

Civil Society

NEW POLICY TRIGGERS FEARS, ASPIRATIONS



BIG RETAIL SMALL FARMER



'PAY MORE FOR WATER IN GURGAON'

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Administrator, HUDA
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Naye AVASAR
Nayee UMMEED
Nayee DISHA

नए अवसर
नई उम्मीद
नई दिशा

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Indian farmers need much better access to markets. But are big international retail chains the solution? Or will they trigger other problems? Voices from the countryside.

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Civil Society

READ US. WE READ YOU.

Small rural voices

OUR cover story this month comes mainly out of rural West Bengal. We chose West Bengal because the Trinamool Congress, which is in power there having recently and heroically defeated the Left, played a key role in stalling a policy on bringing foreign investments into retail chains in India.

West Bengal is typified by small landholdings. There has also been a recent history of conflicts over land acquisition by the private sector.

We thought it would be interesting to hear what these small farmers have to say about their situation and their aspirations. What are their fears regarding big retail?

These voices out of West Bengal can also perhaps be seen as being representative of what small farmers are thinking elsewhere – in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, the poorer parts of Uttar Pradesh. This is in much the same way as big farmers in Punjab and Maharashtra represent a certain interest group in the rural economy.

From West Bengal the message we get is one of confusion and stress. It should be a national priority to change that to a sense of mission and purpose.

The farmers we spoke to are clearly worried about the stranglehold retail chains may have on them in the future. They fear they will lose their small plots, which is all they have. But significantly they also bemoan the fact that they lack infrastructure and don't get a fair price for their produce. They long to be freed from the grip that middlemen have on their lives.

Clearly, the small farmers can't go on like this. Reforms are needed, but the question is of what kind.

Given the scale of the problems in our farm sector, the solutions will have to be both entrepreneurial and driven by government. Investments will have to be made in infrastructure and technology. A fresh approach is required to collection and storage. Such initiatives don't necessarily have to involve FDI. There is enough capital for them in the country itself. But, on the other hand, in today's world what is wrong with money coming in as long as checks and balances are applied?

The problem as we see it is one of governance. It is precisely because of the absence of regulation that the current *mandi* system under performs and middlemen do as they please. If the government has the vision and the resolve it is possible to draw on private capital and expertise and use both to the advantage of our rural areas.

Unfortunately, reforms haven't been grown through consensus and shaped to suit Indian realities. They are viewed with fear and suspicion and are seen as a tool that the rich in India use to get richer. Policies like the one on special economic zones (SEZs) have left many ordinary rural people shaken. There is little trust.

But the fact also remains that people in rural areas want better systems and higher standards of living. Farmers would like to see the prices they get go up. They await infrastructure which could save up to 40 per cent of their produce.

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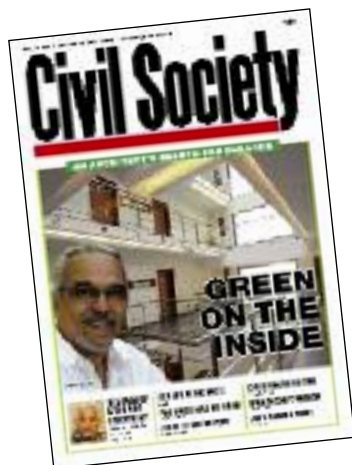


IN THE LIGHT

by SAMITA RATHOR



LETTERS



Green architect

The story on Shahrugh Mistry's brand of architecture was enlightening. He has aptly combined green technology with aesthetics and humanism. It is very rare to get this combination. The green building movement has spread in India due to the work of architects like him who have trained younger architects and inspired them. Even crusty, old-fashioned builders today suddenly

want to turn green. But as Shahrugh says, green is not just bland science. So the heading of your cover story was apt – you have to be green on the inside.

*Rohan, Shahana and Preetha
Gurgaon*

I like the neat lines of Shahrugh Mistry's work. It's not fussy or cluttered. It makes you feel part of the natural world.

Shikha

May Shahrugh Mistry lead a long and healthy life. India needs him.

Gautam

Women drivers

Kudos to Azad Foundation for taking the initiative of training women to become drivers with commercial licenses. Their programme, 'Women on Wheels' must be a healing touch for underprivileged, aspiring women. The course is very comprehensive: day and night time driving, driving in heavy rain, how to read road maps, communicate in English, know legal aspects, first aid and computer knowledge. This NGO, which is tackling social issues,

must be a paradigm to other organizations. The women who have become drivers must have become more confident and their economic condition too would have improved. I would like to wish Azad Foundation more success in their endeavours.

*Sunil Bathini
sunilbathini@rediffmail.com*

Azad Foundation's programme is a very comprehensive one. Even seasoned male drivers don't know first aid, legal issues etc. Perhaps driving schools in Delhi could take a cue from them.

Amita Harriet

AFSPA

I agree with Wajahat Habibullah's views on the situation in Kashmir. In recent months people have demonstrated that they want peace and development. They are sick and tired of violence and of being at the receiving end of militancy. The panchayat and municipal elections and the desire of young Kashmiris to be part of the civil services shows that they want to serve the people of the state and be

part of the India growth story. Elected members are not very aggressive about fulfilling their promises to the people. Maybe we need to give them more time. Perhaps they need capacity building and confidence building measures.

Hashim

I think removal of AFSPA has needlessly become a political hot potato. It should be calmly discussed, as Wajahat Habibullah, says with the army. To give people some relief, provisions of AFSPA could be changed so that the law becomes more humane. Also, what kind of police reforms should be done in Jammu and Kashmir must be discussed. Every state in India has its own security issues and reforms should take place accordingly. One size won't fit all.

Shankar Ganesh

CORRECTION

In the story, 'Chef lights up humble kitchen' the quantity of ingredients mentioned in the recipe, 'Onion and Carrot Croquettes' was wrong. The quantity of onions and carrots required is 250 gm each and not 250 kg. The error is regretted.

Editor

INTERVIEW Praveen Kumar says HUDA has str

'Water will be priced much

Civil Society News
Gurgaon

PUTTING Gurgaon into shape is no easy challenge. From the lack of civic amenities to corruption among officials and politicians and the defiance of builders, the list of problems to be fixed is a daunting one.

But Praveen Kumar, 51, the new Administrator of the Haryana Urban Development Authority (HUDA) has plunged in with a zeal and daring that is rarely seen among Indian bureaucrats.

When we link up with him it is eight in the morning and he has already been on the road for a couple of hours. We are supposed to have breakfast together, but instead we head for Silver Oaks, one of Gurgaon's innumerable gated communities. The residents want Kumar to spend time with them and listen to their problems.

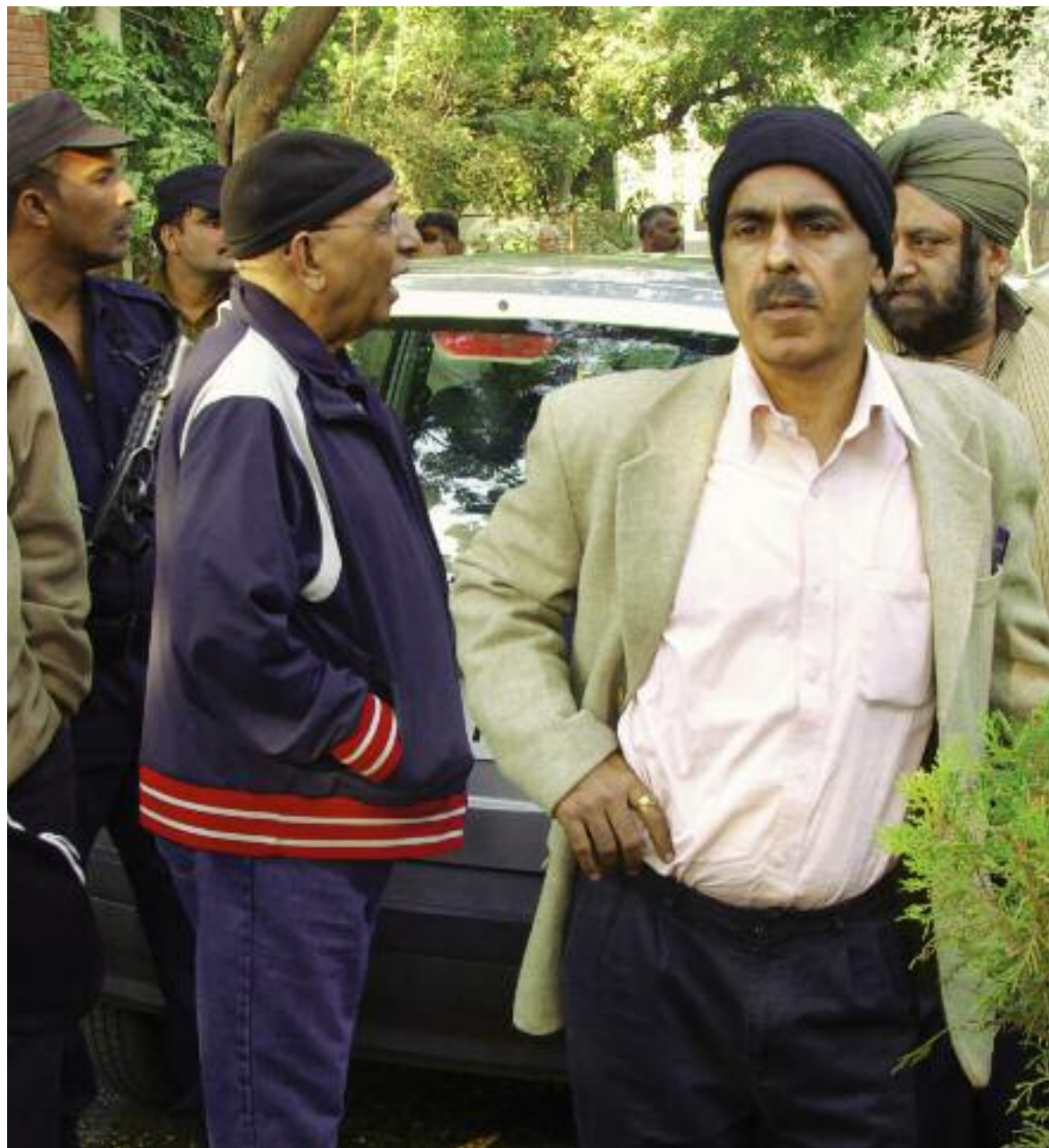
He walks through the neighbourhood with them, examining dustbins for design flaws and discussing how footpaths can be restored. There are residents who believe that Silver Oaks can be turned into a "mini Singapore" – at least as far as some amenities go. They want open spaces protected and community assets revived. Kumar gives them examples from around the world. He tells them about Bogota and how it was transformed into a city of walkways, cycle paths and bus lanes.

From Silver Oaks, the Administrator is off to Sector 29 in Gurgaon where a restaurant called Park Baluchi has appropriated public land for its kitchens and deep-freeze. More land on the other side has been taken over by the restaurant for throwing open-air parties. These spaces are really meant to be green corridors linking up with a rambling park called Leisure Valley, a precious green spot in concrete Gurgaon. But Park Baluchi now illegally sits in between.

Kumar's notices to Park Baluchi have had no effect. So, this time he has turned up with cranes and a demolition squad and they begin tearing down structures. Cooks and their helpers scurry about trying to save what they can. But the Blue Star freezers are massive and getting them out of there isn't going to be easy. So, it is decided that Blue Star will be called in to help undo this land-grab by Park Baluchi.

The manager, a Sikh with a grey beard, pleads for more time. Kumar tells him that he had been given 15 days but did nothing. With the Sikh manager trailing him, Kumar goes next door to the Lemon Tree Hotel. Though a new and modern enterprise, the hotel is also happily occupying land which doesn't belong to it. Once again the cranes swing into action – tearing and uprooting railings.

The next stop is the Qutab Plaza market where shops using the pedestrian areas to display their



Praveen Kumar, HUDA Administrator, on one of his rounds in Gurgaon

goods are in for a rude shock. In a rapid raid, bottles of cold drinks, packets of chips, chocolates, clothes, sewing machines are carried away to waiting trucks. An old rusted bicycle chained to a tree is hacked free and seized. Suddenly the corridors open up and are free of encroachments – a long standing demand of residents.

For several years now, Gurgaon has witnessed a free-for-all. Kumar has decided to deal with it with his own dose of heavy action. In the few months that he has been Administrator of HUDA, he has raised public expectations and cracked down on violators. Citizens, tired of a slothful administration, are looking upon Kumar as a savior.

He has set a pace which has everyone guessing. But Kumar also goes much beyond raids and the dramatic big ticket action, as we discovered in the course of a long interaction. Edited excerpts:

Gurgaon has so many problems which you have inherited. What are your priorities?

I am a person who starts with basics. I am not a person who has a plan first. I am very sensitive to the environment and I would do anything to improve it. I am a keen mountaineer and I have trained as a sky diver too with the Indian Air Force. Whatever I do should bring some joy into people's lives. I believe the other person's life is an intrinsic part of

ong laws and will use them to fix things higher in Gurgaon'

SHAMIK BANERJEE



ervation, percolation dams and check dams. We have examined the cheapest and most viable structures. I'm very cost conscious and quality conscious.

Water harvesting will save roads and conserve water. It's even more critical in Gurgaon than in Faridabad. We have a lesser band of white water here. We will promote rooftop water harvesting. We would like to put a price on water. People are just sinking tubewells and using water. Water is not priced so no one is concerned. When water runs out after 10 years, what is going to happen?

'On that same one acre where 10 to 15 jhuggies were built we can get as much as 500,000 square feet of space for low-cost housing. We will follow the Mumbai model and go vertical.'

How will you price water?

We will be putting water meters. We have already identified the ones we want. We have been in discussions with the Municipal Corporation of Delhi on this. The good thing about those meters is that they can't be fudged.

But right now water is being supplied by the developers and it is all groundwater.

We will give people a timeframe. Right now people buy mineral water for ₹10 or ₹12 a bottle. But look what the government is giving you. For only ₹3 or ₹4, three to four thousand litres are supplied. We will make it necessary for people to use water meters. I want to give Gurgaon's citizens good and cheap models. We have identified a good percolation dam design for only ₹30,000 or ₹40,000. It requires low maintenance, percolates more water and can be cleaned. I would say water is our most critical priority.

But people won't want to pay for water.

We will educate people, create awareness and bring them together. We can also be strict. There is a Water Conservation Act, an Environment Act, and the groundwater board authority authorizes you to

take care of this resource otherwise the country will be in bad shape.

Existing laws are good enough. We are not using them. Within HUDA itself I would like to completely check, like a census, the older water structures created and their efficacy.

And your other priorities?

One of the most important things which is going to happen in Gurgaon is the creation of low-cost housing. The Chief Minister has okayed the proposal. We have about 500 acres which is encroached. People are paying ₹5,000 for mosquito ridden, filthy places to goons who have occupied this land and built thousands of jhuggies. The poor are living in absolutely unhygienic conditions.

On that same one acre where 10 to 15 jhuggies were built we can get as much as 500,000 square feet of space for low-cost housing. We will follow the Mumbai model and go vertical. We will work out maintenance fees for those flats from the beginning. For ₹2,000 or ₹3,000 a month for 30 years a poor person will be able to get a clean place to stay with facilities. Or those flats can be given on rent. Community facilities and commercial spaces can be built there.

We are also requesting the Punjab and Haryana High Court to fast track cases of land encroachment rather than allow them to linger for 20 to 25 years. Such delays adversely hinder city plans. The court is sensitive to the issue.

We also want to design a city plan in which hawkers can be put into zones. Why should residents need to drive to shops which are at some distance? Why can't we have small, beautiful stalls, clean and regulated in the vicinity and regularized somewhere along the way? This is also a priority area for us.

The Aravallis is one of the oldest ecological systems in the world, much older than the Himalayas. But we are not protecting this environment. We cut it and burn it and uproot it. These rocks, this wildlife, this ancient ecological system is not being showcased. Look at Leisure Valley Park, it is more than 500 acres of green. Yet there is little awareness of our ecology.

Tourists don't stop in Gurgaon. But Gurgaon is full of history. This is where Eklavya trained. It is the only place in India to have a temple dedicated to Eklavya, one of the most outstanding disciples who ever lived in terms of his commitment and qualities. We want Gurgaon to be recognized as the city of Dronacharya and Eklavya. Nobody knows who Eklavya is. He is a forgotten soul.

