

Civil Society



HELPLINE FOR KIDS GETS BIGGER

With a call centre, partners and mobile telephony, Childline grows its network to help children in distress



'A POLITICAL PARTY NEEDS AN AGENDA'

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Childline holds out hope for children in distress. A single toll free call sets off a chain of supportive actions. Childline has overcome many technological challenges to be effective.

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Civil Society

READ US. WE READ YOU.

Our children deserve better

CHILD welfare is a measure of an evolved society. Children represent our investment in the future and if we can't work out their happiness and security we have achieved little. Our cover story this month is about Childline: a voluntary service which helps children in distress reach out and find support. Childline keeps it simple. It has a phone number on which children can call in to either just talk about a situation or, more urgently, ask to be rescued.

Childline has been available for around 15 years, but the stress under which children live has only increased nationwide in this time. Trafficking figures keep getting worse. The children out begging on the streets tell their own story. It should make us all feel ashamed that children should be begging in the heart of the Indian capital. If we can't find solutions here, then where?

Childline draws on heart and expertise. It is structured to work with multiple voluntary partners and government agencies and use telephony. It is a laudable initiative, which has gone from fixedlines to mobile phones and increased its reach. But, of course, Childline is not enough. No single effort can be.

Child welfare, to be truly effective, needs to be driven by the government using the bandwidth and spirit of a Childline and other such NGOs. Scale is needed and into it has to be injected innovation and flexibility. Legally and morally, governments are bound to do this. And given the escalating nature of the challenge, governments must pick up the best initiatives already in existence and act quickly.

Good laws exist. Recent legislation in particular has been forward looking. But what we see by way of implementation in the state sector is distressing. The child welfare machinery is in a shambles and has reached this level of poor performance because of steady neglect over the years. It has become the norm for lightweight politicians to be put in charge of child welfare and other such ministries. We need achievers in these jobs instead if anything meaningful is to be done.

We also carry in this issue a story on Delhi's parks. These valuable public spaces have been leased out to private entities in the name of maintenance. What they have become instead are enclaves for a few. Children need to get out and play and these days they find it increasingly difficult to do so in Delhi. Parks have either been sealed off in the name of beautification or are in such disrepair that children can't use them. It is distressing that in a growing number of beautified parks poor children are not allowed to enter. It is the duty of local governments to ensure that such segregation does not happen.

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The magazine does not undertake to respond to unsolicited contributions sent to the editor for publication.

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Printed and published by Umesh Anand from A 53 D, First Floor, Panchsheel Vihar, Malviya Nagar,

New Delhi-17.
Printed at Samrat Offset Pvt. Ltd., B-88, Okhla Phase II.

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

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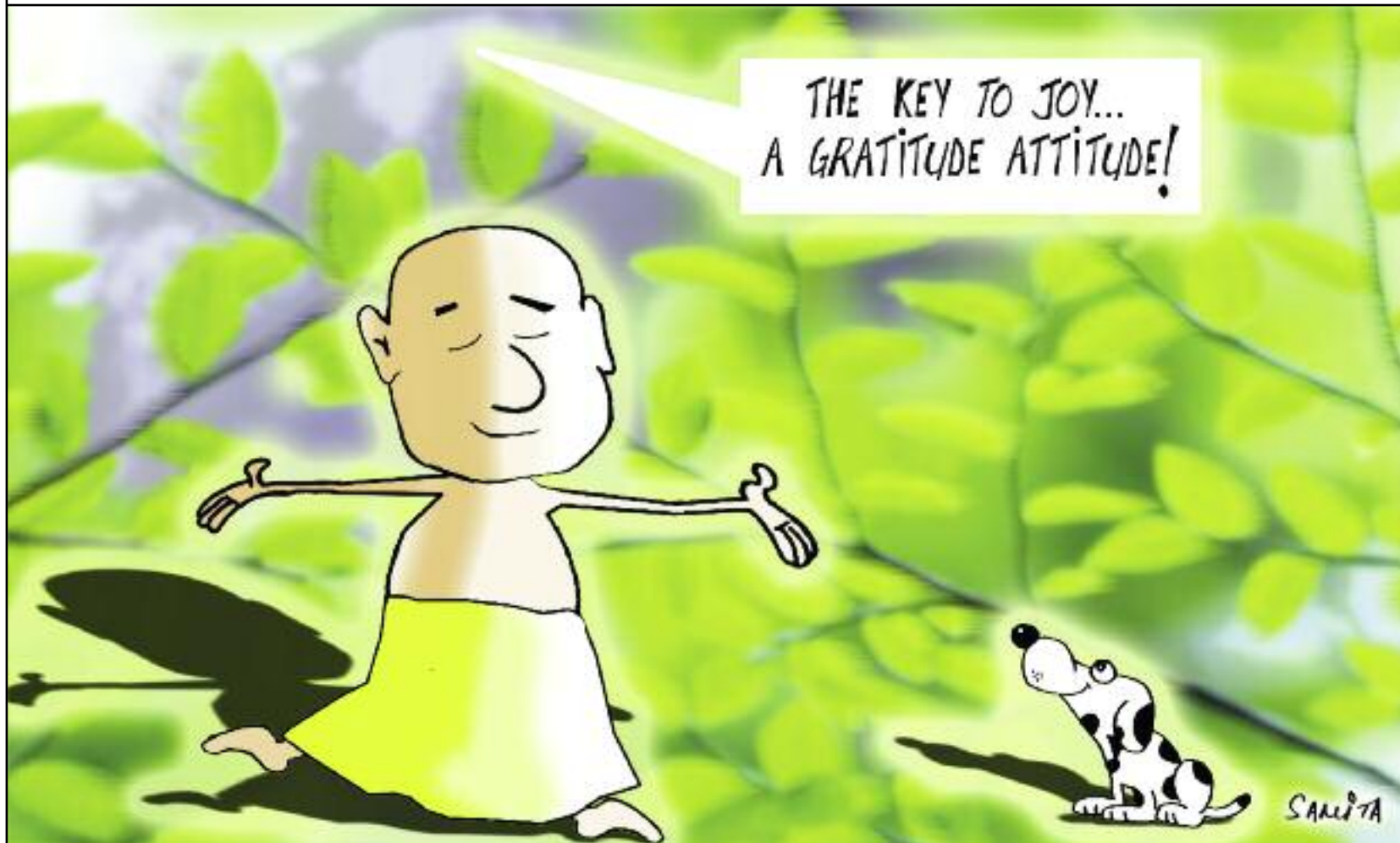
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INTERNET EDITION
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IN THE LIGHT

