

# Civil Society

## THE MANSI WAY

### Saving infants and mothers in Jharkhand



Sumitra Soren, the Sahiya of Chorok Pathor village



**'WE SEE EACH OTHER'S FILMS ABROAD'**

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### THE MANSI WAY

A three-year initiative in the Seraikela block of Jharkhand has trained 200 women as frontline health workers and brought down infant and maternal mortality rates.

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# Civil Society

READ US. WE READ YOU.

## When everyone is on board

**P**ARTNERSHIPS are necessary when it comes to dealing with the complex problems of development that face us. What we like about this month's cover story, The MANSI Way, is how a united effort has resulted in a replicable model.

The American India Foundation has brought together Tata Steel, SEARCH and the Jharkhand government to significantly reduce, in just three years, infant and maternal mortality rates in the very poor Seraikela block.

This is a noteworthy effort for several reasons. First of all, there is an urgent need to deal with infant and maternal deaths because India's record is dismal. Second, it shows us the good that can result in the government embracing the voluntary sector, companies like Tata Steel and competent professionals in order to find creative and durable solutions. Third, MANSI brings out the best in the people of Seraikela. There is wide ownership of the initiative in the villages. It empowers the Sahiya as a frontline health worker and in doing so makes women in Seraikela generally feel better about themselves. Finally, MANSI is evidence that there is no substitute for focused ground level work – it creates awareness, nurtures local talent and defines a methodology through trial and error.

Companies looking for CSR projects should examine MANSI closely. We would recommend they learn from it ways of working with government. It is important to help the State sector find solutions, but we think it is foolish to seek to replace it. So big are the requirements in healthcare and education that a significant difference can only be made through the government. MANSI shows how to achieve this. Through the Sahiya and other health workers it solves a last mile problem, injects energy into a moribund system, but doesn't try to take over.

A growing number of social enterprises now seek to improve the lives of people through ideas that only innovators can deliver. The World Bank's Development Marketplace showcases such enterprises and puts them on a shortlist. Helping these enterprises grow is necessary, but it is equally important for governments to recognise the solutions these initiatives provide and find ways to scale them up. Only the State can do this at a level that matters. As of now social enterprises have the status of outliers. But they represent an expanding pool of talent and new energy and need to be integrated into the system itself so as to make it more responsive.

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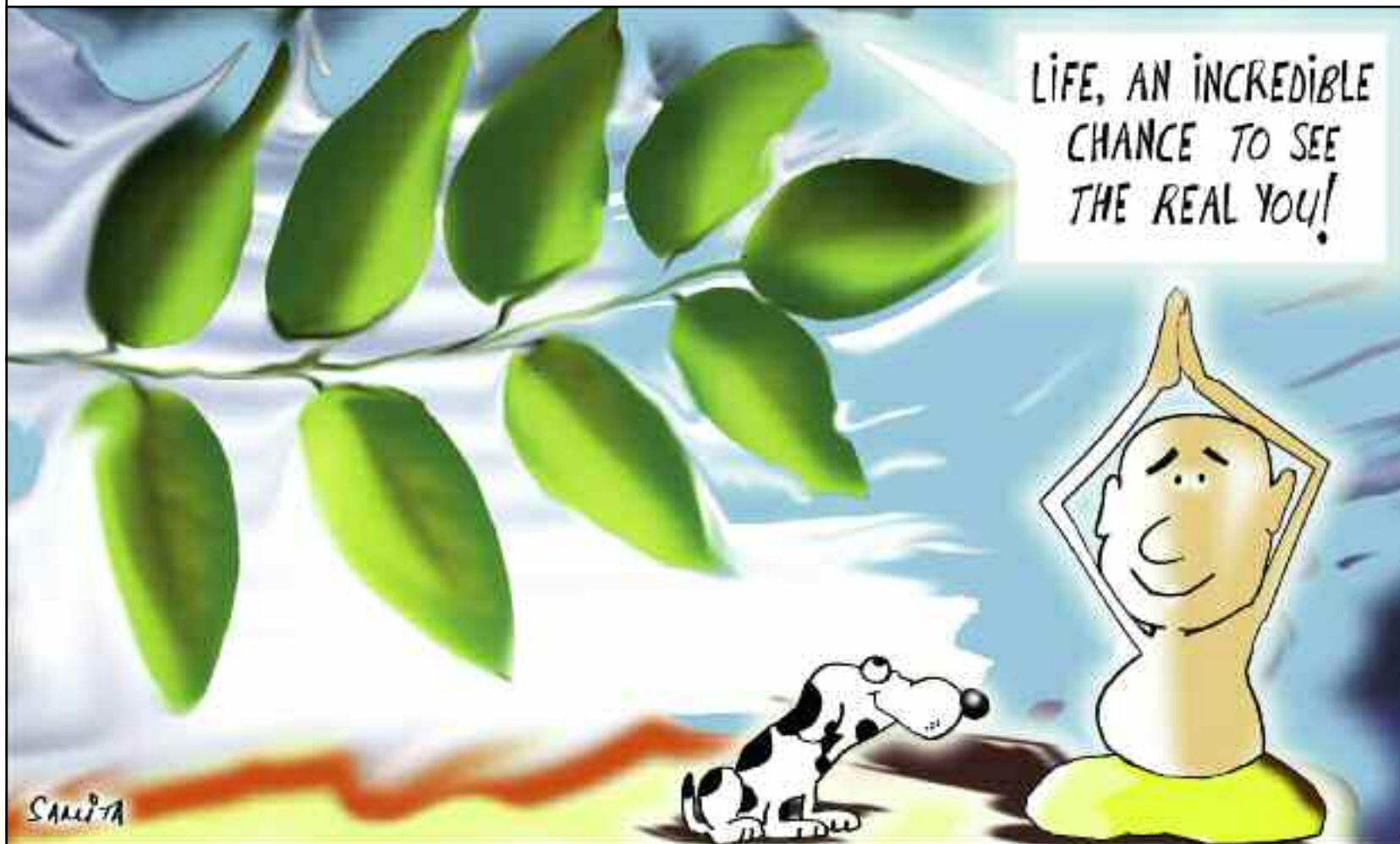
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## IN THE LIGHT

by SAMITA RATHOR



## LETTERS



### Pristine Sikkim

Thanks very much for the lovely cover story, 'At home in Sikkim.' The pictures too were stunning. Gautam Singh's descriptions of homestays in Sikkim tempt us all to visit this pristine state with its flowing rivers, dense jungles and friendly people.

**Manisha Kapoor**

Reading Gautam Singh's cover story makes me want to go to Sikkim again. Kewzing's Bon religion

deserves a mention. It's a pre-Buddhist religion still alive in Kewzing which is perhaps the only place where there are still some practicing Bonpos. The monastery is a Bon monastery and the people are called Bonpos. The Kewzing-Ravangla stretch is extremely bird-rich and has the potential to attract a lot of bird-lovers.

**Sudipto Roy**

### Green CM

I would like to congratulate Pawan Chamling, Chief Minister of Sikkim, for the awesome work he has done. He has become a role model for the rest of India and an inspiration for those aspiring to join politics. He works for the people and not for companies and foreign interests.

**Nitin Dadlani**

### Mayong magic

I enjoyed reading Saibal Chatterjee's story, 'Magic men of Mayong.' I have heard so many stories about Mayong right from my childhood. But the actual history of the place had become a mist in my memory. An awesome article. I am sharing it on my Facebook page.

**Purab Kumar Das**

### Jackfruit

Congratulations for the excellent article, 'Jackfruit defies drought in Vidarbha.' In Vidarbha people are aware of the use of jackfruit as a food. My Maharashtrian friends in Nagpur relish various dishes we prepare. It appears that the farmers of the region are still not aware of the jack tree's potential as a source of timber for making furniture and constructing houses. I hope the article is translated into Marathi and popularized through Panjabrao Krishi Vidyalaya, Akola.

**Ramesh V Bhat**

Fifty years ago, my father planted a jack seed in his home in New Delhi. He wasn't sure that it would survive in Delhi's climate. Perhaps a dripping garden tap nearby helped. The droppings of flocks of sparrows that roosted on the tree must have helped too. In about eight years the tree started bearing fruit to the awe and surprise of passers by who had never seen jackfruits on a tree! It was yielding fruit profusely in 1997 when the house was demolished, but I believe it is still there, the only jack tree for miles around.

If jackfruit can be induced to grow

in hot dry areas, as these Vidarbha farmers have proved, so much the better. It will serve as timely insurance in years of crop failures, with only a small premium of water and manure.

**Debashis Ray**

This is an incredible story of how people have adapted to drought and managed to support their livelihoods by growing jackfruit. The story also indicates the need to value and encourage cultivation of locally available, easily grown and sustainable varieties of fruits and vegetables among farmers. It is also important to give jackfruit the value it deserves.

**Aarti Kelkar Khambete**

Shree Padre's story is an encouragement for us in Karnataka.

We have plenty of jackfruit trees but no organised market. Because of Shree's encouragement we have formed the Varanashi Jackfruit Growers Society and we are trying to organise a market for the crop.

**Dr Varanashi Krishna Moorthy**

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**INTERVIEW / Onir** Save Indie Cinema Campaign**'We see each others films in**

LAKSHMAN ANAND



Onir at home in Delhi: 'We want designated spaces for cinema that has something to say about the times we live in.'

**Saibal Chatterjee**  
New Delhi

ON May 2, the day before President Pranab Mukherjee gave away the 60th National Film Awards, seven directors and an actor-producer came together at a press conference in Delhi to fire another salvo in the ongoing battle to save independent cinema in India.

A group of 60-odd filmmakers from across the country are spearheading a campaign for the creation of low-cost exhibition spaces for Indie films, both Hindi and regional, to showcase the plurality and cultural diversity of India and its cinema.

The initial impetus for the Save Indie Cinema campaign came less than a year ago from writer-director Onir, maker of the National Award-winning crowd-funded quartet of films, *I Am*. The movement has steadily picked up momentum

and despite the many road blocks in the way has begun to yield results.

Given the current movie exhibition scenario, many films that win National Awards have no way of securing decent distribution. They lack access to screens in a system in which the profit motive far outweighs cultural imperatives.

Pushed to the wall, Onir, with the help of several other filmmakers, drafted a petition appealing to the government to initiate measures to nurture and promote meaningful cinema in the Indian film industry's centenary year.

"While applauding the fact that the ministry is spending ₹300 crores to revive our archival films, we want to bring to your notice that urgent attention also needs to be given to supporting meaningful Indie cinema. Otherwise, we will be celebrating past glory while letting the present new wave Indian cinema die," read the petition

addressed to the Union Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Manish Tiwari.

Besides Onir, present at the pre-National Awards press conference were Ashvin Kumar, Aamir Bashir, Amlan Dutta, Anusha Rizvi, Shivendra Singh Dungarpur, Shonali Bose and Sanjay Suri.

Among those that have signed the petition are Aparna Sen, Nandita Das, Ashim Ahluwalia, Rituparno Ghosh, T.V. Chandran, Girish Kasaravalli, Buddhadeb Dasgupta, Goutam Ghose, Vishal Bhardwaj, Umesh Kulkarni, Rahul Bose and Jahnur Barua.

In an interview ahead of the 60th National Awards, Onir threw light on the various challenges and issues that lie ahead of India's new wave Indian cinema as well as on the breakthroughs that have already been achieved by the campaigners.

# wants spaces for screening new wave films some foreign country'

## How and when did the 'Save Indie Cinema' campaign begin?

The seeds were sown in Cannes in May last year. Several of us – Suman Mukhopadhyay, Umesh Kulkarni, Sanjay Suri and I – were chatting about the state of independent cinema in India. Actually we were complaining about the complete lack of exhibition avenues for our kind of films. We get to see each other's work at a festival in some European city, never ever in India. There are no outlets available here. That is a very sad situation. What happens to all the small Indie films that win National Awards, make the Indian Panorama cut or are selected by major international festivals? They are never screened in the country. How do we continue to sustain ourselves? So we asked ourselves, why don't we do something instead of just complaining? We decided to launch a full-fledged movement aimed at forcing a rethink by the country's cultural establishment so that viable spaces could be created for exhibition of independent films. We started with some basic demands. However, we were initially rather sceptical.

## What did the scepticism stem from?

We were not sure we would be able to pull it off. I was sceptical about how many people would actually join the campaign. But the fears have turned out to be unfounded. We started with just 11 filmmakers. Today we are 60-odd and counting. Well over 20,000 people have signed the Save Indie Cinema petition (by logging on to [change.org/saveindie](http://change.org/saveindie)). The number is growing steadily. We have met (and are meeting) the Union Information and Broadcasting Minister, the Doordarshan Director-General, state Chief Ministers, heads of political parties and other leaders to impress upon them the need to create designated spaces for cinema that is different and has something to say about the times that we live in.

## How hopeful are you now of achieving your goal?

We destroyed the culture of watching quality cinema over the years. So it will take time to rebuild it. I grew up in a small town but back then we had access to regional films made by the masters in regular screening spaces. But today, in Delhi or Mumbai, you cannot watch a Tamil, Malayalam or Oriya film. The government has to play a vital role in reviving that culture. When Rabindranath Tagore's centenary was celebrated (in 1961), the then government, in a visionary move, drew up a plan to construct a Rabindra Bhawan in every state capital as a hub for the performing arts.

Why can't the government today do something similar by constructing Dadasaheb Theatres in all major cities of the country to celebrate the centenary of Indian cinema? This would enable people around India to watch films made in different

states of the country. Take a film like Jahnu Barua's *Baandhon* as a case in point. It is so universal in its theme and it is full of humour and pathos. Unfortunately, it will be seen only in Assam. If there were theatres to screen such films, everyone in India would access these gems.

## How did the partnership with change.org come about?

It happened in July last. I was invited to the Pakistan-India Social Media Mela in Karachi to speak on "the art of crowd funding". I connected with Raheel (Khursheed), the Communications Director, India, of change.org (the world's fastest

that it just takes over everything. Moreover, we have demanded that Doordarshan, which once was a strong platform for regional and world cinema, should revive the practice of airing independent films.

## Is there any other way in which you plan to counter the overwhelming emphasis on commercial gains?

The biggest challenge that we face pertains to exhibition. The multiplexes that were given tax breaks on the condition that they would promote small budget content-driven cinema have in fact been instrumental in destroying small films by

**'Take a film like Jahnu Barua's *Baandhon*. It is so universal in its theme and it is full of humour and pathos. Unfortunately, it will be seen only in Assam. If there were theatres to screen such films, everyone in India would access these gems.'**

growing social action platform with over 20 million users in 196 countries), and they decided to help us take the Save Indie Cinema campaign forward. It took off from there.

## Who drafted the initial petition?

I did, but the petition evolved through several meetings with Suman, Umesh, Sanjay, Nila Madhab Panda and others. Shyam Benegal and Ashutosh Gowariker were on board from the very outset. Filmmakers of the stature of Girish Kasaravalli and Jahnu Barua also joined us. Right from the beginning, I also wanted to get in touch with directors who work in the mainstream industry – Vishal Bhardwaj, Zoya Akhtar, Kiran Rao, Homi Adajania and others. As support grew, I got constant feedback and the petition kept getting modified. Shabana Azmi helped me redraft it in the light of her experience as a social activist and a Member of Parliament.

## What exactly do you hope to achieve in the long run?

As the country celebrates 100 years of its cinema, we want the government to not merely showcase our past glories, but also look at creating a structure that would encourage and promote quality filmmakers who are currently working in different production centres. You cannot just give medals to filmmakers and then leave them to their own devices in the current climate in which economic interests interfere so much with art

playing the box office game. It should be made mandatory for a multiplex to block one screen for alternative cinema. We want the government to spend one-third of the ₹300 crores that has been allocated for the restoration and conservation of archival films (which of course is no less important a goal) to set up a network of 60-70 theatres across the country. In many cities, there are existing structures that are under-utilised or unused. These can be renovated and used for screening of independent films irrespective of language at lower ticket prices.

## So are you suggesting a mechanism that will run parallel to the Indian Panorama selection?

What we are suggesting is a decentralised process to select films that should be shown in these small theatres. It is important to clearly define independent cinema and give these films the support that they lack today. We have proposed that centres be created under the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC) in cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai, Thiruvananthapuram and Guwahati and a board of four to five filmmakers set up in each centre to identify the films that deserve to be supported. The panel in one zone will see and judge films from another zone so that vested interests do not mar the process. Ideally, these selection boards should change periodically to prevent any conflict of interests.

*Continued on page 8*

Continued from page 7

**Has the government's response been positive so far?**

Yes, the Information and Broadcasting Minister Manish Tiwari has already announced that the Films Division auditorium on Mahadev Road in Delhi will be turned into a hub for Indie cinema. I hope the government does not stop with just one. I was invited by the Doordarshan Director-General Tripurari Sharan for a formal meeting. The national broadcaster has already created a slot called 'Best of Indian Cinema' and hopefully it will get going very soon.

**'Unless independent filmmakers make money how will they continue making films?'**

**How substantial will the payments for these screenings be?**

The screening fee for a premiere prime time telecast would be ₹25 lakhs, thrice as much as what it used to be in the past when Doordarshan used to telecast National Award-winning and Indian Panorama films every Sunday. For a film that has been screened before, the fee will be ₹15 lakhs. All award-winning and recognised films made since the year 2000 will qualify. That is a great start.

**And how would you want the screenings at the designated theatres to be done?**

These should also be ticketed shows. The response to the independent films shown at the recent Centenary Film Festival in Siri Fort Complex in Delhi was tremendous. But they were screened free. Why shouldn't people be encouraged to pay to watch these films? Unless independent filmmakers make money how will they continue making films?