But, if we may say so, Gurgaon is run by private developers not the government. The developers do pretty much whatever they please.

Governance exists. HUDA is asserting itself and so is the Town and Country Planning Department. We have called all the players whether it is Unitech or Ansals or DLF. They have been told to do things right otherwise we will do it for you. Videos of your misdeeds will be sent to the Chief Justice of the Punjab and Haryana High Court. If Sushant Lok's roads are not repaired, if their parks are not proper-

Continued on next page

your own life. This is part of my philosophy which I have assiduously followed wherever I have worked and I don't mind taking risks.

Gurgaon has bad roads, garbage problems, encroachments, no drainage, sewage... you must be having priorities?

Yes, of course, lots of them. We are already doing a lot of good work in around 20 to 25 areas. For example, there is water harvesting. We have interacted with the Soil and Conservation Department, the Irrigation Department, the Survey of India, and studied best practices all over the country – whether it relates to recycling, con-

Continued from previous page
ly maintained, HUDA can take over.

The government has all the laws in its hand. It has clear authority which overrides any private developer. The government is very strong.

HUDA is seen as a corrupt and inefficient organization. How do you propose to deal with that?

We are proposing to deal with it in two ways. We are trying to make our systems as transparent and as available as possible. We are putting up information on the Internet. So, if you have submitted an application for a completion certificate you will be able to track your application. You will know on whose table it is, when it went and how many days it took. The official concerned has to take a decision within a time frame. If there is an objection he has to say so. Or he has to justify the delay.

The second is a carrot and stick policy. Good work will be appreciated. If you do bad work you will be in trouble, serious trouble. We will create an environment which is conducive to good work.

The roads are full of potholes. Are you setting any standards for road construction?

We have already engaged the best people to guide us on the best parameters for roads whether it is building the right kind of water structures, the level of compaction, redesigning the road to ensure proper drainage, quality of bitumen etc.

We will clear garbage from zero point to end point. The present system of intermediaries is a failure. The system of garbage segregation at household level does not work. The garbage is mixed and hard to separate. I have studied international models and models at the department of new and renewable energy. We will create energy with it.

There is sewage all over.

We would like to recycle water which can be used for gardens etc. Water is a clear priority for us. Seventeen percolation points have been proposed in the Aravallis. The systems under the British will be revived, remodelled and restructured. Sukhrali has a pond which is 15 acres. It is deep and lying dry. We are planning to revive it and change it into a clear water lake.

If residents approach you and say they want to set up their own sewage treatment plant and utilise the water will you welcome it?

Yes, very much. Any good sustainable model is welcome.

Gurgaon also has a new Municipal Corporation. What is HUDA's relationship with it?

They are definitely the arms of the government. HUDA has presently more than 21,000 acres and MCG has about 3,000 acres to look after. But what matters is not how much land we have. We are already keen to work with each other. For example if MCG starts work on a road, we can complete it and share the costs.

HUDA is leading since it is a major player and because of circumstances. A unitary system in terms of governance is a better system than the agency system particularly for places which are large so as to ensure harmony. The government is very clear that we have to work like a committee. So whether it is me or the police or the Deputy Commissioner, or the Town and Country Planning Department we are all working as one. ■

BPNI's historic battle



Dr RK Anand

Heroic NGO celebrates 20 years

Civil Society News
New Delhi

SOME time in the early 1980s, Dr R.K. Anand, a paediatrician, returned from London to practice in Mumbai. One evening, he went to see a film. Advertisements preceded the main film. Dr Anand watched with deep dismay as one of the ad films cheerily told mothers that bonny babies came from tins of Glaxo milk powder. Dr Anand was working in a charitable hospital and he knew the reality was very different – weak, malnourished babies fed on bottled milk were dying of diarrhoea and pneumonia. But mothers who breastfed had healthier babies.

Almost 30 years later, Dr Anand still remembers that ad jingle and he sang it at the 20th anniversary celebrations of the Breastfeeding Promotion Network of India (BPNI) in New Delhi.

BPNI was founded on 3 December 1991 at Wardha in Maharashtra by a handful of doctors alarmed by the campaign unleashed by giant baby food companies inciting mothers to replace healthy breast milk with their canned

products. Since that historic day, BPNI has grown from six small groups in India to 250 groups in 166 countries called the International Baby Food Action Network, (IBFAN).

BPNI was then seen as a fringe group. It evoked amusement, recalled Dr Arun Gupta, founder and central coordinator of BPNI, who heard Dr Anand speak on breastfeeding at a hospital in Jalandhar and decided to join the Wardha meeting. Indian women breastfed their babies anyway, it was believed. But the founders of BPNI knew the truth was very different.

The bottle was replacing breast milk. Mothers threw away colostrum, the first breast milk critical for building the newborn's immunity. Harmful ideas on nutrition for infants were rampant. Poor feeding practices are the core reason for India's miserable infant mortality rate.

Twenty years later, the dedication of BPNI's founders has changed perceptions. Nutrition is now a priority for the Union Government, keen to lower infant and maternal mortality rates. BPNI's advice is sought. Dr Arun Gupta is a member of the Prime Minister's Council on

for 'mom-made'

PHOTOGRAPHS BY SHAMIK BANERJEE



Dr Arun Gupta



Anganwadi workers (in blue saris) and another health worker from Lalitpur district

India's Nutrition Challenges. And breastfeeding is included in the Approach Paper of India's 12th Plan.

A project in which BPNI was a partner, promoted breastfeeding and corrected infant feeding practices in Lalitpur district of Uttar Pradesh by training health workers. It dramatically improved the health of babies and reduced infant mortality rates.

"First you get ridiculed, you face opposition and then you get accepted," said Dr Gupta philosophically quoting Swami Vivekananda. The Union government has been supportive, he said.

"One of the biggest changes is that women do want to breastfeed. But they need support. That is missing," says Dr Anand. Today, Lactogen, Farex and Cerelac have faded away, points out Dr Gupta. The next generation of babies will benefit.

But the journey to success has been tough. Dr Anand, Dr Gupta, Dr JP Dadhich and Professor KP Kushwaha briefly recounted BPNI's troubled past and outlined the challenges ahead.

To beat back the powerful baby food industry, the NGO fought a persistent and heroic battle. In 1992, after years of lobbying, the Union government passed the Infant Milk Substitutes Feeding Bottles and Infant Foods (Regulation of Production, Supply and Distribution) Act or in

brief the IMS Act. This law restricts the marketing of infant milk substitutes, feeding bottles and infant food for babies.

But BPNI, which was put in charge of monitoring the Act, realized soon that companies did not listen and violations were rife. In 1994 Dr Gupta acting on behalf of ACASH (Association for Consumer Action on Health and Safety), an NGO founded by Dr Anand, filed a criminal complaint against Nestle for violating the IMS Act. The case is ongoing. ACASH has successfully forced companies like Johnson and Johnson, Lintas and retail chains like Shoppers' Stop to adhere to the IMS Act.

BPNI also got the Union government to ban advertisements of infant milk and infant food on television. In 2003 it got the government to ban promotion of baby milk and baby food for children under two years of age. "If we consider the way TV has boomed, imagine how feeding practices of babies would have been destroyed if the IMS Act did not exist," says Dr Gupta.

The NGO has beaten back WTO attempts to jettison the IMS Act. It has thwarted the ambitions of the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition

(GAIN), a conglomeration of multinationals who wanted to enter the Indian market to promote 'nutritious' foods to fight hidden hunger. It has resisted attempts to merge the IMS Act into the Food Safety Bill.

But while BPNI has succeeded in checking the decline in breastfeeding, rates have not dramatically increased. Dr Dadhich said that 20 million out of 26 million infants in India do not receive optimal breastfeeding despite India's adoption of international guidelines. In Delhi, just 20 per cent of women exclusively breastfeed their babies for six months.

He said though women did want to breastfeed they did not get information or support. They needed counselling services. For this training of health workers on a large scale was essential. Harmful beliefs still continued. So a sustained information campaign advertising breastfeeding was essential to counter industry.

Dr Dadhich also pointed out that there was still no effective mechanism to deal with violations of the IMS Act. To break the nexus between the healthcare system and industry was very difficult. BPNI has always highlighted that industry's financing of conferences for doctors represents a conflict of interest.

Women in the informal sector need maternity leave and maternity entitlements to exclusively breastfeed babies for six months. The Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana does give a maternity entitlement of ₹4,000 in three installments to pregnant and lactating mothers but it is inadequate. BPNI has been lobbying for ₹100 per day, the minimum wage, to be given to mothers at the anganwadi. It has pinned its hopes on the Food Security Bill.

BPNI is also replicating Lalitpur's Baby Friendly Community Health Initiative in Punjab's Ferozepur and Gurdaspur districts and in Andhra Pradesh. In Lalitpur district, the project was led by the Department of Paediatrics, BRD Medical College, Gorakhpur, in partnership with UNICEF, the district administration and the state government.

BPNI's training material was used to train 48 local graduate women as mentors in breastfeeding, complementary feeding, infant feeding and HIV counselling. The mentors in turn trained anganwadi workers, the ASHAs and dais, who then formed a 'mothers support group' which fanned out to villages, identifying pregnant women, doing home visits and counselling mothers.

In all the mentors trained over 3,330 village level workers who reached 84 to 90 per cent of mothers with advice. By 2008, breastfeeding within one hour of birth increased from 39.2 to 72 per cent, exclusive breastfeeding from 6.85 per cent to 50 per cent and introduction of complementary foods from 4.6 per cent to 85 per cent.

A group of anganwadi workers and ASHAs came to attend the BPNI meeting. "The training was most useful," says Rama Dubey, an anganwadi worker. "At first the mothers-in-law would not listen to us. So we began with our own families. When a severely underweight baby in my family became healthy thanks to my advice, the mothers-in-law finally got interested. Now, of course, our opinion is respected."

So what is needed are many more trained health workers, mentors specializing in nutrition, linked to an activist medical college or hospital. ■

Hall of Fame honour for eight

GAUTAM SINGH

Civil Society News
New Delhi

EIGHT new entrants to the Civil Society Hall of Fame 2011 were honoured at a special gathering at the India Islamic Cultural Centre on Lodhi Road in Delhi on 30 November.

A diverse audience drawn from different walks of life in the true spirit of civil society attended the event. It was a rare gathering of doctors, lawyers, activists, business leaders, journalists, teachers, students and ragpickers.

The Civil Society Hall of Fame is for people who make our world a better, happier and more inclusive place. These are people who live a life of action far from headlines and public gaze.

Visit civilsocietyonline.com to see a film of the event

Now in its third year, the Hall of Fame is an initiative by *Civil Society* magazine and the Azim Premji Foundation.

This year's entrants were chosen from a longer list of 30. They were identified in remote parts of the country. Some of them had never left their villages before.

There were:

- **Fatima Mynsong, Acquiline Songthiang and Matilda Suting** who have been fighting corruption in the village of Jongksha in Meghalaya.
- **Gyarsi Bai**, a tribal, from Baran district in Rajasthan where she has been freeing bonded labour.
- **Bashir Ahmad Mir** a peace crusader from Baramulla in Kashmir.
- **Kaippilly Jayan**, who campaigns for the jackfruit in Thrissur in Kerala.
- **Govind Desai** represented Urja Ghar which works to being communities together in Gujarat.
- **Chintakindi Malleshham** whose invention, the Laxmi Asu, has revolutionized the weaving of the Pochampalli sari in Andhra Pradesh.

The keynote speaker and chief guest of the



Entrants to the Hall of Fame 2011 with their citations

occasion was activist and National Advisory Council member Aruna Roy, who said *Civil Society* magazine had bridged the gap between India and Bharat.

Speaking on the 'Role of Civil Society', she congratulated the publication for having created and preserved the space for people's issues and struggles. She talked about how civil society has come to be defined in exclusive ways which keep out ordinary people.

Such people's names are hardly seen in a hall of fame – they are more likely to be found on BPL lists.

But it is these nameless people who were instrumental in getting fundamental laws like that of the right to information passed and implemented.

Roy recalled how Gyarsi Bai had faced physical assault in this very struggle. But it was people like Gyarsi Bai, with their extraordinary courage, who made the foundations of the country.

Roy said when her fellow campaigner, Sushila, who hadn't studied beyond Class 5 in school, was asked what she understood about RTI, she replied that when she could ask her son to account for the money she sent him to the market with, why

change agents

GAUTAM SINGH



Aruna Roy delivering the keynote address

GAUTAM SINGH



Chintakindi Mallesham with Dunu Roy and Dinesh Mohan

SHAMIK BANERJEE



Dr M.S. Swaminathan speaking before presenting the citations

GAUTAM SINGH



Fatima, Acquiline and Matilda sing an anti-corruption song in Khasi

GAUTAM SINGH



Gyarsi Bai, fourth from left, with other women from her group

couldn't she ask the government to account for the money it spent on behalf of the people. She understood her rights better than many educated people and had the conviction to fight for them.

To institute a hall of fame for such pioneers, Roy continued, was to "salute people's politics – the politics of humanitarianism and justice that asks for MGNREGA, not cash transfers, for a grievance redressal system, not for the UID."

"Recognizing people in this way is a way to get our own voices registered," she said. She was joined by the audience when she concluded her speech

with the slogan: 'We shall fight, we shall win.'

The citations were given away by Dr M.S. Swaminathan, known the world over as a path-breaking agricultural scientist and community leader. He commended the selection of the people being honoured and pointed out that all their work was interrelated.

"Freedom from corruption, for which one set of activists were fighting, is necessary for freedom from hunger which is another activist's domain," he said.

In particular, he mentioned Kerala's Jackfruit

Jayan, stressing that growing of jackfruit as an enterprise must be promoted. The growing of several commonplace crops in our country is ignored because we are unaware of their nutritional value, something which we can't afford to do while so many continue to face starvation.

Dr Swaminathan presented the citations after a small film on each one's work.

A highlight of the evening was an anti-corruption song sung in Khasi by Fatima, Acquiline and Matilda. They had composed it in Delhi the night before and recorded a background melody on

SHAMIK BANERJEE



The Sufi band, 'Chaar Yaar' with Madan Gopal Singh singing

GAUTAM SINGH



Govind Desai and Gyarsi Bai in conversation

GAUTAM SINGH



Bashir Ahmad Mir greeted by Shibani Bakshi, a fellow Kashmiri in the audience

GAUTAM SINGH



Aruna Roy talks with members of the audience

GAUTAM SINGH



Rita Anand, Umesh Anand and Viraf Mehta

their cell phone.

Speaking on behalf of the three, Fatima said they never believed that they would be recognized for their efforts to fight corruption in the distant village of Jongksha.

"To be here in Delhi is like a dream come true for us," she said.

Gyarsi Bai from Baran district, Rajasthan, talked about how bonded labour affects generations in a family. Workers' children remaining uneducated and because of their long hours the workers lose their health.

For years now, she has been striving for the release of bonded labourers, apart from working as an RTI-NREGA activist. She reflected the relentlessness of all change-makers when she said that her fight has a much bigger aim – the total eradication of bonded labour in the country.

Chintakindi Malleshham from Andhra Pradesh spoke in Hindi from a Telugu script. He accepted the award on behalf of all the illiterate innovators in the country and dedicated the public recognition he was receiving to his mother. After 30 years of wrapping a fine silk thread on an Asu with her right hand, she had impaired her vision and her shoulder. This had inspired him to invent a mechanical Asu.

Kaippilly Raman Jayan pledged to plant 100,000 jackfruit trees and continue his work as long as nature allowed him to do so.

Govind Desai accepted the award on behalf of Urja Ghar, "Such occasions encourage us to continue our work with renewed enthusiasm. Though our work is in Gujarat, we are in touch with Delhi as well."

The master of ceremonies for the evening was Viraf Mehta. The celebration concluded with Sufi music by the innovative band 'Chaar Yaar'. ■

Small dam, big rewards

Bharat Dogra
Jaipur

THREE small dams and anicuts in the Jaipur and Ajmer districts of Rajasthan are providing water to about 40 villages without causing any displacement. The achievements of these inexpensive structures, which cost just ₹1 crore to build, make big dams look rather small.

The water projects are located in Korsina village in Jaipur district and Mandvariya and Palona villages in Ajmer district. The Barefoot College, Tilonia Shodh Evam Vikas Sansthan and Prayatna have implemented all three projects.

