

Civil Society

AT HOME IN SIKKIM

Eco-tourism in India's only green state

Gyatso Lepcha and his wife Samsay at their homestay

INTERVIEW



'IT'S PEOPLE RAJ'
Chief Minister Pawan Chamling explains the Sikkim model of growth with equity



'ENDEARING FIRMS DELIVER MORE VALUE'

Jagdish N. Sheth on the companies of tomorrow
Pages 24-25

FIRST TIMERS IN KARNATAKA

Pages 8-9

JACKFRUIT DEFIES DROUGHT

Pages 12-13

RATNAULI'S BRAVE BATTLE

Pages 27-28

BANGALORE'S MOBILITY WOES

Page 29

MAKING A JOLLY GOOD POINT

Pages 31-32

FOR HEALTHY GUMS

Page 36

CONTENTS



COVER STORY

AT HOME IN SIKKIM

India's only green state is becoming a much sought after destination for eco-tourism. The government has promoted comfortable homestays nestled in Sikkim's lovely mountains.

16

COVER PHOTOGRAPH: GAUTAM SINGH

Fenced out in Poonch	10
Architecture is also art	11
Army opposes dam in HP	12
A crusader for safer roads	14
Mobile tech eases micro-credit	26
Govt can't be silent	30
Charms of lovely Lakshadweep	32-33
Music with a message	35
Shell bowl and leather art	38

Contact Civil Society at:
response@civilsocietyonline.com
The magazine does not undertake to respond to unsolicited contributions sent to the editor for publication.

Civil Society

READ US. WE READ YOU.

Sikkim's success

THERE are so many things we somehow don't know about Sikkim. Chief Minister Pawan Chamling has been elected four times and the Sikkim Democratic Front government he heads seems to defy all theories of anti-incumbency. The state's economy has been growing at 12 per cent, which is way ahead of other Indian states. Poverty has been all but wiped out because the growth has been bottom up and is accompanied by innovative skill-building strategies and improved yields in agriculture.

Chamling has a green vision of development. His model for Sikkim's economy is sophisticated and farsighted at a time when a rather rudimentary, old fashioned debate on industry versus environment rages in the country.

Encouraging Sikkim's farmers to go organic, Chamling has helped them make the transition in real terms. He has linked farmers to markets. He has promoted floriculture and eco-tourism. Protection of the environment is considered paramount. Industries are welcome as long as they are clean.

When a government presents itself like this, work gets done and policies translate into action. Chamling himself comes from a village. "I am a politician," he said to us in a matter of fact way when we were interviewing him. It is only politicians with clear goals who can deliver better governance.

Sikkim's is a heart-warming story because of the challenges that have been overcome. It is one of India's youngest states and grapples with serious disadvantages because of its location. It was bankrupt and wracked by corruption when Chamling took over in 1994. The state also has its social divisions and political frictions.

But in 20 years, Chamling and his team have shown that a new and refreshing narrative is possible through pragmatic governance at ground level. Change has come from reaching out to people and building trust through dialogue. There are lessons in this for the rest of India.

In its efforts to speed up economic growth Chamling's government has had to be inventive and flexible. Its green policies have been best suited to Sikkim's natural wealth and rural livelihoods. However, since hydro power is one of Sikkim's biggest resources, a decision to build dams has been taken while being aware of the damage they will cause. Two of the dams have been shelved after protests, but Chamling is going ahead with the remaining 16.

From Bihar comes the disturbing news of the violent death of Ram Kumar Thakur who had helped Sanjay Sahni of Ratnauli village in Muzaffarpur district lead a campaign against corruption. Sanjay and his fellow villagers were in last year's Civil Society Hall of Fame.

His death raises the need to urgently provide protection to whistleblowers. A bill on whistleblowers is pending but no one seems to have the time to discuss it. Meanwhile, innocent citizens who have the courage to expose corruption continue to become targets.

Publisher
Umesh Anand

Editor
Rita Anand

Associate Editor
Saibal Chatterjee

News Network
TS Sudhir, Shree Padre, Jehangir Rashid, Rakesh Agarwal, Susheela Nair

Photo-journalists
Gautam Singh, Lakshman Anand

Layout & Design
Virender Chauhan

Cartoonist
Samita Rathor

Write to Civil Society at:
D-26 Basement, South Extension Part 2, New Delhi - 110049. Ph: 011-46033825, 9811787772

Printed and published by Umesh Anand from A 53 D, First Floor, Panchsheel Vihar, Malviya Nagar, New Delhi - 110017. Printed at Samrat Offset Pvt. Ltd., B-88, Okhla Phase II, New Delhi - 110020.

Postal Registration No.
DL(S)-01/3255/2012-14.
Registered to post without pre-payment U(SE)-10/2012-13 at New Delhi PSO Registered with the Registrar of Newspapers of India under RNI No.: DELENG/2003/11607
Total no of pages: 40

Advisory Board

ANUPAM MISHRA
ARUNA ROY
NASSER MUNJEE
ARUN MAIRA
DARSHAN SHANKAR
HARIVANSH
JUG SURAIYA
SHANKAR GHOSE
UPENDRA KAUL

Get your copy of Civil Society from

Delhi: Bahri Sons, Central News Agency, stalls at Green Park market, South Extn Part II, Aurobindo Market, R. K. Puram, Vasant Vihar, Vasant Kunj, J.N.U., S.D.A. Market, Saket, Kalkajee, C. R. Park, New Friends Colony, Lajpat Nagar, Defence Colony, Hauz Khas, Moti Bagh, Sector 62 Noida.
Gurgaon: DLF Phase 1

Market, Galleria Market, Qutab Plaza, Sector 14 Market, Sector 17 Market, Sector 54, Sector 44.
Kolkata: Oxford Bookstore, Classic Books.
Bangalore: Variety on St Mark's Road.
Lucknow: Ram Advani Bookseller at Hazratganj.
Chandigarh: The Browser.

IN THE LIGHT

by SAMITA RATHOR



LETTERS



Pension Parishad

Your cover story, 'Pension to all inches along,' is a telling commentary on the hardship that elderly working people have to face in India. This section of society is the most eligible for pension. Goa has done well by providing a meaningful pension to them. Money gives older people dignity and enables them to live with respect with their families. The Union government must expedite this legislation.

Anila Sharma

The working elderly have contributed immensely to the growth of the economy.

It is time they were taken care of by the government. Pension would give them independence and enable them to live with dignity. It is shameful that we have not made a decent pension mandatory. This is a violation of human rights.

Anshuman Mukherjee

Women's bank

Ela Bhatt emerges as a visionary in your interview, 'A women's bank cannot be just another bank'. Filled with compassion and commitment, she has worked relentlessly for more than 40 years to build up the SEWA Bank brick by brick. May God give her more strength in taking the movement forward to even greater heights.

sharmyth@gmail.com

Paddy boom

Rakesh Agarwal's story, 'Paddy boom in barren Damoh', is one solution to the impending water crisis that is sure to hit agriculture hard. Definitely, SRI is the alternative as more food grains could be grown by

this method using less water. And, just to tell your readers, it is already being successfully used for wheat, maize and legumes too, albeit with a lower degree of success than paddy.

Suresh Thapaliyal

Speak up

Congratulations Rina Mukherjee for the wonderful first person account in 'Speak up, abandon your fears'. You have given an inspirational account of your 10-year battle against sexual harassment you suffered at the organization that summarily dismissed you. Your victory is a marker of what women like you are capable of. I remember many ridiculed you and some simply discarded you. I salute you from the bottom of my heart.

Shoma Chatterji

Tuber feast

Shree Padre's story, 'Taste for tubers on the rise,' was very informative and interesting. I would like to grow many of the tubers mentioned but for the wild boar menace. Shree Padre's contribution towards India's food security deserves special mention.

Rajagopal

I agree with the message of this story that food security comes from conservation of our diversity such as ethnic tubers. I appreciate Shree Padre and *Civil Society* once again.

C.D. Suneesh

Tubers are neglected crops which need to be put into use along with mainstream crops. It is also important to create awareness about the culinary aspects of these crops. As mentioned in the story, making *idlis* and sweet dishes from tubers are important for making them popular.

Thimmaiah

We are collecting and documenting various tuber crops in the tribal area of Jawhar with the involvement of the local community.

Sudhir M Wagle smwagle@gmail.com

Wonder plant

With reference to guggulu balm under Wonder Plant, I would like to say, natural remedies are best for health. These are natural, effective and give long lasting results without any side effects. For lowering cholesterol these are the best remedies.

cdoyle@archmereacademy.org

INTERVIEW / Pawan Chamling High growth at 12%,

'Sikkim will be a model for a

LAKSHMAN ANAND



Pawan Chamling: 'I am a politician and we work for the people.'

Civil Society News
New Delhi

THE small state of Sikkim, tucked away in the eastern Himalayas, is doing big things. By 2015 it will be India's first wholly organic state. That's not all. In two years, Chief Minister Pawan Chamling hopes to make Sikkim free of poverty, a significant achievement in a country where poverty declines at snail's pace.

What makes the Sikkim model unique is its growth strategy. Chamling has chosen for his mountain state the path of sustainable development. Under him, Sikkim has opted to be green, clean and inclusive. The sectors of the economy that have been prioritized for growth are organic agriculture, horticulture, floriculture, eco-tourism and hydro power.

The state government has launched a series of

measures to benefit from conservation. Everybody is encouraged to plant trees. And interestingly, Sikkim's green economy hasn't affected its GDP. In fact, the state has been growing consistently at a decadal figure of 12.26 per cent, the highest in the country.

Not for nothing has Pawan Chamling's Sikkim Democratic Front won four elections since 1994, emerging stronger every time and nailing the lie that parties lose elections because of anti-incumbency. Chamling wins because his policies are designed to meet the needs of people.

His approach is strongly pragmatic. So, when it comes to hydro power and the revenue it will provide, he goes ahead with building dams.

Sikkim spends more than any other state in India, or perhaps in the world, on education and health. There is universal sanitation and it is the only state where rural health infrastructure has

been built. While other states are juggling various delivery mechanisms, Sikkim has managed to implement its policies. It was also the first to give 50 per cent reservation for women in panchayats.

Chamling himself is from a village and understands rural poverty. He travels to the remotest hamlet, sometimes on foot, to listen to people and explain his policies. There is constant dialogue between the Chief Minister and them.

For Chamling there is no contradiction between economic growth, the environment and people. "We want to be a laboratory on sustainable development for the world," Chamling told *Civil Society* in an interview.

You have worked to develop Sikkim into an eco-friendly, inclusive state. Where does your outlook come from?

I am a politician. We work for the people and our

four terms in office and environment friendly truly green state'

perspective is local. When we came to power in 1994, Sikkim had no revenue and no innovative work had been done. We were completely dependent on grants from the Centre. We did not even have enough money to pay salaries. I was perplexed. How would we run the government?

Sikkim has a location disadvantage. I thought: how can we turn this into an advantage? What does Sikkim have which distinguishes it from the rest of the world?

Sikkim has rich natural resources that you will not find elsewhere. I decided to implement sustainable development based on our natural resources. I declared 1996 as the Year of the Green Revolution in Sikkim. We sent out a message to all our people that we must conserve our trees, birds, plants, aquatic and wild animals, our natural flora and fauna. Our Green Revolution sought to create harmony between humans and their environment. We made it a people's programme.

I explained to the people that the rich leave behind a big bank balance for their children. The poor can leave behind a different kind of bank balance – of a green environment. We could plant trees in our reserve forests and our children could inherit this legacy. After 20 years, a tree would be worth at least ₹1 lakh. Besides, our land would be fertile, its ecological balance would remain intact, and we would be protected from landslides. Sikkim would have a clean and green environment.

The people liked my message hugely. They came forward, young and old, to support me.

I started a second programme called Smriti Van. It is run by villagers and gram panchayats and extends from Gangtok to the smallest hamlet. Anybody, including a tourist, can go plant a tree in a Smriti Van. A record is created of who planted a tree in whose name. It could be in the name of a loved one or God. This too has become popular. In Gangtok itself we have a Smriti Van where you can plant a sapling.

We also started eco-friendly tourism. We decided to make our forests and wildlife productive in a sustainable manner. Everywhere, people cut trees for money and kill animals for food. But we took a decision to protect and conserve our environment and increase our forest cover. We want to be a laboratory on sustainable development for the world. People can come to Sikkim and learn how people and the environment can live in harmony.

The world has 18 biodiversity hotspots and Sikkim is one of them.

We have also banned tree cutting in our state. No green felling is allowed. If somebody wants to cut a tree on his own land, he has to plant 20 trees in return. He does not have to pay the government anything. We totally banned grazing in for-

est areas. We are perhaps the first in the world to impose such a ban.

But how have you managed to implement all this?

We have implemented our policies successfully. But, it was very difficult. At first people were not happy about the ban. But soon they realized why it was essential and they began to support us.

We have also completely banned killing of wildlife. If somebody kills wildlife, even a bird, he has to pay a fine of ₹5 lakhs and serve one year in jail. Here too we are the first in the world.

Ten Minutes for Earth is another programme we have started. Every year, on one day, all our

'If any girl student comes first in any class at district or state level she gets ₹3,000 per month as scholarship. I wanted girls to be competitive and due to this scheme they began to compete.'

people, including students, and government employees, come out and plant a tree. We provide the saplings.

All our initiatives are green. The industries we have introduced are also green and clean. We are laying emphasis on eco-friendly tourism.

Gangtok will soon have an international airport. Won't that adversely affect eco-tourism?

We will always protect eco-tourism and ensure its success. We have introduced environment education in our schools so that our children acquire a scientific temperament. An airport will boost tourism. We educate our people and explain our policies to them. I always say: '*Janata ke raj mein, janata hi raja.*'

The people are king and they should realise their rights and fulfill their responsibilities.

You were the first to give women 50 per cent reservation in panchayats. What impact has this had on development?

I believe that in politics you have to take all the people along. Unless women gain respect in society and become part of the development process,

we will not progress. For years they have been seen as second-class citizens and not got their rights.

When we formed the government I coined a slogan: "We will make women the owners of half the sky and half the earth. We will not rest till this objective is reached." The women appreciated this.

We gave them 50 per cent reservation in panchayats along with affirmative action. They have 30 per cent reservation in higher education and 30 per cent reservation in jobs. Property that is bought or sold has to be registered in the name of the wife and husband. We built institutions like a court for women.

I also started a scheme for girls called Purna Yojana. If any girl student comes first in any class at district or state level she gets ₹3,000 per month as scholarship. I wanted girls to be competitive and due to this scheme they began to compete.

We have introduced a Small Family Scheme. When a school going girl attains the age of 13, we put aside ₹5,000 for her. When she passes Class 10 she gets a bonus. When she passes Class 12, she gets another bonus. A bonus is given when she graduates from college. If a girl marries at the age of 23 she gets a marriage bonus. But if she marries before 23, she doesn't get this bonus. At the age of 50 after being a mother of two children she will get the entire sum of money.

The idea behind this scheme is to encourage girls to go to school, join college, delay marriage and have a manageable family of two. They need to keep good health. That is why in Sikkim the ratio of girls in school is higher than boys. In government service too there are more women than men.

This scheme has been very successful. The most empowered and free women are in Sikkim. They have progressed and are respected.

Your government has boosted horticulture, floriculture and organic farming. These are all green sectors. How did you implement these policies?

We introduced organic farming because it is environment friendly. Secondly, Sikkim is a hill state with small farms. We thought: how can we achieve high value, low volume agriculture? We zeroed in on organic farming. In 2003 we passed a resolution in the Assembly declaring that Sikkim would be an organic state.

But our biggest problem was to convince the agriculture department. That alone took me all of two years. We had to explain organic farming to them. The secretary of agriculture/horticulture, Hare Ram Pradhan, was completely opposed to it. He said it could not be done. It hadn't happened anywhere in the world.

I found convincing bureaucrats to be my toughest job. I also had to convince the people. They were used to chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Some opposition party members told them, this is against your interests. You will be ruined. I had to face these three hurdles.

Also, no state had carried out such a programme. So we didn't have a role model.

Continued on page 8

Continued from page 7

We had to create our own policy and programme from scratch. It was innovative and very difficult. After convincing everybody – and this took three years – we trained our youth and officers in organic methods. We built a skilled workforce and sent them out to farms.

Another problem was the lack of organic manure. But now we make organic manure and organic pesticides. We are today leaders in organic farming. In two years the entire state of Sikkim will be organic. Already, 90 per cent of our farms are organic. We will also get certification.

Where will organic products sell?

We are getting inquiries from the Netherlands, Germany and Argentina. I feel a deep sense of satisfaction. If there is one sector in our country that is rather backward, it is agriculture. Farmers, the producers of food, are themselves going hungry. This is a tragic irony.

In Sikkim our poorest people used to be farmers too. But now their purchasing power is rising. I am confident that the most lucrative sectors in the state will be farming and horticulture. Farmers will sell whatever they grow. They are growing organic baby corn that has high demand. Ginger too.

Sikkim is slated to be India's first organic state. People from other states can learn from our example. This is the contribution of a small state to the nation.