by SAMITA RATHOR



LETTERS



Hall of Fame

It gives me immense pleasure to congratulate you on your ninth annual issue and the Hall of Fame 2012. I, being a recipient of the same award in 2011, do have strong faith in you since I agree that you unfold hidden truths by bringing out stories of unknown people whose contribution to society is unforgettable.

I salute and congratulate Sanjay Sahni, Naurti Bai, Dr Chiranjeeb

Kakoty, Boya Pedda Rajanna and Dr Evita Fernandez for their hard work and I congratulate the jury too for selecting these invisible names for the awards.

**Bashir Ahmed Mir, Chairman,
Human Aid Society, Baramulla,
Kashmir**

I found Naurti Bai's story very moving. For a Dalit woman to rise from being a labourer to becoming sarpanch by overcoming such awesome barriers requires outstanding grit and character. She is a role model for all women.

Shanta Desai

Sanjay Sahni you are a real hero. Leaving your work in Delhi to fight for the NREGS entitlements of poor villagers, that too against powerful interests in your own community...that requires a sense of justice and morality.

Amit Chatterjee

India owes a lot to the simple Pedda Rajanna for his outstanding work for animals.

Sriram Hegde

Each and every sentence about Dr Evita Fernandez is absolutely true.

She is the next Mother Teresa of India. Honesty starts with her. Evita is an inspiration for every woman. I wish and pray that every mother is blessed with a daughter like her. We Indians are proud of her. Although Dr Evita hasn't experienced motherhood, she still stands out as a living example of all the wonderful qualities of a mother.

Roopa Khanna

I am very proud to be a part of the Evita family – the Fernandez Hospital. She is really an inspiration for all human beings.

Philomina Raj

All your five entrants are truly inspiring. Made me smile today.

Mayank Goel

Really inspiring stories, especially the one on Dr Chiranjeeb Kakoty. Look forward to such stories in the near future.

Rajib Chowdhury

Dr Chiranjeeb Kakoty is among those who have gone to extreme lengths to change the living standards of remote people with his own capabilities. He has never refused to help them and has never sought anything in return

from them. Being his cousin I am proud of his work. The way he speaks and the words that he uses have a lot of deep meaning. A great motivator, he is always ready to help others regardless of his own problems.

Joydeep Patowari

Products

We are an NGO that works for income generation among slum women of Delhi. We train these women to make various types of gift items made of handmade paper. Interested readers may please contact me.

Devasri@growindia.org.in

Phone: 9990845558

Organic chef

Hmm, I wonder if grinding almonds in mortar and pestle would turn out well. I have not ever attempted to do this, but I have used mortar and pestle to grind roasted chickpeas and that has worked well in the past.

All the same grinding almonds would be fresher than buying the readymade powder, I guess.

Pedro Bello



Aruna Roy



Vir Chopra



Anupam Mishra



Dr Chiranjeeb Kakoty, Boya Peda Rajanna, Naurti Bai, Dr Evita Fernandez and Sanjay Sahni

Five change leaders enter

Civil Society News
New Delhi

FIVE remarkable individuals from across India were inducted into the Civil Society Hall of Fame 2012 at a ceremony on 11 October in The Stein Auditorium of the India Habitat Centre on Lodi Road in New Delhi.

Sanjay Sahni, Naurti Bai, Dr Evita Fernandez, Dr Chiranjeeb Kakoty and Boya Peda Rajanna were chosen for their efforts to strengthen democracy and

make our world happier and more inclusive.

The Civil Society Hall of Fame is in its fourth year. It is an initiative by *Civil Society* magazine in partnership with the Azim Premji Foundation.

The Civil Society Hall of Fame is not meant for the famous. No one can apply and no one can be nominated. Entrants are identified for the work they do and the values they espouse in their daily lives. They are mostly discovered far from the lime-light, immersed in their unique missions.