For a long time, Korsina and its neighbouring villages in Dudu block suffered from acute water scarcity. These villages are located near Sambhar, a famous salt water lake. Because of their proximity to the lake, the groundwater here is brackish with high salt content. Villagers had been trying to find a solution to their water woes since ages. They finally stumbled upon the answer – hilltop rainwater harvesting.

Some centuries ago, they recalled, a traditional water collection structure had existed on a hilltop near their village. Its remains were still visible. However, over the years the structure had eroded. But it still stood there, badly damaged and covered in mud.

Villagers realized why their ancestors had chosen this spot for water collection. Water from four nullahs flows around this structure. It has a very good catchment area. A social worker, Lakshmi Narayan, began a campaign for building a people's dam here so that rainwater could be harvested again.

But Lakshmi Narayan died in a tragic road accident. So, the Barefoot College decided to take up the unfinished task which he had cherished so much. Belu Water, an organization in the United Kingdom, agreed to finance this project to the tune of ₹18.5 lakh. Barefoot College decided to build a small stone and cement dam and one more structure to contain the overflow.

This project was implemented with the help of Prayatna, a voluntary organisation. The catchment was first treated to increase its green cover. Bunds were provided to reduce water pressure on the hill's steep slopes. The soil and sand dug up from the main storage structure was used to build bunds further down the water path to increase recharge. The main storage structure can now store up to 15 million to 20 million litres of water.

If this water is not tapped on the hilltop, it begins its descent into the Sambhar lake and soon turns brackish. But when the water is stopped and collected near the hilltop, then potable sweet water becomes readily available to the people and animals of Korsina and nearby villages.

Several gaps have been created with stones to enable recharge. So less water is stored in the structure. Subsequently, when the gaps are filled with



The check dam on a hilltop which was built for Korsina

silt, water will also be stored for a longer time.

Just a year and a half after the completion of the Korsina dam, its beneficial impact is apparent. The water level has risen in almost 50 wells, several hand pumps and many ponds. Pipes from a central well in Korsina also take this water to nearby villages. So, the benefits of this increased water supply reach several other villages too.

Eventually at least 20 villages will gain, according to estimates by the Barefoot College. Directly or indirectly it is hoped that the project will benefit 13,874 villagers and 79,850 farm animals, including sheep and goats. It has also been estimated that this dam will help to recharge 106 handpumps, 36 open dug wells and 31 ponds. Also, project documents reveal that most of the project funds – nearly ₹10.5 lakh of the total budget of ₹18 lakh – were used to pay wages to local workers employed in the project. Nearly 3,196

persons were employed.

Of course future benefits will also depend on timely rains, but the project is structured such that moderate rains are enough to fill the storage space. So people have high hopes from this project.

Sonath Gurjar, an elderly villager says, "This project has been very beneficial. It is very well constructed. My experience of the previous year has been that the water level has risen in at least 50 wells. People not only got drinking water, a lot of land could be irrigated as well. Farm animals and wild animals could also quench their thirst. Apart from Korsina village, benefits also reached Sarthala and Nangal villages."

Sonath Gurjar then drew a neat diagram to show how this work can be extended by implementing a similar project lower down at Kankraya so that more water can be collected. He explained in detail how a natural water storage space exists there. By spending a little money an even higher quantity of water can be collected.

A few days later Ramkaran, a senior coordinator at the Barefoot College, returned to Korsina and worked with Sonath and other villagers to see how this water conservation work can be linked to the Kankraya site.

Similarly, in the villages of Mandavaria and Palona, appropriate sites were located so that more water can be collected at a lower cost. These two projects have the potential to help about 40,000 people and 70,000 animals in 20 villages and replenish hundreds of handpumps, wells and ponds, without displacing a single person. ■

Villagers had been trying to find a solution to their brackish groundwater since ages. They finally stumbled upon the answer – hilltop rainwater harvesting.

NCPRI tests out grievance redress

Civil Society News
New Delhi

TAKIYA Kale Khan is an obscure slum behind the highrises of Connaught Place. You could go round and round in circles trying to find it. On 15 December the slum became the venue for one of four camps held by the National Campaign for People's Right to Information (NCPRI) to register public grievances against government-run services.

The camps were meant to show on the ground the large number of grievances that people have against government services. At Takiya Kale Khan alone there was a steady stream of complaints. A Grievance Redressal Bill, tabled in Parliament on 22 December, would have to deal with this kind of flood.

The Bill was championed by the NCPRI to separate grievances from corruption and thereby lighten the load on an institution like the Lokpal.

The government's Grievance Redressal Bill creates a Central Public Grievance Redressal Commission and State Public Grievance Redressal Commissions. Reservation has been proposed to include women and Scheduled Castes and Tribes.

Government departments and ministries will have a Citizens' Charter informing people about the goods and services they provide with a timeline. Each department would also have an officer for redressing grievances and an information and facilitation centre where citizens can complain.

An independent empowered designated authority will be created above the grievance redressal officer. Citizens dissatisfied with the action taken by the grievance redressal officer can appeal to this designated authority. The grievance redressal officer too has to report what action he has taken on complaints to the empowered designated authority which will have the powers of a civil court.

The NCPRI has welcomed the Grievance Redressal Bill. But it said that the Bill has some shortcomings which if corrected can create a law that will empower people to claim their entitlements and bring about greater accountability.

First, the NCPRI has asked for the empowered designated authority to be at district or sub-district level and to be manned by proper technical staff. This authority should be independent of government control. Therefore, staff appointments should be handled by the Central or State Grievance Redressal Commissions.

Secondly, NCPRI said that an independent 'people's facilitation centre' in every rural block and municipal ward should be created instead of an information and facilitation centre embedded in each department. Officials in the department could prevent people from filing complaints or harass them.

At the 'people's facilitation centre' citizens will be able to register grievances without fear. This centre will send their complaints to the department/public authority concerned and track them. NCPRI wants a 'single window clearance' system.

The NCPRI camp at Takiya Kale Khan slum on 15



Mukesh, second from left, listening to grievances at the camp in Takiya Kale Khan

December, was an experiment to find out if grievances could be redressed in Delhi under its existing system, and if not what were the challenges of getting them resolved in a timely manner. Delhi has a Delivery of Services law.

The voluntary groups involved were the Satark Nagarik Sangathan, Josh, Pardarshita and the National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW), which works in Takiya Khan Kale.

Sitting inside a school in Takiya Kale Khan, a handful of volunteers diligently noted down complaints by a sea of residents, mostly women. Shivam and Siddharth were law students. Radhika was a student of public administration. Mukesh, a volunteer from the MKSS, was supervising the operation.

"We did an awareness camp a day earlier, but the people didn't need to be motivated," said Mukesh. "They are relieved that at least somebody is willing to listen to them."

Most complaints appeared to be about ration cards and pensions. A large percentage of residents were impoverished Muslims. A few had Above Poverty Line (APL) cards. Most residents did not seem to have access to any entitlement, though they knew what their rights were.

Ahmed Bi said she had been trying to get a ration card for the past 10 years. Her husband works as a vegetable vendor and earns a paltry amount. Her family has 10 members. "I just want a ration card, APL, BPL, whatever. We can't afford to buy food at market rates," she said.

A few steps away sat Fatima Bi, her eyes full of hope. "She is elderly, a widow and handicapped. But she doesn't get a single entitlement," explained Mukesh. "She has no death certificate, nor any handicapped certificate."

Another lady said she had lost her ration card and the department would not give her another. A group of women complained they had applied for

ration cards in 2006, received receipts but soon after the ration card department refused to recognize them.

So how much money did the ration card officials ask for? They must have been asked to grease some palms, surely. The women looked irritated. "Where is the question of paying bribes?" they replied in chorus. "Those fellows don't even talk to us. They just throw us out. Or they tell lies. I was told I can't get a ration card because my slum is classified as a jhuggi-jhonpri colony," said Ahmed Bi. Mukesh explained residents here are so poor, officials don't think it worth their while to ask them for bribes.

Those who did have ration cards said they never got their correct quota of food from the fair price shops. "Instead of 25 kg of wheat, we get only 10. As for rice, we get 5 kg instead of 10. Forget about getting oil and sugar," said Shabir and Farzana.

Ration cards were seen as prized possessions. The women also asked for Voter Identity Cards. Rupa, a resident, complained that she couldn't get a copy of her child's birth registration certificate and now her child can't get admission into school. There were also complaints about the local Municipal Corporation of Delhi's school.

Mukesh explained that they were working only as mediators. The complaints would be sent to the departments concerned. "People don't know how to write a complaint, where to go and deliver it," he said. The camps revealed that the Delhi government's Delivery of Services law did not cover even 10 per cent of the complaints registered. Most complaints were against the Food and Civil Supplies Department, MCD, DJB, the Education Department, Social Welfare Department, Health Department and the Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board.

The Grievance Redressal Bill should shake up these departments. But poorer people need a helping hand in the form of an independent people's facilitation centre. ■

Ingredients of a People's Budget

Vidya Vishwanath
New Delhi

THE Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability (CBGA) held a conference at the end of November to discuss the upcoming Union Budget. In 2006, CBGA and its partner organizations had started the People's Budget Initiative so that civil society groups, academia and people's movements could put forth their views on how the government should be spending its money.

Participants expressed concern about privatization of the education and healthcare sectors. The government, they said, is talking about a spate of measures like self-financed higher education institutes, maintenance grants and subsidized student loans. All these will boost privatization of education, including higher education. A very commercial kind of education should be avoided, it was felt.

There was also concern about unspent amounts in education because of a gap in allocations and releases. In many places Detailed Project Reports were not finalized and district and village level committee plans on spending this money had not been drawn up. As a result, utilization of funds on education in states varied widely.

More money needed to be allocated for training teachers and improving the quality of education, said participants. According to the Right to Education (RTE) Act, the teacher-to-student ratio to be targeted is 1:30. That means training 90,000 to 100,000 teachers in less than two years. Currently, money for training teachers comprises a paltry two to three per cent of the education budget.

The current number of out-of-school children is about 850,000. According to the RTE Act these children should be enrolled in bridge courses and admitted to classes commensurate with their age.

Governments are also expected to move on to providing universal secondary education by 2017.

Disquiet was expressed about institutes for higher education being started without any infrastructure. The government is talking about achieving 15 per cent enrolment in higher education. But this has been realized largely because of the growth of the private sector. Now there is talk of increasing enrolment to 30 per cent by 2020. It was felt that the government should consolidate all its education schemes and be flexible about



Pranab Mukherjee

how each state is going to implement them.

The panel also discussed the hazards of excessive privatization in the health sector. Participants demanded universal public healthcare with no payment at the point of service. The private sector in health, which has availed of government subsidy in the form of cheap land, should provide free services to the less advantaged. Healthcare must be seen as a social good. In the 12th Five Year Plan, at least 2.5 per cent of GDP should be set aside for healthcare.

Also of concern was the way public health workers were being compensated. The anganwadi workers, the Accredited Social Health Activist

(ASHA) and midday meal workers were all seen as 'voluntary' workers. This has now created a women workforce of 60,000 who are not employees of the government, have no rights and are poorly paid. There was a demand to make the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) a permanent entity and to regularize these workers. Rural health infrastructure needs to be built urgently.

There were suggestions that funds for social audit and administration in MGNREGA should be increased. It was noted that panchayat members were overburdened. Twelve members had to administer 214 centrally administered schemes. But only six per cent of money was set aside for administration. Most of it got spent at zilla level. It was felt that the amount being spent on administration should be increased to 10 per cent. Also, the district planning committee needed to be strengthened.

There was also a shortage of people to conduct the social audit. Speakers asked for an independent ombudsman. They cautioned that in many areas the private sector did not want MGNREGA because it deprived them of cheap labour. In food security, the demand was for a universal entitlement. Participants denounced the government's cash transfer schemes, in lieu of food. Since inflation was high, cash transfer would be disastrous, they said. Also the money system does not reach everyone. The RBI innovation of a bank correspondent in every village has resulted in the money-lender becoming the correspondent, they said.

Did the Union government have the resources to implement all these schemes? It was pointed out that the government was collecting taxes most inefficiently. According to a CAG report, the number of returns filed as a percentage of PAN card holders was dropping. Also, out of 800,000 registered companies, only 300,000 filed returns. The number of officers for income tax assessment had decreased from 3,800 to 3,600. ■

SAMITA' S WORLD

by SAMITA RATHOR





Winners of the Helen Keller awards with Ajay Maken, Minister of State for Youth Affairs and Sports with Javed Abidi, seated left

Icons who defeated barriers

Kavita Charanji
New Delhi

It was a proud moment for several disabled persons and their supporters as they stepped on stage to receive the Helen Keller awards instituted by the National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP) and Shell.

The chief guest at the awards ceremony was Ajay Maken, Minister of State for Youth Affairs and Sports. Unveiling his ministry's plans to make stadia in the country accessible to the disabled, he said sports was becoming more inclusive. The Asian Games, the Commonwealth Games and the Olympics are now much more accessible to the disabled.

Maken also said that a sensitisation meeting of the disabled with the directors of the Sports Authority of India (SAI) was on the cards.

While the 13th edition of the awards are cause for celebration, there is still a long way to go for the disabled, said Javed Abidi, honorary director of NCPEDP. Accessibility, education and employment remain major challenges. "There is no question of empowerment of the disabled unless there is accessibility – be it in terms of physical access to school, university, the workplace or

transportation, especially public transport." In term of facilities for the disabled in India, Abidi gives the country not more than a miserable one on a scale of 10.

The other problem is that policy makers tend to view disability as a charity issue. "My message to the disabled and their families is that the discourse on disability should hinge on rights. We should demand our rights be it in education, employment or access," said Abidi.

Though the picture may look dismal, Abidi describes himself as a "terrible optimist." A new disability rights legislation is being eagerly awaited and the emergence of many committed role models at the awards certainly gives reason for hope.

Ashwin Karthik, India's first quadriplegic engineer, has the distinction of securing the highest percentage scored by a student with cerebral palsy.

The NCPEDP-Shell Helen Keller awards are in three categories: Role Model Disabled Persons, Role Model Supporters and Role Model Companies/NGOs/Institutions.

Role Model Disabled Persons:

Ashwin Karthik, Delivery Software Engineer, Mphasis, Bengaluru.

Ashwin Karthik, India's first quadriplegic engineer has achieved success through sheer grit and perseverance. He has the distinction of securing the highest percentage scored by a student with cerebral palsy and receiving the National Scholarship for Engineering Studies, which is given to only one physically disabled student across India.

He has flourished in the supportive work environment of Mphasis and his success has encouraged other disabled people to join the company. Karthik is also a budding poet, has appeared on TV shows and other platforms and amply demonstrated that disability need not be a hurdle to employability.

Nilesh Singhal, deputy manager, SBI

Nilesh Singhal, a visually impaired bank manager, has advocated equal rights for disabled people in Madhya Pradesh. A post-graduate in political sci-

Continued on page 18

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Continued from page 16

ence, he appeared for the Madhya Pradesh Civil Services Examination but was not called for the interview due to his disability. An undaunted Singhal filed a petition in the Madhya Pradesh High Court which ruled that persons with disabilities are equal citizens. Currently, Singhal is deputy manager at the State Bank of India's (SBI) Bhopal headquarters.

Singhal's endeavours have won wide recognition. He was awarded the Godfrey Phillips Bravery Award in 2011 and the CNN-IBN Citizen Journalist Award in 2008.

Pradeep Raj, general secretary, Association for Disabled People

Pradeep Raj, a disabled sportsperson, has participated in several advocacy campaigns for disability rights, ranging from the inclusion of disability in the Right to Education Act to lobbying for the new Disability Rights Law. His crusade against corruption in disability sports led to the derecognition of the corrupt Paralympics Sports body in 2011. Raj filed Right to Information (RTI) applications to glean the truth and put pressure on the Ministry of Sports and the Paralympics Sports Body. His advocacy also ensured the participation of disabled sportspersons in the last Commonwealth Games in New Delhi in 2010. Currently he is lobbying for the participation of deserving disabled sports persons in the London Olympics.

Role Model Supporters:

Meera Shenoy, Chief Executive Officer, Centre for PwD Livelihoods (CPDL)

Meera Shenoy is the founder CEO of Youth4Jobs which provides market-linked vocational training to



A volunteer translates Ajay Maken's speech into sign language

disabled youth from rural and underprivileged families. In Andhra Pradesh, CPDL has been set up as a public-private-partnership, with the Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty (SERP), a part of the state government's rural development department.

