is an intriguing ancient Jain temple with an unassuming entrance, an open courtyard dominated by domes, and a hidden place of worship in the basement. Threatened by Muslim invasions, the temple had to be camouflaged. For those who cannot descend the steep steps, a mirror in the backyard offers a reflected image of the deity.

We then walked through the historic Fernandez Bridge passing through Rani-no-Haziro, Badhshah-no-Hazero and Chandla Ol that now sells ethnic Indian wear and junk jewellery. Around 11 am every day, a second-hand book market springs up under the bridge with thousands of old college books sold in carts. Just beyond the book-stalls are rows of shops that sell temple accessories.

We continued walking south to cross Relief Road, one of the main roads that cuts across the city. It was built after the first road of the city, Gandhi Road (originally Richie Road), got too crowded. This parallel straight road was constructed to provide relief from the heavy traffic – and was named accordingly.

Moving through the historic Fernandez Bridge brought us to Manek Chowk, a narrow lane bustling with shops selling brass lamps. It is one of the country's biggest jewellery markets. We passed by scores of gold and diamond shops lining these lanes. It is named after Manek Baba and his temple.

At night, after the jewellers pull down their shutters, this street gets transformed into a food street which is open till 1 am. Food carts, peddling an amazing variety of food ranging from chocolate pizzas, pineapple sandwiches to soda pop and *kulfi*, swarm the road.

Our walk culminated in the serene Jumma Masjid, one of the enduring landmarks of the city located in the midst of the chaos of Gandhi Road. Claimed to be the city's oldest mosque, it flaunts 256 pillars, intricate filigree work and a fountain at the centre of the compound.

A unique feature of this mosque is that it is an amalgamation of Hindu, Jain and Islamic architecture. It is considered to be the first mosque in India that allowed women to enter and pray. Another interesting thing about the mosque is that it has a separate chamber for women to pray. A carved stone curtain let women see without being seen. Constructed in AD 1423 the mosque was established by Sultan Ahmedabad Shah. The mosque houses the graveyard of three great rulers—Ahmedabad Shah, his son and his grandson. We returned spellbound by the old world charm of Ahmedabad and reassured that heritage is definitely the essence of this city. ■

FOR HERITAGE WALKS**Contact 093270 21686****Timings: 8 am to 10.30 am****GETTING****Film director taps his own life for inspiration****Saibal Chatterjee**

New Delhi

FEW debut films in the history of Indian cinema have elicited the kind of unstinted critical praise that has come the way of the uncompromising and disquieting *Fandry*.

Written and made by poet and first-time director Nagraj Manjule, the Marathi-language film is a scathing indictment of the caste system whose tentacles are still embedded deep in Indian society.

The 105-minute film does not wield the sledgehammer until it rolls into its concluding stretch. When it does, the blow is precise and telling.

Fandry builds itself up to a shocking climax through narrative means that are unambiguous but subtle.

It narrates the story of an adolescent 'untouchable' boy who wages a losing battle in a bid to close the unbridgeable gap between his lowly social status and his urge to break free from the imposed shackles of his identity.

Manjule tells the story with such disarming charm and remarkable restraint that it is difficult to anticipate its angry finale.

"It is really my own story," says Manjule, who was born in a family of stone-cutters and grew up in a small village of Solapur district amid poverty and deprivation.

During his growing-up years, he faced constant discrimination and humiliation on account of the fact that he belonged to the Kaikadi community that made a living by making wicker baskets and digging pits for the construction industry.

"There is very little fiction in *Fandry*," says Manjule. "It is only a rearrangement of events that have actually occurred in my life and in the lives of my siblings, cousins and uncles."

The honesty that lies at the heart of the film has helped *Fandry* make an instant connect with audiences wherever it has been screened.

Since its hugely successful world premiere at the 2013 London Film Festival, it has won a string of awards and accolades.

Fandry bagged the Jury Grand Prize at the 15th Mumbai Film Festival last October. It was also chosen for the inaugural Film of the Year award instituted by the India chapter of the International Federation of Film Critics.

Although Manjule does not see *Fandry* as an outright revolt against the kind of feel-good, escapist films that dominate Indian cinema, he does agree that it is an attempt to correct an imbalance.

"The films that get into distribution in India have no space for characters that exist outside the

CASTE EXPOSED



Nagraj Manjule shooting his film



A poster of *Fandry*



A still from the film

charmed circle of the rich, powerful and socially privileged," he says.

"Characters who look and live like me and my people are never portrayed," adds Manjule. "Our cinema would have us believe that all is well with our society. It is in constant denial of the continuing existence of the scourge of the caste system in our midst."