Are people from other states inquiring about Sikkim's experience with going organic?

Yes, people do come. But the state that has shown the most interest is Kerala. They are progressive and in touch with us. Our officials go there to provide consultancy.

You are from a village yourself. Was it difficult to convince the people?

People have faith in us. They know that what Pawan Chamling says, he does. The decisions he takes are the right ones. I always wanted to work for the people. I listen to their problems. I know very well what poverty is and its sorrows. I understand village life, the *aam aadmi*, and therefore what needs to be done.

My family belong to the middle class in Sikkim. We owned land on which we grew cardamom. My family continues to farm. I have not forgotten my rural roots. When I read of farmer suicides, I feel saddened. I want to reach out to those farmers.

What impact have your policies had on education, health and livelihood?

In Sikkim we do not have extreme poverty. My target is by 2015 we will have a slum-free, poverty-free Sikkim with a literacy rate of 100 per cent and *pucca* housing for all. We are doing a lot for poorer children. In all government schools up to

the college level, education is free. We spend 20 per cent of our budget on education – the highest in the world and in the country. Currently, our literacy rate is 83 per cent.

On healthcare we spend 15 per cent and we are also doing a lot. We do a complete health check up for all citizens under a programme called Catch (Comprehensive Annual and Total Check-up for a Healthy Sikkim).

I think in livelihood a lot of change has come about. All our programmes are result-oriented. In 2003 we started a Capacity Building Institute and 41 Livelihood Schools with a Directorate.

Can you tell us about this initiative?

Actually this institute and the livelihood schools are the first of their kind in India. Any school dropout can enroll and get trained. We have a wide range of options – from driving a car, becoming a beautician, an electrician, carpenter, flower decorator to running a dairy, a fishery, or a horticulture farm. We want our children to be a highly skilled human resource. The state sponsors our graduates or post-graduates if they want to specialize or study further.

Youth must be employable, skilled and fulfill the expectations of the job market. We are also preparing them to meet the needs of the local job market. For example, we need trained hotel personnel and professionals for our services sector.

Sikkim was planning to build several dams. There was an agitation against this. You cancelled some of those dams. Can you tell us your perspective?

Sure. I read in the newspapers that West Bengal has a debt of ₹2 lakh crores. Many states have debt. So our state too has debt to the Central government. Out of our grants from the Central government, 10 per cent are loans. These loans will keep increasing and so will our debt. We can't just do nothing.

So we thought, we have water. It is a resource. We decided to implement hydro-power projects. Eighteen of them are under construction. Once completed, in five years, we will be debt-free. In fact, Sikkim will be India's first debt-free state.

Ninety per cent of our 18 hydro-power projects are underground. Only seven families will be displaced. Yes, there will be some damage to the environment. We have tried our best to reduce the environmental impact. If we have to cut 2,000 trees we will plant 20 per cent more to make up.

What I have done rightly or wrongly is for the interest of my state and its people, in good faith. We are doing hydro-projects in PPP mode. The government has a 26 per cent stake and we are in control. If all our projects work out, Sikkim will be India's greenest and cleanest state, manageable and strong. ■

'We spend 20 per cent of our budget on education – the highest in the world and in the country. Currently, our literacy rate is 83 per cent. On healthcare we spend 15 per cent.'

Karnataka has new faces in politics

Lok Satta fields 25 for upcoming Assembly polls

TS Sudhir
Bangalore

DR Meenakshi Bharath introduces herself to voters in Malleswaran, northwest Bangalore, in a rather unusual way.

"I heard there is a vacancy for the post of MLA of Malleswaram. I am applying for the job," she says.

A gynaecologist and fertility expert, Meenakshi is contesting her first election to Karnataka's State Assembly as a Loksatta Party candidate. Her supporters distribute her resume to voters so that they get to know her better.

In Bommanahalli constituency, a Bangalore suburb, Ashwin Mahesh is making a similar pitch to his voters. He too is contesting on a Lok Satta ticket. Ashwin is an astronomer and a journalist. Meenakshi and him have been very active in the anti-corruption Saaku movement and in the India Against Corruption Jan Lokpal Bill movement in Bangalore. Ashwin Mahesh has done very good work on Bangalore's traffic management system. Meenakshi has worked on solid waste management.

Meenakshi and Ashwin are people like you and me who have decided to get their hands dirty in the cesspool of Karnataka politics.

Lok Satta is fielding 25 candidates for Karnataka's State Assembly polls. All of them are accomplished professionals. Eleven are contesting from Bangalore. They include a lecturer, a software engineer, a couple of farmers, entrepreneurs, teachers and those from other professions.

Lok Satta was founded in 2006 by Dr Jayaprakash

PICTURES BY T S SUDHIR



Dr Meenakshi Bharath campaigning

Narayan, an IAS officer in Andhra Pradesh who became a politician to offer people a cleaner political alternative.

"We think two or three of us stand a good chance. If we win that many, we will be over the moon," says Meenakshi. "It became necessary for us to contest because the government we elected with so much hope in 2008 did not deliver. So we needed to enter politics to bring in accountability and transparency. Bangalore's sheen has reduced. It is time Bangaloreans elected people who do not have vested interests."

Interestingly, the website that introduces Lok Satta's candidates is called 'Occupy the Assembly'. While that may be a tall order, the big positive is that the entry of these non-political faces has changed the debate to development issues and not mere vote bank politics.

The new candidates talk about bread and butter issues and the quality of life in the city. They ask why encroachments are the norm in Bangalore, where footpaths have disappeared, how garbage should be scientifically managed and so on.

"For nearly 70 years since Independence, we have been fed this story of development that never seems to arrive but is always in the distant future," writes Mahesh in his message to voters.



"I believe this has happened because thus far we have only been consumers of such politics. We need to change that and become producers of the democracy we want for ourselves so that it is not only a form of government for the people and of the people but also by the people."

Jayaprakash Narayan says the cosmopolitan nature of Bangalore could help Lok Satta candidates but warns against sky-high expectations.

"If we get 10 per cent of votes in a constituency, it will be a huge achievement. Ten per cent is a lot of votes. We are not here to take an adversarial position. We expect our support base among the

middle class and the educated to increase gradually, thereby changing the trajectory of politics."

At Meenakshi Bharath's campaign headquarters, a poster says: "If you have been waiting for change, I stand right here in front of you."

The transparent manner in which the campaign is being conducted is itself a change. All funds are accounted for even the ₹20 an auto-rickshaw driver contributes to the election fund. The campaign is carried out without noise. Loudspeakers are a strict no-no.

Candidates do not contribute to the carbon footprint, travelling instead on bicycles or horse-drawn carriages.

Victoria, an event manager, has shut down her professional activity completely since the last one month to help Meenakshi win. "We have been going to meet people for almost a year now. They were surprised that we were enquiring about their problems when elections were so far away," she says.

But not many expect Lok Satta's professionals to triumph on debut. Bangaloreans do express deep angst over the shoddy manner in which civic, infrastructure and ecological issues were addressed by the BJP government. But this may not translate into votes in favour of the professionals because they are seen as elitist. The absence of a political approach to problems could go against them too.

Jayaprakash Narayan says this criticism is not entirely unjustified. But, he points out, the image of an MLA in people's minds is of a person who should do all your work – from getting a birth certificate to a water connection to cleaning the drains. This is unrealistic, he explains. Lok Satta's professionals aim instead at changing the system.

While Lok Satta's candidates are seen as solution providers, elections in India are also about building a base. The gestation period for that is invariably long.

Former Additional Chief Secretary of Karnataka, V. Balasubramanian recalls the fate of celebrated Kannada poet Shivram Karanth who contested the Lok Sabha polls from Karwar in 1989, only to come third. "You could not have elected a better person and yet the electoral process failed to do so," he says. Others point to the fate of the Professionals Party of India which has failed to make a dent in politics.

The challenge also lies in convincing voters to try out a new candidate, almost akin to pushing a new product in the market. It is then important for professionals aspiring to public life to look and sound like winners, not also-rans.

The consensus on the street is that the entry of fresh new faces in the electoral fray is a good beginning. Industrialist and Rajya Sabha MP Rajeev Chandrasekhar, feels that Bangalore needs new blood in public life. Dinesh Gundu Rao, a Congress MLA from Bangalore who is contesting this time, thinks that if they poll a significant number of votes, established political parties will realize the merit of fielding professionals and clean candidates and will do so next time.

Five years ago, Karnataka was seen as the BJP's stepping stone into southern India. In 2013, well-meaning professionals are using Karnataka as a gateway to a democracy where *neta* is not a four-letter word. ■

CONFLICT ZONE



CHARKHA

Afsana Kousar treks to school

blades. If an animal gets close, it won't survive. Our villages have been turned into human zoos. Even animals in enclosures are taken care of better than us," says 90-year old Mirza Khan who lost a leg to a landmine blast.

Crossing the fence is a daily embarrassment for villagers. "At the gates, we are frisked thoroughly. Security men rummage through our belongings. The whole drill puts severe stress on children and women. They are vulnerable to being touched indiscreetly," says Mirza Khan.

A local social activist who wanted to remain anonymous said girls were increasingly dropping out of school in border areas. "Young soldiers usually grope or do other acts that violate the dignity of our women and girls. Therefore, parents prefer not to send their adolescent girls to schools across the fence. In every house you will find that girls do not study beyond Class 8," he claimed.

In the evening, the gates are closed for villagers. If they have to take a critically ill person to hospital at night, they need to seek permission which sometimes takes a long time. Delays often prove fatal.

Villagers of Bhagyal Dhara, another border village, share the feeling of being persecuted. "The Union government should treat us like other citizens. It must relocate and rehabilitate us elsewhere so that we can live peacefully," says Mohammad Safeer, 17, an amputee who survived a landmine blast last year.

Villagers live an isolated existence. "Even close relatives are not allowed to join our social functions during birth, marriage and death," says Fatima Jaan, a widow who lost her leg to a landmine in her village, Gontrian. "People living outside no longer want to maintain a relationship with us. They have stopped marrying their daughters into villages behind the fence."

"Years of conflict have eroded the rural economy and increased poverty. Villages here need major post-conflict rehabilitation and reconstruction," says a teacher at a degree college in Poonch. "If the fence can't be relocated very close to the zero line, the villagers should be rehabilitated elsewhere. For how long does the government expect them to live in a conflict zone?"

A senior army officer pleading anonymity says: "We have been supplying water through vehicles to these villages. We also hold free health check-up camps from time to time. The army provides vehicles to villagers to transport their patients to the civil hospital. The long standing demands of the people have to be responded to by the civil administration."

"Since such areas are highly sensitive from the aspect of security, we have to maintain strict surveillance. After all, this is our primary job. At the same time, we enjoy good relations with the villagers because of Operation Sadbhavana," he says. "Decisions on compensation and shifting of the fence have to be taken by the government." ■

Charkha Features

(The article has been written as part of a series on Life in Conflict Zones under the National Media Fellowship instituted by the National Foundation for India.)

Fenced out in Poonch

Ashutosh Sharma
Poonch (J&K)

AFSANA Kousar, a student of Class 4 from Keerni, a border village in the Poonch district of J&K, treks four to five hours every day to attend school at Qasba. To reach there this small girl crosses lofty mountains, rushing streams, treacherous dirt tracks and dense forests. Finally, she arrives at a gate with endless concertina wires on both sides. This is a fence, technically called the Anti-Infiltration Obstacle System (AIOS). The Indian Army constructed this fence after a ceasefire at the Line of Control (LoC) in 2003 to check illegal cross border activities including terrorism.

The fence, which is usually 12 to 15 feet high and nearly eight feet wide, is made of coils of concertina wires. In some areas it is located nearly seven to eight km away from the zero line leaving many villages literally sandwiched between fence and zero line.

Like Afsana, the entire population of Keerni, comprising 750 people, has to pass through this fence to access government services. The civil administration is conspicuously absent. Army men are the only face that villagers see of the Indian state.

Despite the government spending thousands of crores under the Prime Minister's Reconstruction Plan, mountainous border villages in Poonch, a district surrounded by the Line of Control (LoC) on three sides, continue to survive without basic amenities and alternative employment opportunities. Threat from landmines, restricted movement, fear of militants and border skirmishes

make people's lives all the more miserable.

Balakote Panchayat in Poonch has been divided into two parts by the fence. News of the hardship people from one side of the fence face filters in when they visit people from the other side for their daily needs. Residents are allowed to intermingle for a specified time of the day after their identities have been verified by army personnel manning the gates.

"The army has occupied vast tracts here. The fence runs through fertile land," says Karamat Ullah Khan, sarpanch of Keerni. "Villagers do not have any source of livelihood. Land is their only asset and they are not getting any compensation either."

Residents living outside the fence have to walk for miles to reach the gates and cross the fence to cultivate their farmlands. This area has potential for horticulture but there are no transportation and cold storage facilities.

"Teachers attend the school inside the fence for hardly more than six to seven days a month as per records of army men at the gate. But they draw their full salary," says Karamat Ullah. "The Panchayat Ghar and the sole dispensary here are in shambles. We do not know where the border development fund is going," he says sadly.

Living a life stifled by administrative inertia and conflict, people here consider themselves no better than human shields. "At night, the fence is electrified. Its barbed wires have poisonous



Sarpanch Karamat Ullah Khan

Architecture is also art

T S Sudhir
Hyderabad

IN August last year, Hyderabad-based architect Srinivas Murthy put in a bid to design the Kasargode Central University in Kerala. Some of the best names in the business were in contention. He lost the bid but that was no reflection on the quality of his plan.

In fact, Murthy's design earned 75 marks out of 75 on creative parameters, but only five out of 25 on the financial front because the price he had quoted was on the higher side. The person who came third and eventually won the bid got a higher total by virtue of scoring 25 out of 25 in the cost component even though he did not secure high marks for his design.

"The jury was very impressed with my design. It was the biggest model the University had ever seen. But because I was priced more, the University ended up compromising on the quality of design for such a prestigious project. It failed to get the best designer due to the tendering process," rues Murthy.

This "tendering of creative excellence", as the architect acerbically puts it, is the bane of Indian design today. "The need is to peg yourself low, where quoting less becomes more important than the creative part of your design. Ultimately it harms the project because you do not get the best," he adds.

"Instead, if designs were looked at through a competition route with the fee component announced in advance as per stipulated norms, and the best design selected, you will always get the best mind to work for you," he says. In the bargain, the client has to settle for a badly designed project.

Srinivas Murthy, a 1991 batch alumnus of the prestigious Delhi School of Planning and Architecture (SPA), is today one of the best-known names in the field of design and architecture, having designed some top commercial, residential and tourist landmarks in different Indian cities.

One of the first projects he worked on soon after he passed out of SPA was the Indira Gandhi Memorial Museum at the residence of the former Prime Minister, where she was killed in October 1984. The museum is dedicated to the memory of both Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi.

But what sets Murthy apart from other members of his tribe is his passion to make urban spaces in India more user-friendly and architecturally aesthetic. He is a founder-member of the World Association of Architectural Organizations in Chicago, a four-year-old network of like-minded



Srinivas Murthy: Design is more important than price

design organizations dedicated to enhancing public dialogue about architecture and design.

"Schools in Chicago teach the importance of appreciating design to their students," says Murthy. "So from a very young age, they are sensitized towards better aesthetics and design. We have nothing of the sort here."

It was with that thought in mind that Murthy founded the Architecture and Design Foundation of India last year, its aim being to create a platform to inspire, provoke and facilitate appreciation of architecture and design, traditional and contemporary, local and global. This first-of-its-kind foundation in the country seeks to highlight the relationship between architecture and other forms of art such as music, dance, sculpture, photography and cinema.

What helps here is Murthy's own grounding in classical music, painting and photography. He is a trained musician and has been associated with some great musicians, including the late Pandit Ravi Shankar, who has had a great influence on him.

He also shoots and paints, and his home in Banjara Hills in Hyderabad is a tribute to his interest in the arts. Murthy is involved with INTACH and

P ANIL KUMAR

has documented the heritage structures in Visakhapatnam and Vizianagaram districts. He played a key role in instituting the first Heritage Awards of Vizag, where he worked for 10 years before moving to Hyderabad in 2008.

While India and its architects have so far done well in individual building spaces, the country has scored a zero when it comes to large public spaces, be it for recreational purposes or shopping areas.

"It is a pity because historically we have had examples like the Vijayanagara empire in the south and Fatehpur Sikri and Lutyen's New Delhi in the north where large urban spaces have been designed and appreciated. But now we are unable to do it primarily because of issues with ownership of land as most land is owned privately," says Murthy.

"The owners rarely think and contribute beyond their own boundary lines and the spaces that are owned either by the government or other agencies are rarely cared for, developed and maintained well."

Another problem, he feels, is with the quality of design education in India and teaching faculty at colleges of design and architecture. Murthy, who is a visiting faculty at several educational institutions, regrets that compared to the quality of the faculty that taught him at SPA, the best minds are not taking to teaching any

more.