**Has the issue of the ban on 'A' certified films on television and satellite channels been resolved?**

A 10 pm slot for U/A films on Doordarshan and satellite channels has been approved. But the prohibition on 'A' films stays as of now. These films can be telecast only after 11 pm. Some of the gems of Indian cinema cannot be seen on DD because of this policy. Films like *Pyaasa* and *Charulata* have mature themes – and under the existing policy, they cannot be screened on prime time. What a shame! Nothing else on television is censored. Serials and reality shows get away with so much regressive content while films are clamped down on when it comes to TV. Once a film has been given a censor certificate, its screening should be allowed on TV in an appropriate time slot without any further censorship. Moreover, a film that has won a National Award should automatically qualify for screening on television irrespective of its certification. ■

# Coca-Cola plant gets

**Rakesh Agarwal**  
Dehradun

**T**HE village of Chharba in Uttarakhand has refused to allow the setting up of a Coca-Cola bottling plant on 60 acres of its land, saying that the plant will damage the local ecology.

Chharba, which is 30 km from Dehradun, is proud of a forest of sheesham and khair trees which it has nurtured over the years.

"Reforestation brought about a green revolution in our village. Our water sources got recharged. This plant will destroy the labour of our ancestors," says Monika Rana, a ward member of the Chharba gram panchayat and a member of the Jal Jangal Zameen Bachao Grameen Samiti (JJZBGS), a collective of villagers formed to fend off Coca-Cola.

The bottling plant has the clearance of the Congress state government with Chief Minister Vijay Bahuguna announcing it with much fanfare. Bahuguna has said that he expects the plant to bring in ₹600 crores of investment and with it will come jobs and other smaller industries.

But Coca-Cola has an image problem. The villagers don't trust Coca-Cola and talk of its record elsewhere. At Plachimada in Kerala, for instance, a Coca-Cola bottling plant was shut down after villagers won their case in court.

Hindustan Coca-Cola Beverages Pvt Ltd (HCCB-PL), the Indian subsidiary of Coca-Cola, has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation of Uttarakhand Ltd (SIDCUL) to buy 60 acres for ₹95 lakhs an acre. It has handed over ₹1.60 crores as earnest money to SIDCUL.

The plant will produce non-alcoholic carbonated beverages, juices, fruit-based drinks and packages of drinking water. This would be Coca-Cola's 25th plant in India. The state government is believed to have assured the company it would get clean water from the Yamuna river and the nearby Daakpathar barrage for its operations.

"Coca-Cola setting up a plant here will give tremendous boost to investment in Uttarakhand. It will attract more business houses and mega companies," said the Chief Minister.

But the people don't share his enthusiasm. They say this is precisely the kind of development they detest. It will ruin their natural resources, livelihoods and their lives.

Rattled by the voluble opposition to its plans the state government is trying to lamely placate the people. Over 1,000 people are likely to be employed in the new plant, said Rakesh Sharma, State Principal Secretary and Managing Director, SIDCUL.

He said Coca-Cola also refused to take any incentives being offered by the state government. "We are surprised that Coke did not take any incentives from us. They could have easily got a 25 per cent discount on the land price but the company refused to take it," said Sharma.

But the villagers of Chharba are not impressed by



Protest meeting: Women from Chharba village waiting for Anna



Rumiram Jaswal, gram pradhan, Chharba

the company's rejection of incentives. "They will get our land, our water and our trees for nothing. They will exploit this area to reap huge profits. Why do they need any incentive?" asks Rumiram Jaswal, the gram pradhan (village head) of Chharba village, who is heading the agitation.

The government's claim that the company will create 750 to 1,000 local jobs is treated with disdain. "We know this is all a big sham. They don't employ locals as officers. At best we will get work as daily-wage labourers. Look at what we lose –

# a thumbs down from villagers

PICTURES BY RAKESH AGARWAL



Hazare to arrive

our land, greenery and water," says Anurag Singh, 24, a farmer. "This whole region will suffer from pollution. Our water sources will dry up. The employment offer is just a charade," says Raju Ram, a ward member.

The villagers say in 2005 this same stretch of land was allotted to Doon University to set up its campus and they didn't oppose it at all because they thought it would improve educational prospects for the youth in their village.

"The proposal to set up a Doon University campus was sent to us for approval during the time of Rajendra Singh, who was our pradhan then. The approval was given on condition that construction will be over in two years but not a single brick has been laid since then," says Jaswal.

"This land belongs to our gram sabha and we will not let Coca-Cola enter," declared Munna Khan, ex-pradhan of Chharba gram panchayat at a protest meeting organised by the village on 6 May.

The agitation is snowballing with NGOs and activists throwing their weight behind Chharba. Others who have joined the battle include forest rights activists, those in the anti-dam struggle, supporters of organic farming and political parties.

The villagers point out that they have grown a forest on the land being handed over to Coca-Cola. About 30 years ago, under the Rajiv Gandhi Plantation Programme, the Central Government had given ₹10 lakhs to the Chharba gram panchayat. With that money they had planted the 25,000 sheesham and khair trees that exist today.

On 14 May, the villagers of Chharba waited patiently for over three hours for Anna Hazare to turn up. The famed anti-corruption crusader was touring the state as part of his Uttarakhand Jantana Yatra. About 500 people including about 100 school-children had gathered to hear Anna Hazare speak. He urged people to vote for candidates, "who are responsible to you and are not corrupt." He said he didn't know much about Coca-Cola. "But it should not destroy natural resources," he said.

What deeply disappointed people was that Anna Hazare refused to tie *raksha sutra* (protection thread) on the khair and sheeshum trees that the villagers had grown. Uttarakhand has a history of ardently protecting its trees. This is the land of the famed Chipko movement.

NGOs in Dehradun too warn of pollution and depletion of groundwater if Coca-Cola decides to set up its plant here. "Our study of areas adjacent to Coca-Cola plants in Mehdiyanj near Varanasi, at Kaladera near Jaipur and at Plachimada in Palghat district of Kerala confirmed the presence of highly dangerous and toxic heavy metals like lead, zinc, cadmium and chromium. This has adversely affected people's health as it seeps into groundwater. In Plachimada, farmers used this water for irrigation. That made their land barren. Also the excessive amount of water extracted by the company has dried up groundwater," says Dr. Anil Gautam of the People's Science Institute (PSI) in Dehradun.

Scientists are still trying to figure out the exact origins of these effluents. The Coke formula is a secret. "Obviously, they don't observe the same stringent norms here as they do in industrialised countries although their catch-line is 'Coke is the same everywhere'," remarks Ravi Chopra, Director, PSI.

Activists working on water issues are incensed. "First of all the state has no water policy. Then it gives leverage to Coke to exploit our water sources," says Sachchidananda Bharati, Secretary of the Dudhatoli Lok Vikas Sansthan, an NGO based in Chamoli district. Bharati has passionately promoted water harvesting and is famous for having revived a dead river.

Anil Joshi, well-known for his cycle marches to promote water-harvesting and traditional water mills, responded cautiously. "There should be an in-depth study of the profit and loss that accrues to people living near Coca-Cola's plants. If the

government still thinks the company's plant is profitable, it can be set up but with local villagers owning a 50 per cent share."

The legendary Chandi Prasad Bhat of Dasholi Gram Swaraj Mandal in Gopeshwar, Chamoli district, said: "Kerala is throwing out Coca-Cola for polluting their environment. Now, we are welcoming them. This is pathetic."

The other issue that has cropped up is the impact the company's use of water will have on the state's hydro-electricity plants. Uttarakhand is known for its potential to generate power through its state-run hydropower projects. The proposed bottling plant is likely to divert some of that water and affect power generation in the state.

The 100 MW Kulhal, Dhalipur and Dhakrani hydropower projects at Vikasnagar block use water from the Yamuna to generate electricity. Groundwater sources in Vikas Nagar and Sahaspur have already been depleted by industrial and construction activities. The setting up of a water guzzling plant will intensify the water crisis.

"This bottling plant may affect power generation especially those hydro power projects that generate electricity by using Yamuna river water. If water is taken by Coca-Cola from Yamuna at Vikasnagar it will surely affect power production by our five major hydel projects," says G.P. Patel, managing director of the state-run Jal Vidyut Nigam Limited which produces 475 MW. Clearly, the state-run department is also opposing the plant.

"If we explore different options, there should be no problem in supplying water to the Coca-Cola plant. We'll not clear the plant till all environmental standards have been met. If need be, we will bring water from nearby canals instead of the Yamuna barrage," said Rakesh Sharma. "The Yamuna water at the moment goes 'waste' for us as it flows down to Haryana, Delhi and Uttar Pradesh."

The defeat of the Congress in the recently held municipal elections has further encouraged political parties in the opposition to pounce on the Vijay Bahuguna government. The Communist Party of India (CPI) called the Congress anti-people and demanded it reconsider the green signal given to Coca-Cola.

The Uttarakhand Parivartan, a regional political party, demanded the government take back its MoU. "Since the establishment of Uttarakhand, the natural resources of the state are being usurped in a planned way. People's rights are being transferred to private companies," says P.C. Tiwari, the party's president.

Uttarakhand's first major investment after the withdrawal of the hill-based tax incentives in 2010 has indeed run into rough weather. ■



Anna: 'Vote for clean people.'

# Himachal a model in plastic war

LAKSHMAN ANAND

**Kavita Charanji**  
Shimla

**J**UNK food may soon become history in the hill state of Himachal Pradesh. The state's High Court has directed the government to ban the sale of non-essential items in non-biodegradable bags from 1 July. Essential items like edible oil and milk are exempted from the ban.

This important judgment was delivered by the bench of Justice Deepak Gupta and Justice Sanjay Karol in response to a public interest litigation (PIL) filed by Sanjeev Kumar of Hamirpur district.

Howls of protests are likely to follow from junk food manufacturers who will have to find ingenious ways of getting their products to traders and consumers in the state. But for now the state government is holding its ground.

Says Sudripta Roy, Chief Secretary, Himachal Pradesh, who also holds the environment portfolio: "We are conscious that there will be a loss of excise duty as a result of a ban on fast food in non-biodegradable plastic bags. Moreover, there is the question of whether the High Court order will stand scrutiny in the Supreme Court should it be challenged. The decision of the High Court is the latest in a series of actions to protect the environment and the health of children in the state. It is going to be difficult but we will definitely try to enforce the ban."

The state government has been rather successful in its endeavour to curb the use and storage of non-biodegradable plastic bags and plastic waste. As shoppers in Himachal will testify, goods can only be taken away in jute, paper and cloth bags.

On 2 October, 2011, the government imposed a complete ban on the storage and use of non-biodegradable disposable cups, plates and glasses. The state's success story in banning plastic bags dates back to the introduction of the Himachal Pradesh Biodegradable Garbage Control Act of 1995. Four years later, on 1 January, 1999, a ban was imposed on coloured polythene bags made from recycled plastic. Subsequently in 2004, a ban on the use of polybags less than 70 microns in thickness and less than 18x12 inches in size came into effect.

In a historic move that had many traders up in arms, on 2 October, 2009, a total ban was imposed on the production, sale, usage, storage and distribution of plastic bags made of non-biodegradable material. Depending on the quantity of the prohibited variety of polythene carry bags and plastic, violators of the ban were slapped with fines ranging from ₹500 to ₹25,000. Littering of plastic waste by individuals attracted a fine of ₹1,000. Institutions and commercial establishments were lucky if they got away with ₹5,000 for the same offence.

"Himachal is the only state in India to totally ban plastic bags and has overtaken even developed countries on this front," says Dr S.S. Negi, director, Department of Environment, Science and Technology (DEST). In India, Himachal Pradesh has become a model for other states to follow. Of late Punjab and many other states have shown a keen



The government is firm despite a loss in revenue

**'Himachal is the only state in India to totally ban plastic bags and has overtaken even developed countries on this front,' says Dr S.S. Negi, director of DEST.**

interest in studying how Himachal implemented a complete ban on plastic and polythene bags.

Himachal Pradesh has made progress on this front because of decades of exploring environment-friendly solutions for plastic waste disposal. After years of trial with recycling plastic waste, DEST piloted a model to process plastic waste in cement kilns in the state. However, as the process of segregation, cleaning, packing and transporting waste was difficult and expensive, the model was not replicable and sustainable for the entire state.

Finally, DEST personnel decided to explore the Tamil Nadu model of using plastics in road construction. Now DEST has a tie-up with the Himachal Pradesh Public Works Department (PWD) so that plastic waste can be used effectively to construct roads. "About 113 km of roads have been constructed in small stretches identified by the PWD. Using plastic waste is highly cost effective as ₹30,000 can be saved per km," says Dr Suresh C. Attri, Principal Scientific Officer (Environment) at DEST.

Many ground level initiatives have helped ensure that the ban on plastics is sustained.

Departments such as the Pollution Control Board, Forest and Tourism as well as Police, and Deputy Commissioners, Sub Divisional Magistrates and tehsildars have been authorised to monitor and enforce the ban through fines if necessary.

Abhishek Jain, Deputy Commissioner, Una, says, "The ban has largely been effective in our district. Of course there are problems since the ban on plastic has not been introduced in other states with the result that outsiders and tourists bring plastic bags to Una."

Roy, too, points out that the periphery of the state is prone to plastic dumping. Nevertheless, a strong people's movement against the use of plastic and an increase in awareness about the problems of plastic waste management in the fragile and pristine Himachal environment seems to have carried the day. The 'Polythene Hatao-Paryavaran Bachao' campaign was launched by former Chief Minister Prem Kumar Dhumal on 21 December, 2009 at Dharamshala. Around 142 tonnes of polythene were collected by volunteers from "hot spots" where people were throwing plastic waste.

Raising awareness among students, eco-clubs, mahila mandals, associations of panchayati raj institutions, NGOs and industrial associations, among others, was the other prong of the strategy. For the sensitisation of the people, the mass media was roped in through jingles, video clippings, documentary films, rallies, posters and essay competitions.

DEST has scored a win along the way. The organisation won the Prime Minister's Award for Excellence in Public Administration for the year 2009-2010. The award was a recognition of DEST's remarkable initiative, "Sustainable Plastic Waste Management in Himachal Pradesh: From Concept to Policy". ■



# With INSAF, govt draws FCRA line

KS Narayanan  
New Delhi

**E**VEN as preparations were being made for the annual summit of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) on 3 May in Noida, the Union Home Ministry slapped a notice on the Indian Social Action Forum (INSAF), a coalition of NGOs and people's movements, suspending its FCRA (Foreign Contribution Regulation Act) registration and freezing its bank account.

In an order dated 30 April, AK Sinha, Director, Foreigners' Division (FCRA wing) froze INSAF's bank account for 180 days, stating that the Forum's activities are "prejudicial and against public interest." If INSAF needs to utilise its fund, it has to take prior permission, the order added. The action was taken under Section 13 of the FCRA 2010.

The Home Ministry's order has been roundly condemned by activists. The immediate provocation, they say, is that INSAF organised and staged a protest against the ADB Summit.

About 300 protestors – representing NGOs, farmers groups and people's movements led by Medha Patkar and other activists – had turned up at the venue shouting slogans against ADB and accusing the bank of causing displacement and loss of livelihoods by promoting privatisation.

"This was the immediate cause of provocation to act against us," alleged Anil Choudhury, founder of INSAF.

Formed after the demolition of the Babri Mosque in 1992 to resist globalisation, combat communalism and defend democracy, INSAF has been at the forefront of agitations against the government's neo-liberal policies.

Chitranjan Singh, general secretary of INSAF, says the organisation is paying a heavy price for challenging the FCRA, a 'draconian piece of legislation.' "What kind of parliamentary democracy is India if we cannot even tolerate a little dissent?"

"What they are doing is criminalising dissent," says Amita Joseph, head of the Business and Community Foundation.

Prashant Paikaray of POSCO Pratirodh Sangram Samiti in Odisha points out that the government is pursuing a double-edged policy. It is co-opting civil society organisations to create awareness and enhance the success of its welfare schemes and, at the same time, it is using tools like the FCRA against NGOs fighting violence perpetrated by the State and corporate entities.

This is not the first time that NGOs are facing

flak from the Union Home Ministry. In 2012, the ministry cancelled the FCRA registration of about 4,138 NGOs. It said that out of 40,000 NGOs registered for FCRA accounts only half were active.

Those with an understanding of foreign funding to the voluntary sector said: "We understand the importance of dissent in a large democracy like ours. But the government does not want to encourage those receiving foreign funds to be engaged in protests as the donor is a foreign entity. The government is sensitive about it. NGOs are welcome to protest with funds raised from India."

INSAF seems to have got on the wrong side of the ministry since it has been receiving foreign

the FCRA Rules 2011, are unconstitutional because these say that if an organisation indulges habitually in 'bandh', 'hartal', 'rasta roko', 'rail roko' or 'jail bharo' it will be termed as 'political action' and such an organisation will be declared a political organisation.

"The term 'habitually' is prone to gross misuse and abuse. In a democracy, some of these actions are accepted methods of expressing public grievances. They are the only tools in the hands of the people to show their disagreement or dissatisfaction with the functioning of the Government," reads Singh's petition to the Supreme Court.

When the Union government was drafting the FCRA, it had asked for the opinion of all stakeholders.

Six political parties had then stated that, "India is a democratic republic. Therefore, everyone has a right to be part of the political process." These political parties had dubbed FCRA provisions related to banning organisations of a 'political nature' from foreign funding as incongruous with rights guaranteed under the Constitution.

Sanjay Parikh, the Supreme Court lawyer who has filed the petition, said that INSAF has proposed that Sections 3(1)(f) and 5(1) and 54 (2)(b) be removed.

Harsh Jaitely of Voluntary Action Network India, (VANI) an apex body of voluntary organisation, says the FCRA Department should be much more accountable and its investigations must be timebound.

"We have cases where investigations are being carried out since two years. The cases are kept under permanent suspension. No certificate or document is issued by the FCRA Department after receiving annual returns from the registered organisations. The FCRA Department needs to undertake outreach workshops in the northeast, north and eastern regions of the country. A permanent joint mechanism needs to be put in place between the voluntary sector and officials of the Home Ministry."