Manjule made his way out of his village thanks to education. "My real-life father was very different from the fictional father in *Fandry*. He was determined to educate us," he says.

He, however, laments that 90 per cent of the Kaikadi community, including his own extended family, still languishes at the bottom of the social heap despite the availability of avenues of education.

After an MA in Marathi Literature from Pune University, Manjule went to the New Arts and Science College in Ahmednagar although at that point in his life he had no idea what he was cut out for.

His first shot at filmmaking, the National Award-winning short title, *Pistulya*, focused on the obstacles that a young boy faces in his quest for formal

'There is very little fiction in *Fandry*. It is only a rearrangement of events that have actually occurred in my life.'

education. Manjule admits that he never thought he would become a film director one day. "Until I was in high school I did not even know what a film director was," he says.

When it is pointed out to him that the 'explosive' final shot of his film is reminiscent of the climax of the Shyam Benegal classic, *Ankur*, he asserts that he hasn't seen the latter yet.

It took Manjule 40 days to write *Fandry* (meaning 'pig' in the Kaikadi dialect) and he cast mostly non-actors in the film. With the exception of theatre and screen actor Kishor Kadam and Chhaya Kadam, the cast is composed of actors who had never faced the

movie camera before.

The protagonist of *Fandry*, Jambuwan Mane, Jabya to his friends and family, goes to a village school where a teacher ironically tells his students that it isn't a good idea to judge people by their appearances. But the boy is never allowed to forget who he is.

Jabya has a massive complex about his looks and the clothes he wears. So while his poverty-stricken father struggles to raise money for the wedding of a daughter, the boy looks for means to buy a new pair of trousers.

His family lives on the edge of the village and is summoned by members of the higher castes only when runaway pigs, considered unholy and inauspicious, have to be trapped and chased away.

Jabya's personal problems are aggravated by the fact that he is infatuated with Shalu, a fair-skinned Brahmin classmate, but cannot gather enough courage to express his feelings for her.

The young boy has only two friends in the village, classmate Piry and bicycle repairman Chanakya. The latter, himself a victim of caste violence, advises Jabya that he should look for a black sparrow whose ashes would serve to fulfil his heart's desire.

Manjule presents the non-existent black sparrow that Jabya and Piry search for as a stinging metaphor for the obvious impossibility of the protagonist finding love across the caste divide.

Jabya's alcoholic father, Kachru (Kishor Kadam), is reconciled to his identity, but the boy nurtures aspirations to rise above his fate.

But the black sparrow that he hopes will help him escape his lot in life is as much of a myth as all the others that state and society have constructed in order to sustain the status quo.

The final 15 minutes of *Fandry*, which signify the release of long-suppressed frustration within Jabya, add up to a sequence of such unsettling power that it feels like a knockout punch in the face.

The defining sequence of *Fandry* is one in which Jabya is brought face to face with reality when, in the town fair, his festivities are cut short by his own father. The boy, attired in a new shirt, is brought down from his perch on Chanakya's shoulder and forced to carry a gaslight on his head.

"The act symbolises the darkness that surrounds the very boy who must carry the burden of a source of light," explains Manjule, who plays the role of Chanakya.

On 11 January, *Fandry* was screened at the Pune International Film Festival. It was a homecoming for Manjule. "The response was overwhelming," says the director.

"The standing ovation continued for six minutes all the way till the end of the credits scroll," he says. "Nobody left the auditorium."

Fandry is scheduled for commercial release in Maharashtra and Belgaum, Goa, Indore and Jabalpur on 14 February, Valentine's Day.

"The date has been consciously chosen," says Manjule. "*Fandry* is a love story but not of the kind that movie audiences in India are accustomed to consuming. Why should the celebration of love be the preserve of a few chosen segments of the country?"

Given the power that *Fandry* packs and the universal relevance of its core message, there is reason to believe that it would find takers in every city and town of this country.

Nagraj Manjule is an original new voice in Indian cinema and his debut feature deserves to travel beyond the borders of Maharashtra. ■

Litfest captures Kolkata's *adda* spirit

Anjana Basu
Kolkata

THE inauguration of the fifth Apeejay Kolkata Literary Festival at the Victoria Memorial caused quite a stir since its chief guest was well-known actor Aamir Khan. The litfest coincided with the 125th birth anniversary of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Aamir Khan is one of his best-known descendants.

All at once, the inauguration became the event of the day not just for the literati, but for the city's stargazers. The phones at the Oxford Bookstore were jammed with requests for passes and, if the Victoria Memorial organisers were to be believed, Apeejay staff became hoarse, politely refusing.