CPDL works closely with companies to convince them to employ disabled people by conducting sensitisation workshops for CEOs and supervisors and helping make workplaces disabled-friendly. Companies who have subsequently employed people with disability are McDonalds, HDFC Rural BPO, Tata Teleservices, Shoppers' Stop and Aegis.

Niranjan Khatri, General Manager of WelcomEviron Initiatives, ITC Welcomgroup

ITC Welcomgroup is well known for its disabled friendly policies. Niranjan Khatri heads the Sustainable Development Initiative of ITC Hotels. As part of its social responsibility initiative, ITC Hotels began working with the disabled in 2005. Besides providing them employment, ITC Hotels

SHAMIK BANERJEE

has audited its old hotels to make them barrier-free to the best possible extent.

Khatri has also helped NGOs working on disability with information and by putting them in touch with people in the hospitality sector in India and abroad. In fact, an inspiring presentation by Khatri convinced Pointec Pens Pvt Ltd to begin hiring disabled people in their company.

Thilakam Rajendran, Managing Director, ARUNIM (Association for Rehabilitation Under National Trust Initiative of Marketing)

Thilakam Rajendran has been working for the disability sector for the last 21 years. Rajendran has

strived to empower people with developmental and intellectual disabilities. Her goal is to promote the economic independence of the disabled.

Her major endeavour is to create employment opportunities which are inclusive and make sound business sense. A pioneer of the concept of partnerships with FICCI, CII, the Vocational Rehabilitation Centre and the Labour Ministry, she has actively promoted the concept of 'Shop in Shop.' Through this endeavour, she has introduced products made by the disabled to brands like Fab India, Good Earth and Cottage Industry, among others.

Companies/ NGOs/ Institutions

Five organisations also received awards for promoting equal opportunities for people with disabilities. These include Aegis Limited, Mumbai, Deaf Enabled Foundation, Hyderabad, ITC Maurya, New Delhi, Muskaan (Parents Association for the Welfare of Children with Mental Handicap), New Delhi and Pointec Pens Private Limited, Bengaluru. ■

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SHWETA WALISHETTAR

B. D. Tatti Deaf & Dumb School | Lakshmeshwar, Karnataka

SHWETA'S SIGNS FOR CHANGE

Illustrating concepts with videos and presentations using **Microsoft Office PowerPoint** and **Windows Movie Maker**.

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Nurturing a spirit of enquiry with online research and scanning materials.

Signalling a new era in teaching through Project Shiksha

Shweta was only 6 months old when she was left severely crippled by spinal polio. While growing up, her choices were never easy, but this didn't stop her from pursuing her dreams. She attended school, got herself a Diploma in Computer Applications and is now a computer teacher at a school for the hearing impaired. Even as she used sign language to teach, Shweta felt it was necessary to further simplify computer education.

Microsoft's Project Shiksha empowered her to make this happen. Under this initiative, teachers are trained to use computer programs like Microsoft Word, PowerPoint and Moviemaker as tools for their teaching. Shweta used her learnings to create her own set of signs and gestures that incorporated computer commands, and helped the students understand computers better.

The result — skills that go beyond the classroom to create a better life for all.



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SMALL FARMER, B

Better prices needed but loss of land is a fear

Arup Chanda
Kolkata

Araging debate on whether international retailers should be allowed into India in a big way seems to have left small farmers in the countryside more confused than ever.

Mired in the stress of shrinking holdings and poor access to markets, farmers worry about their future – both with a policy change and without one. They want a better return for their produce, but they also fear the hold that strong retail chains could have on them in the long term.

PRASANTA BISWAS



Ram Das, a farmer, in Bali village in the Sundarbans

Farmers fear the hold that strong retail chains could have on them in the long term.

PRASANTA BISWAS



Abdul Kalam Gazi, at Taalpur village in Hasnabad in the North 24-Parganas district



Fruits and vegetables selling at a super market in Gurgaon

There is serious concern about what farm labourers and small local traders will do if the big chains move in. Land serves more than just the farmer who may own it. The promise that jobs will multiply once foreign investments pour in is not taken seriously. Many rural folk lack the skills and education for the jobs that might be available.

In the past 20 years in India economic reforms have been seen as widening income disparities. There is a sense that the rich have got richer at the cost of the poor. Foreign direct investment (FDI) in retail is seen as one more such reform decreed from above.

We spoke to small farmers in West Bengal because what they say is perhaps representative of Tamil Nadu, Kerala and many other states. The big farmers already have a voice. But what is going on in the minds of small and marginal farmers who form the majority? What do they fear and aspire to?

In West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress believes it has served its vote banks well by stopping the Central government in its tracks. Without the Trinamool's 19 MPs the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) couldn't have ushered in a new policy.

Having just recently defeated the Left Front and come to power the Trinamool is taking no chances. Its main support has come from peasant farmers for whom land is a sensitive issue as the Nandigram and Singur

IG RETAIL

LAKSHMAN ANAND



PRASANTA BISWAS



Abdul Ahmed Gazi, a farmer at Taalpukur village in Hasnabad, North 24-Parganas

'I will not enter into contract farming with big retail as I fear they might take over my land.'

PRASANTA BISWAS



Subid Ali Gazi, farmer and politician

uprisings against land acquisition revealed. Support for opening up retail would make the Trinamool an easy target for the Left.

However, voices from West Bengal's farms are far from unanimous about big retail. It is from these voices that a more complex story emerges.

At Hasnabad, in the North 24-Parganas district, Abdul Ahmed Gazi says: "I have taken six bighas (a bigha in West Bengal is one-third of an acre) of land on lease. I grow tomato, cabbage, brinjal and chilli. I have incurred a loss of ₹70,000 this year as chilli and brinjal did not fetch good prices. We want good prices for our vegetables and if big companies give us that we welcome it otherwise we might have to give up farming."

Raul Amin Mollah, too, wants a better deal, but worries about losing his land. "I grow a variety of vegetables and mustard. I have around seven bighas. I incurred a loss on the vegetables but mustard fetched me a good price so I could manage a reasonable profit. We welcome retail companies if they provide us with good prices and superior technology. But in no case will I enter into

'I grow tomato, cabbage, brinjal and chilli. I have incurred a loss of ₹70,000 this year as chilli and brinjal did not fetch good prices. We want good prices.'

contract farming with them as I apprehend that they might take over our land."

Alamgir Gazi grows radish, carrots, cauliflower, cabbage and potato on 10 bighas. "I incurred a loss of ₹10,000 this year as cauliflower prices were at ₹4 a kg. I want village middlemen to be eliminated so that we get higher prices," he says. "But I am not willing to give my land for contract farming as my independence might be harmed. I don't know much about FDI, but our local political leaders of both the CPI(M) and the Trinamool have told us that it will be harmful in the long run."

Abul Kalam Gazi is clearly opposed to big retail's entry: "Foreign companies are coming to India not to help farmers but to reap profits. FDI will not be in the interest of farmers. It might help buyers in urban areas," he says.

Azizul Haque of Bajitpur village, also in the North 24-Parganas, says that last year he incurred a loss, but this year he made a profit because of Metro Cash and Carry.

"The company gave us a good price. The execu-

tives of the company taught us superior techniques which helped me increase my production. I even grew cauliflower which fetched me a good price from this company. Last year I was forced to sell cauliflower to village middlemen at 10 paise a kg and incurred a huge loss. We want these middlemen to vanish."

But the question is whether replacing middlemen with large retailers is the solution. Will it do more harm than good in the long term?

Farmers like Subid Ali Gazi, who make up the cadres of the Left, continue to have a strong sway over local public opinion.

Subid Ali owns 12 bighas at Hasnabad. He is the district level CPI(M) leader and a post-graduate in Modern History from the University of Calcutta.

"I can foresee the situation 10 years from now if FDI in retail trade is allowed. Farmers who own small land holdings like me will become agricultural workers for these MNCs and lose their lands," says Subid Ali.

The 64-year-old lungi clad farmer agrees that in the beginning farmers would benefit as foreign retail chains would offer very good prices for vegetables and food grains.

"In the long run these MNCs will force farmers to start organic farming, buy fertilizers from them and then as a first step offer contract farming. The next step will be to take their land on long-term lease and employ their own agricultural labourers," says Subid Ali.

He paints a grim picture of corporate greed and subterfuge. "If the lease is around 30 years, then after its completion the companies according to the present land laws can record the holdings in their favour in government records as 'permissive possession'," he says. "The MNCs will gobble up these lands."

Subid Ali says not everyone sells to "phoreys" as the village middlemen are called. "Many of us sell directly to wholesalers in cities. Indigenous contract farming also exists since decades in many parts of the country. This agricul-

'I keep visiting backward areas like Maoist-affected Jangalmahal. FDI in retail trade will seriously affect our agrarian economy leading to unemployment in rural areas and give an opportunity to the Maoists.'



Jyotipriyo Mullick

tural system employing hundreds of thousands of people has been there for generations. The entry of foreign retailers will smash this system. Like the East India Company these MNCs will control our economy and ultimately our politics."

Voices like Subid Ali's keep the Trinamool firmly opposed to foreign investment in retail because it can't risk a backlash from the Left.

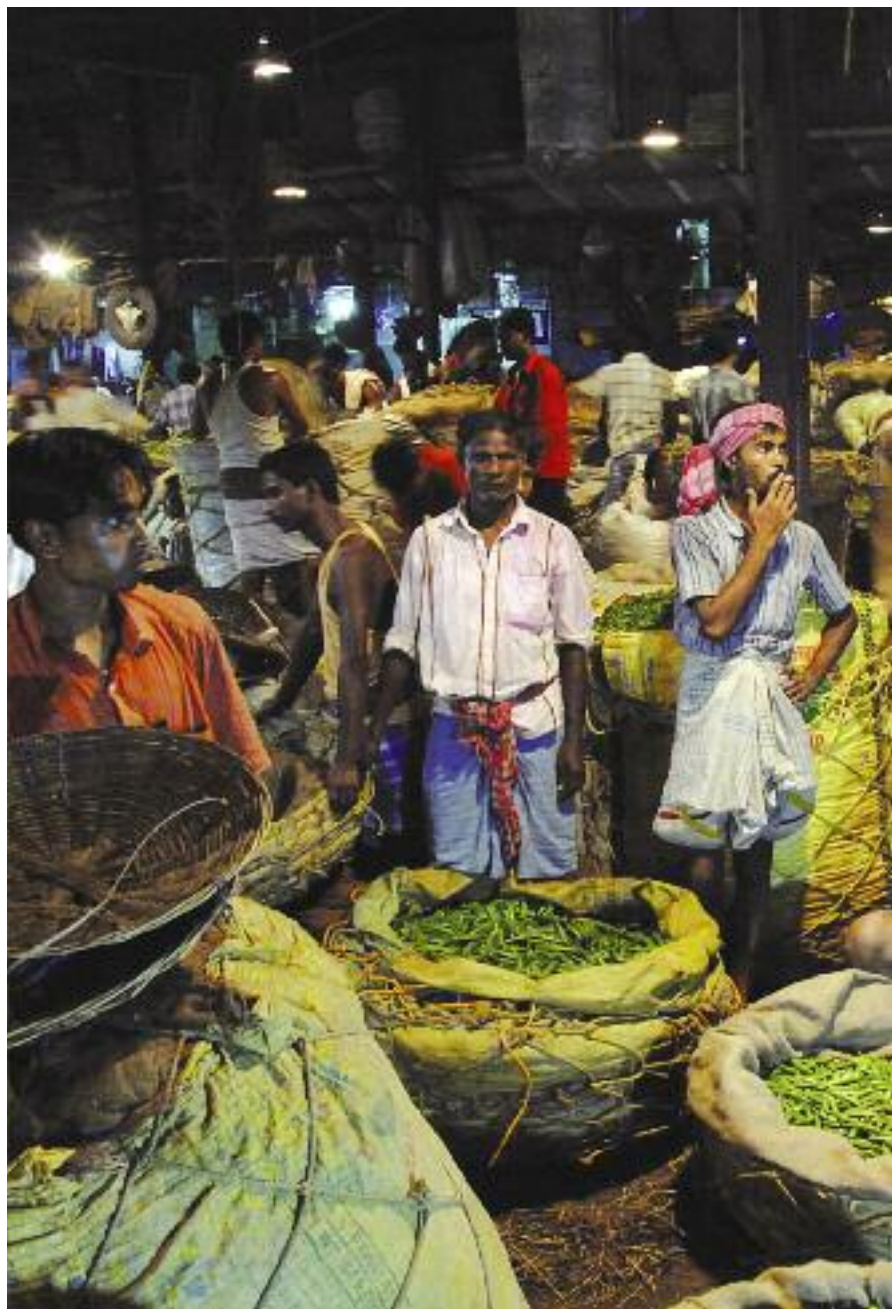
"My topmost priority is to safeguard the interests of the farmers and small retail shops and I will not support the UPA government on this issue unless the farmers have sufficient resources and the small retailers find themselves secure," says Mamata Banerjee.

She explained her political compulsions to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and to Union Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee. She said that she succeeded in dislodging the Left in West Bengal after 34 years by wooing away farmers and peasants, one-third of whom are Muslims.

Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee chief, Ramesh Chennithala, is in the same situation as Mamata Banerjee.

He shot off a letter to the Prime Minister describing the "imposition of FDI" as "anti-people." He also met Kerala Chief Minister Oomen Chandy and asked him not to implement the central government's decision – something which till the other day would have been unheard of within the Congress.

Another Congress MP from Kerala, Sudhakaran, staunchly supported Chennithala, saying: "The people of Kerala cannot agree with the Centre's decision on FDI. The party cannot agree with it. It will erode our support base because the majority of retail merchants are Congress supporters. The Congress in the state is firmly behind the PCC chief on this issue. We won't allow the UDF government to implement FDI in retail in the state."



A wholesale market for vegetables at Sealdah in Kolkata



Mohammed Salim

'Middlemen might be eliminated but the MNCs will reap the profit now made by the middlemen. The present exploitation of poor farmers will be more organized in a much larger proportion.'

Echoing the Kerala unit's concern, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) too opposed FDI in retail because not doing so would have meant alienating small farmers and playing into the hands of Chief Minister Jayaram Jayalalithaa.

Ridiculing Union commerce minister Anand Sharma's argument about creation of jobs, Jayalalithaa said, "This will lead to 40 million people being uprooted and thrown out from their business. Most of these people are not well educated and will remain unemployed forever. I strongly feel that this decision of the Union Government of India is a wrong decision, taken under pressure from a few retail giants."

DMK president Muthuvel Karunanidhi could not help but agree with his main rival Jayalalithaa. He said, "The move is dangerous and will affect hun-

PRASANTA BISWAS



PRASANTA BISWAS



Vegetable market

dreds of thousands of small traders as well as poor and middle-class consumers. It will also be a cause for the economic decline of our country."

The agricultural situation in Tamil Nadu and West Bengal is similar. Small farmers and traders feel threatened. Even if they want a better deal, they are afraid of big retail chains.

"Eighty per cent of the farmers in Tamil Nadu, which has also witnessed land reforms like in West Bengal, are either small or marginal farmers. No single farmer in Tamil Nadu has more than 15 acres. If big MNCs are allowed now to play in agriculture, all these farmers will be gobbled up by them and the entire indigenous system employing lakhs of people will be smashed," warns S. Ranganathan, general secretary of Tamil Nadu Cauvery Delta Farmers' Welfare Association.

Talking to *Civil Society* on phone, the 75-year-old farmer whose family once owned thousands of acres of agricultural land in Thiruvarur district in Tamil Nadu said, "Some farmers are convinced it might be good for them as they will get better prices for their produce. But in reality it will be good for the urban population residing in cities like Chennai, Bangalore and Hyderabad."

"We already have our own Indian companies like Spencers and Reliance. With the entry of MNCs the retail market in rural areas will be smashed and many will become jobless," he felt.

Ranganathan agreed with Subid Ali of Hasnabad in West Bengal, though thousands of miles separate them: "These MNCs will ultimately offer attractive schemes and dictate their terms not only regarding the crops or vegetables to be grown but also which fertilizer they should use. The MNCs will also control the price of fertilizers as the central government is planning to withdraw subsidy on fertilizers. At the end of the game the MNCs will gobble up land belonging to small farmers."