On its part, the Union Home Ministry is working towards a better reporting system and digitising submission of records. With the new FCRA Act providing for renewal every year, the ministry is planning to scrutinise the utilisation of foreign contributions before it grants the licence to an NGO to receive foreign funds.

But even as this process goes on, the message from the government's decision on INSAF is loud and clear: it does not want NGOs to go out and garner foreign funds for organising protests against its policies. ■



A meeting to protest the Home Ministry's suspension of INSAF's registration

funds and organising protests against the government's development policies.

Kavita Srivastava of the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) said the cancellation came soon after the Prime Minister stated that foreign-funded NGOs were responsible for protest movements against national projects including the Koodankulam Nuclear Plant in Tamil Nadu.

"So the key aspect of the current ban is that the government wants to rein in peoples' struggles related to land, forests, water and dignity happening all over India from Koodankulam to Kashmir," said Srivastava.

INSAF has taken to legal recourse and filed a petition in the Supreme Court. On 5 May 2011, the NGO had challenged certain legal provisions in the FCRA in the Delhi High Court but its writ petition was rejected on 16 September 2011. Subsequently, INSAF filed the same writ petition in the Supreme Court where it was admitted.

Chitranjan Singh in his Special Leave Petition to the Supreme Court on 7 May has asked whether Sections 5(1) and 5(4) of the FCRA, 2010, are ultra vires and violative of Articles 14, 19(1)(a), 19(1)(c) & 21 of the Constitution.

Singh has also asserted that 3(i), 3(v) & 3(vi) of

LAKSHMAN ANAND

# Apple takes root in Karnataka

**Shree Padre**  
Mangalore

FOUR years ago, Dr Chiranjit Parmar, a veteran horticulturist, travelled to Indonesia. A student of his, Sunil Mamgain, took him to see Batu in Java Islands. Dr Parmar couldn't believe his eyes at what he saw. Right there in front of him, banana and apple were happily growing in the same orchard. "This is a horticultural wonder," exclaimed Dr Parmar.

What's so special about banana and apple growing together? Well, banana is a tropical crop whereas apple can grow only in temperate or sub-temperate regions. But the farmers of Java grow apples in a tropical climate. Their apples are called Batu apples named after the town where they were first cultivated.

Batu is 20 km from Malang, a big Indonesian city. It was J. Kribben, an Indonesian electrician, who developed an innovative technique to grow apples in 1952. Since then the area under apple cultivation has expanded to 2,000 hectares.

Java's successful tryst with the apple got Dr Parmar thinking. Why couldn't apples be grown in Karnataka and parts of tropical India where temperatures don't rise above 35 C or dive below 10 C? He approached research institutes and businessmen but his idea elicited a yawn.

At this juncture, *Adike Patrike*, our Kannada farm magazine, stepped in. We highlighted Dr Parmar's story in our November 2010 issue. Word got around and farmers became interested. Krishna Shetty, an ex-banker and farmer, decided to try his hand at apple cultivation. He requested Dr Parmar to fly in some plants and share his knowledge of growing apples.

**Batu experience:** Unbelievably, Batu apple growers cultivate two crops a year. The annual apple production in Batu is 67 tonnes per hectare compared to six to seven tonnes in Himachal Pradesh! Farmers tame the trees to make them yield fruit during periods suitable to them. In February, Dr. Parmar saw apple trees at three different stages in the same orchard – some were bearing mature fruits, others were blooming and growing trees with unripe fruits and lastly there were leafless trees. Such a sight can't be seen anywhere in the world, thought Dr Parmar.

Generally, from September-October, when winter is round the corner, apple plants shed their leaves and begin to hibernate. They revive in February when the weather gets warmer. New leaves start sprouting, the trees begin to flower and the apples appear.

But Batu farmers ignore the seasons. They prompt the apple plants to fruit by confusing them. After harvesting, they manually defoliate the tree. The tree starts flowering after 60 days and the crop is ready in four months. The plants keep growing throughout the year. Unlike in traditional apple growing areas, there is no dormant phase for them.

**Apple migration:** In January 2011, Dr. Parmar sent 300 apple saplings from Bajaura in the Kullu region of Himachal Pradesh to Karnataka where they were planted. The saplings grew incessantly and did not shed leaves in December or January. This was a positive indication.

Word spread and more people evinced interest. An additional 600 plants reached Shetty in January 2012. Farmers from Dakshina Kannada, Chikmagalur, Kodagu, Tumkur and Shimoga have

also suggested using dwarfing rootstock.

**Farmer interest:** Most of the 60 farmers who planted between two to 10 apple saplings did so out of sheer curiosity. They weren't really aware of the intricacies of cultivating apples. Neither are they overly concerned about commercial gains.

"I'm really happy to eat my home-grown apples, devoid of any pesticides or chemicals," says Gangadharamurthy.



Dr Chiranjit Parmar at a Batu apple orchard: trees yielded fruit in Tumkur after just two years

planted apple trees in the last two years.

Surprisingly, a few plants started flowering in the second year. This is unusual for trees grafted on seedling rootstocks. A tree in Sringeri even yielded fruits. But the most surprising development was reported from Tumkur. Here, Gangadharamurthy had planted 13 saplings two years ago. This year, three plants yielded fruits too.

"This is amazing because in Himachal trees take five to six years to yield apples," says Dr Parmar. "In my professional career of 45 years, I haven't heard of apple trees flowering and fruiting anywhere in the world in the second year. Even the height and girth of the apple trees are bigger here."

In April, Dr Charanjit undertook a five-day study tour in Karnataka where apple trees were being tried out. He then made some clear cut suggestions. "Grow three to four plants at more locations to get an idea of the suitability of the place. This way you can map potential apple areas. Tumkur plants seemed to have done the best. Concentrate your efforts in regions with a similar climate."

He said for the experimenting stage he had sent self-pollinated varieties. But he would now select commercial cross-pollinated varieties so that plantations of around 50 trees could be tried out. He

Dr Parmar suggests the newbie 'apple growers' organise themselves into an informal association, meet regularly, publish a newsletter and hold a conference by 10 November.

But can farmers on their own study the feasibility of growing apples on a commercial basis? "Please don't get excited," says Dr Parmar cautiously. "I have given you a new idea. The horticulture department has to now conduct trials for commercial cultivation. Agronomists and pathologists have to get involved. For ordinary farmers to do all this is very difficult. Commercial cultivation trials may take eight years."

However, commercial cultivation of apples is not new to Karnataka. Dr Hittalamani, Additional Director of Horticulture (fruits), recalls that Bangalore had more than 1,000 acres of apple orchards from 1890 to 1950. Once Himachal apples began flooding the market, local apples had few takers.

The question everyone is asking is: how does the Karnataka apple taste? Well, it is too early to pass judgment on that. But thanks to Dr Parmar and Krishna Shetty, apple has struck root in Karnataka. ■

Dr Chiranjit Parmar - parmarch@gmail.com

# Doom for Pashmina looms



BILAL BAHADUR

**Jehangir Rashid**  
Srinagar

**H**ANDMADE Pashmina shawls, once the pride of Kashmir, are on the brink of extinction. This traditional craft was a means of employment for thousands and the beautiful product that it yielded had takers all around the world. But today, in the face of government apathy and the advent of shawl-making machines, the artisans have their backs to the wall.

Traditionally, women constituted the bulk of the workforce in the art of making Pashmina shawls. But machines have put these women out of work. Many of them are widows who made a living by spinning the yarn for making these exquisite shawls.

Machines have led to the assembly-line production of fake Pashmina shawls, which are being passed off as the real thing, threatening the livelihood of families that have traditionally relied on the ancient art.

Rauf Ahmad Qureshi, president, Kashmir Pashmina Kaarigar Union, says that with machine-made Pashmina shawls being sold as hand-made originals Kashmir's reputation is being damaged. He believes that it would be difficult to restore the credibility of Kashmir's arts and crafts if serious efforts are not initiated at the earliest by the government.

"Kashmir was known all over the world for its Shahtoosh shawls, Pashmina shawls and

Jamawars. But today there are no Shahtoosh shawls to attract customers. The machine-made Pashmina shawls have undermined the credibility of the Kashmiri artisan. The demand for Jamawars, too, has declined," says Rauf.

Rauf says that the disappearance of Shahtoosh and Pashmina shawls has wreaked havoc on the arts and crafts industry of Kashmir. He demands that a mechanism be put in place to make a distinction between handmade and machine-made Pashmina shawls. "They should be treated as separate brands. That is the only way the traditional art of making Pashmina shawls can be saved," he adds.

"It is really disappointing that machine-made Pashmina shawls are being sold in the name of handmade Pashmina shawls. Over the past few years, we have been hearing that the handicrafts department will recognise the original Pashmina shawl as a brand, but there has been no forward movement. The government, especially the department concerned, has to show a greater sense of purpose," says Rauf.

According to Ghulam Mohammad, a shawl-maker, most artisans have been forced to say goodbye to their traditional craft and take up menial jobs in order to survive. He says that the market has been flooded with machine made Pashmina shawls.

"The hands that once carved out beautiful designs on Pashmina shawls have been reduced to breaking boulders and rustling up concrete mixes for the construction of houses. The youth

of Kashmir don't see any future in shawl-making and they are ready to brave the vagaries of the weather to do menial jobs," says Ghulam Mohammad.

Rauf says that the biggest difference between machine made Pashmina shawls and the hand-made variety is that carbonised nylon is added to the yarn. He says that the original Pashmina shawl is made of pure yarn and it has no impurity whatsoever.

"In the making of handmade Pashmina shawls, the yarn is spun by women or girls at home. It is then handed over to

a group of persons who take the impurities out. The yarn is then put on looms and after that it is handed over to the artisans for making beautiful designs," says Rauf.

He says that for machine-made Pashmina shawls, no such process is involved as nylon is added to the yarn to make it smooth. The product is sold off as a handmade Pashmina shawl. He says in the past many families married off their girls on the income generated from the making of Pashmina shawls.

"But all is not lost as a section of girls is ready to take up this business," says Rauf. "But they need support from the government. The government should impose a blanket ban on the manufacture of machine-made Pashmina shawls and encourage the making of original Pashmina. Proper branding would be a great step in this regard and this should be expedited," says Rauf.

The Pashmina shawl has a religious history attached to it as the art was imparted to Kashmiris from Central Asia. Shah-i-Hamadan, the famous Islamic saint of Central Asia, came to Kashmir and in addition to spreading the religion he, along with his companions, imparted training to the people in various arts and crafts. This included the art of shawl-making.

Mohammad Maqbool, a shawl-maker, demands that big business houses be barred from purchasing machines that are utilised for making Pashmina shawls. This, he says, would revitalize the traditional form of shawl-making. ■

## SAMITA'S WORLD

by SAMITA RATHOR



CHARKHA



Families wait for news of their loved ones from the other side of the border

## CONFLICT ZONE

# Heartbreak on the LoC

**Chetna Verma & Mohammad Ali Khan**  
Kargil

*Birds and rivers are like the breeze  
No border can halt them  
Borders are for people  
Think  
What have we achieved?*

THESE thought-provoking lines by renowned lyricist Javed Akhtar evocatively describe the lives of the people of Kargil living along India's northern most border – a backdrop shared, interestingly, by people on the other side, in the Baltistan region of Pakistan occupied Kashmir.

When people from the two sides meet, they hug each other and weep with joy. When it's time to bid adieu, they cling to each other and shed tears of despair. The underlying emotions are evoked by the "forced separation" which the divided families of Kargil and Skardu have faced since the India-Pakistan war of 1947.

Skardu is a mere 173 km from Kargil – a five to six hour drive. The Kargil-Skardu route was once significant for intra-regional trade on which the local economy depended. This all-weather road witnessed the movement of people and goods from Tibet to Central Asia through Kargil, Leh, Skardu and Gilgit for centuries. Until 1947 that is. The creation of the Line of Control (LoC) changed the scenario beyond recognition.

The LoC divided thousands of families in 1948 – a divide that intensified after the 1965 and 1971 Indo-Pak wars. The route that

facilitated cultural, political and economic development, not just in the Kargil and Skardu region but in all of Ladakh extending up to Gilgit, was closed down as a fallout of the conflict. It transformed the five to six hour-drive into a challenging journey of five to six days.

"During the war of 1965, the Indian Army occupied two or three villages, of which I remember the names of only two – Latoo and Hundurman," says Zehra, a 65-year-old retired government teacher from Kargil. "Lines were drawn between members of the same family. Many of us were on this side and the rest were left behind on the other side. Till date, we miss each other's presence."

For the last several decades, the LoC has kept apart the people of Gilgit, Baltistan and Ladakh, who otherwise have a shared history, civilization, geography, culture, religion, language and economy. Among those affected are tens of thousands of refugees who wish to meet their loved ones but



Kargil town is only a few km away from Gilgit-Baltistan

can do little more than hope and wait for India and Pakistan to end their differences over Kashmir and allow free travel across the LoC. Most refugees come from Skardu, Shigar, Nubra, Gultari, Kharmang, Turtuk, Tyakshi, Chulungkha, Chorbat, Chushot, Kargil, Leh, Drass and Zaskar.

Wishes don't count for much here. If there is a 'valid' emergency or a family gathering, only then does one have a chance of getting a visa, and that too after several verifications, validations and identity checks on both sides. Getting the visa is only half the battle won. The real struggle begins thereafter. One has to undertake an arduous journey from Kargil to Srinagar, to Jammu, to Amritsar and then past the border on to Lahore and Rawalpindi to reach Skardu. This is not only time-consuming but also heavy on the pocket. Not many can afford these family reunions.

"We cannot see them when we want. Sharing our happiness and moments of loss depends on the approval of the government. We feel helpless when we are unable to lend a helping hand to our dear ones in difficult times. Many of us would prefer to die than have to struggle to meet our relatives like this," exclaims Agha Syed Ahmed Rizvi, Member, Legislative Council at Kargil, whose relatives reside in the Chotron region in Skardu.

When families return from the other side after meeting their kin, they face a barrage of questions from family members, especially eager young children who are full of questions about relatives they have never seen.

It was not just personal and cultural relations that snapped with the creation of the LoC. The entire region's economy collapsed too. Once the vibrant centre of Central Asian trade, the area now limps along in forced isolation. The only connect to Kargil is the Zojila Pass on National Highway 1 (NH1) that remains cut off for more than six months in winter due to heavy snowfall. The inaccessibility and inclement weather have so far not allowed air services to become a commercially feasible option either.

If the governments on both sides agree to open up the road, it can become a beneficial trade and tourism link for Ladakh and its people. This will boost the overall development of the region and give the people a sense of inclusion at national level.

"For decades now, the young and old have been demanding that the Kargil-Skardu route be opened. The Indian government, on several occasions, has agreed to take this up during its talks with the government of Pakistan but nothing has been done till date. We are told the Pakistan government is reluctant to open up the route for fear that this will draw attention to developments on our side," says Najumul Huda, a local youth from Kargil whose maternal family has nearly half its members living on the other side.

Divided families in Kargil and Skardu are suffering from a conflict not of their making. Like the Pahari and Kashmiri families who were divided by the LoC, the Baltis, particularly the Shia families in Kargil and the northern regions also faced heart-wrenching separation. The opening up of the Uri-Muzafarabad and Poonch-Rawal Kot routes has infused renewed hope in the hearts of these families. ■

Charkha Features

# THE MANSI WAY

## Saving infants and mothers in Jharkhand

**Civil Society News**  
*Seraikela, Jharkhand*

**A**T 18, Sonam Purti is a very young mother in the village of Bundu. Her baby girl is just a few months old and she is full of apprehensions. With every day of motherhood come challenges big and small. Not only does she have to overcome the rigours of childbirth and the changes in her body, but she also has to get used to meeting her baby's needs.

Sonam had a serious scare in the first week after the delivery in December. The baby stopped suckling and her temperature dropped. In infants, these symptoms can be deadly. Immediate interventions are needed, but for mothers like Sonam in remote villages trained medical help is hard to find. The result is that each year in rural India a large number of infants die in the first few weeks after they are born for want of institutional care and timely interventions.

Sonam, however, was plain lucky that Priyanka Purti was on call. Priyanka could be just about any other woman in the villages of Jharkhand, but with this difference – she has been specially taught to identify and deal with the signs of ill health in a newborn.

Priyanka was quick to recognize what was happening to Sonam's baby and did the few simple things needed like keeping the baby warm in a wrap and feeding her breastmilk from a bowl a little at a time. Very soon the baby was back to normal.

Priyanka is called a Sahiya in her village and she is part of the state of Jharkhand's rural healthcare outreach. The interventions she used to save Sonam's baby were learnt in two and a half years of training and intensive guidance under a project called MANSI or Maternal and Newborn Survival Initiative.

MANSI is the creation of Tata Steel, the American India Foundation (AIF) and SEARCH. The iconic Dr Abhay Bang and his wife, Rani, are the founders of SEARCH, which stands for Society for Education, Action and Research in Community Health and is located in Gadchiroli in Maharashtra.

In 2009 the three organisations came together for



Priyanka Purti (centre) with Sonam Purti and her mother, Laxmi

MANSI to strengthen the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) in Jharkhand. It was decided that they would work with the Jharkhand government for four years till the end of 2013.

The idea was to design and implement management systems and training methods for improving home-based maternal and neonatal healthcare.

The Seraikela block, in the Seraikela Kharsawan district of Jharkhand, was chosen because it is one of the most backward in the country. Reducing infant and maternal mortality rates here would mean confronting the most difficult of challenges.

The Sahiya was crucial to this initiative. By keeping track of women through their pregnancies, the Sahiya could get them to hospital in time for deliveries.