Aamir said the Maulana's philosophy of following one's heart inspired him when he acted in Rajkumar Hirani's famed film, *Three Idiots*. He said he had been planning a biopic of his illustrious uncle for quite some time. The audience at the Victoria Memorial cheered and demanded a date for the yet-to-be made movie's premiere, led by Syeda Hameed, whose book, *Maulana Azad, Islam & the National Movement*, was released.

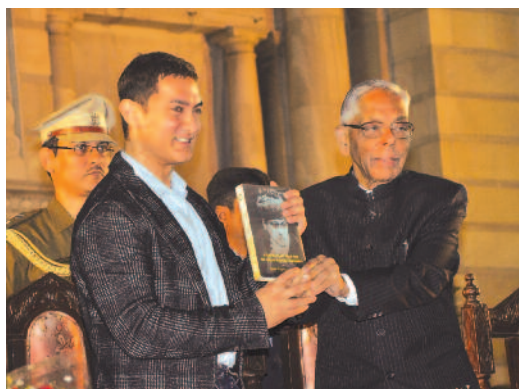
Aamir commented that Kolkata has an inexhaustible wealth of culture and West Bengal Governor M.K. Narayanan declared the festival open.

The inauguration was followed by the festival dinner. Last year, Shobhaa De was a lively participant. This year there was Anita Nair who had been part of the Kolkata Literary Fest at the Book Fair and was new to the Apeejay Litfest. She commended the thought that had been put into programming the festival and spoke briefly about the launch of her latest book, *Idris the Light Bearer*. However, the buzz of the evening continued to be Aamir and his retinue of bodyguards and attendants, including a hairdresser.

But, glitterati aside, part of the Apeejay Litfest's focus this year was on education and women's rights. The social condition of the Indian woman was discussed, beginning with her right to sexuality and equity. Bina Ramani then launched her inspirational memoirs. Since the subject hinged on unfair arrests, Rita Bhimani, the moderator, interjected a Tarun Tejpal note by wanting to know how Ramani felt about the fall of a man to whom she owed a great debt.



Rita Bhimani, Syeda Hameed, Bina Ramani and Bhaichand Patel



Aamir Khan and M.K. Narayanan

There was a *mélange* of book launches and author discussions peppered with Urdu literature, given the focus on Maulana Azad. Shamsur Rahman Faruqi's tome, *Mirror of Beauty*, translated from Urdu, was released along with Mani Shankar Mukherjee's *Thackeray Mansions*. Authors hung out in the Writers Lounge and talked, fuelled by cups of hot sweet tea and rather nice cookies.

Compared to the Jaipur Litfest, the Apeejay Litfest is rather tiny and has an almost homely drawing-room feel. Most events took place at the iconic Oxford Bookstore on Park Street. But then, Kolkata is well-known for the intimacy of its *addas*.

Writer Nighat M. Gandhi, who first came a couple of years ago, was happy that the Litfest did not have the brashness of the Jaipur one but she added that it had probably grown by now. It certainly has. Discussions now continue over six days and are scheduled back-to-back. Writers reflect diverse cultures like Egypt, China, Ghana as well as neighbouring Bangladesh, Pakistan and Nepal.

The venue shifts from the Victoria Memorial to the Park Hotel to the Town Hall and St John's Church. This year, the venerable Tollygunge Club lent its overstuffed armchairs and wooden floors for a discussion on the Raj between Mark Tully and Farrukh Dhondy.

Usha Ramaswamy, author, says the Kolkata Litfest is small and manageable, not like the Jaipur one, 'so at least it has the quality of intimacy – people can hope to meet writers and interact and we should keep it that way'. But she added that it preaches to

the converted. Her theory is that beyond the usual suspects, awareness does not spread unless an Aamir Khan arrives to electrify the city. Invitations are reserved for the select few.

Kolkata does have Jhumpa Lahiri who comes to visit her relatives and attends both the city's literary festivals. There are several other well-known writers like Romesh Gunsekera, Rana Dasgupta and Gloria Steinem on its growing list.

Of course, Jaipur has a four-year head-start over Kolkata and the advantage of palaces with sprawling lawns, and proximity to New Delhi, the heart of publishing in India. Buttonholed outside the Rosewood Hall, journalist Bachi Karkaria pointed out that literary festivals were obviously filling a hunger for reading and offered an option to the mall and multiplex life because they were spreading across the country. She mentioned the one at Patna and said that her own experience was of audiences doubling with every successive year.