A jury decides from a long list of names chosen in a silent nationwide effort over the year. This year's

jury consisted of Aruna Roy, Nasser Munjee, Anupam Mishra, Darshan Shankar and Nandan Maluste.

A diverse audience consisting of a cross-section of *Civil Society* magazine's readers – executives, activists, doctors, bankers, lawyers, teachers, architects, journalists – cheered when the work of this year's five entrants was showcased in short clips and they stepped on stage to receive their citations from Aruna Roy.

Vir Chopra, the producer of the *Munnabhai* films and other box office hits, delivered the keynote

PICTURES BY SANDEEPA VEERAMACHANENI



Hall of Fame

address on 'Citizengiri and Gandhigiri'.

Anupam Mishra of the Gandhi Peace Foundation was the master of ceremonies with his trademark gentle humour and insightful commentary. He said with most big media talking about the 'important things' that 'big people' do, *Civil Society* magazine had chosen to focus instead on the 'big things' that 'small people' do.

In an address supported by strong visuals, including clips from *Lage Raho Munnabhai* and *Rang De Basanti*, Chopra said the definition of civil society which he found most acceptable came from

Wikipedia: "... the arena outside of the family, the state, and the market where people associate to advance common interests."

In much the same way that 'Gandhigiri' is meant to demystify Gandhi and denote his relevance in our daily lives, so also 'Citizengiri' is the life of action that everyone of us must lead if society is to move forward, he said.

Chopra listed six issues that each citizen should be involved with: environmental concerns, sustainability, rapid urbanisation, energy, human development and constitutional issues.

FEEDBACK

Civil Society is the only magazine that I know in the country that is seriously and genuinely concerned about involving civil society in the country's growth process. The Hall of Fame by Civil Society has genuine intentions towards the awardees.

B. Muthuraman, Vice Chairman, Tata Steel

Civil Society is an important contributor to the debate on social issues. The Hall of Fame brings focus on people whose contributions would otherwise go unnoticed.

Nandan Nilekani, Chairman, UIDAI

In a society which has become a cesspool of instant gratification and insensitivity to human values, it is refreshing to see the Hall of Fame graciously promote individuals who contribute to human betterment.

Dr Ashok Khurana

It was a wonderful evening. It is so refreshing to see the work of people that Civil Society highlights. I was at last year's Hall of Fame too. You must keep this going.

Sudhanshu Batra, Senior Advocate

Heartiest congratulations for an impressive Hall of Fame event.

Dr H. Chaturvedi, Director, BIMTECH

Very well organised. Vir Chopra was really good. Hall of Fame is making impact.

Shiban Bakshi, Investment Banker

Great show with positive energy and hope. It was an amazing experience.

Geeta and Brij, Architects

Vir Chopra's presentation was very well thought out. Came back very impressed with all the changemakers in the Hall of Fame.

Geeta Pandey, Journalist, BBC

The Hall of Fame celebrates the goodness and worth of apparently ordinary people. We are privileged to be a part of it.

Kabir Mustafi, Educationist

It was a humbling experience. People making so much of a difference at the grass roots silently even as we only theorize.

S. K. Gagroo, Banker

Great way to get to know about, meet and interact with such amazing people.

Dr Vineeta Shanker, Sasakawa Foundation

Excellent programme. I salute the people in the Hall of Fame.

Dr D. P. S. Toor



Before the ceremony, as people take their seats



Nilanjan Choudhury



Naurti Bai and Dr Evita Fernandez at Microsoft's Democracy Wall

"Citizengiri can be a definite method to hold the administration accountable," he said.

Presenting the citations, Aruna Roy praised the five new entrants to the Hall of Fame saying they were people who "keep dreaming alive in a battered country". She ended her short but stirring speech by echoing Chopra with an exhortation, "*Lage raho doston!*"

Rita Anand, Editor, *Civil Society*, said in her welcome address that the five individuals who had been chosen had each at a local level and in their small spheres solved problems of national concern. There were lessons in their achievements, which deserved to be analysed and replicated and also used to make policies more effective. A country as diverse as India, she pointed out, needed multiple solutions and shared learning. The Hall of Fame and *Civil Society* through its stories sought to promote such a spirit.

Civil Society magazine draws its strength from

meaningful partnerships. The Azim Premji Foundation and the Azim Premji University have been supportive of the magazine's mission and the spirit behind the Hall of Fame.

Speaking for the Azim Premji University, Nilanjan Choudhury said both the magazine and the university were endeavours to bring about a society envisioned in the Constitution, "a society which is under threat today".

The university's focus is on creating a cadre of changemakers and it has a natural synergy with *Civil Society* magazine and the Hall of Fame.

At the recognition ceremony this year, Microsoft put up its innovative and striking Democracy Wall, which presents the company's social initiatives across India. The wall celebrates change at the grassroots in the spirit that *Civil Society* does.

The event drew its special flavour from the stories of this year's five entrants to the Hall of Fame. Naurti Bai is a courageous Dalit woman

who has succeeded in becoming the Sarpanch of Harmada village in Rajasthan. She was also instrumental in getting a historic verdict from the Supreme Court on the payment of minimum wages. Though illiterate, she learnt how to use computers and now teaches schoolgirls in her village to use computers.