Most newborn deaths happen in the first 28 days. Taking care of the mother and child during this period is the key to having better public health indicators. While Sahiya is the name used in Jharkhand, elsewhere in India under NRHM the woman performing this function is called an Asha.

There were four clear objectives for MANSI: To increase the knowledge and skills of Sahiyas and make them effective; to encourage the community to own and sustain public health initiatives; to increase access to healthcare providers; to influence state-level policy and take best practices under MANSI to other blocks.

MANSI will come to an end in November 2013 and the turbo-charged block-level system in

**The Seraikela block is one of the most backward in India. Reducing infant and maternal mortality here means confronting the most difficult of challenges.**

PICTURES BY LAKSHMAN ANAND



Some 200 Sahiyas have been trained in 167 villages of the Seraikela block. The record of their interventions shows that they have been effective. They feel empowered and purposeful because they are embedded in structured field efforts.

Sahiyas keep track of women from the time they become pregnant. A ready reckoner helps them calculate the date of delivery. It is the Sahiya's job to ensure that the woman eats well and stays healthy.

The Sahiya prepares a woman and her family for a delivery in hospital. In the final hours as the woman goes into labour, it is she who calls the Mamata Van, an emergency vehicle, to take the woman to the hospital.

These days the Sahiya is allowed to go into the operation theatre for the delivery. It is a significant concession which raises the status of the Sahiya.

A Sahiya has been taught how to take care of premature babies whose weight is low. She can manage asphyxia and hypothermia. She knows to identify infections like sepsis. She provides treatment for diarrhoea and moves an infant to a doctor quickly in cases of pneumonia.

An important innovation under MANSI has been to give a kit to the Sahiya. The kit consists of a thermometer, weighing scale, mucous extractor, watch, warm wrap, blanket, flipcharts for nutrition and health education, checklists to record the health status of the child, Tetracycline eye ointment, Gentian Violet paint, soap and so on.

The government has also agreed to allow the Sahiya to administer cotrimoxazole syrup, which is used as a first line of treatment for sepsis and pneumonia.



Contact details of the Sahiya and the Mamta van painted on a wall in Bundu village

Seraikela is to be handed over to the government once again. But so significant are the successes that MANSI is being seen as a model for driving up the efficiency of rural healthcare delivery across Jharkhand and perhaps the rest of India.

Infant and maternal mortality rates at the block level are not easily available. But information collected by the MANSI team for six months from July in 2010 showed 24 infant deaths in 390 live births. In 2012, from January to December these figures were 63 infant deaths in 1,594 live births.

Similarly, for maternal mortality there were two deaths in 390 live births over six months in 2010 and six deaths in 1,594 live births from January to December in 2012.

These figures are crude, but they indicate that much has been achieved in two years under MANSI – especially if the figures are read in the context of the efforts made on the ground in training people and spreading awareness.



Sumita Mardih's baby boy's temperature is taken



The kit given to the Sahiya is an important innovation



Dibyahas Ray, the project manager



Bharati Mandal, a Sahiya Saathi



Sonam Puri and her baby girl in Bundu village

Jharkhand is rich in minerals, but its social infrastructure is that of a very poor state. Its health indicators are among the worst in India. For instance its infant mortality rate is 42 per thousand live births and, assuming lapses in reporting, the figure would be higher. In the Seraikela Kharsawan district the infant mortality rate is 60.

Under MANSI the priority has been to work with the government and not override it. Many months were initially invested in convincing officials that the government would continue to have ownership of the healthcare system.

If MANSI could be successful within the limited geography of the Seraikela block with a population of 80,000, there was the prospect of it being tried elsewhere and scaled up. Only the government would be able to do this and so replacing it was never an option.

In fact, much effort has been made under MANSI to secure buy-ins from state officials, local government institutions and the community at every level. For healthcare programmes to be effective in the long term they have to involve people.

The project is unique because it has succeeded in building up and empowering the Sahiya as the first person the woman turns to for maternal and infant care services. The Sahiya will continue to remain within the community even after the project ends.

A functioning structure now exists in the Seraikela block. It looks like this: Sahiya, Sahiya Saathi, Maternal and Neonatal Health Mobiliser, Zonal Coordinator and Field Coordinator.

There are 14 Sahiya Saathis to oversee the work of the 200 Sahiyas. Then there are 22 Maternal and Neonatal Health Mobilisers (MNHMs) who handhold the Sahiyas in the field to ensure structured home visits, schedules, case management and maintenance of village-level records. The MNHMs ensure supplies and provide logistical support. There are also four zones with a coordinator each for roughly 38 villages. The coordinators keep the Sahiyas trained and up to date.

There are review meetings. Records are regularly maintained and checked at various stages. But at the same time MANSI has shown that the strength

# 'MANSI will be replicated by us'

**B**IREN Bhuta is the intense and energetic chief of Corporate Sustainability Services at Tata Steel. He brings new ideas and a contemporary flavour to the company's social initiatives. *Civil Society* met him at his office in Jamshedpur for an interview which went late into the evening though he was leaving early next morning to make a presentation to government officials in Bhubaneswar. Bhuta spoke at length on the Maternal and Newborn Survival Initiative or MANSI. Excerpts from the interview:

## What do you see as the significance of this project? Why is it so important to Tata Steel?

Several reasons. First and foremost, the pressing need of the day is tackling infant mortality. My sense is that it is under reported. It is a national shame in today's day and age. When Japan can have an infant mortality rate (IMR) of around two, Kerala 12, there is no reason why states in the eastern parts of the country should have IMRs of 40 and 50. That itself is a compelling enough reason for Tata Steel to have undertaken this project.

MANSI is a very nice example of what can be achieved when like-minded individuals and organisations come together. This is a multi-colaborative approach. There is a company, Tata Steel, and its arms the Tata Steel Rural Development Society and the Family Initiatives Foundation. There is the funding agency, the American India Foundation, which has not just given money but also permanently deployed someone here for the project. There is a technical agency, SEARCH, in Gadchiroli. There is the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) without whose support we would never have been able to do this because we are directly intervening in the government system. So, we are working with the NRHM, the government of Jharkhand and the district authorities. Then there are these rural women, the Sahiyas. And there is the organisation structure that we have created of Maternal and Neonatal Health Mobilisers (MNHMs) and zonal coordinators.

Another reason is to be found in a Chinese proverb. If you want to invest for a year, grow paddy, for 10 years then invest in the stock market, but if you want to invest for 100 years invest in human beings.

To train Sahiyas and see the confidence and enthusiasm in them is itself an achievement. The training of 200 Sahiyas is to me an achievement.

## How does Tata Steel hope to use this as a model?

It is nearly three years since we began this project. It would be naive to say these are excellent results because these are indicators which have long lead times and the jury is still out on what the eventual result will be. But the initial successes we have seen have inspired and motivated us. I think there has been a decrease in mortality rates by more than 40 per cent and we are comparing conservative estimates with more realistic ones right now.

We have decided that wherever we are present we will migrate this in



Biren Bhuta: 'Everyone who has been associated with this project has learnt a lot.'

**MANSI is a very nice example of what can be achieved when like-minded individuals and organisations come together.**

terms of a horizontal deployment of a best practice. The learning we have had of working together, of targeting or overdoing something we will deploy to all other areas where we are present and where infant mortality is a major issue. So, immediately I would love to take this to Chaibasa and to Manoharpur, a very backward area.

## What kind of human resources does a project like this create?

Everyone who has been associated with this project has learnt a lot. I think it is a source of inspiration and pride to everyone involved – right from the people who have directly worked with us to those in the structure we have set up. To give you an example, Tata Steel went for the Demming Grand Prize. It is a quality award and we are the first integrated steel plant outside of Japan to have won the Demming Grand Prize. As part of that our CSR at Tata Steel was assessed. One of the shining cases we had portrayed was MANSI. What the Japanese assessors – when it comes to quality you know how the Japanese are – said to us was that this is a project which could be a case study not just for

India but for the whole world.

Very recently on 3rd March, which is our Founder's Day – our theme was 'Towards World Class' – five panels were exhibited. This project was an exhibit. Everyone including our new Chairman, Mr Cyrus Mistry, Mr Ratan Tata, Mr Muthuraman and Mr Nerukar appreciated it.

## In HR terms how do you see the cadre which has emerged from the project: the Sahiyas, zonal coordinators, the MNHMs and so on.

Our biggest investment has been in human capital. Many of them aren't going to continue working in Seraikela all their lives. I am going to pluck them out for other roles. The MNHM will become a zonal coordinator somewhere, the zonal coordinator will become a field coordinator somewhere, someone else will become a programme manager. I am going to horizontally deploy the learning from this project – and who is going to do that but the people involved. It will be a natural progression for them.



# 'We have seen in this project lives have been saved'

**T**HE Maternal and Newborn Survival Initiative or MANSI is the first time the American India Foundation (AIF) has partnered a company in a social initiative. Anupam Sarkar has been AIF's project advisor based in Jamshedpur. He explains AIF's objectives and the choice of Tata Steel.

## What are the successes of this project?

First, we have been able to develop the knowledge and skills of the front-line health worker who is in the community. I believe this is a major success. We have been able to build the capacity of an individual who will continue to serve the community. By empowering her with knowledge and skills, she can save lives and we have seen in this project that lives have been saved.

## How important has the partnership with Tata Steel been for the success of the project? Is this a unique partnership because Tata Steel has been working in these areas for a long time or is it easily replicable?

Our partnership with Tata Steel has been very successful and we have gone about it very purposefully. Tata is very highly regarded in the community, not just in health care but in livelihoods and education as well. For AIF it was an opportunity to work with a company and we realised that for a partner we could get no other company better than Tata Steel. We had a partnership with SEARCH to bring in technology and skills, but we wanted



Anupam Sarkar: 'We want to scale this up.'

a partner who would actually deliver. So, looking at the strength of the organisation, its values, we thought it would be best to do a pilot project with Tata Steel and then look at its replication.

## Can you think of it being replicable without Tata Steel?

We would have to know the strengths of the organisations with which we partner. It is most important to have values and commitment.

## This is the first time AIF has partnered with a company for a project in the health sector? Is this something that AIF wants to do in the future?

AIF does plan to. We want to scale this up through Tata Steel and take this

of a rural healthcare network is in the activities that take place at field level. A Sahiya is effective because she is next door. MNHMs, Sahiya Saathis and zone coordinators also work close to the ground so that they can spot problems even as they emerge.

Track is kept of women from before the time they become pregnant till 42 days after the time they deliver. What this means is that the health of the woman is taken care of during pregnancy, an institutional delivery is almost ensured and the infant and mother are closely monitored during the crucial month after the delivery.

In the case of Sonam, she had malaria during her pregnancy. If she hadn't been at her mother's home in Seraikela, her story might have been very different. Once again the problems her baby experienced received timely attention because Priyanka, as Sahiya, was present to attend on her.

Sonam's mother, Laxmi, never knew such attention. She had eight children who were all born at home. Sonam is her eldest. Asked what she would have done to save Sonam's baby in the past, Laxmi, says: "We would have used local herbs and medicinal plants. We would have prayed and gone to the witch doctor."

Priyanka was chosen to be a Sahiya in 2008, two years before the MANSI initiative began. Ask her what difference MANSI has made and she says it is the training. Earlier she did receive training at the primary health centre. But under MANSI the training has been more rigorous.

"It is the systems, the knowledge about the newborn's illnesses. We have also been given a kit with a thermometer and weighing machine. The warm wrap and blanket. The kit is very important," she says.



Three of the four Zonal Coordinators: Pushpa Murmu, Nandan Sahoo in the middle and Rakesh Oraon

Priyanka has clear leadership qualities. She is every bit a purposeful woman. She has two boys of her own.

Her name and mobile number are painted on huts in the village. A sketch of the Mamata Van is alongside together with a mobile number on which it can be summoned.

"We have charts with which we track women from the time they become pregnant. We educate them about the importance of having the delivery at

further to the CII forum. We can demonstrate the success of the project and document it and then take it to other companies.

### Is there learning from this project about what does not work?

We have worked through the Sahiya here. We should try to explore the opportunity to do this through some other community health volunteers who are part of self-help groups or members of the village health and nutrition committee.

We will keep our options open on using Sahiyas because it is not easy to go through the government. Getting the Sahiyas for 24 days for training is a big task. Secondly, they need continuous handholding for two years after training. So, wherever we implement this project it has to be for a minimum of three years. It also has to be on the very basic objective of saving the life of the infant.

### How difficult is it to identify health workers, train Sahiyas and coordinators? There is a high level of enthusiasm in the team. How do you achieve it?

It comes from continuous mentoring and recognition at all levels. It is not just the Sahiyas, but the coordinators of the zones too need recognition for the work they do. They also require refreshing. We do a skills assessment on a quarterly basis. There are 10 to 12 skills that they are to always keep in their minds. If they are to identify a sepsis, they should know those six symptoms on the basis of which a sepsis can be identified. If it is pneumonia they should know the breathing rate as per the age of the child. Documentation is important. The work done needs to be documented and shared with a larger audience.

### SEARCH seems to have been a very important link in this project in creating modules, providing training and so on.

We would give SEARCH equal credit for this as an implementing partner. In Tata Steel we found a strong partner to implement the project and in SEARCH we had the partner we needed for providing training. SEARCH's role in providing training and monitoring it has been invaluable.



Sumitra Soren checks the weight of Sumita's baby



The help desk at the hospital: Kamlata Mahato of Narayandih village (left) and Sindhu Devi of Rengudih village

the district hospital. I tell them to call me on my mobile at the onset of labour pains," says Priyanka.

Asked how long the Mamata Van takes to arrive to take a woman to hospital, Priyanka says: "It comes in minutes. It is just a question of dialling the number."

A call centre at the Seraikela District Hospital takes these calls. Two Sahiyas are on duty round the clock at a help desk at the hospital. The Sahiyas know the doctors and other hospital staff so when a woman turns up for a delivery she is

readily admitted and the needful is done quickly.

The hospital is markedly clean and well administered. Dr Priya Ranjan, a paediatrician long in government service, is at the helm. A man of few words, he says: "Where we find dirt we clean up."

Basic blood tests, X-rays and ultrasounds are conducted at the hospital. As happens in rural health facilities run by the government, posts sometimes lie vacant. Doctors are transferred but replacements don't arrive on time.

Despite such problems, women come to the hospital during their pregnancies and for their deliveries. The number of institutional births has risen sharply in Seraikela after MANSI.

At the village of Chorok Pathor, it is 12 days since Sumita Mardih returned home from the district hospital with her baby boy.

Sumitra Soren is the Sahiya who has been handling her case from when her pregnancy began.

"She would visit me from time to time to check on my health. She would caution me against doing hard manual work in the fields or from going into the forest to collect firewood," says Sumita.

"She told me the importance of having the baby in hospital and prepared me for it. When the time came, it was late at night. We called her on her

mobile phone and told her the pains had started. She summoned the Mamata Van. At the hospital there were doctors who took over and the baby was born," Sumita says shyly, her words barely audible.

Over the 12 days that Sumita and the baby have been back home, Sumitra has come by thrice to check them out. These early days after the delivery are crucial for the mother and child.

Sumitra brings her Sahiya's kit along for these check-ups and on this occa-



Mantu, a Maternal and Neonatal Health Mobiliser (MNHM)

**Sahiyas have experienced a change of status under MANSI. They can save lives because they have acquired knowledge and skills.**

sion we get to witness the drill.

First of all a Sahiya washes her hands thoroughly with soap all the way to elbow before touching the baby. She does not use a towel and instead holds up her hands till they are dry.

After this she examines the baby. She has been taught that a bloated stomach or a sunken chest are signs that the child is not well and needs to see a doctor. She checks for eruptions and rashes. She takes the baby's temperature with a digital thermometer. She also weighs the baby using a handheld scale.

Sumitra has a checklist of questions she must go through when she visits Sumita. For instance, how many meals does Sumita have in a day? Does the baby cry a lot and pass urine less than six times in a day? How many times in a day does Sumita breastfeed the baby? Is the baby wrapped up and kept warm and does Sumita hold the baby close to her?

These and other questions provide telling information on the health of mother and child. All the information is recorded on worksheets where current findings can be compared with those from previous visits.

Since reviews are regular, if a Sahiya has been negligent it will show up. If she has overlooked warning signs, others in the system will notice.

A Sahiya addresses the needs of a single village. A Sahiya Saathi supervises all the Sahiyas under a panchayat.

The government selected Bharati Mandal to be a Sahiya in 2006. Then came MANSI in 2009 and somewhere in 2010 she was chosen to be a Sahiya Saathi.

Bharati has seen the NRHM at work before MANSI and after. She says there is a world of difference.

"Earlier we saw ourselves in a clerical role – taking down information, telling the women they must go to hospital and so on," she explains. "But under MANSI we feel that we are part of a healthcare system and can save the life of a child. It is a big thing. After this training we have a sense of responsibility. After all someone's life is in our hands."

A Sahiya Saathi gets ₹1,500 a month for 15 days work. Bharati says she knows what is expected of her. For seven days in a month she visits homes. Six days are spent in gram sabha or village level meetings to discuss health and cleanliness. One day is for a block level meeting and one day for a cluster meeting with seven Sahiyas representing seven villages. The cluster meetings discuss the problems the Sahiyas may be facing. The talk is about expecting mothers and the condition of newborns. If there are deaths they are discussed in an attempt to understand and record the reasons.

MANSI's success has been in engendering aspirations and delivering empowerment. It succeeds in giving women in a village a sense of importance they have long been denied. Expecting mothers, who are visited by Sahiyas and know they can go to hospital for their deliveries, have never had so much attention or felt so good about themselves.

The Sahiyas, too, have a status they never dreamed of. They get very little money, but their names and mobile numbers are up on village walls.