"My teachers helped me get a definitive understanding of what architecture and design is. I was lucky to be in the right institute and environment. I was taught by some of the best practising architects of India. But today when you see design education in India, the faculty consists of architects who have hardly done appreciable professional practice and therefore got into teaching only as alternative employment," says Murthy.

His regret is that the system therefore is churning out architects who look at the profession more as a job than something that requires dollops of creativity and inspiration.

Another sphere that Murthy feels strongly about is the absence of mechanism for due recognition to creative talent in India. There are no Indian awards with worldwide recognition and architectural and design journalism is almost non-existent.

But it is not as though Murthy is pessimistic about the future. He is emphatic that young architects have to embrace ideas that are "innovatively bold, irrespective of whether people like it or not". In Srinivas Murthy's book, clarity of vision and sense of aesthetics constitute the mantra for excellence. ■

Army opposes dam in HP

Bharat Dogra
Shimla

IN a significant decision on 25 March, the High Court of Himachal Pradesh directed the state government to stop blasting work being carried out by the Shongtong Karcham dam authorities on the Sutlej river in Kinnaur district. The court's decision was taken in response to a petition filed by the Defence Ministry of the Government of India. The Indian Army has been deeply worried about this blasting work since it threatened the safety of a high-altitude ammunition point that is responsible for critical defence supplies to border areas.

The defence authorities had earlier approached the state government and local administration to stop the blasting work but to no avail. It was only then that they knocked on the doors of the High Court.

The Army's action has been carefully noted by local villagers. The question now uppermost in their minds is: if local authorities did not listen to the Army, will they ever listen to villagers who live in terror of blasting work?

Questions are also being raised about the future of the 402 MW Shongtam Karcham hydel project. It appears that the ammunition point will be shifted so that the hydel project can carry on its blasting work. The army has reportedly demanded some 1,000 acres to shift its ammunition point. Such a large contiguous tract may not be available in the mountains.

Any effort to acquire even half this land may have serious negative impacts on the livelihood of farmers, pastoralists, wildlife and the environment.

Were all these indirect impacts considered at all in the project report and clearance reports of the Shongtam Karcham dam project? It seems unlikely.

Villagers and activists say that the Shongtam Karcham dam project should be relooked. The costs and benefits of the project and its risks need to be reconsidered along with new issues like the impact of shifting the ammunition point.

When local people and activists point out the adverse impacts of dams, nobody listens. "The re-evaluation of this project should be done keeping in view the cumulative impact of other hydel projects on this river," says Himanshu Thakkar of the South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People (SANDRP). ■

Jackfruit defies drought

PICTURES BY SHREE PADRE



Rambhau Uke's daughter, Kalyani, under the family's bountiful jackfruit tree

Shree Padre
Yavatmal

SOMETIME in the end of March, Rambhau Uke, 42, a farmer from Kamatwada village, took a quintal of his jackfruit or *phanas* to sell at the Yavatmal market. His produce fetched him ₹2,500 or ₹25 per kg. In just a few hours, retailers sold his fruit to buyers at ₹60 per kg.

Poor Rambhau did not realize that the money he was paid is the highest farm-gate price for jackfruit in India. He doesn't know that he has an assured market for jackfruit right in his backyard.

In the last 10 years, jackfruit cultivation has been spreading slowly in Yavatmal and in Chandrapur, Amravati and Gadchiroli districts on a very small scale.

Maharashtra is experiencing its worst drought in decades. But farmers in Vidarbha who invested in jackfruit trees years ago are earning decent sums of money. Jackfruit has a ready market here and unlike Kerala it is seen as the rich man's vegetable.

Tukaram Uke, 75, a farmer from Kamatwada, 20 km from Yavatmal, has pioneered jackfruit cultivation here. He never thought that the handful of seeds he planted would come to the rescue of his village years down the line.

Kamatwada and Chani in Darwha taluka of the district are earning between ₹4 lakhs and ₹5 lakhs every year by selling jackfruit, thanks to Tukaram

Uke's foresight.

Tukaram's story dates back to the late sixties. At that time he was a daily wage worker at Kishan Dhanuji Dawle's farm. Dawle, a widely travelled landlord farmer, owned 100 acres and had three jackfruit trees. Tukaram was intrigued by this new tree vegetable. He took a few seeds and sowed them in his field. But none of them germinated.

He tried again, this time putting the seeds in nursery bags and mothering them. A few seeds sprouted and Tukaram planted them on his field bunds. The trees eventually yielded a good harvest of fruits, so he started a nursery and began encouraging farmers nearby to plant a few trees too.

Today, Chani and Kamatwada, two adjacent villages separated by a rivulet, Datpadi, are models for jackfruit cultivation in Vidarbha. About 300 jackfruit trees have been grown here.

A fecund jackfruit tree fetches a farmer ₹2,000 to ₹5,000. All that

the tree requires in return is periodic flood irrigation and one or two manure applications.

Santosh Uplenchwar, 39, of Kamatwada has 22 jackfruit trees. Seventeen are 10 to 12 years old and yield fruit. Santosh prefers to sell his crop from his field. He makes about ₹30,000 per annum.

Vinod Gulhani, 40, of Chani village has five trees about 25 years old. "As the tree grows older you get more and more fruits," he explains. Middlemen pay him ₹25,000 for the yield of his five trees. Tukaram Uke's best tree yields seven to



Tukaram Uke

in Vidarbha

eight quintals every year. This fetches him Rs 10,000. He selects seeds for nursery propagation from this tree.

Jackfruit cultivation has also spread to Gondia district in Nagpur division. Rambhau Doye, a farmer from Padampur village in Gondia has planted 40 trees on his bund. Last year his trees yielded 92 quintals and he earned ₹119,600. Twenty-seven families here have grown jackfruit. On an average they earn around ₹3,000 to ₹5,000 per tree.

Kamalnain Golchha, 62 of Chandrapur is Vidarbha's biggest jackfruit grower. He has planted jack trees on nine acres. It was his 30-year-old trees that gave him confidence. "I get an average of five to six quintals from these old trees", he says proudly. "One of these trees gives me 1,200 kg. Jackfruit sells immediately for ₹10 per kg. The demand is high." His son, Pankaj Golchha, is preparing to plant jackfruit on another 10 acres this year.

"Farmers say that even if it takes 10 years for the trees to bear fruit it is worth it. Costs are low and returns are good," says Jija Farkade, Senior Programme Officer, BAIF. Traders too are prepared to pay a little extra for local jackfruit for its freshness.

RISING CONSUMPTION: Vidarbha consists of 11 districts of north Maharashtra. From September to May, Nagpur, its biggest city, consumes about 20 to 40 tonnes of jackfruit mostly from Kerala. For a brief period, consignments come from Odisha too.

According to Anil Sherekar, a commission agent whose father pioneered the jackfruit trade, the city consumes eight to 10 tonnes of jackfruit every day. Around 60 to 80 vendors deal only in jackfruit. Satish Babu, one such vendor, sits in front of Mahatma Phule Market. He sells about 80 kg daily, buying it at the wholesale price of ₹12 per kg and selling it for ₹30 per kg.

If the customer wants ready-to-cook jackfruit



Jackfruit curry is popular in local restaurants



Jackfruit is seen as a replacement for meat

then the peel is removed and the fruit cut into bits at no extra cost. "Cutting the jackfruit has helped me increase my sales from 50 to 80 kg," says Satish.

Offering jackfruit as a ready-to-cook item has increased sales by 70 per cent in 12 years, says Shafaqat Khan, a jackfruit commission agent. Earlier only 10 to 12 per cent of people in Nagpur would consume jackfruit.

One reason for jackfruit's rising popularity is

that it is considered a substitute for meat. It absorbs spices very well and mimics meat in texture and taste. A Chandrapur hotel owner described it as 'non-veg in veg'. Vegetarians who like spicy food are major jackfruit lovers.

Varahadi Katta, a Marathi restaurant in Chandrapur, has on its menu, '*phanas masala*' and '*phanas biryani*'. Other curries are priced ₹60 to ₹80 per plate, but *phanas masala* costs ₹100. Says chef Sanjeev Devnath, "We cook *phanas* every day. Some of our regular customers come from far away just to enjoy these special items."

"People who suffer from high blood pressure or heart problems are advised to switch to a vegetarian diet. They see jackfruit as a substitute," says Shafaqat Khan. Nagpur has 40 hotels and restaurants that have jackfruit on their menu.

In recent years, jackfruit has become a popular item for marriage feasts. Kamatwada farmers say they are getting indents for jackfruit. "They reserve 25 kg to one quintal in advance. Since it is for a rare occasion, we charge slightly higher, about ₹30 to ₹50 per kg," says Marutirau Uke, Tukaram's son.

SOIL AND WATER: One notion in Vidarbha is that black cotton soil is unsuited for jackfruit cultivation. Only two or three districts in Vidarbha don't have black cotton soil. But Kamatwada and Chani have proved that with a little care it is possible to raise jackfruit trees.

Another apprehension is about the survival rate of jackfruit plants. The opinion of most farmers is that if they plant 10 only two or three survive.

One prerequisite for growing jackfruit here is irrigation. All the farmers in black cotton soil areas irrigate their jack trees in summer. But in red soil areas like Padampur in Gondia district, they manage without irrigation after five years when the tree looks quite settled.

What is required is careful management. Mixing black soil with red while planting, adding gypsum, shading, fencing and protection from pests is essential.

Jackfruit can help families of tragedy-stricken Vidarbha. "I have seven children, three sons and four daughters. Half their marriage expenses were met by money earned from jackfruit trees. What more can one expect," says Tukaram. ■

SAMITA'S WORLD

by SAMITA RATHOR





Prof. Fred Wegman: 'In hospitals we do not accept human errors. On roads, too, we shouldn't accept negligence.'

A crusader for safer roads

Saibal Chatterjee
New Delhi

It was obviously only a coincidence that Professor Fred Wegman landed in India – a country whose roads are among the world's deadliest – exactly a week after the World Health Organization (WHO) released an alarming Global Status Report on Road Safety 2013. But the ideas that the leading-edge thinker put forth during the two-day trip would be of immense relevance for researchers and planners exercised over traffic conditions in a country of 1.2 billion people that added 500,000 vehicles to its roads in 2012.

Prof. Wegman cited the WHO report to underscore the magnitude of the global problem of fatalities in road crashes. The report said worldwide "road traffic deaths remain unacceptably high at 1.24 million per year". In India, the number is pegged at nearly 1,50,000 annually.

Prof. Wegman, managing director of SWOV Institute of Road Safety Research in the Netherlands and professor at Delft University of Technology, was here to address the fifth annual TRIPP (Traffic Research and Injury Prevention Programme) lecture at IIT Delhi. He pointed out that the WHO report had projected that road accident fatalities will increase to 1.9 million per year by 2020, making it the world's fifth worst killer.

For a citizen of a country that ranks among the safest in the world, that reality could only be a matter of concern. "I am not here to provide instant solutions. There are none," the Dutch pro-

fessor said in an interview hours ahead of his scheduled lecture on the theme of 'Road Transport: The Science of Safety'. "I will only share my knowledge," he said, "and hope that it is transferable from one setting to another. People have to understand what I say and interpret it according to their own specific needs."

Prof. Wegman was quick to notice, on the drive from Indira Gandhi International Airport to IIT, the 'mixed' structure of Delhi's road network. "We drove down a village road, half a motorway, and then a city street to get here," he said. "Such a network in which the nature of the road changes frequently from one stretch to another is clearly not meant for high speeds – it can only serve to get you to your destination."

He travels around the world sharing the findings of years of extensive research on road safety. It certainly helps that The Netherlands has been singularly successful in driving down traffic fatalities over the years. It is a densely populated country. The Netherlands, known as a nation of bicyclists, has 17 million people and nine million motorized vehicles. "The Netherlands today has a highly organized road system. It has taken us decades. Planning and implementing changes require time. Road fatalities have gone down by 80 per cent even as motorized traffic has increased by 20 per cent," he reveals.

Only on motorways where there are no pedestrian crossings should high speeds be allowed, he said. "It is imperative to separate high-speed motorized traffic from bicycles and pedestrians by

creating cycle lanes and footpaths. You have to prevent cars and motorcycles from using these demarcated tracks. And where cars and cycles cannot be separated, mobility speed must be strictly regulated," he added.

He accepted that in India road safety is accorded low priority because the nation has obviously more pressing problems. He, however, asserted that nothing can be a legitimate reason for lax transportation planning. "It is important to ensure that when you are building a road, you build a safe one," he said. "It doesn't cost anything extra."

Public awareness is of the essence. "Dutch citizens," he said, "are as concerned about road crashes as they are about the incidence of crime and other problems." He argued: "We know that in hospitals, errors can happen but we don't accept that, do we? On roads, too, we shouldn't accept human errors or negligence."

"Road crashes are, to a large extent, predictable and also preventable. I do not believe that they are an unavoidable by-product of modern, motorized road traffic," Prof. Wegman said. What is needed, he added, is a holistic, multi-pronged approach in which road and vehicle design, policing and enforcement, mobility man-

agement, education and adherence to rules come together.

Prof. Wegman, a long-time proponent of sustainable road safety initiatives, emphasized that a single solution simply cannot be valid for all the countries of the world. "The methods have to be adapted to the culture of a country for them to be truly effective," he added.

He pointed that the three safest countries in Europe – Sweden, the United Kingdom and The Netherlands, collectively known as the SUN nations – have similar problems but each treats them differently. "You have to invent your own methods. That seems to me to be the challenge for India, given its complex road network and traffic behaviour," Prof. Wegman said.

According to the WHO 2013 global status report, only 28 countries, covering seven per cent of the world's population, have comprehensive road safety laws on five key risk factors: drinking and driving, speeding, failing to use motorcycle helmets, seat belts, and child restraints. This report is intended to serve as a baseline for the Decade of Action for Road Safety 2011-2020, declared by the UN General Assembly. But the professor asserted India must find its own way – the global community cannot help beyond a point.

"Considering the size of the country and the magnitude of its traffic problems, it is surprising that India has such few road safety researchers," Prof. Wegman said, pointing out that more initiatives like TRIPP were needed. That, he believes, is the very least this country owes its road users. ■



Ganesh Chhetri with members of his family outside the Dhungay Homestay. From left are his sister Jamuna, father Ran Badhur, mother Deo Maya and wife Padma.

AT HOME IN SIKKIM

Eco-tourism in India's only green state

Gautam Singh
Gangtok

I arrive late at night. The sound of the river Rhongyong welcomes me as I walk down the steps to the Mayal Lyang Homestay in Passingdang village in Dzongu (North Sikkim). The long journey has left me exhausted and feeling a little guilty for keeping my host, Gyatso Lepcha, 33, waiting. But apologies are waved aside. We both curse the bad roads, and I am warmly welcomed into their home.

Dinner awaits us in the kitchen where Gyatso's wife, Samsay, 29, serves us buckwheat rotis with cottage cheese and wild spinach, chicken, rice and a pickle of peas, wild orchids and *dalay*, the local fiery chilly. It's fabulous and flavourful, like nothing I've ever had, a characteristic shared with the meals served in the three other homestays I've visited before this one.

Later, in the verandah, content in a peaceful high brought on by mugs of freshly brewing *chhaang* (the local millet beer), with bats chasing beautiful moths, and the papiha essaying its plaintive call from a jungle that I can only yet feel, Gyatso tells me about his people, the forest and the river.

With almost 48 per cent of its geographical area under forest cover which is increasing yearly, more than 4,500 species of flowering plants, 550 species of birds, 690 species of butterflies and 154 species of mammals, Sikkim is rich in biodiversity and has become a much sought-after tourist destination, offering a unique experience of nature and cultural heritage.

Realizing its considerable contribution to the state's GDP growth potential and the opportunity it offered for equitable progress, the Sikkim government has been actively promoting a sustainable form of tourism.

Chief Minister Pawan Chamling has been re-elected a record four times since 1994 as head of the Sikkim Democratic Front government. He has shaped a unique development model for Sikkim, delivering 12 per cent GDP growth over the past 10 years. Chamling has vigorously pursued eco-friendly policies, which have made almost all farming in Sikkim organic. The Sikkim Organic Mission promotes vegetable growing on a large scale.

Eco-tourism has been a part of his strategy to have bottom-up growth through sustainable livelihoods and turn the "disadvantages" of Sikkim's location as a mountain state into an advantage. (See interview with *Civil Society* on Pages 6 to 8.)



Orchids in Mayal Lyang

But in the 1990s, when the Chamling government first came to power, it was the age of mass tourism with Darjeeling as the model next door. "Having seen Darjeeling, many of us decided that was not the way to go and we started looking for an alternative form of tourism," says P.D. Rai, Sikkim's Lok Sabha MP who played a key role in introducing the concept of eco-tourism to his state.

The South Asian Regional Conference on Eco-tourism (SARCE) was held in Gangtok in 2002, the International Year of Eco-tourism, and that paved the way for the formation of ECOSS (Eco-tourism and Conservation Society of Sikkim) and a concerted attempt to promote a more sustainable kind of tourism that would not damage Sikkim's fragile natural wealth.