Naurti Bai's message is: "Go out into the world with the confidence that you are the best."

Dr Chiranjeeb Kakoty is a medical practitioner based in Guwahati who has gone far beyond the call of his profession to work with communities in the fractured northeast and deliver health care where it is needed most. He is a pioneer of the HIV/AIDs prevention programme in the northeast and has improved maternal and infant mortality in one of Assam's poorest districts. He has reached out to sex workers and empowered them.

Sanjay Sahni is a self-taught electrician who has a small roadside shop in Delhi. But he comes from Ratnauli Village in Muzaffarpur in Bihar. On visits back home he would hear people complain that they weren't getting work under the government's rural job scheme. When they did get work, they wouldn't be paid all their dues.

Sanjay used the Internet to track down the records of the rural job scheme and made them public in his village. He confronted local officials and the village head. In a matter of months Sanjay has become a local leader. People now get their job cards and money too, though it comes slowly.

In Hyderabad, Dr Evita Fernandez, a gynaecologist, inherited a hospital and a cause from her parents. She has been true to it by remaining single and dedicat-

ing herself to the medical profession. Fernandez Hospital tries to be a model hospital in the private sector. It treats the rich and poor alike. No one is turned away for want of money. HIV positive mothers are treated free of cost and there is a training course of midwives because they are sorely needed for improving the health system.

"We never like to send away a patient who can't pay from our hospital," says Dr Fernandez in times when privatised health care has come to be seen as a big business opportunity.

Boya Pedda Rajanna knows how to treat animals with herbs. He lives in rural Anantapur in Andhra Pradesh and is a farmer. But he is dedicated to reaching animals in distress and giving them relief. He is on call at any time of the day or night.

He acquired his knowledge from his father and grandfather. Like most traditional healers he charges nothing. "It is not fair to take money for treating dumb animals that serve us," he says. ■

'A political party can't have just one issue'

In 2006, Loksatta made a planned entry into politics

T.S. Sudhir
Hyderabad

ARVIND Kejriwal and his group, India Against Corruption, have finally decided to enter the maelstrom of active Indian politics. Kejriwal's decision is similar to the path chosen by former IAS officer Dr Jayaprakash Narayan in 1996. JP, as he is called, first launched Loksatta as a voluntary organisation to campaign for free and fair elections and probity in public life. Ten years later, in 2006, he converted Loksatta into a political party. Today he is the lone MLA of his party in the Andhra Pradesh State Legislative Assembly.

JP spoke to *Civil Society* on the challenges and pitfalls a new political party faces and how Kejriwal's style is very different from Loksatta's.

Arvind Kejriwal and his group are in the thick of street politics even as they convert an agitation against corruption into a political movement. Your Loksatta, after 10 years of being an NGO became a political party, going through a similar process. Does this mean that unless you get into politics, you cannot achieve anything?

I have always said that politics is a noble endeavour. Loksatta was at all times political but non-partisan. After all, we were fighting on issues like justice for all and corruption, both of which are deeply political. But a stage came when we felt that the process was reaching a dead end. What we were doing was not enough to change the trajectory of national discourse. Yes, we had done good work in ensuring disclosures by candidates before and after they were elected, limiting the cabinet size, strengthening the anti-defection law etc but it was not changing politics in India. On the contrary, politics from 1996 to 2006 actually declined. Money power reflected in spending in elections during those 10 years actually went up 10 times! We could see that the political system was not willing to do things beyond a point.

It was an agonising decision to get into active politics and it took us nine months to decide.

What are the challenges that a new political party is faced with?

When you are a non-partisan player, everyone is



Dr Jayaprakash Narayan



Arvind Kejriwal

with you. The moment you seek votes, you are suspect because there is fierce competition in this arena. The challenge is to organise because building a mood with slogans is not difficult but a sustained effort is.

Do you see differences between Loksatta and India Against Corruption's plunge into politics?

There are two main differences. India Against Corruption got phenomenal media coverage. I think unprecedented in independent India. Two, they are still focused on a single issue without articulating where they stand on various other issues like their vision of India say in 2025 or on

'Being a rabble-rouser is important as a gentlemanly attitude does not always work. But, if you do not rein in rabble-rousing, it can become a problem because democracy is also about discourse.'

economic activity or resource utilisation. Loksatta, in contrast, had a lot of writing which defined its views on governance and lots of discussion papers. There was a clear and coherent agenda.

Also, as compared to Loksatta, Kejriwal's style is very in your face.

Yes, it is a very strident and shrill attitude. That is also their strength. Being a rabble-rouser is also important as a gentlemanly attitude does not work all the time. But, at the same time, if you do not rein in rabble-rousing, it can become a prob-

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lem because democracy is also about discourse. Everything cannot become a streetfight.

What are the difficulties you see Arvind Kejriwal's outfit having to surmount?

I see three difficulties. You cannot be all things to all people. Two, where is the leadership in this country because the professional class, the upper middle class that should provide leadership has abdicated politics. This is the problem of India, not just of Kejriwal's. Three, there is the problem that the electoral system poses. A third or fourth party can never emerge as a force because political parties have become like private clubs.