"People look up to us. They give us respect. It feels good to know that we make a difference," says Priyanka. She is eloquent and self-assured – a thin, matured woman who likes what she is doing because it gives her a sense of purpose. She is brisk and businesslike in the way she puts out two plastic chairs at her homestead. When she talks, it is one to one.

Sumitra is less articulate. She is camera shy. She doesn't know what to say into a microphone. But she likes being a Sahiya because it gives her a position.

Sahiyas earn just ₹350 per delivery. It adds up to very little. Sahiya Saathis get an assured ₹1,500 a month. A Sahiya can aspire to be a Sahiya Saathi, but money is evidently not the motivating factor here.

These are women who have experienced a change of status under MANSI. They can save lives because they have acquired knowledge and skills through formal training. A Sahiya basks in her newfound identity. She is no longer just a housewife in the village.

Sahiyas have been going to training camps which keep them away from home for four or five days a stretch. They had never enjoyed such freedom before. It took a lot of persuasion to get their in-laws and husbands to allow them to go.

"Money is not everything," says Bharati. "It is the sense of achievement. The satisfaction of being able to save a life is much bigger than money."

**THE PROJECT:** AIF was looking for a partner for a project in maternal and neonatal care. It chose Tata Steel because of the company's involvement in social programmes. The district of Seraikela Kharsawan falls in the hinterland of Jamshepur where Tata Steel was founded.

Says Anupam Sarkar, AIF's project advisor: "Our partnership with Tata Steel has been very successful and we have gone about it very purposefully. Tata is very highly regarded in the community, not just in health care but in livelihoods and education as well."

"We had a partnership with SEARCH to bring in technology and skill, but we wanted a partner who would actually deliver. So looking at the strength of the organisation and its values, we thought it would be best to do a pilot project with Tata Steel and then look at its replication."

Says Dr P. Mohapatra, a paediatrician and a veteran of social initiatives at Tata Steel, "When they came to us with the idea, we thought, in terms of the millennium development goals, this was the perfect project for showcasing Tata Steel's contribution to public health care which has been taking place over the past 100 years."

"We had already been making some of the interventions AIF wanted, but by focusing on a community in the context of a project we would be able to show the impact much better," says Dr Mohapatra.

An important feature of MANSI has been the partnership between a company, the government and the voluntary sector. Each has had its own strengths.

Dr Mohapatra sums it up when he says: "If you want to produce sustainable results within a timeframe you have to work with the government and the community. There is no alternative. Knowledge has to be passed on to the community and it is important to draw on the vast infrastructure of the government." ■

# ‘We have invested in people’

**D**R P. C. Mohapatra is the head of family initiatives and health at Tata Steel. A paediatrician by training, Dr Mohapatra prefers field assignments like MANSI to plum hospital assignments as a physician. A team player by temperament, he has spent a lifetime at Tata Steel and been an important force behind the company's social projects.

## What has driven the idea of the project?

Just 11 per cent of the population in Jharkhand has access to healthcare services provided by the government. Secondly, in terms of infant mortality and maternal mortality, Jharkhand comes 22nd out of the 34 states in India. Taking care of mothers and infants addresses the needs of 50 per cent of the population. Also, by improving the health of mothers you are improving the health of future generations.

Lower infant mortality and maternal mortality rates indicate better general health. A reduction in these two rates is part of the millennium development goals.

This is the American India Foundation's first project with a corporate house. When they came to us with the idea, we thought, in terms of the millennium development goals, this was the perfect project for showcasing Tata Steel's contribution to public health care which has been taking place over the past 100 years.

We had already been making some of the interventions AIF wanted, but by focusing on a community in the context of a project we would be able to show the impact much better.

## What is your experience of working in partnership with the government and an NGO?

If you want to produce sustainable results within a timeframe you have to work with the government and the community. There is no alternative. Knowledge has to be passed on to the community and it is important to draw on the vast infrastructure of the government.

The government has already accepted that this is one of the best partnerships it has been involved in. It has agreed to training of Sahiyas, allowing them to administer cotrimoxazole syrup in cases of pneumonia and starting of a nutritional health base.

## What are the key successes of this project?

The first success is that we have already established a rapport with the community service providers such as Sahiyas and traditional birth attendants. Secondly we have minimised home deliveries and improved home-based neonatal care. When we started this project just 19 per cent of the total deliveries were institutional. Now it is 73 per cent. It shows that miracles in healthcare services are possible by being focused and involving service providers in the community. Infant deaths were 63.1 per cent when we started this project and now they are down to 39.9 per cent.

## What would you like to bring it down to?

We would like it to be 30 per cent by the end of the project and we would like to persist and finally achieve 12 per cent like Kerala by 2017.

## So, you have been able to motivate the community and that is crucial to achieving success....

Yes because then there is acceptance. Unless they are involved and convinced why will they accept our model? There is no doctor, no stethoscope, no injection,

but people have accepted that it works. There is only cleaning, use of wrappers for keeping the infant warm. It is as a result of this awareness that the number of referrals to the district hospital has gone up.

At Tata Steel we feel that this model is replicable. So we are taking this model to Orissa and other parts of Jharkhand. We have already begun spreading awareness among grassroots workers and service providers and health administrators. The second phase will involve collecting baseline data of the new areas: the infant mortality rate, neonatal mortality, maternal mortality, the services available, percentage of institutional deliveries.

Family planning plays a big role in minimising maternal death. We have already crossed 6,000 family planning operations this year. Previously women used to come for the operation after having had three children, now they come after two children.

**Do you think one of the reasons for your success in the Seraikela block is because of the earlier work that Tata Steel had done there in promoting multiple crops on small holdings, developing water bodies etc.**

Yes it is so because we had created a foundation and the community could trust us. There was very little negativity.

It was easy for us to involve the panchayat members.

**How did you come to the structure which you have used: Sahiya, Sahiya Saathi, zonal coordinators and so on.**

Sahiyas and Sahiya Saathis are all

part of a government created structure. We are part of that. It did take us time to convince the government to allow the Sahiyas to be part of our project. The government does not want to lose its ownership. We had to convince the government that we had no intention of creating a parallel structure and that we only wanted to implement what the government wanted done. Within this it is possible to achieve a lot if the approach is focused.

Our experience in the Child Survival Project, which was funded by Care in the Patamda block, proved to be very valuable. At my first meeting with the director of AIF I told him about the structures we had used for that project and he said he was fine with them.

Of course we had to decide on the zones and the number of villages that would come under each coordinator of a zone. You can't give 100 villages to a coordinator.

All our workers are based at the project site. So, they are always available at any time of day or night. They can contact a Sahiya or Mamata Van.

The project workers have very good rapport with the staff of the district hospital. They can approach any doctor.

All this creates an environment in which the project can be successful.

## Now that it is time to hand over, what concerns do you have?

We have developed a model. Sahiyas are working and they are knowledgeable now. The government has accepted this model and is going to implement it in the 23 other districts of Jharkhand. We ourselves are not leaving. We have eight clinics in the surrounding areas as part of our health programme. We are also shifting MANSI to the neighbouring block of Rajnagar. So we will be in touch. The Sahiyas will be free to contact us at any time.

## All this clearly comes from teamwork. How big is your team?

It can't be done without teamwork. Some of the members of the team are new, many come from my child survival project. Tata Steel has invested in people who can undertake such projects. They are now a valuable human resource and can be deployed anywhere. We have around 150 people.



Dr P. C. Mohapatra: 'It can't be done without teamwork.'

# Business

- Enterprise
- Inclusion
- CSR
- ICT
- Go Green



Anil Sinha, Regional Head, Advisory Services - South Asia, IFC, Onno Ruhl, Country Director, World Bank India, and Drew Von Glahn, Team Leader, Development Marketplace, addressing the meeting

received a grant of \$100,000 (₹54 lakhs) from the World Bank to scale up their operations and expand their geographical footprint.

The 2011 grant helped Operation Asha to get more funding and to spread its operations. In India, the NGO now works in 17 cities in eight states and in Cambodia it works in two provinces and five districts. Operation Asha is currently serving a population of 4.8 million in India and 1.08 million in Cambodia. Apart from urban slums, it is reaching out to Jharkhand's tribal regions.

"We run a competition every second year focusing on three or four states. In 2011, the focus was on organisations working in Rajasthan, Odisha and Bihar. This year we focused on Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh," said Onno Ruhl, Country Head of the World Bank.

While Operation Asha was the largest social enterprise among the grantees, ranked 48 among the top 100 NGOs in the world, there were other smaller NGOs with equally impressive delivery systems or business models.

They included social enterprises implementing ideas like crowd-sourcing finance for micro enterprises, a deferred payment scheme so that rickshaw drivers could own their vehicles, a panchayat kiosk banking system for financial inclusion and safe drinking water for the community.

Each of the 20 organisations getting the grant had an impressive story to tell. The enterprises are based on original ideas and have already made deep social impact by providing low-income communities with livelihoods, education, women and child welfare. They have provided services in agriculture, energy, healthcare and finance.

The grants were given to these enterprises after much scrutiny. Out of 190 applicants from across India, 20 with the best track record were selected.

Seven of these are registered as for-profit organisations. They are SMV Wheels Private Ltd, Dimagi Software Innovations, BILT Tree Tech Ltd, Waterlife India, Embrace Innovations, iMerit Technology Services, and ESAF.

The non-profits were Rang De, Under The Mango Tree Society, ACCESS Development Services, Micro Insurance Academy, Kherwadi Social Welfare Association, Alternative for India Development, Agastya International Foundation,

**Each of the 20 enterprises had an impressive story to tell. They are based on original ideas and have had impact.**

## A World Bank bazaar

*Money and support for social enterprises*

**Arjun Sen**  
Bhopal

A new scourge sweeping the world is drug resistant TB. Patients don't always take their medicines on time and the TB bug becomes invincible. Operation Asha, an NGO in New Delhi, uses an electronic biometric tool called eCompliance to ensure that health workers accurately follow up all TB patients.

The device consists of a fingerprint scanner linked to software on a notebook. Health workers record daily visits of patients by scanning their fingerprints. In this way they create a compliance log that enables them to view each patient's history and identify those who have missed their daily dose.

For the second time in a row, Operation Asha won a grant from the World Bank's Development Marketplace programme, a competitive grants programme which supports social enterprises that are scalable and replicable and "have the potential for significantly improving lives and access to basic goods and services for underserved poor communities," says Drew von Glahn, Team Leader of Development Marketplace.

On 1 May at the Development Marketplace event held in Bhopal, 20 social enterprises each

Real Medicine Foundation, Aga Khan Rural Support Programme, Vigyan Ashram, South Vihar Welfare Society for Tribals and Vrutti.

Naveen Krishna of SMV Wheels was working for an NGO in Guwahati. He was tired of the constant focus on raising funds. He felt a lot more could be done through a for-profit business model. But his proposal was shot down by the directors of the NGO. "I quit the same day and decided to launch my own social enterprise," Krishna said.

His idea was simple – out of a daily income of ₹250, a rickshaw driver ends up paying ₹40 every day as rental to the rickshaw fleet owner. Why not design a scheme so that instead of paying a rental, the rickshaw driver paid an EMI? He could then become owner of his own rickshaw after a year. Starting in April 2010 SMV Wheels has so far helped over 650 rickshaw drivers in Varanasi. "We now intend to spread to more cities in UP and impact at least 2,000 people in the next two years," Krishna said.

Rang De, based in Bangalore, is a non-profit that uses crowd-sourcing to finance micro businesses by poor women entrepreneurs. "All you need to do is to register on our site and choose a borrower from any state of your choice. You can make a social investment of as little as ₹100. Our field partners receive and deliver the money to our borrowers. When the money is repaid according to a repayment schedule the investor gets his or her investment back with a nominal return," said Smita Ram, Rang De's co-founder and managing trustee.

"We chose to be a non-profit because we strongly believe our work is a mission. Our single minded focus is to ensure that our borrowers pay interest rates that are fair and our social investors can make a meaningful difference to other people's lives. But to remain sustainable we take a nominal one per cent cut on all loans repaid by borrowers," Ram said.

Beginning from 26 January, 2008, rangde.org has so far helped more than 21,500 borrowers from 15 states in India. Of them, more than 95 per cent are women borrowers. Social investors can invest in microcredit, micro-ventures or on education. So far the organisation has crowd-sourced funding for 258 business activities and provided 731 educational loans with the help of around 4,800 social investors.

Under The Mango Tree Society, a non-profit in Mumbai, is improving the incomes of farmers through beekeeping. It also helps improve productivity of their crops such as capsicum or ridge gourd through cross-pollination, explained founder Vijay Pastala.

Pastala had spent two decades working with rural farmers. His search for ways to augment their income ultimately led to the idea of Bees for Poverty Reduction (BPR). "We train farmers in beekeeping and then help them to market their organic produce in urban areas," Pastala explained.

"While the mother organisation is a non-profit,



SMV Wheels finances rickshaw pullers so they can own their vehicles



Under the Mango Tree helps farmers earn more by beekeeping



Vrutti is working to set up enterprises run by farmers

we are actually a hybrid as we also have a for-profit organisation called Under The Mango Tree Naturals and Organics Pvt. Ltd. that connects rural and urban and markets the produce of rural communities," Pastala said.

Since its inception in March 2009, Under The Mango Tree has grown from just sourcing honey to providing training in beekeeping, capacity-building and ensuring market access to nearly 3,000 farmers across six states. The organisation has impacted more than 15,000 rural lives including farmers' families.

They have trained 1,432 farmers in beekeeping, and increased their income by ₹10,000 to ₹12,000 annually. They have provided 1,500 small beekeepers direct market access for their sustainably harvested honey. Around 55 Master Trainers have been created to support and scale up the BPR model at farm level. In the last four years eight metric tonnes of honey and five metric tonnes of beeswax have been put up for sale.

Under The Mango Tree is currently working in

Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Odisha, but it plans to expand to Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh in the next two years. Their target is to train another 10,000 marginal farmers.

Vrutti, also a non-profit, is developing enterprises led by farmers to augment farm incomes. "Our model is aimed at enhancing farm productivity through good agricultural practices in the first phase which is usually for one year. In the second phase there is convergence of horticulture, forestry and farming. In the third phase the marketing capabilities of farmers are augmented. Finally we set up farmer-led enterprises to increase per acre incomes to the tune of ₹3 lakhs per year," said Pramel Gupta, one of the co-founders of Vrutti.

Vrutti is working in partnership with the Agriculture Enterprise Promotion Centre which helps to train and set up agri business service providers in villages. Vrutti works in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. "We were selected for our work in Chhattisgarh," Gupta said.

Alternative for India Development is working on delivery of banking and financial inclusion products and services by combining panchayat kiosk banking outlets with self-help groups (SHGs). "We are now operating in Palamau district but we are scaling up to 44 blocks in three districts," said Dr K.T. Arasu, director.

"All the grantees were selected after rigorous vetting together with field visits and evaluation of actual work that they were doing," said Bhavna Bhatia, regional programme leader of World Bank Institute that manages the Development Marketplace programme. Experts of the International Finance Corporation (IFC) have also helped to evaluate financial proposals, she said.

"India is not short of good policy makers. The problem is with implementation and how to ensure last mile delivery," Ruhl said. "Our present focus on inclusive development therefore is looking at models that work as far as last mile delivery is concerned. We want to learn from their delivery and business models and replicate these models on a larger scale. The learning can also help governments frame better policies."

"Our objective is to finance an innovation hub for social enterprises the world over. The idea is to enable sharing of innovations across not only India but the world," said Anil Sinha, Regional Head, Advisory Services, South Asia, IFC.

"Projects that failed to get funding also benefit," he said when asked about organisations that were good but had still failed to make it to the top 20. "We share the details of all shortlisted projects with other funding agencies and many of them get funding from other agencies," Sinha said.

To what extent has the World Bank's intervention really helped projects? Ruhl pointed out that out of the 14 projects supported in 2011 as many as seven have got additional funding from other agencies and have actually scaled up their operations over the past two years. ■

# Microsoft picks 10 smart ideas

Arjun Sen  
New Delhi

IN June 2012, Sahiba Aggarwal, 22, a B-Tech student was working as an intern at the Rajiv Gandhi Cancer Institute & Research Centre in New Delhi. Her job was to maintain the hospital's electronic and electrical medical equipment.

Sahiba's mother, a volunteer for Indian Cancer Society, along with a few colleagues, visited the hospital one day. Sahiba had requested them to come and provide mental support to a patient, a poor woman aged over 70, who had been abandoned by her children.

Sahiba was emotionally wrenched by this experience. She wanted to help. After much thought she came up

with the idea of an online portal that would serve as an interface between organisations and old people. The organisations could be encouraged to outsource some of their work to aged, superannuated people and help them become independent.

Less than a year down the line, Sahiba is among 10 social entrepreneurs that Microsoft, the global software giant, has chosen to support and mentor under its Innovate for Good programme. Her idea is all set to turn into a full-fledged, sustainable social enterprise.

On 26 April, Microsoft held a two-day event at Development Alternatives, an NGO in New Delhi, to formally launch its Innovate for Good programme in India. Ten ideas out of 60 proposals were selected from budding social entrepreneurs across 10 states.

Innovate for Good is part of Microsoft's YouthSpark programme. The initiative is conducted in partnership with the Office of Global Issues of the US Department of State and the Quest Alliance.

"The idea is to help young innovators move from idea to implementation as we believe that one of the most powerful catalysts for change in our society is young people who may not all get jobs. So we want them to become job creators rather than job seekers while bringing about social change," said Akhtar Badshah, Senior Director, Citizenship and Public Affairs, Microsoft.

In all 115 young people from 20 Indian cities with 60 ideas congregated at the event. Microsoft's experts first whittled down the list to 15 most promising ideas. It was then left to the 115 young participants to choose the 10 best ideas themselves.

The 115 participants were organised into 10 groups. Experts from Microsoft and other organisations discussed each of these ideas in mentoring, training and applied learning sessions.