With the help of international experts and aid from UNESCO, the concept of homestays was adopted and four villages in each of Sikkim's districts North (Dzongu), South (Kewzing), East (Pastanga) and West (Yuksam) were developed as the Sikkim Himalayan Homestays Programme.

The central idea was sustainable tourism that provides additional income to the community and in the process helps conserve the natural and cultural heritage of Sikkim and its people. Homes with an extra room to spare were chosen as homestays and members of the community trained as guides, porters and cooks at the capacity building centres in Yuksam and Rabongla, and tour activities that would serve as an introduction to the cultural heritage chosen.



Lunch at Mrs. Bhutia's house in Kewzing



The Rhongyong river flows past the Mayal Lyang homestay in Dzongu



Mrs. Tseten Bhutia, right, her aunt Popkil and her sister Karma outside their home in Kewzing, South Sikkim



A view of the valley from Passingdang in Dzongu

"For example, the Bhutias (one of three communities that inhabit Sikkim; the Lepchas and Nepalis are the others) had forgotten their tradition," says R.P. Gurung, CEO of ECOSS. "Kewzing, a Bhutia village, had a better cluster, that's why it was chosen. They are a closely-knit community with a strong culture of folk songs and dance. This was being lost, but with tourists visiting and wanting a richer cultural experience, they were encouraged to revive that tradition. They even had a herbal bath that had curative properties and this is now being offered as part of the package," he adds.



SPARKLING WATERFALLS

Mayal Lyang Homestay, Passingdang village, Dzongu

It's the forest that leaves one stunned as one travels around Sikkim, and in Passingdang, lulled to sleep by the river's voice. I'm woken at dawn by its sound coming alive with the songs of birds. There are orioles, barbets, tits, cuckoos, flycatchers and many more that I can't identify, but I am content just to hear them sing. From the verandah surrounded by trees of grapefruit, avocado and orange, the jungle is only a few feet away, and I can now see the valley and the looming, steep mountains covered in thick forest. I follow a trail down to the Rhongyong to see a sparkling river flowing fast over rocks.

The undergrowth in the forest is thick with ferns. Wild orchids hang from tall trees from where a green magpie watches, chuckling as I step into a pool of slush. Unknowingly, some leeches have snuggled into my shoes, but I discover that only later at night in Gangtok from my bloodstained socks. My guide is Suresh, a sure-footed young boy who works with Gyatso, and he points out through our trek many medicinal plants used in local remedies for



The leisurely verandah at the Mayal Lyang Homestay in Dzongu

cough, fever and open wounds. We then climb up over the village to the monastery that overlooks Passingdang and are rewarded with a panoramic view of the valley that is truly breathtaking.

After a quick breakfast of dumplings and pork, Gyatso takes me to see the nearby Lingzya waterfalls. The road is being widened in places and after last night's rain it is slow progress through mud and a road deep with ruts. We pass by the office of the Tholung Eco-Tourism Cooperative Society, where we



A woman from the Bhutia community in a large cardamom field at Hee Bermoik



A woman in a greenhouse growing alstroemeria flowers in Sribadam, West Sikkim



A butterfly rests on a leaf in the garden at the Mayal Lyang Homestay in Dzongu

find no one to meet. I learn later it hasn't been much of a success; tourists are discouraged by the remoteness, poor connectivity and the permit which one needs to enter Dzongu, a reserve of the Lepchas, the original inhabitants of Sikkim. The waterfalls are serene and untouched, we watch mesmerized, and Gyatso goes into a world of his own.

The Mayal Lyang (which means 'hidden land' in Lepcha) homestay has its genesis in a struggle that began more than a decade ago when it was learnt that six dams were to be built on the Rhongyong river. The river is as sacred to the Lepchas as the Ganges to the Hindus, Gyatso tells me. *Rhong* is how the Lepchas refer to themselves and *Yong* means prayer.

"After a member of the Lepcha community dies, his soul is transported to caves located at the base of Mount Kanchenjunga by our shamans, and the river is the path. If you dam this river or divert it through a tunnel, you are taking my right to practise my religion, my beliefs and my way of life," he says.

Studying law at that time, Gyatso mobilized friends and relatives from Gangtok and visited every village in Dzongu to speak to its inhabitants and make them aware of the planned project. "Most villages sent their representatives to participate in a relay hunger strike in Gangtok to protest against the construction of dams in 2006. The strike eventually went on for 957 days," he says.

The government has since scrapped four of the proposed dams though two of them are still on the anvil. Gyatso returned to his ancestral home and set up the Mayal Lyang

homestay in 2009. "I couldn't live a life of success elsewhere when my conviction and beliefs lay here," he says.

The homestay idea was also driven by an effort to change the popular mindset that activists are anti-development. "The need of the hour is to know what kind of development we want. Since the region is so pristine, the homestay is an alternative form. It's small-scale, provides income to the local inhabitants and doesn't damage the environment." It has also proved to be a very good vehicle to bring much-needed attention to Dzongu, "which was not even on the tourist map till a few years ago," Gyatso says.

The turning point for Mayal Lyang and Dzongu was in 2009 when the Crown Prince of Norway came with his family (and seven bodyguards) to stay. "All hell broke loose," Gyatso remembers with a chuckle. Senior government officials called him for a meeting and his place was inspected to see if it was good enough for the royal guests.

"We were offered some aid to renovate the bathrooms, add geysers and the like but we politely refused," he adds. However, he assured them that he would make sure that their stay would be comfortable. The crown princess had learnt about the homestay from the website and Gyatso got an inquiry through the Royal Office a month before they arrived. "They had a wonderful time during their five-day stay. The family visited the hot springs nearby, and spent a lot of their time on the river, the Prince remarking that it was the most beautiful one he had ever seen," he remembers.

Shweta Wagh, an assistant professor at the Kamla Raheja Vidyaniidhi Institute for Architecture and Environmental



'Having seen Darjeeling, we decided that was not the way to go.'

P.D. Rai, MP from Sikkim

Studies in Mumbai, had her first homestay at Mayal Lyang in 2009 and has visited thrice since. "It was an amazing experience. Dzongu is beautiful, and the people are so hospitable in Sikkim. We were like a part of Gyatso's family. And the food is just incredible. Samsay made us wild mushrooms, ferns, pickles from wild berries. We're all good friends now," she says. "And I'll always remember the sound of the river," she adds.



THE ORGANIC LIFE

KTDC Homestays, Kewzing

KEWZING's Community Development Programme, established in 2003, is run by the Kewzing Tourism Development Corporation (KTDC) in South Sikkim. There are 15 homestays that form the community and guests are shared on a rotational basis. The remuneration is shared by the host (70 per cent), KTDC (10 per cent), the monastery (10 per cent), and the guide (10 per cent).

Mrs. Tseten Bhutia is my host and as usual I'm late. So I miss out on the traditional welcome at the monastery where I would have been served tea and snacks and honoured with a *khada*, a silk scarf, by the monks. I curse the roads yet again and am looking forlorn when Mrs. Bhutia asks if I would like to have some *chhaang*? Trying hard to hide my elation, I say yes and share a quick smile with my driver Viren Tamang, who has been extolling its virtues throughout the journey. The heavens are indeed being kind.

Chhaang is the local organic beer made with fermented millet stuffed in a mug-sized bamboo barrel to which hot water is added and sipped through a narrow bamboo tube. One waits around 10 minutes after adding the water for it to brew and it can be replenished thrice. Along the highway in small towns there are licensed *chhaang* bars where a serving costs as little as ₹30, but I'd trade a mug any day for a dozen bottles of that bland yellow stuff that calls itself beer.

My guide the next morning is Tsering Tobgay, the general secretary of KTDC, and my first stop is the Bon Monastery atop the hill overlooking Kewzing. Near the monastery are the ruins of a fort built in the 17th century by the invading Bhutanese during their clashes with the Lepchas. The haze deprives me of a nice view but the air is refreshing and my lungs take it in greedily. "We also arrange for a programme of traditional Bhutia songs and dance. Tourists are encouraged to learn and participate and even share their music with us," Tsering informs me. "Most of the tourists are foreigners (almost 90 per cent) and the Indians that do visit are from Mumbai," he adds.

The KTDC plays host to around 150 guests in a year, some sent by the tourism department and others through private tour operators, who take a 15 per cent commission. The guests usually love the local food, go for birdwatching trips into the forest all around, read, or trek four hours to the Maenam wildlife sanctuary, where the red panda can be spotted.

Lunch is a sumptuous meal of squash and potatoes, beef curry, rice and *gundruk*, or fermented spinach. And it's all from Mrs. Bhutia's patch. Her farm has a greenhouse and so does the neighbouring farm and the one next to it. In fact, throughout my journey I have noticed the countryside dotted with them.

Sikkim is severely short on arable land, but the government, in its drive to go organic and boost productivity and agricultural incomes, has played a very supportive role. Greenhouses are provided free, as are the seeds for vegetables, and saplings for trees (these with an incentive of ₹10), bulbs of flowers for floriculture, free organic manure and pesticide. The list is long. It's refreshing to see a government that's actually determined to help its people.

"I'm growing beans in my greenhouse," Mrs. Bhutia tells me over lunch. But what about the pests? "We've been trained by the service providers to make an organic pesticide from cow urine, ginger, chillies and other wild herbs and that works well," she says.

The Sikkim Organic Mission has hired 14 service providers to spread the message about organic farming and impart training to farmers in making their own manure, using cowdung and vermicompost, and pesticide. Chickens roam around her farm, there's a cow of a local breed that provides milk sufficient for her household and a hog in a pen.

"We're quite self-sufficient and don't need to buy much from the market, except for cooking oil, sugar and a few other things," she adds. A former panchayat member, and the first one to join KTDC, she says the homestay initiative has enriched her life too. "Earlier only the old men of the village knew our history and folk tales, but now to be better hosts we have had to learn more about our culture. Many of us now choose to wear our traditional dress,



A room at Yangsum Farm in Rinchenpong, West Sikkim



Breakfast at Yangsum Farm in Rinchenpong

and the Bhutia language, which was dying out, is now being spoken again. In fact, I now want my children to come back to the village and carry on the traditions of our community," she says.



RHODODENDRON PARADISE

Dhungay Homestay, Martam village, Hee Bermoik

THE homestay idea has caught on in Sikkim and most of the initiatives are a result of private entrepreneurship. In fact, three of my hosts are young men who chose to return to their villages and benefitted from the tourism boom. With only a little investment and virtually no training, they're running successful outfits in remote areas, with websites to promote their facility.

Ganesh Chettri, 29, forced by a family situation returned to his village to set up the Dhungay homestay in Hee Bermoik (West Sikkim). In the beginning, he printed pamphlets and pasted them on walls in Pelling, a popular tourist resort, soon receiving enquiries from tourists and travel agents who began to list him. In 2008 he set up his website, which now provides most of his clientele.

"Around half of my guests are foreigners, and the Indians are usually from Mumbai, Bangalore and Kolkata," he says. "I renovated four of my rooms and provided attached toilets to them. The homestay is occupied for around 90 to 100 nights a year," he adds.

The rooms are basic, much like the ones at Mayal Lyang and Kewzing. Traditionally toilets are away from the main houses in Sikkim, but some homestays are beginning to make these adjustments to specifically cater to the needs



Thendup Tashi with his daughter Rewa outside his home in Rinchenpong. The building in the background is the oldest part of his home and dates back to over 100 years.



A room at the Mayal Lyang Homestay in Dzongu

of tourists. "All my guests are already sensitized about eco-tourism and I have never had to stop them from being a nuisance," he says.

He has been able to involve his family in the activities and his father is a delightful raconteur of old tales. They grow cardamoms on their farm along with vegetables for the house, and have two cows and poultry that serve their

needs very well. Before we leave for a trek through the various settlements, his father gives us a few cardamoms to chew and we begin our ascent to the boundary of the Barsey sanctuary and then through the villages.

We stop by a grocery shop in a village and I'm amazed to see it filled with plastic-wrapped packaged food. Ganesh picks up a few packets of instant noodles, which will serve as our lunch later at a Bhutia village, and I ask him what he does with all the waste that his house produces? "All the plastic and glass bottles and oil cans I give away to the *raddiwala* while I burn all the printed plastic," he replies. "But all my guests are familiar with the concept of eco-tourism and I have never had to tell them what not to do," he adds.



SLICE OF HISTORY

Yangsum Farm, Rinchenpong

SOME have made efforts to give the tourist a more exclusive experience while sticking to the basic principle of a homestay. Thendup Tashi began his homestay in 2003 by offering one spare room to guests. His 20-acre farm, of which 12 acres is under forest, is sprawling by Sikkim standards. The view of the mountain ranges is supposed to be fantastic, but it's not in my

destiny to see the Kanchenjunga as the haze plays spoilsport again.

It's a place with history. Thendup's family has lived here for centuries and he's taken great care to retain its authentic character. He's used local materials like stone and wood from his farm for every renovation or expansion. "I want everything to blend in with the environment. I haven't used concrete



Moungyoing, the haze-engulfed mountain at far left, is considered in Lepcha legend to be the bodyguard of Mt. Kanchenjunga, which lies behind it

and I don't want any plastic chairs to ruin the effect," he says.

The oldest part of his establishment, the house where his grandmother lived, looks the way it did a hundred years ago. It's only when one looks inside that one notices the care and attention he's paid to the detail, blending new wood with old timber, and old black and white pictures of his ancestors on the wall bringing to life a time long gone by.

"I've slowly added and renovated rooms, and now I can accommodate five couples. But I don't want to expand anymore. My guests tell me that they love being here because of its exclusivity, peace and quiet and advise me to keep it that way. I want to listen to them and this is where I've stopped any plans for expansion," he adds as he serves me another helping of pork curry and lightly fried fiddlehead fern. "I think I can give better attention when there are fewer guests."

Kaushik Roy Chowdhury, 37, an IT professional from Kolkata, recently stayed at Yangsum along with his family. "It was my first homestay experience. I enjoyed it thoroughly. It was very homely and everything was done with a smile. Thendup arranged everything for us, even the taxis that picked us up at Bagdogra airport," he says.

"The food was terrific, it tasted so fresh. I enjoyed the pork and spinach, and Thendup even took us as guests to his cousin's wedding, which was a unique experience for us," he adds.

The rooms at Yangsum are spacious and look lived-in. The furnishings are the best and there are bookcases in every room. The foreigners want to hike all the time and Thendup sends educated boys from the village to accompany them on treks through the forest and the village, which also has a monastery dating back to the 18th century. He has a lot of Indian tourists too, mostly from Mumbai, Bangalore and Chennai, and since he's put up a web-



'We have around 600,000 tourists yearly, equal to our population.'

R.P. Gurung of ECOSS



Kesang Dorjee Bhutia of Sribadam recycles waste creatively

site, a lot of enquiries come from there. "Most of my guests just want to read a book and be left alone," he says. With breathtaking views, the clean mountain air and a book to read, what more could one ask for?

But the common refrain throughout my interactions with the hosts has been the state of the roads. "Most of the guests are discouraged by the long journey over bad roads," says Thendup. He doesn't have more than a month's occupation in a year. And Gyatso at Dzongu would readily agree.

CONCRETE CONUNDRUM: Bad roads are just one impediment to Sikkim's eco-tourism policy. "Our tourist inflow has quadrupled over the last 10 years and if tourism has to run, the highway has to be widened," explains Rai. "But most of the widening is being done by the Border Roads Organisation and there are strategic reasons for that. We have taken up the issue of the slow rate of progress with the Centre, and even wanted to turn over the project to the NHAI at one stage," he adds.



Lunch-time at the Deorali Girls Senior Secondary High School in Gangtok



A woman looks out from a window in her house in Sribadam



A boy walks back from school carrying alstroemeria flowers

Sikkim's eco-tourism policy is a comprehensive document notified in 2012. It clearly outlines the government's intention of promoting a form of tourism that is sustainable and equitable. It envisages a multi-pronged approach to achieving this goal, involving all major stakeholders in a coordinated way.

But there are contradictions. Thendup informs me of the Union Ministry of Tourism's grants to build homestays across the state. Those selected are to be given two rooms with attached bathrooms, to be built by a contractor at a cost of ₹7.5 lakhs. I get to see one under construction at Dzongu, the pillars are up and it's going to be a concrete structure.

A few days later, I hear of the Chief Minister's plan to make Sikkim a *kutcha* house-free state, with a commitment to make every household concrete, covering 6,000 households, within 2013. Shweta Wagh, who teaches architecture and has a special interest in conservation of heritage structures, says, "If they destroy the traditional housing, it would be detrimental for eco-tourism. An effort must be made to strike a balance between conservation

and development."

Gurung too agrees: "This will affect the overall landscape. I've seen lovely hand-hewn stone houses covered with concrete as the traditional architecture is defined as a *kutcha* house and has a negative connotation."

Rai thinks that the alternative is bamboo, but he adds: "It's a very slippery area. Unfortunately, a concrete building is the aspiration of everyone in every part of Sikkim. We're fighting mindsets, and changing this will take a long time," he says.