How do you keep a new political party free of scandals and black money?

If you are ethical, this won't be a problem. Today a padyatra costs ₹20 to ₹30 lakhs a day and this is an underestimated cost. To arrange for a public meeting with 100,000 people costs ₹10 crores. We, at Loksatta, arrange for meetings with 3,000 or 5,000 people at zero cost but then it does not capture eyeballs. These are some of the problems that will be faced by Kejriwal's political party.

Then there is the question of winning elections. Unless you win several seats, the new party will be seen as having been rejected by voters.

Yes I would like to win many seats. The fact that you are practising ethical politics, where every penny is accounted for, you don't disrupt public life, is all fine but is it enough? No, it is only second best. But to say what if Kejriwal does not win, would be a hasty way of looking at it. In states like UP, MP, Bihar, the Congress has not won elections for many years now. So, should we say they have been rejected? It is the same case with the BJP in many states. If that is the case, it is a bigger rejection given the fact that these parties buy votes. How can you blame new parties for not winning in a hostile environment? Honesty is the minimum qualification for such parties, not the maximum requirement.

Would Loksatta be open to joining hands with Kejriwal's party in the elections?

We are willing to go with Kejriwal but not under all circumstances. Also, one or two parties aren't enough. In a country like India, you need several such initiatives that involve the entrepreneurial middle class.

By supporting FDI in retail, your party has stood out. Most opposition parties have not supported it. Please explain.

We are not saying FDI is a panacea for everything. Every policy has its pluses and minuses. In the 1980s, computerisation of banks was opposed by every political party. Today, will anyone including bank employees oppose it? Let us not agitate out of fear. We can take on the world if we do it right. We at Loksatta believe Indian retail chains are inadequate. There isn't enough infrastructure or deep pockets. The country pays a price for political parties speaking in one language when they are in power and another when they are out of power. Half-baked socialism is dictating public discourse. We believe good politics is good economics and vice versa. ■



Public hearing at Banda

Banda's BPL muddle

Bharat Dogra
Banda (UP)

A public hearing in Naraini block of Banda district organized by Vidya Dhaam Samiti (VDS), a voluntary organization working in the region, exposed how impoverished villagers were being left out of government schemes. They did not even have Below Poverty Line (BPL) ration cards.

Hiriya, a traditional midwife of the village, said she struggled to get even one proper meal a day. Her sick husband, Ramkhelavan, cannot afford to buy essential medicines. Earlier Hiriya used to be paid six seers of grain by each family. But ever since Asha community health workers were appointed, most childbirth cases are referred to hospitals. So she no longer gets any grain from villagers. Hiriya and Ramkhelavan's three sons have migrated in search of work. Hiriya has not been able to get a BPL card or pension despite making several efforts.

Rajendra of Naugava panchayat lost his father at an early age. He and his mother are ill. Smaller children in his family are facing difficulties in accessing regular food or education. He has not been able to get a BPL card.

Sripal, a farmer of Mukera village, lost his hand in a thresher accident eight years ago. But he has still not been able to access pension meant for disabled persons.

Member of Parliament from Banda, R.K. Singh Patel, listened to these testimonials. He welcomed the efforts of VDS to organise the public hearing and assured villagers that he would take up these problems with the administration. He said that such injustice happens because of the failure to identify BPL families properly. He urged social activists to help identify such families.

Raja Bhaiya, coordinator of VDS, said that a survey conducted by his organisation had revealed that while well-to-do families had been able to get BPL cards in several villages, the genuinely poor

had been left out.

Take Pappu Yadav. His father died when he was a child. His impoverished mother sent him to work for big landowners for just 1.25 kg of grain per day. When his mother died, young Pappu had to toil as a migrant worker in distant areas. He returned to his home in Gurkala village after he fell victim to tuberculosis. His family has borrowed ₹26,000 at the interest rate of 5 percent per month for his treatment. Now his wife and child are also ill.

Then there is Munni's case. Her husband, Pardeshi, is a farm worker who has become completely indebted to his employers. Apparently he owes them ₹40,000 and so he has to be at their beck and call. He has no time to take Munni for medical treatment although she suffers from serious stomach ailments. Munni cannot find any work due to her illness nor can she arrange a meal. No wonder her daughter had to stop going to school.

Another aspect highlighted at the public hearing was the denial of actual land rights to Dalit landless families. They have been given land 'pattas' only on paper. Dalit farmers of Siyarpakha village said that they had been approaching authorities for almost three decades to take remedial action but powerful persons who have encroached on their land don't allow them to cultivate their fields. Shyamaldas who gathered the courage to try to cultivate the field allotted to him was beaten with lathis and warned not to try this again or else both his feet would be broken.

Farmers of Naugawan panchayat said that NREGA work in their village was marred by corruption and inefficiency to such an extent that an extended canal did not have a single drop of water. Farmers suffered loss of land without getting any benefit. They demanded that the canal be corrected so that they start getting water, or else their land should be returned with compensation for the damage caused by digging work. ■

Ups and downs of the RTI Act

Bharat Dogra
New Delhi

TO mark the completion of seven years of the Right to Information (RTI) Act in India, a public hearing on the 'Implementation of RTI with Special Emphasis on Information Commissions,' was organised at the Gandhi Peace Foundation in Delhi by the National Campaign for People's Right to Information (NCPRI) in collaboration with the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan, (MKSS), Satark Nagrik Sangathan, Transparency International, RTI Manch, the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative and JOSH.