Sabeen Malik, US State Department senior adviser for external engagement, office of Global Youth Issues, Manju Dhasmana, Lead – Community Affairs, Microsoft India, Zeenat Rahman, the US Secretary of State's Special Advisor on Global Youth Issues, and Arun Rajamani, Group Director, Public Sector, Microsoft India at the Innovate for Good event

"The event was a big help," says Sahiba. "I got great insights into how I can make my one small idea become a working social enterprise. I got information on how to develop a business plan and revenue model, how to connect with various organisations and how to market the idea. The project will surely become a reality in a few months once I complete my graduation in June this year."

"Some ideas were clearly project ideas, some were just wishes, while some were already running organisations," says Manju Dhasmana, Community Affairs Manager. "Our efforts were aimed at providing the resources needed to turn the 10 best ideas into reality," she added.

Apart from mentoring, Microsoft will provide \$500 to each of these budding entrepreneurs so that they can kick-start their ventures. They would also get a specialised nine-week SPROUT course worth \$400.

"Even those whose projects were not chosen participated in the mentoring sessions. We hope that they too would have learnt how to take their ideas forward," said Lokesh Mehra, Director, Education Advocacy.

Another winning idea came from Saransh Dua, 23, and his buddies Dhruv Arora and Guneet Narula from New Delhi. "It is a great opportunity for us to find a viable business model for our idea of creating a new way of thinking about the way men engage with gender movements and participate in the debate on crime against women," said Dua. He has launched a Facebook page to enable gender sensitisation among young males through witty posters.

"We now have 19,000 members on our page. We are working with the police in Delhi and Haryana to hold social media workshops on gender sensitisation. We have also begun to approach schools in Delhi and we are getting a good response," he said.

How will his idea be monetised? "We have some initial ideas. We are getting paid for the social media workshops we hold and Microsoft is helping us work out more revenue streams," he said.

Karisma Dashwani, 31, also from New Delhi, has launched a portal for women employability at various levels. The portal provides relevant resources and information, employability skills, resume database and also a space to house collections of handcrafted products made by women in rural areas.

"With Microsoft's help we should be able to expand our corporate partnerships to provide job opportunities to women in sales, retail and finance," she said. Initially it will be free but later she would be charging a small fee for

membership and other services. Right now she earns a commission on handcrafted items that she is selling through her portal.

Some of the other ideas that got selected were:

- Piyush Agarwal, 26, a B-Tech student from Karnal, intends to develop mobile applications that can be used to report any gender-based violence and mark suspicious areas by calling on automated IVR or sending an SMS.
- Natasha Taraporewala, 26, a student from Pune, plans to spread awareness about the social understanding of disability. Approaching disability only through a medical framework has serious limitations. Her suggestion is to reform social infrastructure to make it more inclusive for the disabled.
- Ashish Gupta, 21, a B-Tech student from Sonapat, Haryana, intends to develop technology that will inform people of their medical rights and the facilities available in government hospitals.
- Monika Shukla, 25, a B-Tech student from New Delhi, plans to design a decentralised mechanism to process organic waste and convert it into high calorific energy briquettes that will be affordable, clean and energy-efficient. The briquettes will be safe and be a replacement for conventional household fuels used in rural and semi-rural areas.
- Varun Kashyap, 25, a student from New Delhi, has envisaged an information platform for farmers so that they get direct access to demand and supply information from the market and thereby earn more.
- Sunita Panwar, 30, a social worker from New Delhi, intends to develop remedial education programmes that can bridge the gap between the education standards of government and public schools. ■

# Insights

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## Heroic bard of RTI

NIKHIL DEY

ON 13 March, just 15 minutes before 75-year-old Mohan Ram died, he had been demanding information from the Primary Health Centre (PHC) in Barar about the benefits provided to pregnant women under the Janani Suraksha Yojana. Mohanba, as many of us addressed him, had actually gone to the hospital to collect his TB medicines, but decided to use the occasion to monitor the PHC as well. He got his answers, picked up his medicines, and on his way home, collapsed near the hospital gate and died.

A week earlier Mohanba had asked a similar set of questions to the staff in the big hospital in Beawar where he had been admitted with a severe relapse of TB. Mohanba was one of the pioneering heroes of the Right to Information (RTI) movement. He regularly and effectively used the RTI. But his contribution to launching the RTI, nurturing it, and giving it life, needs to be known, acknowledged, and recognised. He was one of the people who firmly established the connection between the RTI and survival issues, as the struggle in Rajasthan helped shape and change the right to information discourse in fundamental ways.

Mohanba, like many indefatigable Dalit fighters who have struggled to live a life of dignity, had the insight and wisdom to understand the heart of the matter and the courage to articulate it. He was one of the first people we met when we moved to the tiny hamlet of Devdungri in Central Rajasthan in 1987. He invited us to his desperately poor home, and in the first few hours we built up admiration and friendship that even death cannot part. He spoke of justice and ethics in a quiet and determined manner, and was soon part of the very first struggle we fought for minimum wages. He and his wife Chunni Bai, refused to accept a wage less than the minimum wage, insisting that they were willing to starve rather than accept less than their due.

Much after his powerful perceptions had already given us strength and understanding, Mohanba put his efforts behind an emerging demand for copies of muster rolls so that a nerve centre of power and exploitation could be exposed. We had been through two hunger strikes demanding minimum wages, which were skilfully and cynically overcome



Mohan Ram: His powerful lyrics became the anthem of the RTI movement and the struggle for justice

by the government through deliberately making, and then breaking promises. Chunni Bai, had sat on a hunger strike herself, and our frustration was becoming our greatest adversary. We were sitting together to reflect on how to change our modes of struggle. Mohanba crystallised our thoughts with the statement that "until the records came out, the poor would always be considered liars and *kaam chors*, and the real thieves would always occupy the high moral ground."

That statement was part of a collective understanding built by people like him who had been through one minimum wage struggle after the other, only to be told that they had not done the work that they were supposed to, and their 'recorded output' (measurement) was sealed in official records, not to be seen by ordinary people.

We had discovered during the first minimum wage struggle that Mohanba was a powerful singer

and lyricist. Linking the demand for wages with the information in the official records did not come through his songs, but that particular conversation and what he said, has nevertheless left an imprint on our minds like the lyrics of his powerful songs.

Mohanba's songs swept across a large canvas. Even before the first minimum wages hunger strike in 1990, Mohanba had created what for us became his signature song.

"*Sun lo Raj choron ka, jamana bhaiya rishwat choron ka, Raj choron ka...*

*Pehle wale chor bhaiya, jungalon mein rahte the, aaj kal ke chor bunglon mein rehte hain... jamana choron ka"*

(Watch out! The State is being taken over by thieves. This is an age of corruption and bribery...

Thieves of the past lived in the jungle. Thieves of today live in bungalows...in this age of thieves)

**Continued on page 28**



**Continued from page 27**

We were often attacked for singing this song, being labelled anti-state and extremist. Today his song seems to be an even more apt commentary about the state of the State, but it is the other stanzas of the song which display his vision and sharp perception.

*"Pehle wala chor bhaiya bandookon se maarte the, abhi walle chor to kalmon se maarte hain, raj choron ka."*

(The thieves of the past used guns to loot, today's thieves use the pen to loot...in this state of thieves.)

It is difficult to say how much of this is a reflection of an organisation that had begun to focus on records and the power exercised by the official pen over people's lives. Or are these actually Mohanba's thoughts at that stage, recorded for posterity through his songs? Mohanba never really cared, or asked for credit for his extraordinary contribution. Not once did Mohanba refuse to give time for an agitation or campaign or put the crisis he was facing at home before the collective need of the movement. He could be woken up in his sleep at the dead of night, and he would pick up his *jhola* and *dholak* and be ready to go – fearless, enthusiastic, and determined to contribute.

In times when even thoughts, movements and struggles are personalised in an elite exercise of appropriation, the story of the ordinary person's contribution to the RTI movement must be told.

Correction: The poor person's contribution. It is not only that the elite want to package, patent, and commodify anything that might have the scent of success, but they also need to keep the poor away from all ideas of change, for it might radicalise the thought itself. That is how the hitherto academic, esoteric RTI movement got radicalised. The contribution of people like Mohanba, was not just at the level of physical agitation and commitment, but at the level of ideas as well:

*"Pehle waale chor to jungle mein loote the, Abhi waale chor to daftar mein loote re, raj choron ka."*

(Thieves of the past looted us in jungles, but today's thieves loot us in offices, in this State of thieves...)

The office, and who it represents, is at the heart of modern democratic politics. But Mohanba wanted to also place the poor in the context of a market driven framework.

*"Pehle wale chor daka junglon mein daalte the, aaj kal ke chor to bazaaron mein loote re, raaj choron ka..."*

Mohanba understood the power of information on his skin. He had never been to school so most often he did not "file an RTI" but simply asked the right questions at the right time and demanded information and answers. In the most simple, straightforward manner he got to the heart of the matter.

In a recent Ph.D thesis, a scholar from the London School of Economics, Prashant Sharma, questions what he calls the production, consumption and celebration of the dominant narrative – that India's RTI movement was different in either process (arising from a bottom-up grassroots movement) or in outcome (altering the citizen-state relationship). In essence, his claim is that India's RTI movement is another case of elite driven reform: the leadership in thought, practice, and composition was elite, as was happening across the world, that the Indian law was driven by commercial mul-

tilateral forces and processes of market globalisation that wanted a transparent regime for business interests to function – presumably in an atmosphere of free and open competition; and that contrary to popular belief, India's powerful bureaucracy did not resist the RTI, but actually "democratised" by economic liberalisation, worked silently and determinedly to have the RTI law enacted in its current form. He amplifies what he calls these three 'silences' to tell the real story.

In honour of Mohanba, we decided to start a lecture series with the inaugural lecture in the premises of the 'School for Democracy', 10 kms from Mohanba's house and village. While thinking about a title for the series, we picked up the line of Charul and Vinay's famous right to work song, the way Mohanba used to sing it. The line goes: "*Sansad ka har ek khamba maine hi uthaya re, soun kyon footpath pe, ki mere liye kaam nahin...*" (I/we have built every pillar of Parliament and yet why do we sleep on the footpath – because we have no work...)

**I don't know if Dr Prashant Sharma ever bothered to interview Mohan Ram, and many others who gave shape and substance to the movement.**

Mohanba's inadvertent rendition stood apart from the chorus as he sang this line – "*Sansad ka ek khamba, maine bhi uthaya re...*" (I/we have also built one of the pillars of Parliament/Democracy). The inaugural lecture was delivered by Naurti and Sushila – two extraordinary grassroots working class leaders who have also played a seminal role in the conception and growth of the RTI. In fact, in the early 1990s, Sushila along with a group of working class women gave birth to the defining slogan of the RTI movement: "*Hamara paisa, hamara hisaab*". (Our money, our accounts). Her articulation of this slogan in a press conference in Delhi in 1996 has been captured by the rest of us, and reused many times.

Sushila was asked, what a woman like her who had only studied up to Class 4 could have to do with an issue like the RTI. Why had she spent 40 days on *dharna* in Beawar, demanding the RTI? What would she gain from it? She replied "When I send my 10-year-old child to the shop to buy groceries with a Rs 10 note, and he returns, I ask him for accounts. The Government spends billions and trillions of rupees in my name. Should I not be demanding accounts? *Hamara paisa, hamara hisaab!* It is "our money, and our accounts." We tell this story many times because of its clear articulation and sharp analysis. Dr Prashant Sharma must have heard this story too, but he clearly felt that constructs such as these were not worthy of acknowledgement. Instead, he makes the claim that the intellectual contributions of World Bank and ADB officials, or senior Indian bureaucrats have been ignored.

The elite has its own ways of obliterating the contribution of ordinary people and their struggles

in shaping the architecture of anything new. Even our elite academic institutions are quick to look for elite "leaders" and reinforce the idea that even change comes from the elite. Mohanji, was not just a foot soldier, but also an architect of a radical, more egalitarian concept of democracy. When Naurti and Sushila spoke, they remembered and paid tribute to Mohanba, but additionally through their own articulation clearly established the seminal contribution of ordinary people to the ideas and leadership of change. About Mohanba and Sushila and Naurti, and so many others, Prashant Sharma's Ph.D is in fact conspicuously "silent".

Naurti, like Mohanji, is from a poor Dalit home. In 1982, she organised 800 men and women to strike work on a road being built under the drought relief programme and eventually secured a landmark decision from the Supreme Court that anyone, anywhere, being paid less than the minimum wage was a violation of the worker's fundamental rights under Article 14 (equality) and Article 23 (forced labour). Over a decade ago, she put Rajasthan's comparatively weak RTI law to use, to ask her liquor dealer sarpanch for information about development works in her village. Along with her colleagues she meticulously recorded 76 unsuccessful attempts to procure the information, and eventually her vigilance was rewarded with a false case being slapped against her by the influential sarpanch. She is sarpanch now, having run a low cost and exemplary campaign, but the case still continues, revived in the courts by the ex-sarpanch despite the police investigation showing the charge to be completely false.

For his fieldwork, Prashant Sharma did travel to the MKSS area, but I don't know if he ever bothered to interview Mohan Ram, and the many others who gave shape and substance to the movement. It did not fit well in his theoretical framework. So, he seems to have steered clear of it. As I heard a video recording of Mohanba talking about his involvement in the 15-year RTI struggle, I realised that what had been done to people like him was not just a misrepresentation in recording what happened but an attempt to wipe out from the RTI movement its symbiotic connections with oppressed communities and their rebellious leaders and activists. It is not just the appropriation of ideas, but eventually it is changing the idea itself.

Mohanji's, Sushila's and Naurti's stories are important because they exemplify the courage, persistence, and innate understanding that is born out of determined resistance and commitment. The number of hours spent by these three (and many, many others) in dismantling illegitimate centres of power and doggedly fighting for ethics and equality, are more than can be counted. They have never sought recognition.

But this piece is not really written for 'recognition'. The most important reason for ensuring that these contributions are acknowledged is to also understand that ideas of liberation come most of all from those who feel the oppression and regardless of the odds, are determined to collectively resist it. It is important to also understand their theoretical and intellectual contribution, and the spaces their struggles have created for others like themselves. Mohanba's legacy will live on in the world through the space he has helped create for others to fight for a more equal and just society. ■

*Nikhil Dey is a member of the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan*

# New govt, new hope

V. RAVICHANDAR



Congress workers celebrating their party's victory in the Karnataka Assembly polls

THE recently concluded Assembly election was notable for three developments. One, the State recorded a high turnout of over 70 per cent and even normally apathetic Bangalore recorded 57.3 per cent (up from 47 per cent last time). Secondly, in Bangalore there was noticeable, visible civic activism (certainly on TV channels and local print media) due to the entry of the newly formed Bangalore Political Action Committee (BPAC). Lastly, in Bangalore the Lok Satta party fielded 24 candidates positioning itself as a party with a difference with a clarion call for good governance.

The State seems to be relieved that there is a clear majority for one party and hopefully there will be stability and progress. So what does this election tell us about the role of civic activism and does a change in the ruling party improve government functioning?

The Lok Satta party won about 3.2 per cent vote share and their best known candi-

date, Dr Ashwin Mahesh (who has a creditable record on implementing urban initiatives) got a commendable 7.5 per cent vote share in his constituency coming in third place. In at least four of the constituencies their candidates worked the streets, the houses, apartments and offices painstakingly carrying their message of public problem solving, solutions for outcomes and a plea for bad politics to give way to good politics. In the end, money power, better oiled political mechanisms and wider reach in the state of the

major parties won out. The reality on the ground is that currently there is a limited 'vote bank' for the good governance themes that are needed. Caste, community, slogans, promises, inducements aided by apathy and scepticism still rules. Well-intentioned people and groups have to soldier on.

The increase in Bangalore's voting public was certainly aided by the efforts of bodies like Smart Vote, BPAC, media campaigns like 'Vote Maadi' and efforts of NGOs like Janaagraha and the Election Commission to exhort folks to vote. These groups

addressed frequently asked questions on how to register and helped people get on to the voting lists. For instance, Smart Vote led by Prithvi Reddy, held registration camps in offices and localities and helped over 300,000 new voters register – the incremental additional voting numbers compared to 2.8 million turnout in 2008 was around 900,000. Civic groups across the country could learn from

Bangalore activists on how to get new voters on a scale basis registered in their city wards. Given the migration into urban areas, eligible new voters and given the high youth demographics the new additions have a chance to change the way vote bank politics is traditionally played.

The Bangalore Political Action Committee (BPAC), headed by Kiran Mazumdar Shaw and Mohandas Pai, two prominent business leaders and Jairaj, a former senior government officer with about seven to eight other prominent Bangaloreans as founder-

members, made a splash with their Agenda for a Better Bangalore with a "Let's be better" call. BPAC's appeal is to the middle class, the educated voter class that has traditionally been apathetic to the political process and a 'no show' at election booths, come election time. BPAC wishes to consolidate this middle class 'vote bank' by getting them registered as voters and getting them to exercise their vote for 'good' candidates. They organised a 'March for Bangalore' walkabout that got about 4,000 participants and a flash dance that played out in malls, social media and TV studios. BPAC went ahead and endorsed 14 candidates from 12 constituencies and gave them contributions from ₹3 to 5 lakhs. Five of the endorsed candidates won.

While the goal of a better Bangalore, voter registrations and getting the vote out was welcomed, critics had concerns about BPAC. It was branded an elitist group. The counter was that the agenda was inclusive and elites need to take the lead. The decision to endorse candidates was not welcomed by all. There was a feeling in some quarters that there was insufficient data to make an informed call and BPAC needed to establish itself and build a follower group before endorsing candidates. BPAC felt they needed to be courageous in doing what's required and a visible campaign donation by cheque was a first step for more transparent donations.