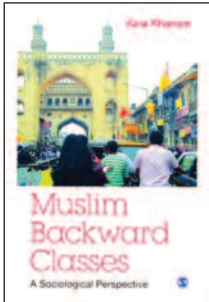
It is a truth universally acknowledged that Kolkata is a city of readers, of poets, writers and, of course, inveterate gossip. Kolkata loves nothing better than asking questions that go on and on, spiralling into an endless debate.

At a gathering of young writers, a man listening in burst into a tirade about the arrogance of youth and their lack of life's experiences. There was Naipaul bashing but then the crabby old man seems to have become grist for everyone's mill these days.

Gunsekera said that he liked the way the festival was arranged with panel discussions that did not compete with each other. For Kolkata it all started with the Book Fair with its hustle and bustle and the presence of authors from various countries. The Apeejay Litfest borrowed the same atmospherics, moving it to other venues and retaining the book-seller link in its own inimitable way.

This year, too, the logo of the Apeejay Litfest had a Kolkata connect, a curving fish in conjunction with the white lotus, which stands for knowledge and enlightenment. Five is a landmark year for an event that began in 2010. As Maina Bhagat, director of the fest, said, the second week of January has now become synonymous with the Apeejay Literary Festival. ■

‘Muslim OBCs are powerless’



MUSLIM BACKWARD CLASSES: A sociological perspective

Azra Khanam
Sage
₹ 795

Civil Society News
New Delhi

PIHANI is a mundane historic town in Hardoi district of Uttar Pradesh. It is of little interest to anyone except perhaps Azra Khanam, Research Associate at the Dr K.R. Narayanan Centre for Dalit and Minorities Studies in Jamia Millia Islamia.

Azra went back to her roots in Pihani to do extensive fieldwork in Pihani block and survey 11 sample locations. She wanted to understand the economic and social inequalities that Muslim OBCs (Other Backward Classes) living in Pihani faced. What sort of life did they lead?

Her book, *Muslim Backward Classes: A Sociological Perspective* is important because it is a thorough study of Muslim OBCs at the grassroots and confirms what activist groups have been saying all along about their neglect. Azra also provides a national perspective.

According to some estimates, nearly 40 per cent of the Muslim community consists of OBCs.

They are people who work as tailors, weavers, barbers, milkmen, *dhobis*, butchers and are at the lowest rung of Muslim society. Mostly, they converted over a period of time from Hinduism to Islam.

Historically, such communities occupied a low status in Hindu society and some were treated as untouchables. But while the benefits of reservation were extended to Dalit Hindus, Muslims who practised these same professions were left out since it was believed that by converting to Islam they would be freed of discrimination.

That, however, did not happen. Social activist Ali Anwar and the Pasmanda Muslim Mahaz have for long been pointing out the discrimination they suffer. The Sachar Committee Report, too, confirmed that Muslim OBCs lag behind socially and economically.

Khanam's research of Pihani is in depth. She has mapped the local Muslim community's literacy levels, family, marriage, work participation, religious practices, landholdings and basic amenities. Nearly 77 per cent of Muslims in Pihani did not have electricity and 60 per cent relied on a hand pump for drinking water. They are surprisingly politically

active. But they don't access government schemes.

There is a hierarchy among Muslim OBCs among the various professions they follow. So they tend to marry among their own community. Khanam's book also brings out the syncretist nature of Islam at the grassroots. Most Muslim OBCs retain some of their indigenous social practices.

Azra Khanam spoke to *Civil Society* about her book and her perspective on what should be done for Muslim OBCs. Excerpts:

Does your study confirm the findings of the Sachar Committee Report? Or has the status of Muslim OBCs improved, perhaps marginally?

Yes, my study confirms the findings of the Sachar Committee Report. The status of Muslim OBCs is very poor. The level of literacy among Muslim OBCs is very low and, among females, very disheartening. The book has clearly described the literacy level of the respondents, their educational profile as well as the school orientation of the children in the sample population.

You conducted extensive fieldwork in Hardoi district of UP. Was there any specific reason for choosing this area?

I conducted a survey in Pihani block of Hardoi district. Ten villages, with a large concentration of the Muslim population, were selected for the study. This is my hometown. I have been watching this society very closely since my childhood. Their backwardness compelled me to think about it. I thought that I should raise the issue of people who are socio-economically and educationally backward. I have always thought about issues related to women who are subjugated, depressed

and marginalised among the Muslim community which is extremely tradition-bound. The marginalisation of the people in Hardoi was the real reason for my choosing the area.