The proceedings were conducted by Nikhil Dey of the MKSS and Anjali Bharadwaj, head of the Satark Nagrik Sangathan. The panelists included two former Chief Information Commissioners: Wajahat Habibullah and Shailesh Gandhi. Aruna Roy of the MKSS was also present.

The focus was on identifying problems and finding remedies. Anjali Bharadwaj stated at the outset that the problems in implementing the RTI Act should not obscure the larger picture – the great success of RTI or the outstanding work of some Information Commissioners. She recalled her own experiences in Delhi, the use of the RTI by weaker sections and Wajahat Habibullah's helpful role in making old age entitlements and widow pensions available to the poor.

The success of the RTI was reaffirmed by Subhash Aggarwal who has filed nearly 6,000 RTI applications and 600 appeals before the Information Commissioner. Of these, he received the information he required from as many as 540 applications. He said he has posted a 90 per cent success rate. But in cases where he had to appeal against the denial of information, the Central Information Commission (CIC) appeared more responsive than the Information Commissions (ICs) in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. "There is need to improve the State Information Commissions (SIC)," he said.

Other speakers also highlighted the need for improving the functioning of the SICs. Habibullah too admitted that the issue of excessive pending appeals has been worsening even in the CIC. He said that while the appeals disposed per day at the Commission have actually increased, the rate of fresh appeals received per day is far greater.

He said one main reason for the increase in appeals is that much routine data, which various public authorities have to provide suo moto (on their own), is not given out. Most RTI applications and subsequent appeals relate to that routine data. Hence the ideal solution would be to improve the implementation of the suo moto provision. This would decrease the number of RTI applications as well as appeals. Routine information from government departments should be

available not just on websites but also in publications and on notice boards.

This solution was endorsed by several activists at the hearing. Mohammad Afsal from Maharashtra said that needless restrictions, such as a limit of 150 words and one question per form, have increased the number of RTI applications. Activists then gave vent to a litany of complaints. Aslam from Gujarat said 18,000 RTI appeals and complaints are pending in his state. District-level hearings were started but did not go far. Manipur's Joy Kumar said that those seeking information are questioned by the authorities on why they want this data, despite the fact that reasons are not required under RTI legislation. Dr. Sheikh from J&K said too many second appeals have accumulated. The reasons for seeking information are being questioned but penalties are being imposed on erring officers.

Advocate Abraham from Kerala said that the IC there is poorly staffed with nepotism posing another problem. Kamal Tak from RTI Manch in Rajasthan said that as many as 9,500 appeals are pending in the SIC there. It takes eight months to a year to get a date for a hearing and up to two years for a decision, he said. For nearly five months the IC was non-functional leading to a pile up of appeals.

The hearing was followed the next day with an RTI Mela at the Sanskriti School. ■

Land march ends with policy promise

Bharat Dogra
New Delhi

OCTOBER 2012 will be remembered by the participants of Jan Satyagraha as a month when their peaceful movement achieved a significant victory. A reluctant Union government agreed to begin placing land reforms on the national agenda.

Jan Satyagraha is a Gandhian movement that successfully mobilized 60,000 extremely poor and landless people from all over India on the issue of land reforms. Led by PV Rajgopal, coordinator of the Ekta Parishad, the people began a march by foot from Gwalior on 2 October and were slated to reach Delhi on 26 October. But the Union Rural Development Minister Jairam Ramesh met the Jan Satyagraha marchers in Agra on 11 October and signed an agreement with them.

Following this a Task Force on Land Reforms was constituted which held its first meeting on 17 October. According to Rajgopal two vital decisions were taken.



One, that the Task Force will prepare the first draft of a land reform policy for the country. Two, that land will be recognised as part of the right to shelter initially for rural areas. This means that every rural citizen would be entitled to a home-stand and land for cultivation.

The creation of a task force to work out a policy for land reforms is a victory for India's democracy

and reaffirms that injustice and conflicts can be resolved through dialogue. Another remarkable aspect was Ekta Parishad's ability to mobilise nearly 2,000 people's organisations from all over India for the Jan Satyagraha.

The Planning Commission has recognised the critical role of land reforms in mitigating poverty. In its Tenth Plan document the commission stated, "In an economy where over 60 percent of the population is dependent on agriculture, the structure of land ownership is central to the well-being of the people."

This official document also admitted the government's growing reluctance (even opposition) to take up this important task, "Land reforms seem to have been relegated to the background in the mid-1990s. More recently, initiatives of state governments have related to liberalising of land laws in order to promote large-scale corporate farming."

Since October 2011, Ekta Parishad has been organising a series of marches in 338 districts because landlessness has grown. ■

PUBLIC INQUIRY: *Himanshu Thakkar gets* Dams aplenty in Maharashtra but

WHAT is unfolding over the last few months on the issue of corruption in irrigation projects in Maharashtra is unprecedented in many senses. However, one thing clearly stands out – never before in the history of independent India have the links between politicians, contractors, engineers and bureaucrats been exposed more clearly.