Bhim Dungal, Sikkim's Minister for Tourism allayed such fears. He said people do have a choice and can opt for using local materials and he would be sending out this message to them.

Sikkim's eco-tourism policy also exposes the long-existing stand-off between the tourism and the forest department. Eco-tourism exists in Protected Areas (PAs) that are under the jurisdiction of the forest department, whereas the tourism department is generally concerned with increasing the number of footfalls.

"Our job is to market eco-tourism," says Dr. S Anbalagan, Divisional Forest Officer, Eco-tourism. "We selected 10 villages near PAs in four districts, formed four Eco-Development Committees (EDCs) and started by training them to be guides. Activities special to the village, like handicrafts and folk music were developed. The guides are sent to capacity building institutes where professionals from the Indian Mountaineering Federation and Sikkim Ornithological Society impart training."

"Unless there are clear directions from the Centre that bring the forest and tourism department under a common policy of responsible tourism, eco-tourism will remain a contested space," remarks Rai.

Tourist influx into Sikkim is fast increasing and there is a need to study the carrying capacity especially in fragile areas. Says Gurung: "We have around 600,000 tourists yearly, which is equal to our population. A figure of 1.5 million is being targeted. What impact this is going to have has to be studied."

Rai is aware that a crush of tourists could have adverse impacts but he takes

a pragmatic view: "As a government I'm not going to shut the doors on the mass tourism industry that is providing livelihoods to a whole bunch of people. It would be foolhardy for me to say that these are the rules to be administered in a forceful manner and thus drive people out of business."

He adds: "This is a democracy and we can't follow Bhutan's example. But it is like a big ship and we'll keep trying to turn it around slowly. Very soon you'll find more and more people moving towards that end. It is already happening."

Gurung strikes a note a caution: "Sikkim's eco-tourism policy looks very nice, but unless it has teeth and becomes mandatory for the tourism department to follow, it'll just be a wish list."

The warmth and hospitality of Sikkim's people, the terrific food, its beautiful forests and wildlife made my trip an unforgettable experience. The government's clear intention of doing good for its people is heartening. As I drive to Bagdogra, I remember Gyatso's words when I left Dzongu, "We all have a responsibility to this world, with only one sky to share." ■

Business

- Enterprise
- Inclusion
- CSR
- ICT
- Go Green

Why emotive management delivers better value

LAKSHMAN ANAND

‘Firms of tomorrow will be like large NGOs of today’

Civil Society News
New Delhi

INDIAN companies grapple with strategies to be seen as being socially responsible. Some become donors and others put money into schools and hospitals. But elsewhere in the developed world heavy-handed corporate social responsibility is going out of fashion. There is a growing realisation that long-term value is really delivered by companies that are admired for the way in which they do business – not what they do with the money they make any which way.

These are companies with heart. Their managements seek an emotional connect with all their stakeholders. Many of them are purpose-driven companies with strong beliefs. They aren't in a rush to rake in profits, but in the long term they deliver big value.

Firms of Endearment is a study by David B. Wolfe, Jagdish N. Sheth and Rajindra S. Sisodia that looks closely at 30 such companies and tries to understand how their success reflects changes



Jagdish N. Sheth: ‘In the West more and more we are practising servant leadership.’

in society and the expectations of investors, customers and employees.

Extracts from an interview with Sheth, a marketing guru who is at the Goizueta Business School at Emory University in the US.:

What are firms of endearment?

The notion of firms of endearment came from watching companies have an emotional bond with their stakeholders. Investors weren't investing in these companies just for returns. Similarly,

employees didn't work in them just for wages. We found a similar connect with suppliers. So, we wanted to figure out what makes some companies bond emotively? And which emotion is appropriate: Is it admiration? Is it love? And why is it happening?

So, that was the reason for the book. But for me it also goes back much earlier. When I studied in the doctoral programme I was very influenced by Maslow and his hierarchy of needs. I did a lot of work and one of the things that came out on the

human resource side was that Theory X was dying in America. Theory X works very well when the boss is a super powerful guy, drives everybody and people work because survival is the game.

There was a very strong industrial psychologist at MIT, Douglas McGregor, who showed that in Western Electric's plants, if the company was more caring towards the employees – just showing that I respect you for who you are instead of this caste system of blue collar versus white collar – productivity went up and there was less absenteeism.

He was able to show that when people put their hearts into the work, productivity went up and there was strong value for the company. And he created Theory Y.

It stuck in my mind. I dabble on the human resources side pretty much and so the genesis of this book is in trying to define the next evolution. In America we are beyond Theory Y. I have given a lot of lectures on what I call Theory U. Today the young generation is brought up with love and affection. I wouldn't speak before my father without his permission. That is how I grew up. You respected your father. Now my children, who are in their forties, bond with their children like they are their friends: you know love and affection. Today all young people don't want a boss any more whether you are a caring boss or an authoritarian boss. They just hate the word boss. So, I have been giving a lot of advice to companies that their leadership has to become more like a coach and mentor. In athletics you will see tough love. As a coach you know that your job is to get the best out of an athlete. No one knows who the coach is. But you know the athlete who won the gold medal. To get the best out of people you have to empower them.

I was also interested in knowing what makes somebody win somebody's heart. *Share of Heart* was the original title of the book. But my colleague, Raj Sisodia, who is a great wordsmith, coined the phrase *Firms of Endearment*.

So, which companies did you put into this?

There were 30 companies. They ranged from a company like Toyota, which was famous for doing things other than just for investor community. It was in a small town. Again my hypothesis is that most of these companies are headquartered in small towns. They get corrupted when they move to big cities. GE started in a very small town in upstate New York. But once they went to New York, the culture changed because the company began to be driven only by investors.

So which are the companies you looked at?

Toyota, UPS, Johnson and Johnson (for which we were criticised with some people saying how could we have included them. But they are good and once again they are not in New York City), we had new companies like Patagonia, which began as purpose driven companies, Wholefoods, Southwest Airlines. We also got Google and Ebay.

How would this model apply to Apple or Microsoft? These are hugely successful companies, originate in smaller cities, but have tough and hyper work environments.

They are not (in our study)... Apple was relatively new at the time we wrote the book. There were two reasons: we asked for nominations from which we chose and the nomination did not come because around 2002 Apple was struggling. The second reason was that Steve Jobs was actually not liked by his people. He was an obsessed human being who drove people crazy. He was like an artist.

I don't remember why we didn't choose Microsoft.

But these are successful companies that don't fit your model of big city /small town.

No. But I must tell you both these companies were successful in attracting great talent. I am digressing here, but you know the good thing about Azim Premji is his knack of attracting young talent. It is like a great diamond cutter knows a brilliant rough diamond when he sees one. He gives young people enormous opportunity to fail and scales up the maturity in them. He always had this tough love kind of thing. He becomes like an equal but you know he is not equal. It is like a coach.

It seems your firms of endearment model is essentially North American.

Good point. I would say the model could be generalised except for two areas. Out of the five stakeholders in some cultures one of the stakeholders could have a higher importance. In some places it could be strictly community, for instance in Scandinavia. In some places it could be suppliers. Japanese companies are more supplier-oriented. The supplier shares in the value created. I have actually added two more stakeholders – the press and government.

I've added the two for Marico. I am a very strong believer that companies should see the press and government as important stakeholders. If you can get very sceptical people to admire you then you have achieved something.

In India all the best talent a company may be looking for will most likely be in the big cities. This trend is getting reinforced. So how would your small city model work here?

Two answers: One is that it is possible (to find talent in small cities). Let me tell you urbanisation is taking place out of necessity. People who are in Pune and Mysore really don't want to migrate to Mumbai or Bangalore. So what companies need to think about is going there and getting their share of heart by nurturing them and investing in those

'In smaller places (staff) turnover is low and after investing in their training and development the returns are faster.'

communities. That is what Infosys did in Mysore and at Wipro we have done this in about a dozen cities now.

We have found that in a big urban setting the worker has a transient mindset, specially in the BPO business – I'm here just to do my work, how soon can I get out. But in the smaller places we have found that the turnover is low and after investing in their training and development the returns are faster. Salary expectations are not so high because the cost of living – mostly rent – is a lot

lower. And in America we do the same thing by the way. We have our call centres in rural populations. The problem with urbanisation is not the employees or the suppliers, but that the leaders of the companies don't want to live in the smaller places.

So you would say to Indian businesses that they should look at smaller places.

That is one answer. In the smaller cities they will find great talent. But the second answer is that assuming urbanisation is inevitable then you should not have the gated community mindset. I don't know much about Delhi, but South Mumbai is so insular and cut off from reality. Managers have to open up and live among the community. The Aditya Birla Group has made it mandatory for every manager to spend some time each year in the village where his grandparents are staying. They have to report back. There is a feedback mechanism. Behind the scenes, Kumaramangalam is very good and he has a good set of people. They have understood their factories are all in the rural areas and in Mumbai you get isolated in a cosmopolitan world. So my point is that one has to learn to be more egalitarian.

What is the company of the future going to be like? What do Indian companies need to prepare for?

I think the corporations of tomorrow will become more like the large NGOs of today where the outside board members, the trustees are more responsible to the purpose of the corporation: I don't own it, I am just given the responsibility to maintain the legacy or enhance the legacy. No matter who you are and how powerful you are there is a counter balancing force worldwide that I know which is saying "you have to be modest". It is a message coming out loud and clear. I think in India it is inevitable that it will happen. Some companies have done it. The Tatas have from the beginning clearly selected their leadership from that viewpoint.

In the Western world more and more we are now practising "servant leadership". It means you are a servant to your people. If there is a job to be done you can't simply say, "I am the boss...." To me the servant leadership model is going to be something the Indian leadership will have to adopt because the traditional Theory X model is not going to survive. In India I don't think companies will go from Theory X to Theory Y, but instead they will go straight to what I call Theory U. ■

'I have been giving a lot of advice to companies that their leadership has to become more like a coach.'

Mobile tech eases micro-credit

Ekgaon has other innovations on the way

K.S. Narayanan
New Delhi

AN open-source application developed by Ekgaon Technologies Pvt Ltd has eased access to micro-credit in rural areas and significantly brought down the cost of transactions.

"Financial inclusion is the key to sustaining the nation's growth story," says Vijay Pratap Singh Aditya, CEO of Ekgaon Technologies. The company is all set to launch several innovations this year in a bid to address the challenges posed to the microfinance industry under India's restrictive banking regime.

It was in 2002 that Aditya and his friend, Tapan Parikh, hit upon the idea of harnessing information and communication technology to meet the financial needs of rural communities.

Ekgaon's business is today focused on tapping mobile and cloud technology to bolster the capacity of microfinance institutions in rural India.

While savings and remittances remain limited to India's formal banking system, Ekgaon is using technology to bolster the availability and viability of micro-credit and other financial products for rural areas.

"We began from scratch on microfinance. It was important to understand what kind of technological intervention had to be made," says Aditya, an electrical engineer and alumnus of the prestigious Indian Institute of Forest Management, Bhopal.

In 2002, Ekgaon began implementing CAM, a camera and web-based mobile information services framework for rural areas, and SHG MIS (self-help group management information system) in collaboration with Covenant Centre for Development, Madurai. In all, 75 SHGs covering 5,000 people in Dindigul district participated. The free web-based software employs mobile technology to enable microfinance officers to monitor transactions real time in the field.

Ten years on, the platform has been scaled up and about 800,000 SHG members have benefitted in Tamil Nadu, Uttaranchal, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. The Rajasthan government has plans to bring 300,000 SHGs, comprising six million individuals, under the Sakh Darpan fold that uses SHG MIS. For each transaction (loan, mortgage, internal savings) that hits the server, Ekgaon receives a nominal fee of 4 paise from the MFIs or NGOs.

"The microfinance industry faces many challenges, the first of which is the high cost of doing



business," says Aditya. "The cost is ultimately passed on to the consumers. But with free software, MFIs can cut the expense of installing a server and hiring staff to run it."

Financial inclusion remains a dream for millions of rural Indians, says Aditya, because MFIs are barred from taking deposits. They can only grant loans on interest. "While the Reserve Bank of India and the finance ministry are concerned over chit fund scams, the government has not allowed useful products or services to reach the *aam aadmi*," he says. "Policy constraints and a bias towards the formal banking system forces unviable product offerings to rural customers. Firms engaged as business correspondents find it extremely difficult to service rural customers and cannot build wider portfolios due to regulatory constraints."

Moreover, the tendering process tends to focus on the lowest bid for providing services to rural customers without understanding the ground realities of delivering such services. "Less competent bidders who are only interested in enrolling customers and not in servicing them end up being engaged," says Aditya.

Migrant labourers across the country spend as much as ₹150 per ₹1,000 they transfer home, a McKinsey study sponsored by Ekgaon has revealed. The scenario is set to change for the better with Ekgaon's plan of launching affordable products for low income individuals and rural communities. It

has already developed One FIN, an enterprise version of the existing MFI solution. Organisations or NGOs need not buy the software; they merely have to host customers on their sites.

While registration and data maintenance are for free, a transaction would attract a nominal fee of ₹3 to ₹14 per customer, depending on products and transactions. However, Ekgaon is planning to charge MFIs or NGOs a flat fee of ₹2 lakhs if the number of customers is more than 50,000.

One Remit, to be launched by the end of the year, targets migrant labourers wanting to send money back home in denominations of ₹500 and ₹1,000. It is a

mobile charge card which will initially cost ₹10. "We are working out details of the charges, agent network, etc...," says Aditya. The service can be availed through mobile applications, IVRS and the internet.

To launch these products, Ekgaon itself needs adequate capital

(as regulated by RBI, the minimum

is ₹2 crores), which it is raising through the private equity player Exhilway Private Capital Market (EPCM). "We have registered with them. We have to raise around Rs 6 crores." Ploughing the profits back into developing new technologies and new geographies, Ekgaon has had a turnover of ₹1.6 crores during 2012-13 and hopes to scale up.

As part of its global footprint, Ekgaon is implementing a system for direct cash transfers through mobile phones in Tanzania. It also plans to enter other African countries like Kenya and Uganda. Nearer home, Ekgaon, besides eyeing the Nepal market, is involved in implementing gold mortgage against loans along with Sabaragamuwa Development Bank, Ratnapura, Sri Lanka.

Aditya refers to the success of Kenya's M-Pesa which operates independent of the banking system and allows users to pay bills and transfer money with just a few taps on a mobile phone. He wonders why India, despite being a software giant, has nothing remotely as effective as M-Pesa.

Financial inclusion brings freedom to areas not covered by the banking system, Aditya asserts, adding that it enables greater access for rural customers, creates a wider market for products and services, and spurs higher gross domestic growth. ■

Insights

- Opinion
- Analysis
- Research
- Ideas
- Angst

Ratnauli's courageous battle

NIKHIL DEY

LAKSHMAN ANAND

If I wonder about my share of responsibility for the death of Ram Kumar Thakur, what must Sanjay Sahni feel? I have heard Sanjay trying to cope with the murder of his friend and colleague in Ratnauli Panchayat in Bihar and I can hear a million questions he has that should be answered by the State, but have been left for the sufferers to answer for themselves. The State and most of its functionaries have become callous and openly dishonest. Even the honest are helpless and murder has become a pedestrian fact of life. Sanjay Sahni's story and Ram Kumar's cold-blooded murder need to be understood if we are ever going to support the many ordinary people fighting corruption and the arbitrary use of power and protect them from being hounded and killed.

Sanjay, a young self-taught electrician who had studied up to Class 8, had left his village in Bihar to set up a tiny electric service point in Janakpuri in West Delhi. He had established himself well enough to bring his bright and determined wife and two young children to come and live with him in the big city. His children had started attending a private English medium nursery school, and he had dreams of a better middle class life. (See *Civil Society* September-October 2012.)

He never imagined that asking questions about MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) works in his village would trigger a series of events that, in the short span of a year, would turn his life into something unrecognisable even to himself. The work he and his colleagues have done to fight corruption, injustice, and poverty, is of the highest order, but he is realising the hard way that the cost of courage and commitment to the public cause is persecution and even death. While individuals might care, the State doesn't, and truth be told, those of us who recognise the incredible tenacity that many ordinary people have shown do not make the effort needed to provide even the minimal support they need to sustain their struggle. As we read this, let us keep asking ourselves how many times we have stood up to fight injustice



Ratnauli's villagers: Ordinary citizens fight corruption putting their lives at risk

and how much we have done to support those who do.

Sanjay, who is all of 25, had gone home to Ratnauli, his village in Muzaffarpur district of Bihar for a short break when he found his friends talking about the corruption that seemed to be taking place in works under MGNREGA in the panchayat. People were poverty stricken and unemployed, but there was no work available. It was rumoured that the *mukhiya* had filled false muster rolls and pocketed large sums of money. They decided to file a complaint at the block office. Before Sanjay had left his village there were threats, which not only seemed to indicate that there was truth in the allegation, but also made Sanjay feel angry and irritated that the ones engaging in corruption seemed to believe it was

their birthright and no one should ask any questions.