There is a new government and a Chief Minister known for his administrative acumen in place. New dispensations, new faces give citizen's hope. Past experience in the State has shown that in the first year particularly, the mandate for development is taken seriously and initiatives do get taken. In the context of Bangalore, the 2000 elections led to the setting up of multiple task forces including the Bangalore Agenda Task Force. The 2008 elections led to the setting up of ABIDE, a task force focussed on Bangalore. However, the window of opportunity tends to be a fast closing one. With the passage of time, political capital inevitably diminishes – in the 2000-04 period the Veerappan kidnapping and Cauvery crisis took its toll; in the 2008-13 period, the mining scam, land deals impacted the CM's continuance.

Overall, civic activism is in a good place and though there are detractors, the entry of entities like BPAC with a middle class focus is welcome for strengthening the democratic process. BPAC has said it will monitor the work of the city's MLAs, do report cards and push for the Bangalore agenda. They might be required to get involved in the process of making the change happen. The challenges in the State and urban centres are complex and it is this author's case that crafting public-private collaboration (not PPP where it's about commercial arrangements) for better outcomes is the way ahead. This requires government to create spaces for such collaboration and individuals outside of government willing to engage in this synergistic venture. ■ V. Ravichandar, Chairman, Feedback Consulting

**Civic groups across India could learn from Bangalore activists on how to get new voters on a scale basis registered in city wards.**

# Bihar's DESI Power

RAM GIDOOMAL

SOMETHING amazing is happening in the villages of Bihar: there is now light where it was once completely dark. Because of the passion of the villagers there, and with some outside help from a visionary man with his roots in the villages, many communities are now generating their own clean electricity.

As a result, village life has been transformed, people can work in new fields and into the night, and whole strings of villages have found new economic prosperity.

I had the pleasure of visiting Bihar a couple of years ago, having been invited by Hari Sharan, the visionary I mentioned, who is the founder of DESI Power, and its clean energy initiative, the EmPower Partnership Projects.

I remember arriving at Bagdogra Airport in West Bengal and travelling southeast to Bihar, through the villages. I was to meet with Hari's brother and his extended family, professionals who inherited some land in these villages in Araria district of Bihar. Hari who is a power engineer, told me he always had a passion to do something for the villages connected with energy production as the motor of rural development and had worked on this project for over 15 years before it was finally implemented.

During this visit to India, I was also scheduled to visit a hospital near Varanasi in the north, conscious they were having energy problems there. With this in mind, I was keen to see how Hari's work in Bihar might translate to the hospital, and also to villages in the south where the Fair Trade Alliance of Kerala is based.

When we arrived at the village, we were warmly welcomed and our hosts were very keen that I stayed until after 6 o'clock. Of course, I knew it was very dangerous to travel at night in West Bengal, as it is in many places, because of the dark. However, when evening came, I saw the most amazing thing: the lights all came on! This is nothing new for the millions who live in the towns and cities, but we are talking about a village in a poor, rural district – seeing the lights switched on as the sun set was a profound moment.

It went far beyond just lighting. Electricity was also being used to empower local businesses. I saw enterprising people setting up shop in the street and staying open until 10 or 11 at night. People from the nearby villages who didn't have electricity came to visit the local businesses, which included a computer repair business. It was extraordinary to see a man with his laptops, powered by the village's local power station.

People were also trading in general, selling clothes, food and merchandise. Hari and his family had built a community centre which had been designed to accommodate a big television screen, which villagers were anxiously awaiting delivery of. I also saw how the local villagers were picking

up skills in plumbing and wiring, and the main electricity engineer was a villager who had learnt the trade and was now employed full-time. There was a whole job creation scheme underway, and the empowerment of the villagers was great to see – Hari told me that investment in one EmPower Partnership Project creates between 20 to 30 new permanent jobs, in addition to many more indirect jobs and encourages many local social initiatives.

So, for example, the arrival of electricity also



Bhalo Devi, the wife of a poor farmer, is now a power plant operator

meant that local farmers now have water-pump electricity points at hand, which has meant that the size of their pumps has doubled, enabling them to irrigate much faster than before, when they used the equipment the state gave them. More effective water generation has its own benefits for the village. What I saw was transformation taking place before my eyes.

I remembered how, on the way to the villages, there were electric lines, Rajiv Gandhi lines they called them, which were out on show, though there was nothing going on with them! In comparison, this village had managed to create its own electricity and it was lighting up their lives and creating local jobs. The village I visited was one of the prototypes, and the project had taken many years of persistence on the part of Hari and the employees and board members at DESI Power, so I really take my hat off to them.

The system uses a wide range of agricultural waste including rice husk briquettes, a raw material which is available in abundance in the villages. This is gassified – a process that converts organic materials into carbon monoxide, hydrogen and carbon dioxide by reacting the material at high temperatures (without combustion) with oxygen or steam. The result is an environmentally-friendly power station, which produces energy in a much more eco-friendly way than other methods, that burn carbon, for example.

Hari's work with the villages began in 2001, was supported by The Shell Foundation and more recently attracted the attention of the Rockefeller

Foundation, which together with Hari, developed the concept of SPEED to make telecom towers (which currently use diesel generators) as the anchor load for village power plants and thus make their operation commercially viable.

As part of its SPEED project, Rockefeller Foundation helps DESI to use the power stations to power local telecom towers, work that began in June 2010. Now, a 75 KW plant in Gayari village, Araria district, supplies power to a Bharti Infratel tower as well as another plant in Bhebhra which supplies power to a Vodafone-owned tower which is shared by Vodafone, Idea Cellular and Tata Docomo equipment. Power supply agreements are now being negotiated with these companies. All this creates new income for the villages as businesses pay to use their electricity.

I did a cost calculation exercise for the hospital I mentioned earlier, on the baseline costings. Using Hari's model, there would be a saving of at least 20 per cent on the electricity bill, and the hospital could generate electricity for the neighbouring villages: a green project that makes business sense, generating both electricity and financial returns and creating jobs!

Over time, the electric village concept has been rolled out in other places in the region, with villages hosting even bigger generators and selling electricity. DESI Power's EmPower Partnership Projects are currently working towards a '100 Village Program' in Araria District, Bihar, and there are now electricity plants in Bahabari village in Bahabari district, and Vebhra village, Gayari village and the Zero Mile area of Araria district.

DESI Power has also invested in the people, in order to make the 100 Village Program a reality, and is planning to train 3,000 local people over 10 years through its Management Training Centre for Rural Women called DESI MANTRA. The centre provides relevant training to women in computers and applications, biomass generation and management, energy services, micro-finance, book keeping and accounting, project management, project profitability and personnel management. It's an ambitious initiative and full of potential.

On my journey through Bihar, I remember passing a school where the students were studying using kerosene lamps to see because electricity hadn't come to them yet. It struck me that with clean electric lights they could study freely without having to 'burn the midnight oil'.

As for the villages, they would no longer have to shut down when the sun sets, with life stopping until daybreak. Clean energy can give them light, life and income, without most of the young men having to migrate to cities to support their families. Imagine this model being reproduced across India's 645,000 villages through a self-sustaining decentralised power sector – the social and economic ramifications are massive. ■

# Living

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

## Gir lions step out

**Susheela Nair**  
Ahmedabad

It was the beginning of summer when we zoomed into the Gir Sanctuary and National Park, a rugged terrain of scattered dry deciduous woodland in the south of the Kathiawar Peninsula in Gujarat. The forest was arid with balding trees, stubby shrubs and thorny things everywhere. This last bastion of the Asiatic Lion

also plays hosts to more than 30 species, including leopards, hyenas, foxes, crocodiles and monkeys. A monkey here, a wild boar there and deer in abundance coexist in this domain. The deer include nilgais – the largest Indian antelope – graceful chinkara gazelles, chow-singhas and barking deer.

Gir Forest is one of the largest tracks of dry deciduous forests in the world. The landscape is mainly undulating. Fed by seven perennial rivers

like the Hiran, Sarawti, Datardi, Shingoda, Macchundri, Ghodavadi and Raval, and large water bodies, the forest is a birdwatcher's paradise with 256 varieties of birds.

Within the first hour we spent here, we spotted a night jar cuddled up in a tree top snoozing nonchalantly unaware of trundling vehicles ferrying tourists. A peacock was strutting around. We caught a fleeting glimpse of a Hoopoe bird hopping

**Continued on page 32**

SUSHEELA NAIR

SUSHEELA NAIR



A Gir lion



A herd of deer

SUSHEELA NAIR



Jeep ride into Gir Forest

from one branch to another. We passed by a herd of chital startled by the cries of alarm by monkeys, sensing the imminent danger of their predator.

Soon after, we heard the roar of the lion reverberating through the dry deciduous forest. Subsequently we had our first fleeting glance of a lion and lioness lolling a few feet away from our jeep. The lioness was taking a siesta oblivious of

gawking fans clicking born-free moments but the lion looked up. The Asiatic Lion is slightly smaller than the African Lion and has a smaller mane. Visibility was poor as the lions were obscured by foliage.

**Looking back:** Once upon a time the Asiatic lion used to majestically stride across India, from Punjab to MP, from Gujarat to Jharkand. Its roar could be heard in Iran, Iraq, Syria and a lot of Eurasia. Rampant hunting almost pushed the lions of Gir to the brink of extinction in the early 20th century.

Thanks mostly to the unprecedented efforts of the Nawab of Junagadh, the Asiatic lion rambles wild today only in the 1,420 sq. km area in the heart of Saurashtra. The Nawab initiated what was probably the first institutional wildlife conservation effort in India and one of the earliest in the world, banning all lion hunting entirely.

This initiative assisted in the conservation of the Asiatic lions in Gir. Their population had plummeted to only 15 through slaughter for trophy hunting. The last lion to be killed in Gujarat was in 1870. But in Central India, where they were not protected, the last lion to be shot was in 1884. From a population as low as 20 in 1913, the lion count increased

rr Ir Ir I



Baawre Mann ke Sapne: Theatre helps women to bond and share deep secrets

# The lives of older women

**Subir Roy**  
Kolkata

**B**AAWRE Mann ke Sapne, produced by The Creative Arts, is several things woven into one – theatre, entertainment, therapy and the inner world of Indian women. It is also a tale made up of several little ones culled from stories by Jhumpa Lahiri, Bulbul Sharma, Abha Iyengar and other Indian women writers.

The stories are woven around a core figure, Amma, who has called together all the women who people the stories to make an announcement. In the large courtyard of a typical rambling Indian home the women form little groups of two and engage in routine chores like washing clothes, making *achaar* and *laddoos*. There is also a single woman who keeps struggling with what she is trying to draw on an easel set up near the rear.

Amma keeps an eye on the women to whom she has doled out the tasks and whom she occasionally playfully scolds and raps, urging they get on and be done with the work. The women in groups relive their lives, the focus shifting from one group, one chore and story to another with all of them making up one big narrative.

The stories begin lightly but end up with some-

one coming out with a deeply embedded sorrow – a romantic marriage turned sour, a child lost, sibling envy spoken out, or an innocent childhood sexually abused with a tragic aftermath.

Ultimately Amma reveals her secret. She, who had not spoken to her daughter who had married an Englishman and moved to London, was going there for a kind of reunion with her estranged child. But the women spring a surprise on her. The driver who was to take her to the airport has already gone there without her! To fetch her daughter and son-in-law who have secretly conspired to beat her in moving for a rapprochement.

*Baawre* is enacted by an all-women group of amateurs who have come together under The Creative Arts to both learn theatre and discover themselves. Ramanjit Kaur, artistic director, says that the venture has two aims – to imbibe theatre as an art form and also use it as therapy. Middle and upper middle class Indian women are underprivileged in their own way: "They lack a voice," rendered silent by "a false sense of self-esteem, pride and fear of ridicule".

Getting the play together has been, for the women, a journey of bonding, sharing, enacting and most of all exhilarating and rejuvenating in being able to get things off the chest. "It was touching to see how everyone laid their hearts

bare, slowly being able to reveal their anxieties, concerns, deep dark secrets and of course joys and sorrows." And in the process they are able to exorcise the little demons that have been gnawing within them, sometimes for years.

Kamal Ahluwalia, 62, a teacher and homemaker who plays the role of Amma, has been with The Creative Arts for several years. She was always interested in theatre but went into it in a structured way only after teaming up with The Creative Arts. What has she acquired? "Theatre skills and in the process helped emotionally open up," she says.

Indian women usually find it difficult to express themselves openly. Going through the process while on the face of it engaging in theatre "has been a matter of great strength for all the women as they realize they are not the only ones with such problems. They now feel better as they see their relationships improving."

Considering that the actors are all amateurs, the play is able to carry itself off without falling down. Structurally it faces a challenge in narrating diverse stories on a single set, moving the highlight from one story to another, groups coming forward to have their say in the spotlight and then moving back to become part of the timeless gestures of daily Indian routine. ■

## RANDOM SHELF HELP

A quick selection from the many books that turn up for review

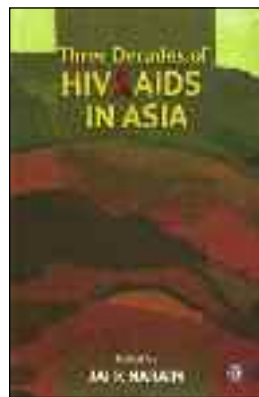


**ATLANTIC  
GANDHI: THE  
MAHATMA  
OVERSEAS**

*Nalini Natarajan*  
Sage  
₹ 695

A fascinating study of Mahatma Gandhi's life overseas and how it shaped his philosophy and political strategy. The author traces the Mahatma's footsteps as he steps on to a ship to travel to England and subsequently to the plantation and mining society of South Africa. It was Gandhi's interaction with indentured laborers in South Africa which inspired his thinking. The Mahatma shared a close bond with the Indian diaspora and deeply empathized with the harsh lives of laborers. The author also explains her intriguing title. While the Atlantic transported the victims of the greedy and brutal plantation system, it also became the hub of revolutionary ideas. It was the plantation system and the racial terror which Gandhi encountered as well as his struggle against this injustice, that formed the basis of his activism. ■

A serious and solid work on the HIV/AIDS epidemic and how nations have responded to the crisis in the last three decades. The book consists of research papers written by health and development experts. The countries covered include low prevalence nations like Sri Lanka and those with advanced epidemics such as Cambodia, China, India, Thailand etc. What emerges is that HIV/AIDS can be prevented and clinically managed with political commitment, resources and an integrated approach. Generic drugs produced by India have transformed HIV care. Overall Asia has done well in curbing the epidemic. HIV transmission has now changed to men who have sex with men, drug users and transgenders. Much still remains to be done. ■



**THREE  
DECADES OF  
HIV/AIDS IN  
ASIA**

*Edited by: Jai  
P. Narain*  
Sage

₹ 895

FINANCIAL inclusion cannot take place if banking staff is untrained and appropriate financial services have not been designed for low-income households. The book fills this void. The first two sections explain financial engineering – a combination of finance, math and economics. The last two provide an understanding of risks which low-income households face and how these could be mitigated through financial products, creation of non-financial assets, insurance, annuities and loans. Financial products that could reduce misery due to ill health or drought are covered along with delivery mechanisms. This is a good textbook for banking staff. ■



**FINANCIAL  
ENGINEERING  
FOR LOW-  
INCOME  
HOUSEHOLDS**

*Edited: Bindu  
Ananth & Amit  
Shah*  
Sage

₹ 595

GOOD Governance studies trends in corruption in 12 public services including the public distribution system, NREGA and banking. The author offers useful suggestions on ways to implement good governance. He breaks up corruption into three main types. The first is the nexus between business and government or grand corruption. The second is corruption in public services, which is need based but adds up to an impressive sum. The third is the electoral process, the 'mother of all corruption'. It feeds off the first two. The author provides a strategic approach to tackle the menace of corruption. An interesting book, crisply written. ■



**GOOD  
GOVERNANCE**

*Delivering  
corruption-free  
public services*  
*N. Bhaskara Rao*  
Sage

₹ 695

# Healers of the earth

**Saibal Chatterjee**  
New Delhi

**TIMBAKTU** | 30 minutes

*Directed by Rintu Thomas and Sushmit Ghosh*  
*Produced by Public Service Broadcasting Trust*

THE documentary opens with the words of the late Masanobu Fukuoka, the world's most celebrated proponent of natural farming, emphasizing "the relationship of food to the human spirit". It then proceeds to highlight the ways in which that essential connect has been eroded over the decades to the detriment of mankind.

*Timbaktu*, the winner of this year's National Award for the best non-feature film on environmental issues, points out that the vegetables that

# Rumination

**CANCER KATHA** | 26 minutes

*Directed by Vasudha Joshi*  
*Produced by Public Service Broadcasting Trust*

A personal, freewheeling cinematic essay about her fight against cancer, Kolkata-based filmmaker Vasudha Joshi's 26-minute documentary is remarkable in many ways. The most striking aspect of the film is the refreshing equanimity with which she shares her thoughts on the dreaded disease.

The viewer hears Joshi's voice all through the film, but sees her visage only occasionally, and that too mostly reflected in a mirror. She seems to be dealing with two levels of reality – one is strictly physical and about a real medical crisis and its emotional ramifications; the other is embedded deep in the imagination or, as the filmmaker puts it in the context of old photos that we see her sharing with her sister, "is hard-wired into the memory".

The latter aspect of the narrative plays out through the music of a Baul singer, who talks

## DOCUMENTARIES

an average Indian consumes have 40 toxic chemicals that cause a variety of life-threatening diseases.

It is against this backdrop that the Timbaktu Collective has been working in Andhra Pradesh's drought-prone Anantapur district since the 1980s to promote organic farming. It has been chipping away with resolve at continued governmental indifference to the pressing need to clean up this country's agricultural practices.

The 32 acres of barren land that activists Bablu Ganguly, Mary Vattamattam and John D'Souza bought in Anantapur in 1989 have been nursed back to health, drawing on native knowledge, and addressing the needs of the local community.