As the facts unfold in small parcels every single day, it is clear that they are all in this together. Absolutely, shamelessly. We have yet to see a sign of remorse or a feeling of wrongdoing on the part of any of the involved parties. Unfortunately, we have to depend on those very groups to know the truth. Hence the question: how much will we really get to know?

But first let us first draw the contours of this issue. Maharashtra is the state with the largest number of big dams in India: the state has 1,845 large dams, which is about 36 per cent of India's total dams. Incidentally, the second-ranked state in terms of the number of large dams, namely Madhya Pradesh, does not have even half the number of large dams that Maharashtra has, which just goes to show the dominance of the big dam agenda in Maharashtra.

Ninety-six per cent of Maharashtra's dams are exclusively for irrigation. An additional 4.5 per cent of dams have irrigation as one of the objectives, along with other objectives like water supply, hydropower or flood control. Over 40 per cent of India's dams under construction are also in Maharashtra. The state has spent about ₹75,000 crores over the last decade and will need to spend another ₹76,000 crores to complete the projects under construction. So, the size of the sum involved is more than ₹150,000 crores if all the projects as envisaged now are completed.

According to government figures, the net area irrigated in Maharashtra in 1999-2000 was 32.96 lakh ha, which in the latest reported year of 2009-2010 is 32.54 lakh ha. So in this whole decade, there has been no increase in net irrigated area in the state when the state has spent over ₹75,000 crores in this period. Therefore, after spending all this money the state has not increased the area under irrigation at all.

In just five out of these 10 years (i.e. 2005-2006 to 2010-2011), the state economic survey for 2011-2012 says, subsidies have been doled out to provide drip irrigation in 1.95 lakh ha and for sprinkler irrigation in 4.17 lakh ha, thus covering a total area of 6.12 lakh ha in these five years at an expense of ₹1134.82 crores. This expenditure was also supposed to help save water use in irrigation and thus provide additional water for irrigating more areas, but even that has not happened.

The performance of the irrigation sector in Maharashtra can be looked at in another way. The Economic Survey of the state for the year 2011-2012 said, "The ratio of gross irrigated area to



The quality of construction of the Gosikhurd dam project in the Vidarbha region has been found to be very poor

The Chief Minister's White Paper is yet to come out and a departmental inquiry holds out little hope.

gross cropped area for 2008-2009 in the state was 17.7 per cent, which was much below the national level ratio of 45.3 per cent."

So the state having the largest number of dams in India, almost all of which are supposed to be for irrigation, performs 60 per cent below national average in terms of proportion of area irrigated.

These figures indicate that something is seriously wrong in Maharashtra's irrigation sector. In fact, first indications of corruption came from official quarters. For instance, in the late 1990s, a police official based in Pune had requested permission to probe the possibilities of corruption in contracts given out by the Maharashtra Krishna Valley Development Corporation. At that time, it was the BJP- Shiv Sena government that was ruling in Maharashtra. Permission was denied.

Much latter, reports from the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG), starting from its report in 2007 (for the Gosikhurd project) to the latest one for the year 2010-2011 for the Accelerated Irrigation Benefits Programme (AIBP) and the

Vidarbha Irrigation Development Corporation (VIDC) for the period 2006-2007 to 2010-2011 showed signs of serious wrongdoings. However, the CAG report does not seem to have captured the most serious aspects of the corruption and the politician-contractor-officials nexus. The HT Mendhegiri Committee (June 2010) reviewed the 22.93 km left bank main canal of Gosikhurd project in Vidarbha and reported that the entire work was of highly inferior quality and recommended demolition. The Vadnere Committee Report in 2010 highlighted corruption and the contractor nexus in VIDC, and recommended a departmental enquiry. No enquiry has been constituted in the past two years since the report came out.

The credit for exposing the link of politicians with contractors, engineers and bureaucrats largely goes to civil society groups. The origin of this exposure can be seen in the campaign against dams like Kalu, Kondhane (Anjali Damania of India Against Corruption exposed the corruption involved in Kondhane dam, as also some others), Susari, Shai, Balganga Gargai, and others in the Konkan Irrigation Development Corporation area, even though the amount of expenditure and corruption may be much larger in the VIDC area. In fact it was the meeting of the representatives of these groups past midnight on 4 May this year which led to Chief Minister Prithviraj Chauhan announcing the next day that he would bring out a White Paper on the irrigation sector in Maharashtra.

The Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) which is a

to the bottom of an old scam

where is the irrigation?

these issues through a series of letters, an attempt was made to brand him insane!

The links of the Bharatiya Janata Party leaders in this scam have been exposed only recently, but they seem to have been closely involved. A large number of contractors that have benefitted from irrigation contracts in the state belong to the party. This possibly explains why the opposition was quiet or ineffective in exposing this scam for so many years. Even the Congress chief ministers before Chavan seemed happy to let the sector go along from one scam-tainted project to another.