Even as he carried on with his work in Delhi, Sanjay got news of the continuing threats and intimidation to all those who had signed the letter demanding an enquiry. This fuelled his determination to carry the matter to its logical conclusion. Every time he went home to Ratnauli, he realised how difficult it was to even get a simple enquiry instituted, and how important it was to not let go. But what more could he or any of his friends do?

In front of his little electricity booth in Janakpuri was a cyber cafe where Sanjay had watched people come, spend hours at a computer, pay money, and leave. He was curious about the utility of this shop where he sometimes left

Continued on page 28

Continued from page 27

his tools for safekeeping. Sanjay asked the owner of the cyber cafe, what exactly people were spending their time and money on. "You can find out about anything," he was told.

Sanjay was sceptical, but he decided to test it out. Through a series of trial and errors, browsing the Internet, Sanjay traced his district, his panchayat, and made a connection between MGNREGA and his village within the Government of India's MGNREGA website, which had somehow popped up on his screen. He could not believe his eyes when he saw the muster rolls of works carried out and paid for in his panchayat. There were hundreds of names of people he knew who had, in fact, not got a single days work. There were many who desperately needed the work, but had been told by the *mukhiya* that there was no work available. With great excitement he asked if he could get copies of these. Armed with printouts, Sanjay left for his village quite sure that he now had the required proof to expose the scam and get action taken.

The scam was certainly exposed and the village was indignant and angry, but it seemed to make no difference to the block office or the government. Inaction seems to be what government servants feel they are paid their salaries for. As Sanjay returned to Delhi, frustration and anger growing once again, he returned to the cyber cafe to ask the computer whom he could contact who would take action. All he could find was a mobile number of the MGNREGA website web manager, who gave him our names as people who were known for fighting corruption in MGNREGA, and influential enough to get something done. He got our names, but only the number of some journalist the web manager knew in Maharashtra. Sanjay doggedly pursued this trail until he tracked us down, and two months later he made sure that we met him and heard his story.

We were very excited. We knew the Secretary, Rural Development, in Bihar, as an honest and dynamic officer who was as appreciative as we were about this remarkable effort. He agreed to meet Sanjay in Patna the very next day, and promised to send an officer from the state government to conduct an on-the-spot enquiry immediately. He kept his word. However, the officer who had told Sanjay to gather those willing to testify backed out, citing a problem with his coming to the village. He asked Sanjay to bring a few people to the block office to record their testimonies. Sanjay knew that it was a sign that there was trouble ahead, but what could he do but comply? A few people went to testify, but Sanjay and his friends felt the enquiry was a symbolic farce.

We had suggested to Sanjay that he also apply under the RTI for copies of the records he had found on the Internet. The most enthusiastic and courageous of his colleagues – a young lawyer in the village, Ram Kumar Thakur, agreed to file the RTI, as Sanjay had to return to Delhi.

Sanjay's extraordinary story has only just begun, but for the purpose of this column, focus must shift to Ram Kumar Thakur and the government.

Ram Kumar Thakur did not receive the information within a month as promised under the RTI Act. He only received threats from the *mukhiya*.

In fact, as the Secretary, Rural Department, increased pressure on the panchayat and block offices to provide the information, he realised how much certain places were a law unto themselves. He issued orders that details of expenditure made under MGNREGA be painted on the walls of all the panchayat buildings in the area. The *mukhiyas* of the area went on strike refusing to part with any information. He called for the records of Ratnauli panchayat to be brought to his office in Patna, but the panchayat secretary disappeared with them. With great difficulty only a small fraction of the records Ram Kumar Thakur had asked for were given to him.

Sanjay and his group persisted and the Secretary ordered that a summary of the records available on the Internet be painted on the walls of Ratnauli Panchayat, and a social audit be held under the supervision of a team of officials from

In Ratnauli every legal means for registering a complaint and providing necessary evidence was explored. Not a single corruption complaint was properly investigated.

Patna. While the whole village gathered for this unprecedented exercise of a public audit, the *mukhiya's* gang warned everyone of trouble if they participated and testified. We were sure that if one person spoke out, the floodgates would open, and even the poorest would tell their own stories. Ram Kumar was the first person to speak out and testify. He was promptly pounced upon and beaten up by the *mukhiya's* men. The state government suspended the social audit, asked everyone who had gathered to disperse, and ordered the block office to file an FIR report against those who had disrupted it and attacked Ram Kumar. The FIR has not been acted upon till date.

Sanjay Sahni strategically shifted focus and started asking that people in his panchayat get work. Over a period of a few months, with sustained support from the Secretary in Patna and new friends he had made in the social sector, his group managed to make MGNREGA a credible reality in not only his panchayat but in a dozen other villages in Muzaffarpur district. The group formed itself into an informal organisation that decided to call itself, 'Bihar MGNREGA Watch.'

Possessed by the processes of change that had begun and his own sense of responsibility Sanjay changed the course of his life. He left his electricity work in Janakpuri. He moved his family back and forth between Janakpuri and Ratnauli, getting his children in and out of different schools. He applied for an MGNREGA job card and worked on the worksites. Hundreds of landless poor in surrounding panchayats got together under MGNREGA Watch to demand work and receive the wages they were due. Their lives were also begin-

ning to change in unbelievable ways. His wife called me a few days ago and bluntly asked me if anyone who chooses to work for others has to do it at the cost of ruining his own life.

For very good reasons, Ram Kumar Thakur refused to give up on the issue of corruption in the panchayat. When he found no action being taken on the earlier complaints, using the bits of information he had, he filed a case in the vigilance court. This infuriated the *mukhiya* even more and this time his gang came to attack Ram Kumar. When they did not find him, they attacked his brother. Ram Kumar filed a complaint with the police and sent a letter to the DIG of police that his life was in danger. Once again, no action was taken – both on the complaint in the vigilance court, as well as his letter to the DIG. On 23 March, when Ram Kumar Thakur was on his way back to Ratnauli from the court where he practised in Muzaffarpur, he was shot three times. He died on the way to the hospital. A nephew of his was witness to the killing and has named the *mukhiya's* son and five others in the FIR he has filed. No arrests have been made so far.

Sanjay has struggled with trying to cope with the many challenges that come with taking up public causes. However, when he got news that Ram Kumar Thakur had been shot and killed, he must have wondered if his worst nightmare had come true. Would he hold himself responsible for the death of his associate? Should Ram Kumar Thakur have been dissuaded from asking questions? Should the corruption of the *mukhiya* have been ignored? What should be done when the State does not act on the most obvious cases of fraud and loot?

Ever since the Right to Information (RTI) Act was passed, hundreds of Sanjay Sahnis and Ram Kumar Thakurs have fought individual and collective battles against powerful and corrupt forces. They have paid for it in a million ways – many of them most tragically with their lives. Each case is a huge question mark on our democratic polity.

Where do the answers lie? It would be easiest for us to lay the blame squarely at the doorstep of the State – for that is where it most obviously lies. In Ratnauli, every legal means for registering a complaint and providing necessary evidence was explored. Not a single corruption complaint was properly investigated and taken to its logical conclusion. Ram Kumar Thakur's pleas for government protection were completely ignored.

The law as it stands is not implemented. A whistle-blower protection law that may provide a little more support is pending in Parliament and likely to be a continued victim of petty partisan politics. The political class refuses to act, the bureaucracy and police have subverted their own oath of office, the poor fight with their backs to the wall and the few who stand up for them are either isolated or eliminated.

We cannot speak for others, but we can surely speak for ourselves. The most cynical thing for 'good people' to do would be to simply applaud Sanjay Sahni and Ram Kumar Thakur and make them martyrs. We need to understand our responsibility for what is, and more than that, learn from them and make every effort to fight what should not be. ■

Nikhil Dey is a member of the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan

Bangalore's mobility woes

V. RAVICHANDAR

LAST month the Annual Survey of Indian Cities (ASICS) released by Janaagraha comparing 11 Indian cities with London and New York saw Bangalore feature near the bottom across most indices of city living including mobility. Another global exercise saw Bangalore race to the bottom 10 on mobility – one gathers even Delhi features low on the global list. The question that arises is whether Bangalore's mobility situation (particu-

on the mobility front once these projects get over. One lives in hope.

Let's break down mobility into its constituent modes of pedestrians, non-motorized (cycles), public transport and motorised private transport and check out the ground reality in Bangalore. It's an unfortunate truism across India that pedestrians get what's left of the road. Bangalore that has great weather for most of the year can build its

keep out the motorised vehicles. One will have to see how it pans out in implementation.

Public transport consists of an over 5,000 bus network, a seven- km Metro corridor, auto rickshaws and a few taxis (mainly airport pick up and drops). Praja, a group of civic activists came up with a plan for a commuter rail for Bangalore using existing infrastructure but it is caught up in bureaucratic processes. Bangalore is one of the few cities which has a good high-end (air conditioned, low floor) bus system that is popular and profitable. Another profitable operation has been the Big 10 buses which run on 10 arterial roads on a pre-fixed stretch with rapid frequency of five to 10 minutes. This is essentially a direction oriented system. One would have thought that the authorities will build on this to set up more direction oriented buses but this has not happened. The emphasis is still on destination oriented buses with longer wait times. And the bus boards are mainly in Kannada making it difficult for folks to understand where the bus is headed. The metric of the bus authorities is the number of buses added every year and not movement efficiency and safety record!

The Metro rail needs to be completed for its impact to be felt. Currently the five station, seven-km stretch is more in the nature of a toy train since it does not provide end to end connectivity. The worrying aspect of the Metro plans is the lack of holistic mobility planning at all stations. There is need for inter modal transfer at the stations. Lack of space has handicapped provisioning for multiple modes near the station. If the Metro is to be successful in reducing transport woes, integrated thinking across all transport modes (including walking and cycling) is needed. Alas the governance mechanism does not have a transit integrator who has the authority to make it happen.

The pampered lot on Bangalore's roads are the two and four wheeler motorised vehicles. But with so many of them (four million and rising) and pot-holed crumbling road infrastructure there is traffic grid lock. This despite a state-of-the-art traffic management centre (BTRAC) that generates over Rs. 60 crores by way of fines. There is talk of congestion charges but this will not be viable till alternate public transport options kick in. Parking lots are visible by their absence and road side parking on arterial roads impacts travel speeds significantly.

Bangalore is on its back when it comes to mobility. The good news is that when on one's back, everything looks up. There are initiatives in silos to improve traffic and transportation but unless there is an empowered authority that can string all the initiatives together into a composite mobility solution, Bangalore will continue to feature in the dismal lists. ■

V. Ravichandar, Chairman, Feedback Consulting is awaiting a mobility Tsar on horseback!



SAGGERE RADHAKRISHNA

Bangalore with its great weather should be a walkable city

larly public transport) is really that dismal to merit the very low scores in surveys within and outside the country.

First, let's attempt the local defence mechanism that kicks in anytime unpalatable news breaks out. As per the last census, Bangalore's decadal growth of 48 per cent is the largest in the country among cities with greater than one million population. This kind of growth would have tested the best and brightest political and administrative talent operating in cities with empowered city mayors. India has dysfunctional governance systems at the third tier with urban land transit departments as mere pen pushers. The leadership lacks vision and urban administrative skills are non-existent. This creates a perfect storm and in Bangalore that leads to traffic gridlock and poor mobility across all modes (including walking).

Across Bangalore there are large road and public transport (Metro) infrastructure projects underway, albeit to a delayed schedule. The city has a Mohenjo Daro excavation kind of look and this is visibly apparent to any person who comes here. The optimists make the case that all will be well

positioning around a walkable city by provisioning wider, uniform footpaths. Currently it scores low on pedestrian access which is so critical for the urban poor. However, pilot road tenders for about 25 roads (30 kms) in the city centre at a budget of ₹300 crores under project Tender SURE (a Bangalore City Connect initiative; disclosure – the author is an advocate of the platform and the project) will be watched to see if it moves the needle on pedestrian walkways. The project is conceived with pedestrians at the heart of the planning. The Metro rail authorities who are part of the project have conceded that for viability, good access to the Metro stations on foot (at least 250 metres) is necessary.

Coming to bicycles, it is the brave, daring cyclist who hits Bangalore's roads these days. In the city centre there are automated bicycle lots but these are rarely used due to limited reach and the lack of safe lanes for them. In Jayanagar, they had marked bicycle lanes but within a week of the launch, the motorised vehicles reclaimed the lane elbowing out the cyclists. The 25 roads city centre project has been designed with cycle lanes that

Govt can't be silent

KANCHI KOHLI

In a judgment delivered on 14 March, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) said: "The act of communication cannot be completed unilaterally. It does require the element of participation by two persons, one who initiates communication and the other to whom the communication is addressed and who receives the same, i.e. the intended receiver."

The issue the tribunal was addressing was whether the delay in filing an appeal against the environmental clearance of the 780 MW Naymjang Chhu Hydroelectric Project in Tawang district of Arunachal Pradesh was time barred or not and if the NGT could still look into the merits of the case.

Time is a critical concern since the NGT Act 2010 provides for a maximum of 90 days from the date of communication of an order granting environmental clearance to file an appeal before the tribunal.

One of the oldest grievances in the environment decision-making process prescribed under the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) notification of 2006, is the lack of availability of the final environmental approval granted by the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF).

Letter after letter has been written by civil society representatives and networks of organizations saying that basic information related to a project's decision-making needs to be made available to the public. This is primarily because access to what happens within the environment ministry's corridors after the mandatory public consultation phase, is not available. Project-affected communities and concerned groups have to rely on a dysfunctional website of the MoEF or wait for the orders to be communicated to local bodies where the particular project is located.

In Naymjang Chhu's case, notes the NGT order, even though the environmental clearance was approved on 19 April 2012, it was uploaded on the MoEF's website only on 8 June 2012, and even then was not 'downloadable' and therefore not accessible. There are letters and records of civil society groups indicating to the ministry that the project's clearance letter was unavailable.

A similar issue arises with respect to the minutes of the thematic expert committees who have been entrusted with the task of reviewing and recommending environmental clearances to projects under the EIA notification and other statutory laws. The minutes of the meeting relating to the review of the highly controversial POSCO steel plant in Odisha which took place from 5 to 7

March this year were not available even a month after the meeting was held. The minutes were surely ready – it was listed as one of the items on the agenda for the expert committee's next meeting on 4 April on the ministry's website. It



The NGT has ruled that environmental clearances for all projects be made available to the public

In Naymjang Chhu's case the environment clearance was not available on the websites of the MoEF or the project proponent or to local bodies like the panchayats.

appears to be a deliberate lapse, especially since each decision on this project has a huge bearing on what transpires for an eight-year-old struggle at the project site.

The present judgment by the NGT was issued by a five-member bench headed by its Chairperson, Justice Swatanter Kumar, who delved deeper into the legal meaning of 'communication' before giving clear directions to the environment ministry. This was in response to an appeal filed by Save Mon Region Federation, Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh.

According to the NGT judgment: "Communication is initiated by transforming a thought into words, act and expression. It is then converted into a message which is transmitted to

the receiver. The receiver understands the message. It may or may not evoke a response. There may be cases where only the sender and the receiver alone are not of significance but even the channel of communication may have some importance....."

What is ironic is that this basic understanding of everyday living needed to be coded and decoded in legal parlance so that the ministry could be reminded of this fundamental tenet of good governance. The NGT's order was clear in stating that 'communication' only takes place when it is made by one and received by another.

In Naymjang Chhu's case this did not happen as the environment clearance was not available on the websites of either the MoEF or the project proponent. It was also not published in full in newspapers as prescribed under Regulation 10 of the EIA notification, 2006 (through a 2009 amendment). Most importantly, it was not available with and therefore not displayed by the local bodies, panchayats

and municipal bodies along with the concerned departments of the state government. Therefore, the act of communication was not complete.

This clearly impacts a person's right to appeal before the NGT as it is important to know the content of the order which they have a right to challenge. The NGT judgment states that "it is only when the content of the order is available and known to a prospective appellant that such appellant would be able to effectively exercise the right of appeal."

The judgment while allowing for the Naymjang Chhu project to be heard on merit, directed that a copy of the full environment clearance letter for all projects be made available to the public through websites, public notice boards and publication in local newspapers. Local bodies including panchayats and municipal bodies must be sent copies as well.

Even though the NGT's judgment is linked to the right of an aggrieved person to file an appeal before it, this order needs to be widened. It should include in its ambit greater public interface and transparency in the entire environmental decision-making sphere including other statutory processes than the EIA notification. In a country where the environment and development trade-off is severely marred with deeper conflicts than ever before, this is the least that can be expected from governments and project authorities. ■

kanchikohli@gmail.com

Living

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

Making a jolly good point

Courtroom comedy delivers more than laughs

Saibal Chatterjee
New Delhi

WHEN writer-director Subhash Kapoor's third feature film, *Jolly LLB*, opened in the multiplexes on the Ides of March, few expected it to set the box office on fire even though, by all accounts, it had the looks of an intelligent courtroom satire with the potential to earn critical encomiums. It did garner heaps of the latter, but it was the commercial success of the film that was the real surprise.