Using purely organic methods, the Collective and its cooperative of farmers, Dharani, have redrawn the landscape beyond recognition. Rintu Thomas and Sushmit Ghosh's visually evocative and expressive documentary captures the beauty of the space that the Timbaktu Collective has carved out without tampering with the environment.

The 30-minute film, produced by the Public Service Broadcasting Trust (PSBT) with the support of Films Division, narrates the story of an amazing turnaround through a mix of pure images, sharp interviews and cold data, all of which are strung together seamlessly.

Films about eco warriors often take alarmist



An earnest bunch of urban environmentalists turned barren land into an organic marvel

positions and lapse into cinematic pamphleteering. Timbaktu does nothing of that sort: it gets its point across with gentle precision. It eschews the hammer-and-tongs approach without diluting the force of its core message.

When Ganguly, a city-bred man, arrived here nearly 25 years ago, he and his associates were up against challenges that appeared insurmountable. As he candidly puts it, he had never seen a village before and had no idea about the severity of the crisis that loomed over rain-deficient Anantapur.

So, in their enthusiasm, they planted 7,000 trees. Some died; the ones that didn't failed to grow. They realized that the soil had no moisture and it needed drastic "healing". It is the success of that endeavour that this film records.

Ganguly stresses that they have only allowed the earth to do its job. "We have done nothing, only stopped the water from running off and protecting the earth," he says.

Such 'inaction', the film informs us, has paid rich dividends. The groundwater here has increased from 60 meters to 18 meters, and the area now yields 400 plant species, up from a mere 21 some years ago.

The film also inevitably alludes to the severity of the agrarian crisis in this part of Andhra Pradesh. Trapped in an unending cycle of debt brought on by declining soil fertility and rising cultivation costs, 700 farmers have committed suicide in Anantapur district in 10 years.

Even as it has sought to reverse the adverse effects of chemical intensive agrarian practices, which were adopted in the mid 1960s as an answer to the nation's food crisis, the Timbaktu Collective is working to turn 7,000 acres of revenue wasteland into forests that have, in turn, transformed the lives of the farmers here.

The organic food they produce now reaches the market and the farmers get a healthy share in the profits of the cooperative. Ganguly makes a strong case for government subsidies for organic farmers to help them cover the risk of wastage that they face because their chemical-free output cannot be stored. Like the earth that they till, they need a helping hand. ■

## on mortality



Cancer Katha: The film is about art, about life

about hearing the wrong news of Vasudha's death while on a train journey from Shantiniketan, and sings: "Death listens to no one/Everywhere, death lurks and waits."

The music takes on the form, essentially, of deep rumination on the inevitability of death, but also, by extension, on life, love and memory. "Death is an opportunity for a new life' is the thrust of the Baul's song – and of the film itself.

The film presents casual conversations that Joshi has with friends on how it felt when she was detected with breast cancer and how acquaintances reacted to the news. Some, she says, were too embarrassed to pay her a visit when she underwent chemotherapy for six months.

The more physical dimensions of the disease are expressed through the doubts and dilemmas that sprang in Joshi's mind after she first learnt, in December 2008, that she had cancer. She read up as much as she could on the Internet in order to understand the implications of the affliction.

Joshi's online research led her to Nobel Prize-winning American paleontologist and science historian Stephen Jay Gould who survived cancer for two decades.

Gould was only 40 when his cancer was diagnosed and he was told that patients with his condition lived no more than eight months on an average. (He died of another bout of cancer 20 years later at the turn of the millennium.)

Gould wrote an essay on his cancer experience and titled it 'The Median Isn't the Message'. He asked his immunologist friend Sir Peter Medawar, himself a Nobel laureate, what the best prescription for success against cancer was. The doctor's reply was: "A sanguine personality".

On cue, Joshi admits: "I am not even-tempered but I am a fighter. If that is half the battle won, then I had a chance." But her resolve was somewhat shaken when it came to deciding on the course of treatment. "I had heard terrifying stories about chemotherapy," she says, explaining why she was in two minds.

After the biopsy came in, it was revealed that the cancer was Stage 2. "I was lucky," Joshi says, adding that "in retrospect, I did the right thing by going in for the treatment".

*Cancer Katha* won a Special Jury Prize at the 60th National Awards. It is no ordinary, single-track narration of a harrowing personal experience. It is as much about art as about life. Using footage shot by her partner Ranjan Palit in Helsinki, she brings in the voice of the pioneer of cinema verite, Richard Leacock, as he narrates his experience of filming a friend who was dying.

*Cancer Katha* is an affirmation of art and cinema as a means to conquer the certainty of death that Debdas Baul sings of. ■

*Timbaktu and Cancer Katha* are available through PSBT ([www.psbtt.org](http://www.psbtt.org)) and can also be accessed online at [www.itokri.com](http://www.itokri.com)



# Those difficult periods

Dr G.G. GANGADHARAN

## GREEN CURES



advice to keep this reproductive phase happy and productive.

The uterus is the primary organ of reproduction. It is safeguarded by nature with a good musculature around and beneath. It is normally well protected from external pressures and influences. Keeping the uterus healthy keeps a woman healthy. In the old days, the tradition was to give women complete rest and light food during these wet days. There is good scientific reason behind this. If full rest is given, bleeding will never become hyper and there will be no chance of the blood getting into the other part of the uterus. The shedding of the mucus membrane in the uterus will also be normal. And as a result there will be normal bleeding and no inflammation to that part.

There are five major and common health problems observed in women during the reproductive age. All these are related to menstruation.

- Amenorrhea: the absence or highly delayed menstruation.
- Dysmenorrhea: This is a state of painful periods that is more common in unmarried women, especially in the earlier reproductive phase.
- Menorrhagia or Hyper-bleeding: Bleeding does not stop even after three to five days.
- Leucorrhoea or white discharge: with or without smell/infection in between periods.
- Pruritis: Itching of the vagina

These conditions are dealt with in Ayurveda very effectively.

**Amenorrhea:** A decoction made of 10 gms of gingerly or sesame seeds, 10 gms of horsegram, 3-5 petals of garlic, 10 gms of palm jaggery boiled in 4 glasses of water and reduced to one glass, filtered and taken lukewarm at 5 pm for

FROM menarche to menopause is the reproductive age of women where physiologically all functions are optimal. A woman is called a *vriddha* after she attains menopause. The best part of a woman's life cycle is this reproductive phase. Ayurveda has a treasure of

21 days will ensure timely menstruation. It is a very useful remedy for most conditions of amenorrhea where other aetiologies like low haemoglobin, chronic infections etc. are ruled out.

**Dysmenorrhea:** Unctuous oils like *dhanwantaram 101* is applied on the lower abdomen above the uterine space during periods. This helps reduction of pain. Internal consumption of 120 ml milk boiled with 10 gms of black sesame seeds (*til*) is helpful in alleviating painful periods.

**Menorrhagia or Hyper-bleeding:** The best remedy is complete rest. If there is no hormonal imbalance, *pravalabhasma* with *ashokarishtam* is prescribed. *Pushyanuga churnam* 5 gm at bedtime and *lakshadi churnam* 5 gm early in the morning – both with honey – are also useful. This helps a lot as a primary remedy for this condition. Of course this should be handled by a trained physician, but it is helpful to know that such remedies are available in Ayurveda. A paste of sandalwood with milk applied on the abdomen is useful.

### Leucorrhoea or white discharge:

This is common in women with *vata* and *pitta prakritis* i.e., those who are lean, dry and ill-built. *Shatavari* (*aspara-*

*gus rhizome*) in any form is very good for this condition. Douching of the vagina with a filtered decoction of *nimba* (neem bark) and *aragwatha* bark are excellent for this condition. Women with this condition should take ample ghee in their food and reduce spicy, deep fried food and food with yeast.

**Pruritis:** Itching of the vagina is very common and can be treated with a daily wash of the vagina with a decoction made from the bark of four milky species – *udumbara*, *ashwattha*, *plaksha* and *nyagrodha*. Application of the vaginal suppository of *jatyadighritam* is also prescribed. Intake of *ushirasavam*, *chandanasavam* or *sharibadyasavam* is also good.

These are simple remedies one can use at home at primary level even before consulting a doctor. Within three to five days symptoms should abate. If they persist, it would be prudent to see a doctor. ■

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## WONDER PLANT

# Smart Vacha

IN many Indian homes traditionally, 'Sweet flag' or 'Vacha' is given with honey in minute quantities to infants on the 11th and 21st day of birth. It is believed that this practice makes the child mentally active and talkative.

Vacha is also extensively used in Ayurveda and other traditional systems of medicine for mother and child care owing to its properties as a *medhya dravya* (intellect enhancer), antipyretic, immuno-modulator and nervine tonic actions. It significantly increases memory and controls hyperactivity in children.

Sweet flag has a rich history of medicinal use in Indian and Chinese cultures. It was widely traded for its aromatic properties and has been used as a substitute for ginger, cinnamon and nutmeg in several parts of the globe. Very few plants have gained such widespread use in diverse cultures.

**Location:** Vacha or *Acorus calamus* is a native of eastern countries and is indigenous to the marshes of mountains in India. It is cultivated throughout India, up to an altitude of about 2,200 metres. It is also found in the marshy

tracts of Kashmir, Sirmour (Himachal Pradesh), Manipur and in the Naga Hills. It is regularly cultivated in the Koratgere taluk of Karnataka.

**Properties:** Vacha works as a carminative. It helps in recovery from habitual constipation, diarrhea, flatulence, dyspepsia, gastritis and colic pain. It is a good remedy for severe sore throat, earache, laryngitis, nasal congestion, sinus headaches, sinusitis, cough, asthma etc.

The herb is also used for ailments like epilepsy, inflammatory swellings, arthritis, neuralgia, rheumatism, nervous affections, dysmenorrhea, shock, gum diseases, healing wounds and ulcers. Some classic Ayurvedic formulations like *Sarswatarishta* and *Sarswata churna*, where Vacha is the chief ingredient, are used for memory enhancement and for the treatment of psychiatric problems.

The nature of this herb is aromatic, stimulant, carminative, diuretic, astringent, anthelmintic, mildly laxative and aphrodisiac. Its *rasa* is bitter and pungent and the part most used is the dried rhizome.

**Gardening:** Although Vacha looks like a grass, its plants are not true ornamental grasses but are in a family of their own that is closely related to aroids. Gardeners can use sweet flag as an ornamental grass in a shady or partly sunny area with average to high soil moisture.

Vacha can be grown near a pond or included as part of an aquatic garden. It grows luxuriously in clay soil, under shady sunlight with adequate water supply. Above the ground, its leaves arise from the underground rhizome which grows up





to 45 to 180 cm long. Its aromatic leaves, beautiful small light brown flowers and their extensive medicinal applications add value to your garden. Vacha was initially distributed from its native range through trade and commerce. The rhizome was subsequently cultivated and the plant spread by vegetative means. Vacha can be grown in your garden by vegetative means through rhizomes from February to May. The sprouting percentage of 80 to 100 is easily attainable. Flowering occurs from July to September.

## Self-Help

**For children:** Dried rhizome powder with honey enhances intellect, memory and speech. It also prevents fever and pain during the teething period. The powder of Vacha and Yastimadhu (licorice) with honey is given to children for treatment in fever, cough and congestion in the chest. An infusion of vacha rhizome and jeera (cumin seeds) is useful in alleviating colic pain in children.

**For stomach complaints:** Vacha alleviates a heavy stomach by relieving flatulence, colic pain and increasing appetite. The dried rhizome is burnt and mixed with a bland oil like refined coconut oil or a poultice of the rhizome can be applied on the abdomen for stomach complaints. For chronic dysentery, the rhizome infusion can help effectively.

**For fits/epilepsy:** To prevent epilepsy in children the rhizome is prepared as an amulet and tied to the body of the child preferably the waist.

**For sore throat:** Mix 3 cups of Vacha rhizomes, peeled and cut into pieces about half inch long with 4 cups of water. You need 4 cups of sugar and half cup of reserved sugar also. Cover rhizomes with water and boil for 10 minutes.

Drain the water, add fresh water and boil again. Repeat this twice with fresh water each time. Stir the 4 cups of sugar into 4 cups of water until dissolved. Add the Vacha and simmer slowly for 10 minutes. Drain and discard the sugar syrup. When the syrup has dripped off, roll the candy in the remaining half cup of sugar, coating well, then lay out on waxed paper to dry for a day. Store in an airtight container. The candy is a great nibble after meals and soothes sore throats. ■

Nagaraj HB is a Research Officer at CHG Department, IAIM, Bangalore. Email: nagaraj.hb@frlht.org

## FEEL GOOD

# Minus sinus

**W**ITH dusty winds blowing across North India, those who suffer from sinus duck for cover. The lack of moisture in the air combined with particulate matter aggravates sinus. A throbbing head with a blocked nose makes it hard to concentrate on work. Relax. You can alleviate your sinus troubles and put your mind at ease.

### Tips to tackle sinus:

- Avoid sleeping during the day and staying awake at night or sleeping directly under the fan. Keep your head upright to help the sinuses drain.
- Sweets and dairy products should be avoided including cheese, yogurt and milk. Avoid cold water and swallowing mucus.
- Eat plenty of organic fresh fruits and vegetables. Don't skip or delay meals, because that will upset the digestive balance and cause more ama (toxins) to be created. Foods that are difficult to digest should be avoided. Eat warm meals that are light, nurturing, and easy to digest.
- Make sure your bowel movements are regular to help detoxify the body and to re-establish a bal-

anced environment in the sinus area.

- Inhaling steam infused with ginger or a few drops of eucalyptus oil can open up the nasal passages. Pungent spices like ginger, black pepper and cinnamon break up mucus and assist expectoration.
- Drink plenty of warm water flavored with spices to purify the sinuses of toxins and to allow the toxic waste that has built up to flow out.
- Try some honey and lemon dissolved in hot water or herbal tea as an alternative to normal tea. Avoid drinks that contain caffeine, such as coffee, tea, cola and other fizzy drinks as these are diuretics which could cause further dehydration.
- Chicken soup is believed to be a good food for colds – it relieves infections of the upper respiratory tract. Vegetables soups with spices are good.
- Keep the room temperature comfortably warm and open the bedroom window so fresh air can circulate.
- Climatic or regional changes and pollution increase sinus problems. Take necessary precautions. Contact a doctor immediately if sinuses are affecting your normal work schedule. ■

Dr Rekha R, RMO I-AIM Health Care Centre

## ORGANIC CHEF

# Soup & Yogurt



## CARROT-GINGER SOUP

### Ingredients:

- Black pepper: 1/8 tsp
- Carrots: 2 whole
- Celery stalk: 2 tbs
- Ginger (fresh): 1/4 inch
- Olive oil: 2 tsp
- Salt: 1/4 tsp

**Method:** Put carrots, ginger and celery into a blender. Fill water up to the height of the vegetables. Puree. Pour into a utensil and boil with other ingredients for 10 to 15 minutes.

## SAFFRON YOGURT

### Ingredients:

- Plain yogurt: 3 cups
- Cheesecloth or clean white handkerchief
- Whipped cream: 1 cup
- Saffron threads: 1/2 teaspoon soaked in 2 tbs water
- Honey: 5 to 6 tbs
- Pistachio nuts: 2 tbs (slivered)

**Method:** Pour the yogurt into the cheesecloth and tie the ends together. Hang over the sink for at least 8 hours. The longer it hangs, the thicker the yogurt. A lined funnel placed over a vessel serves the same purpose.

When the liquid has thoroughly drained off, mix the thick yogurt with the whipped cream. Add the saffron mixture, sugar and most of the pistachios.

Serve in a beautiful bowl, garnished with the remaining pistachios.

- Yogurt is an ideal summer food because it is cooling and has a regenerating effect on the system.
- In winter, yogurt's cooling effect can be balanced with warming spices, such as nutmeg, saffron, cinnamon, ginger or cloves. ■

Dr Rekha R, Resident Medical Officer, IHC

## PRODUCTS

### PUPPET LOVE

IN years gone by, recalls Vinod Bhatt, his father would walk through the lanes of bucolic villages with his puppets strapped on his back. "Come watch my puppets perform," was his cry. Children would scamper down and his father would set up an impromptu stage for his eager little audience.

All that has changed, sighs Vinod Bhatt who has inherited his father's profession but not his rustic ways. Bhatt has a mobile phone on which he takes 'orders.' But he makes more money than his father and that helps his craft to survive.

Bhatt sells attractive handmade puppets. Children love to have a few, he says. Each puppet, made of wood and cloth, costs around ₹150.

He also performs puppet shows at birthday parties and weddings, merging popular Hindi movie songs with Rajasthani folk music. Puppets help 20 members of his family earn an income.

Bhatt's traditional craft has not been completely diluted by modernity, he says. The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), for instance, helps puppeteers perform in countries like Spain and Dubai. That earns them good money. ■



For orders contact Vinod Bhatt at 09811990222



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### TRIBAL CHARMS

EVERGREEN Hand sells a variety of tribal jewelry from Manipur. There are pretty earrings, bracelets and necklaces made with colorful beads. It is the combination of colors that gives the jewelry an identity. Earrings are crafted with orange and green beads, or black and white or pink, yellow and black. "That's because each tribe in Manipur has its own distinct color code," explains Florence who designs this jewelry in Delhi's Manipur Emporium. "Color has meaning for us. We wear different colors for different occasions. Colors are also linked to war, peace, birth, marriage and death."

Some designs are traditional, others modern, says Florence who is a trained jewelry designer. The trinkets are made with silver, brass, sea grass and recycled cotton, all by hand. Florence employs three people from Manipur who also weave baskets. She says she has conducted workshops in Manipur for the community and helped women earn a living. Her products are eco-friendly. No chemicals are used, says Florence who is committed to saving the environment. ■