Your research reveals that the plight of Muslim women among OBCs is especially bleak. How did you manage to speak to them? Was it difficult?

Yes the condition of Muslim OBC women is very bleak. They are not literate and they are nowhere in decision-making, especially in the economic affairs of the family. They do not know about the economic assets of their own family. They are deprived from religious and secular education. They are unaware of their rights as Muslims or as citizens of the country. Authority is vested in the male members of the family. This is very common. It is the basic characteristic feature of a patriarchal social structure. It was difficult but not impossible to interact with Muslim OBC women. Women from the villages were introverts and very shy because of lack of exposure and education. They do not know about the world outside the four walls of their homes.

What action would help Muslim OBC women?

Each and every course of action related to welfare, that is, education, health, basic amenities and skill development programmes will help Muslim OBC women. It is the responsibility of every educated male and female to work on this issue. There is need to conduct research on issues related to women. Emphasis should be given to education and gender sensitisation programmes as well as group discussions with the community. To bring about any change in the status of women, the mindset of the society they live in has to change.

What sort of reservation policy would you favour for Muslim OBCs?

Reservation is meant to provide opportunities to the weaker and vulnerable sections of society. In India's pluralistic society, a reasonable representation of various communities in public and private sector employment is essential to enhance participatory governance. But Muslims in general, and Muslim OBCs in particular, are under represented in government jobs and decision-making positions. This results in the powerlessness of the community.

In a democratic nation like India we need to focus on equality, which can be achieved through distributive justice and the distribution of resources on the basis of equity. Equality can be ensured only through providing equality of opportunity by providing reservation so that weaker and marginalised sections of society can participate in the development process and contribute to nation-building. Had reservation not been there for SC/STs, their socio-economic and educational condition would not have improved as it did.

In the Sachar Committee Report, states like Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Bihar are mentioned as model states in terms of reservation for Muslim OBCs. The Ranganath Mishra Committee Report presented in Parliament in December 2009 has recommended 15 per cent reservation for minorities: 10 per cent for Muslims and five per cent for the rest of the minorities.

What can be done to boost school education for Muslim children in Hardoi?

During my fieldwork in Pihani block I found that the main cause of the low level of education is poverty. In a few villages, the lack of schools is the main reason for educational backwardness. Due to poverty, parents engage children in their traditional occupation at an early age.

The state is making efforts. It has committed itself to providing elementary education under Article 45 of the Directive Principles of State Policy. In 2002, education as a fundamental right was endorsed through the 86th Amendment to the Constitution. Despite this commitment, the number of out-of-school children is alarmingly high. We need to understand the importance of education. There is a great need for community efforts to improve education. The number of educated people among Muslim OBCs is very low. But sensitisation of the community is required to motivate them to send their children to school. ■



Azra Khanam



Andretta blues

ANDRETTA is a historic village in Himachal Pradesh's Kangra Valley. In the 1930s, Norah Richards, an Irish theatre activist

and playwright, started an intense revival of Punjabi theatre and culture here. Richards wanted to convert Andretta into India's first artists village.

She invited famous potter Gurcharan Singh, and portrait painter late Sobha Singh, to Andretta. The village soon became a hub of the arts. Amrita Pritam spent time here. It was also a stepping stone for Prithviraj Kapoor's acting career.

Norah Richards' dream was not realised but pottery lives on in Andretta. Gurcharan's son, Mansimran Singh, and his wife, Mary, run the Andretta Pottery and Craft Society that still makes delicate blue pottery. The society has a studio and a terracotta museum.

Residential courses in art pottery are offered for three months and students acquire skills to set up their own pottery unit. ■

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Kettle & cup

SIX years ago Tenzin Dolkar decided to start a small business in tea things – cups, mugs and kettles. She named her business Snow Lion. A Tibetan settled in Dharamsala, a town in Himachal Pradesh, Tenzin invested her own modest funds and began a pottery unit. "It is run by my mom, my sister and me. Actually, only me," she says with a smile.

Tenzin has a shop in Dharamsala's main market. She says Indian tourists love to buy her products. This is her first trip to Delhi, thanks to the Dastkari Haat Samiti, and she is happy that the response at Dilli Haat, a crafts bazaar, has been good. The kettles and mugs are neat with pretty Tibetan designs etched on them. There are dragons and flowers in a riot of colours, from bright yellow to sombre blue.

But it isn't only tea products that Tenzin propagates. Her stall spouts Buddhist philosophy. There are posters with quotes from the Dalai Lama that gently urge people to curb negative emotions like greed and enhance positive ones like compassion. Tea is, after all, associated with serenity and peace. ■



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