Jolly LLB is a low-budget film sans big names. So it did not trigger mass hysteria on the opening weekend. But its innate artistic quality and the acuity of its comment on the nation's legal system generated enough word-of-mouth publicity to turn it into one of 2013's first certified Bollywood hits.

"I was confident that *Jolly LLB* would strike a chord but I could not have anticipated that it would rake in ₹34 crores and would still be counting," says Kapoor, a self-taught filmmaker and one-time television news journalist who covered politics in the national capital for several years in the late 1990s. "The film has held its ground despite big releases."

Kapoor, a post-grad who was active in leftist student politics back in his college days in Delhi, knows the feeling all too well. Like his film, he has made it in the Mumbai movie industry entirely on his own steam, without assisting any established director, an early career exercise that many aspiring filmmakers take recourse to in order to secure a toehold in the business.

Armed with an MA degree in English Literature, Kapoor landed a job with the National Literacy Mission that allowed him to travel across parts of rural Uttar Pradesh and see for himself the plight of the real India. His empathy for the underdog



Subhash Kapoor explains a scene to the film's principal actors

was strengthened – it is a quality that comes in handy today as he goes about crafting sardonic cinematic fiction about themes and people that mainstream Bollywood tends to ignore as a rule.

Jolly LLB did get its share of free publicity when some lawyers sought to scuttle its release because they felt the film mocked their fraternity. "That was rather surprising," says Kapoor on hindsight. "I did expect some murmurs of protest after the release of the film, but a case being filed merely on the basis of the promos was somewhat strange."

"*Jolly LLB*," he asserts, "is actually a highly positive film about the Indian judiciary – you come

out cheering for the law and the underdog, a Meerut lawyer who triumphs against all odds. So I knew that the misgivings about the film would go away," says the director.

He hails the "historic" Supreme Court verdict that paved the way for the release of *Jolly LLB*. "A two-judge bench ruled that if you don't like the film, don't watch it, but you can't stop its release. Never before has such a ruling been delivered in the case of any film or, for that matter, any book," says Kapoor.

The film benefits hugely from a clutch of impressive onscreen performances. Most notable

Continued on page 32

Continued from page 31

is the one delivered by Saurabh Shukla, who invests the figure of the judge with an avuncular cheeriness that is completely at variance with the stuffily earnest air that a character presiding over a court hearing exudes in an average Hindi film.

Kapoor had the actor in mind when he conceived the character. "For me writing is a lone-



Boman Irani in a still from the film



Arshad Warsi as the titular small-town lawyer

ly process," he explains. "I write alone and at night, so having an actor in mind while developing a role helps me in envisaging more clearly. It wasn't just Saurabh, I also had Boman Irani and Arshad Warsi in my head right from the outset."

"The success of *Jolly LLB* has given me the confidence to continue telling the stories that I want to tell without having to play strictly by the commercial rules of the mainstream movie industry," says the director who made his debut in 2007 with the now-forgotten cricket-themed film *Say Salaam India*.

The release of his maiden film was timed to coincide with the 2007 World Cup hosted by the West Indies. India was knocked out of the tournament in the first round itself and, in the bargain, *Say Salaam India* – its tagline was 'Let's Bring the Cup Home' – turned out to be a cold turkey that had no takers.

The directorial itch had well and truly struck Kapoor (along with his wife, he had set up an independent production company in 2001) when his pals from his news television days, Dibakar Banerjee and Shoojit Sircar, made their first films in the same year (2005) – *Khosla Ka Ghosla* and *Yahaan* respectively.

So, unfazed by his disastrous debut, Kapoor

wrote another screenplay – it was initially titled *Jagdish Tyagi LLB* – and went out looking for funding. But the idea was shot down by everyone that he approached. The rejection was on the grounds that the world was in the midst of a recession and the Mumbai movie industry could not afford to bankroll an unconventional film like the one that he had in mind.

And that sowed the seeds of his second film,

Phas Gaye Re Obama, about a recession-hit NRI businessman who returns to the badlands of Uttar Pradesh to sell a part of his ancestral property in order to save his home in the US. A gang, also in the grip of recession, kidnaps him unaware that he is no longer a millionaire.

The 2010 comedy built around an issue of global concern was anything but a blockbuster, but it was just the turning point that Kapoor was looking for. "The numbers at the box office were average but the film was critically lauded and well received," he recalls.

It paved the way for *Jolly LLB* – the eventual title was borrowed from the name of Kapoor's lawyer-friend Girish Sharma Jolly. "Jolly had a nice ring to it and I opted for it," says the director.

The title, the promos and the film clicked. It is easy to see why. *Jolly LLB* addresses popular concerns about India's judicial system but it isn't a stodgy, preachy drama that talks down to its audience. The film draws its inspiration from real life incidents and newspaper headlines although

none of the characters is actually modelled on anybody that Kapoor knows.

"You see somebody, find him or her interesting, you store away the impression, and it eventually emerges as part of a story you want to narrate," explains Kapoor, who spent hours in the Patiala House district and sessions court as a journalist.

It is this seamless blend of fictionalization and experiential memory that makes *Jolly LLB* out of the ordinary. The courtroom in Kapoor's film is a real, tangible ordinary space and not the kind of larger-than-life, high drama-driven setting that popular Hindi cinema usually creates.

The judge is absolutely believable, as are the two key adversaries – the hotshot advocate who has the world at his feet (Boman Irani) and the cocky small-town lawyer (Arshad Warsi) in a hurry to make his mark.

"I wasn't on the legal beat, but spent time inside the courtrooms on occasional assignments," he reveals. "It struck me that the atmosphere in there was absolutely informal and often quite funny. I wonder why nobody had ever captured that on the screen before."

The Mumbai movie industry was waiting for Subhash Kapoor and the wait has been worth it. ■

Charms of



Heaven from above

Susheela Nair
Lakshadweep

AS our ship sailed out of Kochi's harbour, we looked forward to having a whale of a time on our five-day island-hopping cruise to the Lakshadweep Islands. We could see Kochi's famed Chinese fishing nets fading in the distance. Some dolphins flipped and vanished into the waters.

Before long, we realized that our ship had sped past the coastal city of Kochi and steamed into the open seas heading for the Coral Paradise. The Lakshadweep Archipelago covers an area of 32 sq. km and lies about 440 km from Kochi. It has 12 atolls, five submerged banks and 36 islands of which 12 are inhabited. Lakshadweep shot into the limelight in the late 1980s after Rajiv's Gandhi's brief encounter with a whale in Bangaram. But the whale turned out to be a straying porpoise, a story that remains a closely guarded secret.

The next day, we woke up to find ourselves in Minicoy, a crescent shaped island at the southern end of Lakshadweep and geographically part of the Maldives archipelago. We were whisked into speedboats and ferried across the lagoon to Minicoy. The island first loomed into view as a tiny speck in the horizon. But as we approached by boat, we could see the island in one sweep of the eye.

Remote and isolated, Lakshadweep has perhaps the oldest recorded history among the islands here. Ibn Batuta, the African globetrotter, referred to it as

lovely Lakshadweep

SUSHEELA NAIR



Muluk. He married two women during his brief stay. Marco Polo, who passed by Minicoy in the 13th century, found half the island's population missing. He called Lakshadweep the Female Island perhaps due to the prolonged absence of men from their homes.

The first stop in our itinerary was a 100-year-old lighthouse, the largest in Lakshadweep. From the top, we got a stunning view of the island's shimmering blue lagoon fortified by coral reefs and fringed by dense rows of palm trees.

We discovered that Minicoyians were similar to Maldivians in their food habits and language. Minicoy culture is very distinct. This was apparent when we ambled through the winding lanes of the villages. We found women donned in toga-like capes like the Maldivians.

The main attraction of the island is its carefully arranged 10 villages known as Athiris. Each Athiri has an intriguing name and can be identified by colours or symbols. It has its own internal

organization headed by a Moopan around which the life of the community revolves. We peeked into a Minicoyian's house and were impressed by their cleanliness, order and splendour of colour. Each house has a wooden swing cot, beautifully furnished and painted in different colours.

The Minicoyians have a seafaring lineage. Since time immemorial they have been sailing the vast seas on international trade routes. No wonder that Minicoy seemed modern. Its luxurious houses were stacked with goods bought from all over the world. The husband takes the wife's family name after marriage and continues to be the breadwinner. The lady of the house manages all family affairs in the prolonged absence of men. Minicoy is an important tuna fishing and ship-building centre.

The second halt in our five-day sojourn was Kalpeni, a small island with three tiny satellite isles encircled by an immense lagoon of breathtaking beauty. Arab writers referred to Kalpeni as Kalfaini. Mariners have known of this island since time immemorial. Kalpeni has little to offer by way of tourist spots. We visited the somnolent Moidin Mosque at the southern end of the island. Situated upon the high ground formed by the storm beach and surrounded by walls of coral stone neatly built without mortar, it has an indescribable charm. Built in Kerala style, the roof is still covered with old Mangalore tiles made by the Coelho Brothers.



A Laccadivian woman

From Kalpeni, we island hopped to Kavaratti, the administrative capital and the most developed of the Lakshadweep islands. Kavaratti has 52 mosques spread all over that are architecturally superior to those found in the other islands. The Ujira Mosque with its intricate woodcarvings is a splendid model of craftsmanship and has stood the vagaries of the weather. Sans any minarets, it sports an elegantly carved ceiling and pillars that were probably sculpted some centuries ago. The entire ceiling of the mosque's verandah was carved out of a single piece of driftwood. The main attraction here is the museum-cum-aquarium with its myriad species of colorful fish and an array of remarkable coral formations along with a variety of shells and cowries.

Tourism is monitored by the local administration in close concert with the Lakshadweep Island Development Authority with the sole objective of protecting the interests of the islands. Scarcity of potable water and accommodation is a major constraint. The administration is wary that indiscriminate tourism promotion would lead to depletion of potable water for the islanders.

All visitors, both Indian and foreign nationals, must have a visa-like entry permit to travel to the Lakshadweep Islands. Foreigners are allowed to travel only to Agatti, Bangaram and Kadmat. Indians are allowed only on Agatti, Kalpeni, Kavaratti, Kadmat, Minicoy and Bangaram. Tourism is restricted in order to preserve and protect Lakshadweep's fragile bio-ecological environment and prevent overcrowding. ■

FACT FILE

When to go: October to end-January is ideal.

Tourist Office: SPORTS Lakshadweep Tourism, Willingdon Island, Kochi. Tel: 0484 -2668387/89

Entry Permits: Contact Tourist Office in Kochi.

What to shop: Models of boats made of coconut and shrub, woven straw betel pouch with a silver ornament and areca nutcracker.

Things to do: Hire a bike or a bicycle to get around. Go kayaking or indulge in snorkeling or scuba diving. You can kayak around the tranquil lagoon or wade through knee-deep seawater on a sharp coral bed or laze in the sun. Take a glass-bottomed boat to see the spellbinding underwater reefs and other treasures of marine life. You can also swim with sea urchins, sea cucumbers, fish, sea grass, corals shells and other weeds for company.

SUSHEELA NAIR



Lighthouse in Minicoy

Puppets come alive at Ishaara

Swati Savarn
New Delhi

PUPPETRY, one of the oldest forms of entertainment known to mankind, isn't in good health. So Delhi-based Dadi Pudumjee, master puppeteer, has been soldiering on to keep the craft alive in the face of public apathy. Progress has been slow but steady.

The Ishaara International Puppet Festival, which Pudumjee organises every year, has helped puppetry hold its place in the nation's cultural landscape.

The vitality of the art that thrives on a synthesis of colour, movement, music and storytelling was brought alive yet again at New Delhi's India Habitat Centre in a week-long fiesta in April. It celebrated various forms of puppetry from around the world.

Puppetry, which originated way back in 3000 BC, is struggling to survive in India, where cinema and television has weaned away audiences from traditional forms of recreation. However, it still flourishes in several countries like Europe and parts of Asia.

Pudumjee's Ishaara International Puppet Trust, which hosts the annual festival, has been working to revive the dying art and exposing it to a larger audience.

Like always, the 11th Ishaara International Puppet Festival showcased a wide range of puppetry – old and new, traditional and modern, Indian and international.

Says Pudumjee: "I'm not a traditional puppeteer although I work with them, mixing the contemporary and the traditional." India, he reveals, has traditional puppet theatre in seven or eight states.

Since its inception in 2001, the Ishaara festival has been enthralling Indian audiences by exposing them to the work of puppeteers from around the world. The latest edition saw the participation of puppeteers from Russia, Portugal, Italy, Bulgaria, Israel and Iran.

Until Pudumjee's annual celebration of puppetry began, there was no regular event of this kind in India. Over the years, foreign participation has increased steadily, boosting Ishaara festival's global profile. It has emerged as a dynamic platform for puppeteers, both traditional and modern.

"We don't earn much, but we are still trying hard to preserve our art. A platform like the Ishaara festival helps us take our work to the people," says Sudershan Pradhan, a young puppeteer from Pallahara, a sub-divisional town in Odisha's Dhenkanal district.

The budget for the Ishaara festival is limited.

Pudumjee has to make do with whatever help is extended by collaborators and sponsors. "Ishaara puts all its earnings from the entry fees and some financial help from ICCR (Indian Council for Cultural Relations) into the festival," he says.

The wide variety of forms brought in by foreign performers helps the Indian groups sample international trends. "Through Ishaara we have got

simplest. Khageswar Sahoo reveals that the puppets had been made from the leather of deer, sambhar, wild boar and wild goats which were provided to the group in 1987 by the Odisha government.

Odisha's Dhenkanal district was once known for its traditional folk theatre, but the hub has fallen silent today. Guru Khageswar Pradhan, the head of the team, says: "Today more popular forms of entertainment like films have gained ground in the village. This has driven puppetry into oblivion and the artistes into struggling for survival."

Pudumjee's own production, *Heer ke Waaris*, was also performed in the festival. Scripted by Maheep Singh, it took the evergreen romance of Heer-Ranjha and imparted a modern feel to it by addressing the issue of honour killings and khap panchayats.

The climax of the folk story was reinterpreted to make it relevant to contemporary times. Puppets made of thermocol, wood, cloth and cotton were used in the show.

Some of the foreign performances also entertained the audience. Spain's silent play *Bernada's Backstage* dwelled upon women's issues. Israel's *The Cubes Circus* did not have conventional puppets. Instead, a group of dancers transformed cubes into different animals and objects. It combined modern puppetry, sculpture and dance theatre.

Similarly, *The Pier is Alive* from Portugal combined poetry, dance, animation, music and optical illusion. A *Musician Who Played the Moon*, staged by a group from Iran based on a popular Russian folklore, narrated the story of a lonely musician playing his instrument by the river.

Richa, a member of the audience who came with her six-year-old daughter, was impressed. She says: "It is amazing how in the age of cartoons and 3D movies, the simple art of puppetry can hold the attention of my daughter for so long. Both of us had the time of our lives."

As part of his larger campaign to breathe new life into puppetry, Pudumjee trains children from traditional Kathputli families residing in Shadipur. "They come once a week to our studio. They have very good basic skills and can sing and dance," he says.

Skill enhancement transforms these children for good. "They have put up a whole show based on themselves with the use of rod puppets," adds Pudumjee.

His upcoming events include workshops in schools (like Delhi Public School) and performances for SPIC MACAY (Society for the Promotion of Indian Classical Music And Culture Amongst Youth) in Delhi. ■

PICTURES BY LAKSHMAN ANAND



Dadi Pudumjee's production, *Heer ke Waaris*

rich exposure to international puppetry," says Khageswar Sahoo, secretary of Ravan Chhaya Natya Sansada, Dhenkanal. "We have learnt a lot here. The modern forms employed by the foreign performers have really inspired us to attempt better and more innovative work in the future."

The performances by the Indian groups at the festival were traditional in style. The Odia shadow puppet play, *Ravan Chhaya*, added variety to the event. It is titled thus because the *chhaya* or shadow is considered inauspicious, according to the puppeteers, and is therefore equated to the character of Ravana.

Among all the styles of Indian puppetry, it is the



Swaang live at JNU

was palpable. As the band set up and tested their instruments on the stage, they aroused instant curiosity among onlookers. Questions did the rounds: "Who are these guys? What songs will they perform? Will a tabla go well with an electric guitar?" But as soon as the show began, the audience sang, danced and clapped with Swaang.

Swaang renders a blend of original songs and the works of legendary progressive poets like Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Sahir Ludhianvi, Dushyant Kumar, Avtar Singh Sandhu 'Paash', Gorakh Pandey and Habib Jalib. Their music showcases a fine blend of western blues, jazz and rock and roll with eastern classical and folk styles.

The song *Sur suri* spread feverishly among the audience, consisting of the old and the young. A few listeners broke into an

impromptu jig, swaying and dancing to the intermingling of *jatra* and jazz.

Anoop, a student of Korean language, said, "*Sur suri* talked about serious issues like the silence of better-off people in the face of oppression from the government. But they presented it with humour and amazing melodies and it clicked wonderfully." The band happily performed an encore of *Sur suri*, much to the delight of the audience.