Mohammed Salim, member of the CPI(M) Central Committee, says, "The entire process of exploitation, hoarding and increasing prices of agricultural produce will be managed more efficiently by foreign corporate giants."

He admits that initially procurement prices would go up and farmers might benefit and the declining agrarian economy might be boosted. But he cautions, "Through contract farming they will defraud farmers. They will decide the brand and prices from seeds to fertilizers. Middlemen might be eliminated but the MNCs will reap the profit of the middlemen and the present exploitation of poor farmers will be more organized in a much larger proportion."

"There is no doubt that the present public distribution system (PDS) is weak and faulty but the central government should strengthen it instead of trying to privatise it and hand it on a platter to foreign corporate giants. Some jobs will be created on the shop floors for urban youth but much more than 10 million people will be displaced as the chain in forward and backward linkages in the agro-economy will be snapped," he said.

Jyotipriyo Mullick is West Bengal's Food and Civil Supplies Minister. He is also the President of the Trinamool Congress' unit in the North 24-Parganas district. He and Salim are bitter political rivals but they agree on FDI in retail.

Mullick says, "Being in touch with the masses, the farmers and vegetable growers in North 24-Parganas, I know the situation in the villages. Now as a minister I keep visiting backward areas like Maoist affected Jangalmahal. FDI in retail will seriously affect our agrarian economy leading to unemployment in rural areas and in fact give opportunity to the Maoists to strengthen their bases."

"I am now trying to strengthen the PDS. Instead of only food grains, sugar and kerosene I plan to sell household products needed for a middle-class family each month through the ration shops. Our government is not profit-oriented and ordinary people will benefit while more jobs will be created," he says. Mullick plans to sell detergents, soaps, biscuits and even stationery for students through ration shops.

Salim feels that what is applicable in the Western world can never be implemented in India. He says, "Owning small grocery shops in urban as well as rural areas is the last resort for unemployed educated youths in our country. Many also work in family run grocery shops. Their income might be less but they survive. All these people will be thrown out of work."

The final word comes from farmers who are worried about land security. Says Zulfikar Ali, who grows vegetables and lentils on seven bighas, "We do not get good prices from middlemen who make huge profits. We will be happy if large companies offer us better prices. But we are not ready for contract farming or leasing out our lands. It will be like the days of the British Raj when our forefathers were forced to cultivate indigo forcibly and refusal led to torture by the sahibs. We do not want that situation to return. We prefer to remain content with a small margin of profit than earn more at the cost of our land." ■

Business

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Indian angels for bright ideas

20 companies incubated but the potential is huge

Aarti Gupta
New Delhi

ALTHOUGH India is perceived as a country famed for its entrepreneurial spirit, the reality is that the mortality rate for start-ups is pretty high. It is estimated that over 90 per cent of enterprises fold up because they lack long-term strategy, scalability, ability to evolve and, most importantly funding.

For this reason, Indian Angel Network (IAN), India's largest group of angel investors, set up a community of early-stage seed investors more than five years ago with resourceful and established entrepreneurs providing the initial financial cushion to start-ups with a sound business model.

IAN was founded by a core group of successful entrepreneurs like Saurabh Srivastava, Mohit Goyal, Pradeep Gupta, Raman Roy, Harish Mehta, Jerry Rao, Pramod Bhasin, Arvind Singhal and Alok Mittal. It now has 180 members and its footprint includes Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore and Pune.

"We are proud to have initiated a vibrant angel investing ecosystem to keep pace with young India's aspirations," says Rehan Yar Khan, a serial entrepreneur speaking for IAN. Despite a track record of five years, there is a huge hand-holding void in India for first-generation entrepreneurs in their go-to-market strategies. Angel investors, for instance, put in \$200 million in various stages of incubation of fledgling companies. One only has to look at the figure of \$20 billion that was invested in the United States in 2010 to realize how vastly untapped the potential is.

Extracts from an interview with Rehan Yar Khan.

How many start-ups has IAN funded during the last five years?

IAN is made up of successful entrepreneurs and dynamic CEOs, passionate about helping young innovators with good propositions. Since inception, IAN has invested in over 25 companies, including four located overseas. IAN has made five full or partial positive exits. As we enter 2012, IAN's footprint is expanding to Hyderabad, connecting IAN to investors in virtually all parts of the country.

We want to help as many worthy ideas and business plans as possible. This is why we meet in small groups every week to understand, discuss and evaluate business plans from start-ups. IAN has now established a first-of-its-kind science and technology incubator, bringing our members as well as a large pool of mentors together to help innovators and entrepre-



Rehan Yar Khan

neers create ventures.

This year has been particularly good for us. We funded 10 deals with nearly \$10 million. We have overall directly invested up to nearly \$ 20 million. IAN's portfolio companies leveraged its investment with another \$25 million or so from the next round, bringing in an additional \$ 45 to \$50 million. The IAN incubator handpicked about 20 companies.

Which are the sectors with the biggest potential? What are the kind of projects which interest you?

We look for ideas and propositions that are innovative, scalable and differentiated with a high-calibre execution team. The investments span a variety of sectors with a bias towards the Internet, software, mobile technology, education, hospitality and robotics, among others. The process of dealing with requests for funding new ideas, nurturing and exiting (early-stage investing) has been tested and formalized over a period of time. Besides the much-needed financial investment, the start-ups get from IAN members key inputs in three key areas – strategic thinking, mentoring and ability to leverage networks of IAN members. An IAN investor also serves on the board of the portfolio company. IAN members undoubtedly bring tremendous value to the portfolio company by mentoring entrepreneurs, sharing their experience and wisdom.

What kind of stakes do you typically take in a project?

That is not an easy question to answer because stakes are a function of what kind of value IAN can add and the phase of the company – whether it is at an ideas stage, ramp-up stage or a growth phase. With investible funds of tens of millions of dollars, IAN members look to fund up to \$1 million with an average of about \$400,000 to \$600,000 and expect to exit in about three to five years or so – angels are patient with their investments.

What do you think of Indian entrepreneurship emerging from small towns? Is that increasingly becoming a trend in IAN's scheme of things?

Certainly, entrepreneurship has moved beyond the metros in the last few years. We get lots of ideas

and projects from cities like Coimbatore, Mysore and Chandigarh. In fact, we funded an embedded software tool developer, Vayavya, a company from Belgaum. Availability of talent, early exposure to entrepreneurship in schools and colleges through entrepreneurship development activities is helping to widen this basket. India happily is moving towards creating more job-providers than job-seekers. In 2011, IAN began funding projects in the Internet and telecom space which needed funding of around \$150,000.

'We look for ideas and propositions that are innovative, scalable and differentiated with a high-calibre execution team. The investments span sectors with a bias towards the Internet, software, mobile technology, education, hospitality and robotics spaces.'

How many start-ups are aimed at the bottom of the pyramid?

IAN sees many of its portfolio companies in the software, telecom, Internet and education space impacting people at the bottom of the pyramid. There is the work of mobile video streaming service provider for the feature phone, Jigsee. There is also the work that Vienova is doing in the affordable education space. Both these resonate with Bharat as much as India. Vienova provides a range of educational services to schools in north India leveraging technology to deliver high quality services in value-conscious and price-sensitive markets. Sapience, a patent-pending software product from InnovizeTech, another portfolio company, delivers 15 to 20 per cent gain in work output for companies with knowledge workforce. Interestingly, this productivity increase is achieved without changing any existing process or additional management effort. The gain has a transformational impact on company financials. Druvaa is another company portfolio company whose software products are gaining traction with global majors.

How does the environment for angel investing in India compare to the developed world?

It's not a fair comparison to draw as India was a closed economy till 1991. Over 90 per cent of the IT start-ups in India have been conceived by first generation entrepreneurs, but beyond that we do not have many examples of entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurs like IIS Infotech co-founders Saurabh Srivastava and Mohit Goyal led the venture capital funding activity in 2000 by setting up Infinity Ventures. Now we have several non-resident Indians returning to India and investing their wealth generated from their new economy ideas.

Raising capital in India is still not easy for most companies. How can angel investors make a valuable difference and act as a catalyst?

Angel investors typically are successful entrepreneurs who offer funding opportunities to start-ups. Angel investing kicks in once the entrepreneurs have exhausted their own funds as well as borrowings from family and friends. As a part of the Indian Angel Network built 'by entrepreneurs' and 'for entrepreneurs', investees can gain access to the vast business network of investors. The

biggest pay-off for the angel investors is the satisfaction of converting a job-seeker into a job-creator.

Have some start-ups which have gone on to become successful come from small town India and those addressing the bottom of the pyramid?

It would be incorrect for us to single out any one but I can certainly say that when two leading business journals in the country identified the Hottest Entrepreneurial Start-ups in the first half of 2011, we found that one out of five such companies was an IAN-funded company. We seek companies that create their own IPR and technology to intrinsically create better value.

What should an entrepreneur do by way of homework to get you to invest?

We feel an entrepreneur's job is to look for ideas that fulfill a real customer need in a better, superior and cheaper way than others in terms of quality of experience and great execution abilities. ■

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Disabled by society

JAVED AHMAD TAK

FROM nursery to Class 8, Wasim Feroz Matoo's mother carried him to school every morning, waited for his classes to get over and then brought him back home, leaving aside all her daily chores. She sacrificed a lot to get her physically disabled son a quality education. Wasim, too, did not disappoint his mother. He graduated with flying colours and went on to do his B. Ed.

This was the moment, they believed, when all their fears would disappear. Their dreams of a happy life appeared to be on the verge of realization. But just then an awful step shattered all their happiness. Wasim, despite having the requisite education qualifications, was dropped from the Budgam teacher list. The reason cited was his disability of the lower limbs. A teacher on a wheelchair is not accepted in our society.

Wasim reflects the dilemma of several talented yet hapless disabled individuals at the grassroots who have no reason to celebrate World Disability Day. Face to face with a physically challenged person, the common notion is to adopt a sympathetic attitude. They are less fortunate and know nothing about the world, think people. But, that is not the case. God's balancing act is beyond one's imagination. 'Differently-abled' people have been blessed by God with the sharpest instincts. All that is required on our part is to 'see' those traits and accept them with a little imperfection.

Persons with disabilities are facing intense discrimination at all levels – in education, employment, and accessibility. They are being denied an independent identity in society. The social stigma faced by severely disabled persons forces them to live a dependant life. This discrimination is due to the adoption of the charity model by stakeholders across the country under the pretext of empowerment of the disabled. If empowerment was the objective, then why do we still lack basic structures necessary for their growth?

The situation is worse in far-flung areas like Kashmir where there are no schools for children with disabilities. One special school for several children doesn't promise a hopeful future. On top of that, these schools lack appropriate infrastructure, teaching facilities, learning material



and special teachers.

This "taken for granted" attitude towards disabled persons is testified by the fact that individuals with less healthy lower or upper limbs are forced to match up to the standards set by the

physically fit. Why is there no feasible curriculum available with the state board of education and the university? The time given to finish an exam is similar for all of them – disability is not a hindrance then.

Many students like Wasim who face disability from birth are lifted by their parents to the classroom. The parents wait to take them home once school is over. Buildings are not disabled friendly. There is no provision to accommodate students with loco-motor disabilities. Neither are classes organized for them on the ground floor. The children have to crawl, skid or limp indecently to reach classrooms and exam centres.

But kudos to the strength and determination of 'differently-abled' students. Despite all the bigotry they face they survive to make it big one day. They score well in school, graduate, and go on to earn post-graduate degrees.

The biggest hurdle they face is employment.

Continued on next page

The social stigma faced by severely disabled persons forces them to live a dependant life. This discrimination is due to the adoption of the charity model by stakeholders.

Continued from previous page

Discrimination is at its zenith during this phase of a disabled person's life. In Jammu and Kashmir, Circular no. 62-SW of 2001, issued on 23 March, 2001, has made disability truly into a 'handicap'.

The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment identifies, for example, teacher posts for deaf, mute, blind and other severely disabled individuals. But in Jammu and Kashmir, thanks to this circular, severely disabled persons have been dropped from the list under the pretext that no post of teacher has been identified for them. It is very unfortunate that the Service Selection Board (SSRB) does not consider persons with either upper or lower limb disabilities for any post. They have identified a long list of posts for 'partially' disabled persons as a step towards creating an 'all inclusive policy'.

This sends out a discouraging message to the disabled community who strive to educate themselves. The state is telling them – what is the need to walk on a road which is blocked ahead?

But some souls are quite determined and have never understood the word 'give up.' They have fought and become examples for the entire community, not only in the state but at national level. There are officials in the IAS and KAS with severe disabilities (blind or have no upper or lower limbs).

Khursheed Malik, with 100 percent disability, is supported by a wheelchair. But this wheelchair never became an obstacle to his willingness to serve the state as a Secretary in different departments - Labor and Employment and Flood Control to name a few. His dedication and honesty won him a place in the hearts of the people, thus leaving behind many healthy officials.

Despite their talent and special skills, the government never misses a chance to be vindictive to persons with disability. In one such case, Syed Bashir, who was working as a teacher in the Middle School at Kanjinag Awantipora in Pulwama district under the Rehbar-e-Taleem scheme was dismissed on the ground that he is unable to use his 'arms' for eating and for using a blackboard.

Bashir did not accept this decision. He decided to approach the courts. In 2010, a historic decision was taken by a double bench of the Honorable Supreme Court in the Syed Bashir-uddin Qadri v/s State of J&K case. The Supreme Court considered Bashir's expulsion to be a severe case of discrimination under Article 22 of the J&K Persons with Disabilities Act 1998, which guarantees equal opportunities, protection of rights and full participation. Orders were passed to reinstate Bashir who is presently working as a teacher in the Kanjinag School. He is respected for the extra attention he pays to students and his school.

Persons with disabilities spend more on their education and maintenance. Wheelchairs, crutches and other aids required for mobility cost a lot and cut into family budgets. Extreme climatic situations also have an impact on the lives of the disabled and sometimes force them to discontinue their education.

They don't need your sympathy. All they demand is access to their rights. They have challenged the 'disabled' system with their special abilities. All that we are doing is denying them permission to celebrate World Disability Day at India Gate. ■

Charkha Features

Is MoEF's green list of

KANCHI KOHLI

ON 30 September this year, the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) released a circular indicating a list of 100 consultants who have been officially accredited to carry out Environment Impact Assessments (EIA) for the environment clearance process. Another 101 applications for accreditation are under process. Around 64 applications, says the circular, have either not been approved or withdrawn. Some of them have been termed ineligible but no explanations have been given.

With effect from 1 October 2011, only the approved EIA consultants will be able to appear before the expert appraisal committees which assess project approvals.

What does this step imply?

The preparation of an EIA report is mandatory for industrial and infrastructure projects which are listed in India's EIA notification, 2006. The EIA is one of the most critical processes of ascertaining the environmental impacts of an external intervention on the eco-system and on people's livelihoods. In practice, EIA consultants are hired and funded by project authorities to carry out this essential task. Their job is often focussed on enabling the procurement of approval in the first place.

It is the quality of these assessments which have been a significant area of contention. Civil society groups, researchers, scientists and locally affected people have repeatedly pointed out the poor and inadequate quality of impact assessments. In fact, examples have been cited which indicate that EIAs are often biased and misleading.

Over the years, the growing concern about the quality of EIAs has been articulated and acknowledged by many including relevant ministries and, ironically, project authorities. In fact, the current accreditation process was first envisaged in 2007 by the Quality Council of India (QCI) in a document titled, 'Scheme for Accreditation of EIA Consultant Organizations.'

It stated: "The present situation is far from satisfactory since the EIAs being developed, more often than not, do not measure up to the required quality." Among the reasons cited, the document refers to improper/inadequate scoping for the EIA or the consultants lack of requisite understanding for developing EIAs. But more crucially, the document states that EIAs are poor in quality because they are 'copy-cut-paste' jobs. Further, no liability is placed on EIA consultants, nor are there any checks on their competence.

This initiative of the National Registration Board for Personnel and Training (NRBPT), a constituent of the QCI, came under the scanner of civil society groups for several reasons. First, the process was closed door in nature and secondly, the registration process was voluntary. The MoEF at that point denied any direct involvement with this process in writing in response to Right to Information applications. Critical comments,



submitted to the MoEF in April 2007 along with a list of EIA consultants who should be blacklisted rather than accredited, received no response.