Before the JNU show, Swaang had performed live at the India Habitat Centre and in Dehradun. The concerts were facilitated by Kriti, a voluntary organisation that has been promoting the creative, visual and performing arts to connect with the masses on social change issues for the last 13 years.

Aanchal Kapur, the leader of Kriti, says that Swaang's repertoire that mixes mainstream with the alternative has inspired Kriti to promote the band. "It is a two-way learning and sharing process, where we not only listen to their music but also inspire them with our work," she said.

The band focuses on live shows to connect with the people. Swara says, "Music is the most powerful means of reaching out to the masses. It has no boundaries of geography or language. We received an unexpectedly strong response from Pakistan to our song *Maa nee meri*."

Clapping to the songs, 61-year-old Neena Alagh said, "It's not easy for a band to hold the interest of the audience if they are just preachy. Their balanced approach of message and music sets them apart and makes their performance a memorable experience."

So, what's next for Swaang? Ravinder says, "We want to do more live shows. The audience reaction inspires us to do a better job. We are planning to record and shoot a music video for one of our songs soon. For now, we are just taking small yet sure steps." ■

Music with a message

Shayak Majumder
New Delhi

*Mother, I will not fear
Mother, I will not become you
I will drown but I won't swim with the tide
I will stand, slipper in hand*

Maa nee meri

SWAANG is no ordinary band. Its youthful members sway to a different beat. They compose and perform protest songs that espouse a cause.

"We sing in the hope of sparking a debate and sensitizing listeners," says lead singer Ravinder Randhawa, ahead of a Swaang concert at the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) Open Air Theatre in New Delhi.

Swaang comprises a bunch of creative professionals from the Mumbai movie industry. Among them are writers, actors, directors, singers and composers.

Ravinder, a screenwriter, was the assistant writer for the notable Bollywood movie, *Aarakshan*. He shares a love for humanity and a passion for societal change with other members of the band.

The songs are mostly composed by the band's lead vocalist Rohit Sharma who has created melodious numbers for *Jugaad* and other films. The band's lead guitarist and supporting vocalist Pankaj Badra chips in with valuable inputs. He played the protagonist in the Bollywood caper, *Shivam*.

Actor Swara Bhaskar, who won the Filmfare

award for the best supporting actor (female) for the superhit, *Tanu Weds Manu*, is also an integral part of the band. Being the voice of Swaang, she bridges the gap between the performers and the audience with her lively stage presence and devil-may-care attitude. Without Swara's overwhelming presence, the band might just have got lost behind their otherwise poor stage act.

Swaang performs with a dedicated five-member group of musicians, who provide the perfect cushion for the artistic prowess of the four lead performers.

The band uses music and poetry to raise its voice for women's empowerment and eradication of child labour, among other themes. *Maa nee meri*, one of the band's original compositions, is already a huge success on YouTube, with more than 20,000 hits.

Written in reaction to the horrific gang rape in Delhi late last year, the song extols the victim as a strong fighter, who battled till the very end only to live on forever in the collective consciousness of the nation.

Says Ravinder: "We felt deep anguish, anger and helplessness. We wondered how we should respond to this atrocity. Was the failure of the administration the only reason behind the girl's plight, or was there more to it?" The band poured out its thoughts through the song.

Maa nee meri also challenges parents who feel overprotective towards their daughters. It questions why a wife, a daughter and a victim must always give in to patriarchal rules.

In JNU, the band's connect with the audience

For healthy gums

Dr G. G. GANGADHARAN

GREEN CURES



HEALTH is reflected on the face of a person. And the mouth is the most important aesthetic organ in the face, covered beautifully by two lips. In the mouth are the tongue, gums, teeth and palates. Gums are one of the softest parts of the body. They

hold the teeth in position. Gums are indicators of good health. When the gums become spongy or inflamed or infected, health problems set in. There are about 75 types of mukharoga – diseases of the mouth – out of which 13 are of the gums.

There are three important things to watch out for the health of the gums:

- proper circulation of blood
- proper nerve conductivity and
- proper nutrition to the soft parts of the gums

While brushing our teeth we are actually cleaning our gums also. Any astringent material we use as paste or powder for brushing our teeth is very good for gum health. Astringent materials like the powder and paste of arimedha (khair or khadira or acacia catechu) or dried powder of ripened mango leaves, powder of terminalia balarica and black ash of burnt paddy husk are all good astringent materials for gum health. Black ash of paddy husk is helpful in preventing plaque formation.

Adding a bit of neem leaf powder, clove oil and a few drops of neem oil to this mixture makes it a good gum massage paste. This can be applied with a little pressure from your index finger every day. It can bring good health to the gums.

Gargling with oil made of acacia bark is excellent for gum health. Arimedha tailam available in reputed traditional Ayurveda stores is good for this purpose. Slightly warm this oil on a low fire and gargle every morning after brushing your teeth and at bedtime. This is a very good method of keeping the health of your gums intact. If you have gum inflammation, this can also be used as a curative measure.

The health of our gums is normally neglected by us because we do not know much about its care. Brushing teeth upwards and downwards with a soft brush or the index finger is a good way of

caressing the gums to improve blood circulation.

Here are a few useful tips for better gum health:

- Brush teeth twice daily with the powder/paste mentioned above or any other good astringent herbal paste with a little salt.
- Drink coffee or tea in the morning only after gargling or brushing your teeth. Drinking one or two glasses of lukewarm water with honey and lemon juice regularly every morning is a good habit.
- After each meal gargle with fresh water and lightly massage the gums with your index finger.
- Once a week gargle with lukewarm salt water. Fill your mouth with this water and circulate it thoroughly. This is very good for your gums, the upper part of your throat and teeth.
- You can also use a paste made of mustard oil, rock salt, black ash of paddy husk and powder of the acacia catechu bark. It is a good combination for everyday use and can be made at home. This is an excellent remedy for pyorrhea, inflamed and bleeding gums and toothache as it annihilates bacteria in the mouth.
- You can also use turmeric powder with salt if there is dental caries. But regular use can cause discoloration of the teeth unless you use black ash of paddy husk after this.
- A mix of clove, saunf and a small percentage of jeera makes a good mouth freshener. Chew after meals. It is also good for teeth and gums.
- Never eat very hot and chilled items alternately – for example don't eat ice cream after a cup of hot coffee/tea.
- Avoid excessive sweets and foods with a high percentage of sugar. And if you consume them, rinse your mouth thoroughly after eating.



Here is my personal prescription for the health of teeth and gums. You can prepare Dasanakantichurnam yourself at home for daily use.

- Arimedas twak: Bark of Acacia
- Yasti: Glycyrrhiza glabra
- Darvi: Berberis aristata
- Khadirasara: Katha (used in paan)
- Gairika: Red Ochre
- Maricha: Pepper
- Krishna: Pippali (small pepper)
- Jatikosa: Pod of nutmeg
- Jatiphala: Seed of nutmeg
- Lavanga: Clove
- Ela: Cardamon
- Twak: Cinnamon
- Karpura: Camphor

Wear a pleasing smile! ■



WONDER PLANT

Sweet killer

WITH industrialization and rapid progress India is gaining global recognition. The flip side is that the modern way of life is increasing lifestyle diseases. India is fast becoming the diabetic capital of the world.

But regular exercise and a controlled diet along with herbal medicines can help to a great extent in controlling blood sugar levels. One such important herb is *Gymnema sylvestre* or Madhunashini – which literally means the destroyer of sweet.

Madhunashini belongs to the family Asclepiadaceae. It is a climbing herb. Apart from diabetes it is reportedly useful in alleviating cough, asthma, intermittent fever, dyspepsia, constipation, jaundice, cardiopathy and amenorrhoea. The incredible properties of this plant are experienced when its leaves are chewed – they paralyze the taste buds and prevent one from sensing the sweet taste temporarily.

Location: The natural habitats of Madhunashini are hedges along small streams, wayside thickets and scrub forests. In India, the herb is found growing wild in drier parts of the central and peninsular zone. Profuse flowering can be seen from July to September.

Properties: The parts of the plant that are used are its leaves for fever and diabetes and seeds and root bark for cough. It is astringent and bitter in taste, light and dry in quality and hot in potency. The plant has a pungent post-digestive effect

and it pacifies the vitiation of Kapha and Vaata. Madhunashini is used for curing snake poisoning, constipation, jaundice, intermittent fever, diabetes and dysuria.

Gardening: This demure twiner grows in the sun and shade. But raising it as an indoor plant may be difficult. Madhunashini can twine on wrought iron, a fence, or any structure that can add style and beauty to your garden. Well-designed trellis affixed on the wall can provide an aesthetic look for this lush-green foliage twiner. Madhunashini can also be planted in flowerpots of over 14 inches. This potted plant can be grown vertically by providing suitable support like iron rods or bamboo sticks. You can also grow it in hanging pots with branches drooping down.

The mixture to be put in the flowerpots should comprise of two folds of loamy soil, one fold of sand and three folds of farmyard manure or vermi-compost.

The plant should be watered regularly. If kept in a flowerpot it needs to be watered at least once a day. If it is planted directly in soil, regular watering is needed only till it flowers. Then it should be watered once a week. This twiner does not require any periodical pruning as it behaves well.

Madhunashini is propagated through seeds and stem cuttings. Seeds are reported to have short viability. They are sown in flat or raised

vaidya.ganga@frlht.org



beds from November to January. Sowing should not be more than one inch deep. The plant starts germinating within 15 days. Three-month-old seedlings are transplanted in containers or into the field. In case of cuttings, matured pencil-thick stems are selected. Each stem cutting should bear four to five nodes and be planted such that its underground portion and aerial portion have two nodes each. The soil used should have a higher proportion of coarse sand. After planting, the bed should be covered with polythene to create humidity. Sprouting starts within 15 days and root initiation, after 50 days.

If pests attack the plant, Azadirachtin based neem formulations must be applied. Synthetic pesticides should be avoided since Madhunashini is used for medicinal purposes.

Self-Help

FOR DIABETES: Dry Madhunashini leaves in the shade and pound to make a powder. Take one teaspoon of this powder with warm water after food thrice a day.

Just chewing the leaves is also beneficial.

Grind the leaves into a paste and apply externally for swellings/wounds/ulcers due to diabetes.

FOR COUGH: Wash some fresh Madhunashini leaves. Mix one part of the leaves with four parts of water and boil, reducing the water to quarter of its original quantity. Filter and use. Take half a cup of this decoction twice a day on an empty stomach early morning and evening for dry cough.

Dry the Madhunashini seeds and pound to make a powder. Take half teaspoon of the powder with warm water to alleviate phlegmatic conditions.

Collect and dry the root bark. Burn and inhale the fumes. This treatment is effective in phlegmatic conditions. It can be done after sneezing. Place a few red-hot ambers on a metal plate. Drop the root bark pieces on to the ambers. Keep the plate at a distance and direct the fumes towards you. Sit straight with a calm mind. Inhale and exhale deeply. Inhale the smoke through one nostril. Emit the smoke only through the mouth. Inhale with both the nostrils taking turns. Relax for 15 minutes. Do not wash immediately. Spit out the phlegm. Avoid inhalation if your nose is running. ■

NM Ganesh Babu is a Research Officer at FRLHT, Bangalore, and can be contacted at ganesh.babu@frlht.org.

FEEL GOOD

Skin safe

SUMMER is here and the heat is intense. The sun burns your skin, drying out natural oils and spreading an uneven tan across your face. But a little protection and care taken every time you go out into the blazing sun or come back can prevent your skin from sun damage.

Here are some tips to prevent sunburn:

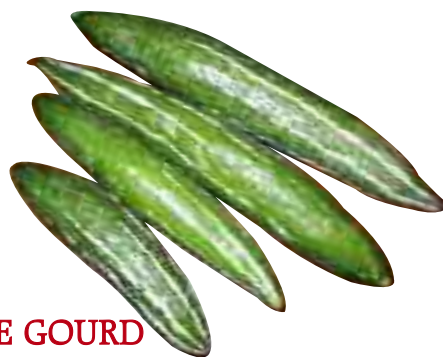
- Apply a good sunscreen lotion on your skin before going out into the sun.
- Drink at least two glasses of water before going out during the day. You can drink lemon water, orange juice, watermelon juice or coconut water. Ensure that your body is hydrated.
- Sunburn can be treated with an ice compress for 10 to 15 minutes. In cases of severe sunburn or if it cause blisters, Ayurvedic medicines for external application like satadhouta ghritam will be helpful.
- Apply fresh gel of aloe vera on the affected area.
- Mix two tablespoons of honey with one tablespoon of lime. Apply the mixture on the sunburnt area.

- Applying sandalwood paste on sunburnt skin will soothe the skin and prevent further complications.
- To get rid of sun tan apply a mixture of honey and tomato juice. Tomato helps to lighten skin colour and removes tan.
- Make a fine paste of neem stems and apply directly on the sunburnt area.
- Place chilled cucumber slices on the affected part of the skin.
- Keep rose water in the refrigerator and apply it on the skin to soothe the sunburn.
- Apply thick chilled curd on the affected skin. You can mix it with sandalwood powder.
- Buttermilk too is a good option to heal sunburn.
- Take frequent cool showers or baths
- Avoid wool or synthetic clothing.
- Soak some clean cloth in apple cider vinegar, wring and place on the sunburnt skin to eliminate pain, redness and to prevent peeling. ■

Dr Rekha R, Resident Medical Officer, IHC

ORGANIC CHEF

Mild Curries



Snake Gourd

Ingredients:

Snake gourd: 200 grams
Mustard: half tsp
Cumin seeds : 1 spoon
Pepper powder : 1 spoon
Curry leaves : A few
Grated coconut : 2 tsp
Rock salt : to taste
Coconut oil: 1 tsp
Asafoetida: 1 pinch

Method: Cut the snake gourd into small pieces and steam it. Season with mustard, asafoetida, cumin seeds, curry leaves and pepper powder. Add rock salt and grated coconut. Mix well and sauté for a few minutes.

Indications:

- An aphrodisiac
- Increases Kapha and Pitta
- Balances Vata
- Works against worms
- It is a laxative

Plantain Flower

Ingredients:

Bengal gram: 50 gm
Cumin seeds: 1 tsp
Turmeric powder: Quarter tsp
Sesame oil: 1 tsp
Mustard seeds: for seasoning
Asafoetida: 2 pinches
Pepper: Quarter tsp
Plantain flower: 1 pc

Method: Soak Bengal gram for 15 minutes. Then add cumin seeds and pepper. Now grind the Bengal gram for a few seconds. Remove the style of the plantain flower. Chop into pieces and clean in running water. Cook for five to seven minutes. Add some turmeric powder while boiling. Decant the water. In a pan add sesame oil and season with mustard seeds and asafoetida. Add ground Bengal gram, pepper, and cumin seeds and sauté for a few minutes. Then add the cooked plantain flowers and salt. Stir fry again for a few minutes. Garnish with curry leaves.

Indications:

- Reduces Pitta, Kapha, increases Vata
- Said to be a sattvik food
- Astringent in taste
- Sweet after digestion
- Cold in potency
- Easy to digest
- Drying

Dr Rekha R, Resident Medical Officer, IHC

PRODUCTS

LAKSHMAN ANAND

SHELL BOWL

A colorful salad looks its tastiest best in an attractive bowl. Toss yours in a seashell. Anil Giri of Digha Sea Shell Emporium specializes in making attractive round containers from seashells and wood just for salads. You can buy matching spoons as well.

Giri's bowls have an earthy feel and look almost as if they are made of clay.

He says his products are made in Digha, a small seaside resort near Kolkata. The raw material comes from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

You can't cook in these bowls but they are unbreakable and the patterns etched are natural. The seashells are melded into the wood. The glossy finish comes from applying heat. No artificial colors are used, assures Giri. He also manufactures photo-frames, bangles and other jewellery from seashells. A large salad bowl costs ₹850 and a pair of spoons is for ₹450. The salad bowls and spoons are smooth to touch and easy to clean. ■



Contact: Anil Giri, 9810540467, 9810556431, 8860245565
Email: dighaseashells@gmail.com

LAKSHMAN ANAND



Contact: Dalavai Kullayappa, Nimmalakunta, Anantapur District, Andhra Pradesh, 515 651.
Phone: 09959309029

LEATHER ART

ABOUT 50 to 60 families in Anantapur district of Andhra Pradesh specialize in the art of Charma Chitrakari to earn a living. This is their hereditary profession. Leather is pounded till it is fine like paper. Pictures of mythological and religious figures from the Ramayana and Mahabharata are then painted on this leather. Finally, cutouts of the pictures are made and strung together.

Dalavai Kullayappa, a Charma Chitrakari artist, says in the old days these pictures were used as puppets. Artists went from village to village and performed shows based on stories from the Ramayana and Mahabharata. With demand for such performances dwindling, Charma Chitrakari artists are now making lampshades, paintings and wall hangings for the urban market. The lampshades are waterproof.

Some of their paintings are hundreds of years old.

Prices vary from ₹150 for a small wall hanging to ₹20,000 for a large cutout of Ravana with his arms swinging. Kullayappa said the state government has stepped in to support them. He has visited several countries to sell his pictures and perform puppet shows. ■