On 18 March 2010, the MoEF issued an Office Memorandum making the accreditation of the EIA-EMP consultants by the National Accreditation Board of Education and Training/Quality Council of India (NABET/QCI) compulsory. This letter stated: "No final EIA/EMP from any Project Proponent prepared by the non-accredited consultant will be entertained after 1 July, 2010."

At this point NGOs and environmental groups once again wrote to the MoEF highlighting a set of concerns. At the heart of this issue was the lack of faith in the QCI which is essentially seen as a body backed by industry associations hand in glove with the EIA consultants in carrying out

EIA consultants good enough?



thermal power plant project of the OPG Power Gujarat Limited in the ecologically and socially fragile inter-tidal area of Kutch coast in Gujarat.

The Executive Summary of the EIA in its opening lines itself talks about the need for a thermal power plant. Locating itself within the burgeoning industrialisation of the Kutch region, the report begins with a clear justification for the need for such a project.

More critically, the EIA Consultant in the draft EIA report which was placed before the mandatory public hearing deliberately misled the public by giving ambiguous information about the location of the project.

In the draft EIA report, the location of the project was on the inter-tidal area, that is, the Randh Bander and the nearest village Bhadreshwar was shown five km away. However, during the public hearing, the project proponent categorically denied that the project would be situated on the Randh Bander – an ecologically important site – and clarified that the nearest village, Bhadreshwar, was 1.5 km away. Despite being located on the coast the EIA consultant had not done the marine EIA when the project was being discussed with the public.

Another problematic name in the list of approved consultants is Hyderabad-based Vimta Labs Limited. It is this agency which did the final EIA for the controversial bauxite mining project in the Niyamgiri hills. The environment clearance for this project has been kept in abeyance by the MoEF. Vimta Labs also did the EIA for Utkal Alumina International Limited (UAIL), Kshipur, Orissa. The problem with this EIA was brought to the notice of the MoEF way back in 2007 when the accreditation process was first initiated. It was pointed out that the EIA contained rampant duplication of data, the environment management plan was not of bauxite but for limestone mining, the impacts on the nearby forest had been completely ignored etc.

The Water and Power Consultancy Services Ltd (WAPCOS) Limited, also on the MoEF's accredited list, prepared EIAs of the Teesta III hydroelectric project in Sikkim. The MoEF had been warned against them in 2007. Critiques of the EIA had pointed out that several aspects had been overlooked in the impact assessment – impact of flash floods, glacial recession, glacial lake outburst floods and sedimentation. Seismicity aspects had been inadequately dealt with. This is particularly important in the light of the recent earthquake in Sikkim.

The WAPCOS EIA for the Athirapally hydroelectric project in Kerala was also proved to be inadequate by the High Court of Kerala.

There are 100 consultants on the 'green list' and another 101 waiting to be accredited. The deepest fears articulated by civil society groups at the very outset of the QCI process are now coming true. ■

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

We now have a list of consultants who are on MoEF and QCI's 'green list.' As anticipated there is trouble brewing here. Some of these consultants have been involved in the worst EIA scenarios.

faulty and inadequate assessments. Back then, the QCI website accessed on 1 April, 2010, stated: "QCI was set up in 1997 as an autonomous body by the Government of India jointly with Indian industry to establish and operate the National Accreditation Structure for conformity assessment bodies. Indian industry is represented in QCI by three premier industry associations,

ASSOCHAM, CII and FICCI."

We now have a list of consultants who are on MoEF and QCI's 'green list.' As anticipated there is trouble brewing here. Some of these consultants have been involved in the worst EIA scenarios in recent times.

For instance, the Detox Corporation Pvt. Ltd, Surat, had carried out the EIA for the 300 MW

MKSS as a role model

BHARAT DOGRA

THE Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) celebrates 25 years of dedicated work for the people of Bharat and India this year. Although this people's organization works in obscure villages in Rajasthan it has given the nation crucial laws and systems which are attracting global attention. The MKSS has successfully linked grassroots democracy to national development. It has placed transparency and poverty alleviation on the national agenda.

India's reputation as a vibrant, even if troubled democracy, has been strengthened by the Right to Information (RTI) law and the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) both of which owe their origins to the MKSS. It has also invented the social audit.

The MKSS was founded by three people very different from each other: Aruna Roy, who resigned from a prestigious job in the IAS, Shankar, 32, a talented native communicator at Bunker Roy's Barefoot College and Nikhil Dey, just 24, idealistic and keen to work for the people.

The MKSS works in six tehsils of Central Rajasthan. These are Bhim, Devgarh and Kumbhalgarh tehsils of Rajsamand district, Raipur tehsil in Pali district, Mandal tehsil in Bhilwara district and Jwaja tehsil in Ajmer district. This is roughly a 150 km long and 80 km wide area with a population of about half a million. The MKSS' main office functions from one or two huts in Devdungri village which is about 10 km from the town of Bhim.

The MKSS works for the rural poor. Most of its membership comes from them. MKSS' work impacts most of Rajasthan and has clear national resonance. Some of its local struggles are planned with an eye on policy changes which can benefit vulnerable people. For instance, the MKSS struggle for minimum wages was linked to policy changes taking place in Rajasthan and eventually benefitted people in the entire state.

The demand for RTI was raised by the MKSS in Rajasthan. The way MKSS activists travelled all over the state broadcasting the message that a right to information law was needed is an inspiring example of how a small group with meager resources can have a big impact because of their dedication and convincing message.

Although a number of people and organisations campaigned for the RTI and NREGA, the contribution of MKSS is significant for two reasons.

First, while the MKSS works on a regular basis in a fairly small area it has developed an amazing ability to link some of its local struggles to campaigns at the national level. Secondly, it has been able to carry on these campaigns for several years on a low



A source of strength for the activists was the response their yatras got in villages. Many peasants and workers, most of them illiterate, recognised the importance of the movement.

budget. As the MKSS does not accept any institutional funds and works with very little money, its achievements are all the more significant. The MKSS can afford to support just a handful of full-time activists on the legal minimum wage.

In its initial years the MKSS struggled against rampant corruption in drought relief works which play a very important role in providing livelihood for villages in Central Rajasthan. The need to put an end to this corruption led to the need to check records related to these relief works and other public works. This in turn led to the demand for the RTI.

Those early days were difficult. The movement faced oppression and even ridicule. But undaunted they organised *dharnas* in all districts of Rajasthan. The prolonged *dharnas* in the heat and dust tested the patience of everyone. Yet there was plenty of song and dance, wit and humour in the campaign.

A source of strength for the activists was the response their yatras got in villages. Many peasants and workers, most of them illiterate, recognised the importance of the movement and extended their support.

Dharnas for the RTI attracted diverse people and

groups who saw the relevance of this law from the perspective of their own work. This further convinced MKSS activists of the wide applicability and relevance of RTI. Later when national level alliances were built it was the grassroots experience of MKSS activists which propelled them into leading the RTI movement.

Similarly, the demand for employment guarantee grew from the MKSS search to find a solution to the desperate economic condition villagers suffered due to recurrent droughts. When the MKSS embarked on its first yatra in villages to press for NREGA, they found ready and enthusiastic support. As Shankar, a senior activist of the MKSS says, "In this case no

explaining was needed. People intrinsically accepted the importance of this law."

Once again the MKSS was able to link its own demand to a larger national campaign for rural employment guarantee legislation. It made significant contributions to this national campaign.

An important aspect of the MKSS campaign strategy is to call upon all democratic forces to get involved. Hence MKSS developed good relationships with lawyers, academics, officials, legislators, and journalists. While emphasising grassroots struggles of the rural poor, the MKSS hasn't ignored urban middle class support. Nikhil Dey, leading activist of the MKSS, says, "The enactment at national level of the RTI Act and NREGA is like a dream coming true." Most members and supporters of MKSS would readily agree.

Even while this movement was in the thick of the RTI struggle, it initiated social reform work particularly an anti-liquor campaign in villages.

Within a short span of just two decades, the MKSS has brought about remarkable change in the lives of thousands of people. It has created a high level of consciousness among them. It has given the rural poor courage to resist injustice and create a better world. What is very noteworthy is the emergence of a strong feeling of solidarity among the people.

Many villages, who for years experienced chronic economic distress and had no choice but to migrate to urban areas, livelihood prospects have improved due to better rural employment works, a new determination to resist corruption, and the creation of a network of fair price shops set up by workers and peasants themselves.

The MKSS experience shows you don't need a lot of money to usher in social change. Their model depends on bringing out the hidden potential of people to spark change. And it is open source. That is why the MKSS model is replicable and attractive. ■

Living

- Books
- Eco-tourism
- Film
- Theatre
- Ayurveda

Lush wondrous jungle

Susheela Nair

Parambikulam (Tamil Nadu)

AS the sun sank into the horizon a blanket of black enveloped the forest. We sat around a *chai kada*, sipping cups of steaming tea and listening to the sounds of the jungle till midnight. We were camping in Parambikulam Wildlife Sanctuary nestling deep in a valley between the Anamalai Ranges of Tamil Nadu and the Nelliampathy Ranges of Kerala in the Western Ghats.

With an astounding array of flora and fauna, a range of challenging hills for trekking and extensive lakes for boating, we found the sanctuary a must visit for naturalists, nature enthusiasts and tourists. It is the abode of different tribal groups living in harmony with wildlife.

The sanctuary has other claims to fame. It flaunts the Kannimara, the world's tallest and oldest teak tree, the first ever scientifically managed teak plantation and the erstwhile Cochin Forest Tramway, a 65-km metre gauge train, chugging its way through a dense forest from Annappada near Chalakudy to Parambikulam. The train carts valu-



Treetop hut at Thunakkadavu

SUSHEELA NAIR



The placid Parambikulam Lake

SUSHEELA NAIR

SUSHEELA NAIR

able timber from inaccessible areas to Chalakudy, to be transported by road to other places. Consequent to the ban on felling, the tramway came to a grinding halt in 1946. From a 48 sq. km. tract of reserve forest, Parambikulam metamorphosed to a 285 sq. km. wildlife sanctuary in 1985. Though declared a Tiger Reserve, chances of sighting tigers are very bleak.

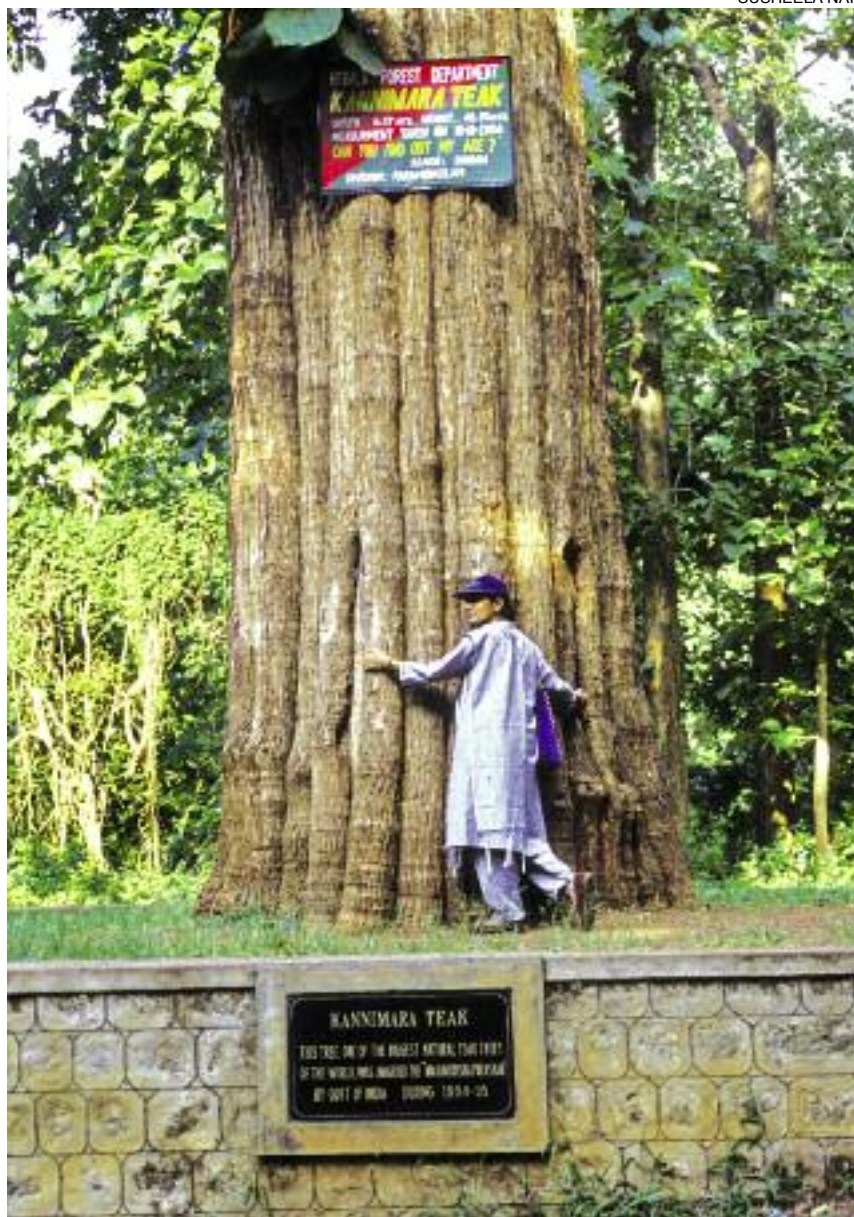
Parambikulam plays host to three dams – the Parambikulam, Thunakadavu and Peruvuripalam dams constructed by the Tamil Nadu government across the river Chalakudy for hydroelectricity. Another interesting feature of this sanctuary is that the irrigation project is connected to the Aliyar dam in Tamil Nadu through a series of reservoirs interconnected by underground tunnels, channels, river courses and canals linking each one of the dams in the sanctuary. The five-km underground tunnel connecting the Parambikulam and Thunakadavu reservoirs passing through the rocky Vengoli Malai is an engineering marvel.

This wildlife Eden has a bewildering variety of wildlife. It shelters 268 species of birds, 47 varieties of fish (of which seven have been listed as endangered), 124 species of butterflies, 1,049 insects, 39 mammals, and 61 species of reptiles. Deer, sambar and gaur roam around freely in marshy grasslands known locally as *vayals*. Also seen deep inside this sanctuary are the lion-tailed macaques, tigers, leopards, bears, Nilgiri Tahrs, reptiles like the Travancore tortoise, the South Indian forest ground gecko, cane turtles, Ceylon frogmouth, etc. There are some species exclusive to the sanctuary like the Parambikulam frog (*Rana Parambikulamana*).

The floral diversity is equally fascinating. Parambikulam has 285 species of flora, 1,408 species of flowering plants, including 67 species of orchids. The sanctuary is a treasure-house of 50 endangered medicinal plants including some threatened South Indian medicinal plants like sarasparilla, sundew, snake root and wood turmeric besides 285 rare, endemic and endangered species of flowers.

Harbouring more than 250 bird species, ranging from the common myna, grey headed myna, tree pie to the Malabar Grey Hornbill and the Great Indian Hornbill, for birdwatchers there could be endless moments of discovery of winged specimens. This awesome birding getaway was once the favourite haunt of the legendary ornithologist, Dr. Salim Ali. To indulge in hornbill watching, go straight to the camp at Kuriarkutty where Dr. Salim Ali stayed for three years from 1936 to 1939, or traverse the paths which were once followed by this famed ornithologist.

Drifting down the Parambikulam reservoir to the island of Vettikunnu on a bamboo raft, we



Kanimara Tree said to be the world's tallest, biggest and oldest natural teak tree

came across herds of pachyderms grazing near the riverside and we saw endangered fresh water crocodiles, otters and turtles apart from a large variety of fish fauna.

Overlooking the placid lake, our tree hut at Thunakadavu had basic facilities and a top-of-the-line location. We saw animals coming out to quench their thirst on the opposite bank of the lake. In the morning, we opted for the Kanimara trail, a seven km detour from Thunakkadavu. Trudging through teak plantations, we saw a wide variety of animals along the grasslands bordering both sides of the road. A herd of gaur was feeding on succulent grass and a spotted deer looked us squarely in the face.

We gaped in wonder at the Kanimara, the world's oldest, tallest and largest teak tree. We were awestruck by the girth (6.57m) and height (48.5m) of this living relic. It takes five adults to encircle the tree with their hands outstretched. This awesome tree towers above smaller teak trees in the heart of Parambikulam.

The chances of spotting wildlife are bright, if you trek along this route. The tribes worship the Kanimara tree, which was awarded the Mahavruksha Puraskar by the Government of India in 1994-1995. Legend goes that when people tried to cut the tree down, blood oozed from it and since then tribals have worshipped the tree

as the 'virgin tree' (Kanni means virgin).

In an effort to bring the benefits of tourism to the four indigenous communities living here and to involve them in conservation activities, eight Eco-Development Committees (EDCs) have been formed in the sanctuary. All the eco-tourism packages are run through the different EDCs who are under an umbrella organisation called the Forest Development Agency. The eco-tourism packages have been designed to make visitors appreciate how precious our nature and wildlife is. The names of some of the packages are – pugmark trail, high range hiking, elephant song trail, Cochin state forest tramway trekking, full moon census, tree top experience, peep through watch towers, Vettikkunnu island vest, bamboo rafting, tribal symphony and hornbill watching. These are sure to lure nature and wildlife enthusiasts to Parambikulam

Parambikulam has myriad trekking options – soft, medium, tough and adventurous trails. If you are a hardcore trekker, it's worth scaling the peaks of Karimala and Vengolimala. You'll be treated to awesome views of the meandering backwaters of the reservoirs on one side, the lush green forests and the vast stretches of thick teak plantations on the other side. The

chances of spotting Nilgiri Tahrs are bright, if you trek along the steep slopes and cliffs of Vengoli Mala. To get a feel of the jungle, trek to the its interiors.

Vehicles are restricted to 30 per day to maintain the peace and serenity of the forest. Entry to the sanctuary is through the Sethumada and Anappady checkposts. To get an insight into the sanctuary's ecosystem, stop by the Interpretation Centre at Anappady.

Many types of tourist accommodation are available. Apart from the Forest Department's rest-houses scattered all over the sanctuary, there are tree top huts, island inns, tented homes and dormitories. If you want a dash of adventure, you can opt for a night vigil in a watchtower or a tree-top machan from where you can peep at deer and gaurs glaring in the dark or listen to the trumpeting of elephants. ■

FACT FILE

How to get there:

By air: Nearest airport: Coimbatore -120km

By road: Pollachi -39km, Palakkad-100km

Visiting time: 7 am to 6 pm

Contact: Eco Care Centre, Parambikulam Wildlife Sanctuary, Anappady, Thunakadavu
P.O.Pollachi(via), Palakkad -678 661
Tel: 04253-245025

Kashmir's chirpy birds

Jehangir Rashid
Srinagar

THE wetlands in Kashmir are now abuzz with activity as they play host to nearly one million avian guests who have arrived from all over the world. The migratory birds are enjoying the serene and mesmerizing eco-system of wetlands dotted across the Kashmir Valley.

The arrival of the birds has gladdened the hearts of the people of Kashmir. Bird watchers and bird lovers are joyous.

Local villagers are ecstatic as they say these lovely birds add to the beauty of this 'paradise on earth.'

Wildlife officials entrusted with the responsibility of looking after their esteemed avian guests are also very pleased. "More than 600,000 migratory birds are present right now in the Hokersar wetland. These birds have come from Europe, Northern Asia, China, Mongolia and the lower plains of India and Pakistan. We have been receiving almost the same number of birds every year. There is not much variation in their numbers," says Abdul Rauf Zargar, Wildlife Warden (Wetlands), Kashmir.

Rauf said that Teals, Common Teal, Mallard, Brahminy Duck, Grey Leg Geese, Formortis, Pochard, Coots, Swamp Hens and many more have arrived in the Hokersar wetland. He said the department of wildlife intends to carry out a census of these migratory birds in February next year to ascertain the exact number of migratory birds visiting the Hokersar wetland and the other wetlands in Kashmir.

"Our last counting exercise was carried out in 2008 - 2009. Since then no such exercise has been undertaken. We intend to do this probably before 15 February as the outward movement of the migratory birds starts from that day onwards," says Rauf.

The chirping of the birds is like an orchestra for people living in and around the wetlands. The birds, huddling in a group to warm themselves, provide a perfect setting for Kashmir's snowy winter.

"Kashmir is known not only for its beauty but also for the variety it offers to tourists. Many people in India wish to come to Kashmir to enjoy its beautiful landscape and meadows. There are oth-

ers who visit Kashmir in winter to see the snow and watch birds," says Muzaffar Ahmad, a tourist taxi operator.

In addition to the Hokersar wetland, migratory birds visit other wetlands in Kashmir. These include Hygam, Shalabugh and Mirgund wetlands and notified areas including Kranchoo, Malagam and Manibugh. However, as these notified areas are yet to be handed over to the wildlife department, it is unclear how many migratory birds visit them.

"Around 200,000 migratory birds are estimated

outing at the lake.

But a disturbing factor has emerged over the past few years. Birds are being poached at some of the wetlands. This does not augur well for the future of these birds since their safety is being compromised.

"Due to the eruption of militancy in the Kashmir Valley, officials of the wildlife department are not willing to enter deep into the wetlands. They are not ready to risk their lives to ensure that no poaching takes place. Many birds

MEHRAJ BHAT



Birds at the Hokersar wetland this year

The chirping of the birds is like an orchestra for people living in and around the wetlands. The birds, huddling in a group to warm themselves, provide a perfect setting for Kashmir's snowy winter.

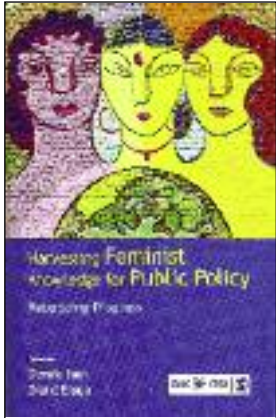
to be present at the Shalabugh wetland. According to our numbers the Hygam wetland has around 100,000 migratory birds. Around 10,000 migratory birds are present at Mirgund wetland. We had requested for the possession of notified areas but that has not been done so far," says Rauf.

Besides the wetlands and notified areas, migratory birds can be seen flitting around in different water bodies in the Kashmir valley. If one takes a round of the world famous Dal Lake one can easily spot thousands of migratory birds enjoying an

have been killed over the past few years and such killings are still going on," says Abdul Rahim, a resident of Soibugh area that falls in the vicinity of the Hokersar wetland.

In all fairness, wildlife department officials have often complained that they do not have the requisite manpower and equipment to tackle poachers at the Hokersar and other wetlands in Kashmir. They have time and again urged the government to look into this matter so that their genuine concerns are addressed. ■

The bubble-up theorists



HARVESTING FEMINIST KNOWLEDGE FOR PUBLIC POLICY: REBUILDING PROGRESS

Edited: Devaki Jain and Diane Elson
Elson
Sage

The women writers come from countries as diverse as the Philippines, Japan, China and Cuba. And the topics chosen are timely. Jain has authored an essay titled, 'Questioning Economic Success through the Lens of Hunger.' Solita Collas-Monsod contextualises, 'Removing the Cloak of Invisibility: Integrating Unpaid Household Services in the Philippines Economic Accounts.' Itza Castaneda and Sarah Gammage explore the links between 'Gender, Global Crises and Climate Change.'

In her opening chapter, Jain points to the Indian paradox of 'mountains of food and millions of starving citizens.' Her argument is that inequity, hunger and poverty in India are due to ill conceived liberalism and a blind belief in GDP led growth resulting in a policy shift from tradi-

investment and consumption. The catchword here would be 'social' which includes non-profits like cooperatives, self-help groups, forest management groups and state-owned enterprises.

Marta Nunez Sarmiento, a Cuban writer, in her essay writes that the Cuban Revolution received mass support because it provided universal and free access to basic benefits. She says that while Cuban working women play an increasing role in the labour market, they have to invest disproportionate time in unpaid work. Also, many traditional discriminatory and patriarchal attitudes survive and there is 'a need to make the decision-making abilities of women workers an accepted component of gender ideology.'

There are some innovative concepts in the

Kavita Charanji
New Delhi

A dialogue between leading feminist thinkers, academics and economists at Casablanca, Morocco, in January 2007 spawned a women's group called the 'Casablanca Dreamers.' This group questioned the existing paradigm of free market-driven development which has resulted in growing poverty and inequity. They dreamed of a new equitable, inclusive and sustainable world for women who bore the brunt of global poverty

The 'dreamers' have contributed 14 essays to this book titled 'Harvesting Feminist Knowledge for Public Policy,' co-edited by Devaki Jain, a well-known development economist and Diane Elson, Professor of Sociology at the University of Essex, UK, who was named one of 50 key global thinkers on development in 2006.

"The initial aim was to narrow, influence and actually redesign the UN's framework for what is called gender and development. We wanted to move it from gender equality to the influence of gendered analysis on macro-economic policy directions," says Jain explaining the rationale behind this volume of essays.

However, the global financial and economic crisis – which Jain describes as the worst since the Great Depression of the 1930s – intervened. It led to an intense critique of financial management and the thinking behind macro-economic policies. The Casablanca Dreamers decided to join the conversation with their ideas and perspectives. This book is a step in that direction.



Devaki Jain



Diane Elson

Due recognition needs to be given to unpaid work such as providing care for family and communities and for producing food, fetching fuel and water and housework.

tional agriculture to export-oriented sectors such as services, trade and non-food agriculture. She points out that since women play a crucial role in food production, providing them land rights is the very first need for universal food security.

In her essay, Elson writes that socially just economies require changes in the way goods and services are produced, distributed and consumed. Due recognition needs to be given to unpaid work, such as providing care for family and communities and for producing food, fetching fuel and water and housework. The vital need today is to ensure that there is no entitlement failure and greater attention is paid to social production,

book. "We advance the idea of how political democracy should include economic democracy and how we would like to see economic change without so much inequity," says Jain. She points to two recent examples of how iniquitous growth can be a tinderbox – the vociferous Wall Street protests, and in India the thumbs down to the entry of foreign direct investment in the multi-brand retail sector.

The book advocates a 'bubble up' model of development led by the poor through 'demand generated by wage increases of ordinary workers and the earnings of small and medium farmers, micro and medium businesses and the self-employed.' ■

Green mantra: soil, soul, society

Swati Chopra
Dehradun

SATISH Kumar is a globally renowned eco-philosopher whose work combines spirituality and ecology. Ordained as a Jain monk when he was just nine, he was inspired by Mahatma Gandhi at the age of 18 to re-enter worldly life and work in Vinoba Bhave's Bhoodan movement. In 1962, he embarked on a peace voyage on foot from India to the US, during which he presented 'peace tea' to leaders of the nuclear nations of the time.

In 1973, economist E.F. Schumacher persuaded Satish to live in England because, as he said, "There are many Gandhians in India, we need one in England." Satish took over as editor of *Resurgence* magazine, started by Schumacher to promote his alternative vision of economics, enshrined in *Small is Beautiful*.

Over the years, Satish has attempted to inspire the international green movement towards a spiritual orientation, termed 'deep' or 'reverential' ecology. In 1991, he founded an international centre for learning – the Schumacher College. His books include *You are Therefore I am*, *The Buddha and the Terrorist*, and most recently, *Earth Pilgrim*, which is also the name of a BBC film on his life watched by over 3.6 million viewers.

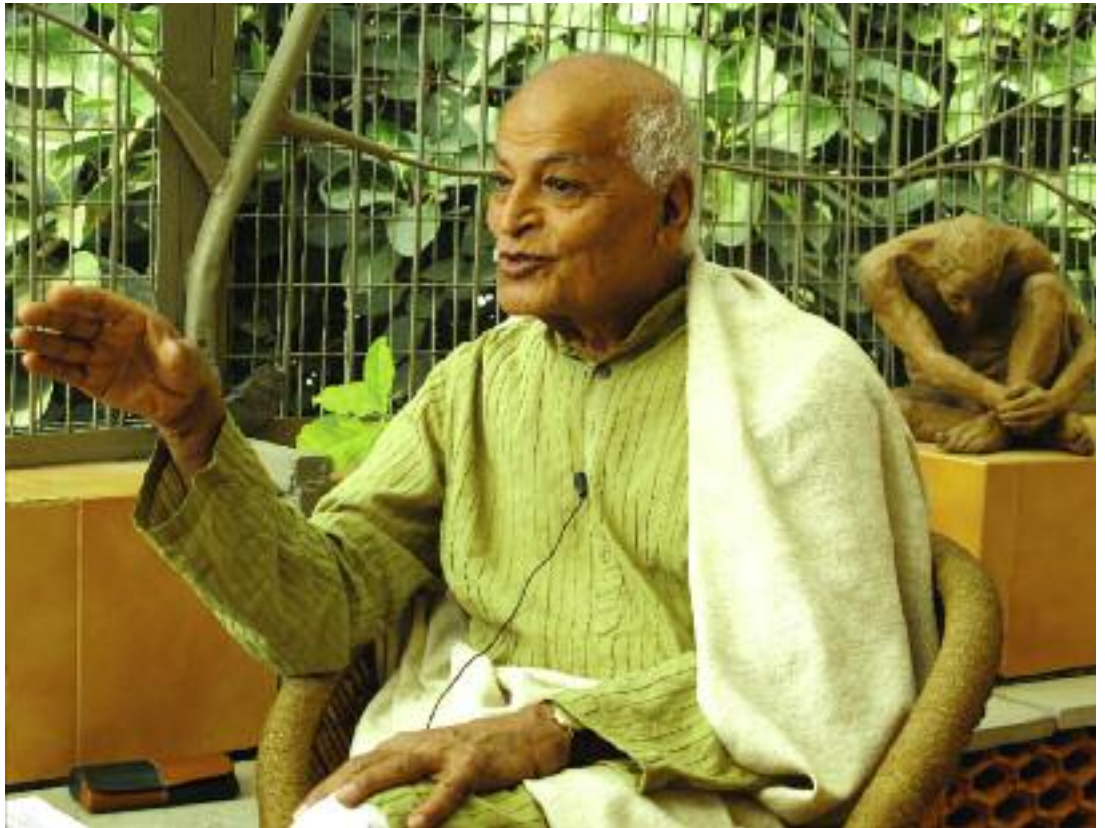
What, according to you, are the challenges before the environmental movement today?

Climate change, biodiversity demise, the population boom and growing consumerism. From my perspective, however, the biggest challenge is our disconnection with nature, our idea that human beings are superior. We see ourselves as being in control, and the 8.7 million species on earth must serve our needs. So we think we can do what we like – over-fish the oceans, clear rainforests to create cities, factory farming, and so on.

The environmental movement is trying to solve all the other problems without challenging this philosophy that puts human beings in charge and allows them to use nature for their benefit. Like human rights, we must recognise the rights of nature. Then, whatever we take from nature will be as a gift, not as a matter of right.

There is increasing awareness internationally that the dominant economic model is unequal and unsustainable. Would you see the Occupy Wall Street movement as part of this questioning?

In spite of 100 years of economic growth, particularly in the US and Europe, people are not happy. It was believed that economic growth for the sake of economic growth was good enough. This is actually not growth in economy but in finance, money. More money is turned around and you measure that as your GDP. People buy bigger homes and new models of cars and computers every year, but they are not happy. Plus, there is polluted air and rivers, isolated communities, congested cities, increasing crime – no problem has been solved with economic growth.



Satish Kumar

We have created a system in which human beings are in a double bind – neither can you stop economic growth, nor can you keep at it. On the one hand, economic growth has been unequal and led to environmental destruction. On the other hand, if there is no economic growth, there is unemployment. Even if you don't need cars or arms, you still have to keep producing them to keep people employed.

The other problem is that economic growth is fuelled by oil. In this, too, we are in a double bind. Continued use of fossil fuels will exacerbate global warming and climate change, and it is limited. The demand for oil is ever-increasing, and its supply is ever-decreasing. The West is in a tough situation.

Not just the West, but India and China too.

Then they will hit the same brick wall!

How could India better manage its 'growth story'?

In the world, India is seen as an emerging market. That is a fundamental mistake. A nation like India is not merely a market. It is a landscape of culture. If we have only financial growth and industrial production, where we follow the same path as the West, we will come to the same place where communities will be broken down, there will be massive urbanisation, and fewer jobs in agriculture because it will become industrialised. The economic growth model of the West, without spiritual and cultural values, turns human beings into mere consumers, cogs in the machine of the market economy.

What can India do differently?

Rather than bring everybody from villages to cities to live in slums, give them land, crafts and work in their villages. Plant trees, grow food, make clothes – become self-reliant. Do not become dependant for your livelihood on exports. An export-based economy is unsustainable because how long can you go on exporting? And if a competitor arrives with cheaper goods, your economy will fall apart. The European economies are failing because they are importing and not exporting enough.

India is rapidly discarding its traditional lifestyles, which might actually hold the key to a sustainable future.

Recently, I went to Maheshwar in Madhya Pradesh. There I saw a way of life where people live simply but comfortably. For example, in a cart with a handmade roof, a woman in a beautiful, handwoven sari was selling papayas she had grown. She was contented. Hers is a better quality of life, even if it does not include cars or computers. Those people don't think they are poor. We tell them they are poor because they don't have this or that.

What can each of us do to become more ecologically sensitive?

We can do this by following a model I call 'Soil, Soul, Society'. 'Soil' refers to caring for the environment, 'Soul' for your personal well-being and happiness. 'Society' means making sure no one is in dire poverty, that the underprivileged are not exploited. These three dimensions exist together, and we must take care of them all. ■

Website: www.resurgence.org

GREEN CURES

Cold war

Dr G. G. GANGADHARAN

AGEING is a natural process which will culminate in the complete cessation of life at a predetermined time. Ayurveda prepares one to face old age with dignity and strength so that the process of ageing can be enjoyed rather than suffered. For this one has to understand what ageing is and how to prevent or reduce its ill effects.

Mostly vata-related diseases appear at this stage, so one has to prepare the body against vitiation of vata. Diseases above the neck region which are seen at a young age do not commonly occur in old age since it is dominated by vata. Some of the common problems which occur in old age are sneezing, allergic rhinitis and chronic running nose.

Many of these conditions can be prevented or corrected if one follows some lifestyle modifications after the age of 60. The body, as a safety reaction, tries to expel allergens that attack the olfactory region in the form of forceful sneezing. If the body's immunity is strengthened and the dryness of the body is reduced through internal and external unctuousness, this can be prevented.

An oil prepared with leaves of Bilwa (*Aeglemarmelos*), black pepper and a piece of dry ginger, used as a head application before having a bath every day, can prevent or reduce sneezing. Vilwam Pathyotyadithailam which is available in the market can be used for this purpose.

Also, the application of five drops of Ksheerabala 101 as nasya (after warming slightly) in the nose at around 7:30 am for 14 days is very useful to stop sneezing.

Application of oil on the head regularly is a good practice in old age which will prevent drying up of organs above the neck. This condition has to be understood from the Ayurvedic point of view. Dryness and unctuousness are not objectively measurable. But one can appreciate the subjective condition. Whenever there is sneezing one should stop consuming foods that can vitiate kapha and vata, like fermented foods, baked foods, curd and certain kinds of fruits especially banana. Sneezing is not a major disease, but it can be a nuisance and hinder normal day to day life. Sneezing can be a premonitory symptom of conditions like asthma. So, one should always be careful to lead a healthy life.

Food is important in old age. Very light and easily digestible food should be eaten. Take warm water, avoid milk products except ghee and reduce intake of fried food. Ghee is one of the most misunderstood foods in the science of nutrition. In Ayurveda, ghee is the only food



which has been equated with longevity to the extent that one of the synonyms of ghee is Ayu (long life) itself – Ghritham Ayuruchyate.

Ghee when made using the traditional method from cow's milk goes through four different stages of 'Paka' or digestion.

First, when milk is boiled and then cooled.

Second, when a few drops of buttermilk are added and left overnight for fermentation.

Third, when the curd which is formed is churned with a wooden instrument and the butter is removed.

And last, when the butter is melted under a low fire till all the water has evaporated. This can be measured by the absence of bubbles in the heated ghritham.

When the gritham or clarified butter or ghee is made in this way it becomes life-enhancing ghee. This is what Ayurveda prescribes for old age, in moderation.

Any indigestion in old age can result in a cold and running nose. We have to ensure that the agni or the digestive fire is maintained properly in old age.

For this, take one tablespoon of Ashta Choornam either with honey or with hot water before breakfast, lunch and dinner.

If there is a tendency for constipation always drink plenty of water boiled with half teaspoon of jeera (cumin seed) and a piece of dried ginger. Whenever there is a cold and running nose, take a pinch of dried ginger powder and smell it several times a day. This is very effective in treating a running nose. Also avoid washing the head since it will help the body to fight against cold. Soups made of horse gram dressed with onion, black pepper and minimum salt are very useful in fighting cold. Not only will such soups improve the agni, they will also help to strengthen the body's immune system.

During old age it is advisable to avoid all deep fried foods since these are difficult to digest and very low in nutrients. When there is cold or sneezing, or both conditions prevail, one should not go out at night. If at all one has to go out, properly cover both the ears and head first. Proper nutrition which reduces vata, controls kapha and pacifies pitha is the food for old age. They can be designed as per one's eating habits and food culture. Take only warm food. Don't consume refrigerated and reheated food, deep-fried foods and no cold water. These will keep you away from cold and sneezing. ■

Email: vaidya.ganga@rlht.org.in

WONDER PLANT

Admirable asparagus

AFTER recovering from his short tryst with ulcers, my grandfather was feeling extremely weak. There were moments when he could not even gather enough energy to walk. All his medical reports were normal, but he was not feeling too good. To overcome his weakness, our family doctor prescribed an Ayurvedic preparation of Shatavari or asparagus racemosus. To everyone's relief my grandfather was up and about in no time. He regained his lost energy and enthusiasm. My family was delighted when I pointed to the Shatavari or asparagus climber in our garden. Till then it had been dismissed as an ornamental addition.

Shatavari or asparagus derives its names from the ancient Greeks who used the word to refer to all tender shoots picked and savored while very young. In India, the tubers of this shrub are used for making several kinds of drugs, the most popular being Chayawanprash.

PROPERTIES: Shatavari is an Indian word denoting "hundred roots." It is one of the most important herbs in Ayurvedic medicine for dealing with problems related to women's fertility. It is also good for the heart. The bark is poisonous but Shatavari leaves are boiled to form part of an Ayurvedic poultice applied for the relief of boils. Its tubers are the commonly used medicinal parts.

The tuber is effectively used to treat problems of circulatory, digestive, respiratory and female reproductive organs. Being a rejuvenating herb, its restorative action is beneficial in balancing the hormonal system of women. It regulates menstruation and ovulation, improves lactation, decreases morning sickness, helps in infertility, menopause, general sexual debility etc. However, it is also effective in ailments like ulcers and hyperacidity. Its cooling action works on chronic fevers, rheumatism, inflammation, nervous disorders, tumors, cardiac debility, throat infections, cough and bronchitis.

This tonic herb is life supporting and Satvik in nature. Shatavari aids in the formation of Ojas, the most subtle, refined essence of life. This in turn brings about a greater flow of consciousness into our physiology and is therefore advised for elderly people due to its rejuvenating properties.

GARDENING: Shatavari is a perennial climber. It has a woody stem, whitish grey or brown in colour, with strong, straight spines and leaf-like rudimentary branchlets (*Cladodes*) arranged in whorls. Flowers are white and fragrant and the fruits are berries resembling black pepper. Its roots are clusters of cylindrical tubers. It is often cultivated as an ornamental plant.

Seeds as well as vegetative means can propagate Shatavari.

Ripe seeds are collected, preferably between December to April, washed thoroughly and dried in the sun. The seeds are first soaked in water for two days before sowing or treated with gibberelic acid for





24, 48 and 96 hours for higher and early germination. Sowing is done in June and July. Seeds are sown two cm below the soil on raised beds and germination takes place in 15 to 20 days.

VEGETATIVE PROPAGATION: The tillers arising from the base of a mature plant can be separated and planted individually.

Make your medicine

For acidity: Crush fresh tubers to extract juice. Take six teaspoons of this juice with sugar in the morning and evening for seven days.

Pound dry tubers to make a powder. Boil together three teaspoons of this powder with half cup of milk till the solution is reduced to half. Take six teaspoons of this concoction with sugar twice a day for seven days.

For burning sensation on the feet: Crush fresh tubers to extract juice. Apply the juice all over burning feet and soles in the morning and at bedtime till cured.

For hoarse throat: Take one teaspoon of root powder with honey two or three times a day after food. This is especially useful in conditions associated with throat inflammation.

As a galactagogue: Shatavari pounded and taken with milk increases the flow of breast-milk

For excessive menstruation: Crush fresh tubers to extract juice. Take four teaspoons of fresh juice with sugar thrice a day half an hour before food for seven days.

White discharge: Crush fresh tubers to extract the juice. Take six teaspoons of this juice on an empty stomach in the morning and evening for ten days.

For piles: Half teaspoon of Shatavari root should be taken with milk.

For general immunity: Shatavari also acts as a strength promoter. Extract juice of fresh tubers. Boil half cup of the juice with half cup of milk and one teaspoon of sugar. Take this decoction every morning for three weeks. Alternately, peel fresh tubers, slice into small pieces and dry. Pound the dried pieces into a powder and store in an airtight container. Take one or two teaspoons of this powder mixed with one teaspoon of cow's ghee in the morning and evening for one month. ■

Tabassum Ishrath Fathima is a research scholar with the Informatics Department of I-AIM FRLHT.

LOOK GOOD

Managing stress

In this competitive world, balancing our professional and personal lives is like fighting a battle. Why this stress? Is it because we think that we can carry the burden of life by being a slave to the mind or is it because we do not want to change our outlook?

Stress results in anger, agitation, feeling low and negativity. Our thought process shuts down and we tend to commit mistakes.

- The first step to beating stress is to control the mind. Start the day by rising early, do a daily work out along with meditation, pranayama and a refreshing oil massage.
- Eat for good health and drink water when you begin to feel stressed.
- Admit limitations. Know your potential. Focus. The mantra to practice is to plan our activities one by one and then execute.
- Organize your thoughts. Correct your actions and never pass on your stress to your near and dear ones.

- Spend time with good people. Share love and happiness. Your acts of kindness will make you enthusiastic and committed.
- Learn to forgive and forget. Smile and be peaceful.
- Don't regret what you lose. Think it was not yours anyway.
- Speak the truth. Be honest and hardworking.
- Never keep a pending job for the next day.
- Don't have too many ambitions, ego, pride, over expectations or over confidence. Don't underestimate another person's worth.
- Believe that what actions we do, will be repaid someday. It may not be what we expect but what we are destined to get. Accept both success and failure.
- Take a good tonic containing Ashwaganda / Brahmi /Sankapuspi to increase your memory and to maintain mental and physical energy. ■

Dr Rekha.R, RMO,I-AIM Health Care Centre

ORGANIC CHEF

Herbs & rice

TAMBULI

Ingredients:

Doddapatre leaves: 25-30 leaves

Green chillis : 1or 2 (optional)

Cumin seeds: 1/4 tsp

Coriander seeds: 1tbs

Grated coconut: 2 tbsp

Black pepper: 1/2 tsp

Fresh ginger: 1inch piece

Buttermilk: 2 cups

Salt: To taste

For tempering:

Ghee: 1 tsp

Mustard seeds: 1/4 tsp

Curry leaves: a string

Red chilli: 1 (broken)

Asafoetida: a pinch

Method: Wash the leaves thoroughly and drain the excess water. Heat a saucepan. Add coriander and pepper seeds and saute for a few seconds. Add the Doddapatre leaves, ginger and saute till the leaves wilt. Turn off the heat and allow to cool. Transfer the fried mixture with coconut, cumin seeds, green chillis and salt to a mixer jar and grind into a smooth paste. Add the buttermilk and churn once. Season with mustard seeds, curry leaves, broken red chillis and asafoetida. Serve with hot rice.

This herb is used for curing stomach related ailments like cholera, diarrhea etc.

It is very effective in curing skin ailments. A light juice or Kashaya made by boiling the leaves in water is an excellent medicine for curing the common cold.

Tambuli is an authentic dish from Karnataka. It

can be made with Doddapatre leaves, (Coleus aromaticus) fresh pomegranate leaves or cucumber. The recipe is the same.

BOTTLEGOURD IDLIS

Ingredients:

Bottlegourd or lauki: Around 1 kg

Raw rice: 1 ½ cups

Cumin seeds (jeera): 1 ½ tsp

Soaked chana dal: One handful

Cocunut: ¼ piece or 30 gm

Asafoetida: 1 pinch

Green chillis: Optional

Salt: To taste

Method: Cut the lauki and cook with one cup of water. Leave to cool.

Wash and drain the rice and let it dry in the shade.

Fry the dried rice, cool, and then powder coarsely.

Mix the powered rice with the cooked lauki, jeera, asafoetida, coconut, soaked chana dal and salt.

Keep aside to soak for about one hour. The mixture should be of dropping consistency. If the mixture is thick add a little water.

Grease the idli plates, pour the idli mix into it and cook for about 10 minutes. Serve with fresh chutney. The cooked lauki and powdered rice should be cool while it is being mixed.

This dish can be given to any patient but would be more beneficial for people who are obese or those suffering from high cholesterol. ■

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

PRODUCTS

PHOTOGRAPHS BY SHAMIK BANERJEE

TASTY PANS

BLACK and lovely these kettles, pots, pans and ladles have a smooth sheen. Ashim Pearl Shimray, an artist potter from Manipur, produces this handmade kitchenware in Delhi. Shimray learnt blue pottery first and then turned her attention to traditional pottery produced by her community. Black pottery is an art form which was fading away, she says.

Shimray has formed a women's cooperative in Ukhrul district of Manipur which makes these utensils. Both stone and clay are used. The stone is ground into a powder and the blackness comes through traditional technology. Some of it is exported. Shimray says the clay enhances the taste of the food cooked in it. She has also been training young people from Manipur who come to Delhi. They learn, go back home and begin their own workshops, says Shimray who believes it is important to keep tabs on modern trends so that black pottery always has a market. ■



Contact: Ashim Pearl Shimray, 87- B Shahpur Jat, New Delhi-110049 E-mail: ashimpearl@yahoo.co.in

GLITZY BRASS

SOUBHIK Daw from Shantiniketan has an eclectic range of products on offer. There are Dhokra brass images perfected by crafts people from Bankura in West Bengal, as well as pretty jewellery, key chains and frames you can slip a picture into. All at reasonable prices and made by hand.

Daw says he runs a small-scale unit in Shantiniketan where he teaches Dhokra art and sculpts images of gods and goddesses. His forte is tribal jewellery. He says he has formed seven 'kirti udyog' groups of tribal women who make the jewellery. It is artistic and trendy. The dull brass looks a lot like antique gold. There are also necklaces made with colourful beads. Such jewellery pairs well with ethnic and western wear and will surely enhance your appearance. ■



For bulk orders contact: Soubhik Daw at 09433482710, E-mail: soubhikdaw@yahoo.co.in

Solid waste collection Community participation by the residents of Kadakola to clean the village



Kadakola is a major panchayat in the Mysore District of Karnataka. It is one of the 56 villages adopted by the Srinivasan Services Trust (SST) in Karnataka.

This panchayat has 903 households and 80 commercial shops. Every day the panchayat generates about 1.5 tons of solid waste. In the absence of any regular system of cleaning a huge amount of solid waste had accumulated in the village. It posed a serious health hazard.

SST interacted with the members of Self Help Groups (women and men groups), and constituted a Village Development Committee (VDC), comprising of members of various Self Help Groups, the asha worker, the anganwadi worker, school teachers and the elected representatives of the panchayat. Now, the VDC meets every month. Its major concern was disposal of the solid waste. After a few meetings the VDC, on the advice of SST, resolved to collect Rs.30/- per month for commercial shop and Rs.10/- per month from each household. The amount so collected was resolved to be used for ensuring regular clearance of garbage and composting the degradable solid waste.



SST on its part contributed a cycle cart with dust bins. Each household segregates its garbage in two packets viz., degradable and non degradable categories. A person has been appointed by the VDC to collect it from each household. Now the cleaning is regularly carried out in six streets of the panchayat. The collected garbage is transported to a distance of 750m and deposited in compost pits.

The community's initiative has helped to resolve a long standing issue of the village.

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