It should be added here that irrigation from major and medium irrigation projects in India has not increased for two decades at an all India level. As the South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People (SANDRP) has shown since several years now, the area irrigated by major and medium projects reached a figure of 17.79 million ha in 1991-1992 and has never reached that figure since then. So what is going in Maharashtra corroborates what SANDRP has been saying. Other major dam building states like Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Karnataka could also be the subject of serious investigation.

In the case of Maharashtra, the blame for the scam not being exposed for so long indicates the failure on the part of a number of agencies that are involved in scrutinising, sanctioning and monitoring these projects. These include the Vigilance departments, the auditors, the Union Ministry of Water Resources, the Union Minister of Environment, the Planning Commission and the Central Water Commission. All these agencies have failed in their work and should be part of any scrutiny. Only a credible independent full scale scrutiny will give us some chance of knowing the maximum truth.

Unfortunately, as yet no such independent scrutiny is in place. Maharashtra's Chief Minister has instituted a departmental enquiry against a large number of serving engineers of VIDC. But such enquiries have a poor track record. Also, the final say in the enquiry will be with the same department. Under the circumstances, such an enquiry has almost no credibility. ■

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partner in the ruling coalition in Maharashtra and holds the irrigation portfolio since 1999, was clearly not happy with this announcement. Most recently, on 26 September, Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar of the NCP resigned since he held the water resources portfolio from 1999 to 2009. But the drama that unfolded in months before the resignation revealed the political links in this irrigation scam. The NCP bosses, primarily Union Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar, spoke up against whoever raised problems in

Maharashtra's irrigation sector, be it the Governor, the Chief Minister, the opposition, the CAG, the NGOs or the media.

These prompt reactions from the NCP bosses were a clear sign of their discomfort on the issue. The NCP actually managed to stall the publication of the White Paper which was supposed to come within 15 days of the Chief Minister's announcement. Over four months later, the White Paper is still to be made public. When Vijay Pandhare, a serving chief engineer of Maharashtra, raised

SAMITA'S WORLD

by SAMITA RATHOR



URBAN BUNGLE

Children get shut out of Delhi's parks

Colin Fernandes
New Delhi

DELHI has plenty of parks big and small. Every year, the city boasts of its expanding green cover. Yet children, who comprise 45 per cent of Delhi's population, have nowhere to play.

The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), when it was a single entity, handed over parks for maintenance to residents' welfare associations (RWAs), NGOs, companies, shopkeepers and traders, thereby putting public spaces in private hands.

How the park will be maintained, who will enter and who won't, are decided by the entities that have taken over parks. Although the MCD has signed a standard Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with them, many private parties don't adhere to the terms and conditions prescribed and there is no accountability.

Although RWAs in south Delhi – Vasant Kunj, Jor Bagh and Defence Colony to name a few – have improved parks and made them very child-friendly, they've added gates and security guards to ensure that only children living within the block are allowed to play.

Some RWAs convert parks into ornamental gardens with pretty plants and well-mowed lawns. "These are then monopolised by senior citizens nervous that children running around may damage their showpiece park," says 12-year-old Pragya Prakash from Sheikh Sarai, a middle-class neighbourhood in south Delhi.

The park she and her friends play in is dirty and unkempt. Children have to be careful while running around since water pipes jut out of the dry, dusty ground. Iron benches have been piled in the



Garbage strewn about and rusty benches piled up in the Sheikh Sarai park meant for children

midst of the park. Mosquitoes buzz around. Garbage is strewn all over.

A gate to Pragya's park in Sheikh Sarai's Phase I was closed and then cemented by the RWA, forcing children to go around to get in. When she and a group of her friends started a signature campaign to regain access, an RWA member called up their parents and ordered them to stop the campaign. The little girl and her friends were threatened with an FIR!

But Pragya's problem may not be quite as bad as what other children seem to face. In June, when Butterflies, an NGO which works with street children, held a public hearing on parks at the Indian Social Institute in Delhi, children related stories of being abused and chased away from play areas.

Alarming, children from Dwarka Sector 16 A and Palam Gaon reported how parks are flooded with live wires left in slush. The open spaces and parks that are not flooded and electrified are dens of vice that are littered with broken bottles. "Goats and cows are released into open spaces where we would like to play," says Sarfaraz, 12. "And because of this, smaller children have been injured by the animals. Now they are too scared to go near them."

Pravin Kumar, 17, from Madanpur Khadir in South Delhi says though there are three parks in his area, the largest is surrounded by jhuggis, the second was first covered in rubble and now has a temple constructed on it and the third is practically an open toilet. "The people from the jhuggis divert their sewage into the park and then dump their rubbish there," he says, "so there is literally no place to play cricket."

Pinky, 16, from Bawana's JJ colony, has a disturb-

ing picture of the only available open space in her area. It is littered with broken glass from bottles thrown by drunks, drug addicts and gamblers and there is human and animal excreta all over. There is a 'clean' stretch, but it has stayed clean because local boys and young men play cricket there and they won't allow the smaller children to use it.

Ironically, as per a report in *Mail Today*, Surinder Kumar, MLA from Bawana gave ₹2 crore to the MCD toward constituency development in 2010.

Civil Society, through activist SA Azad, filed a series of Right to Information (RTI) applications with MCD departments concerned with park maintenance and this is what we found.

Nearly 14,500 parks in 12 zones came under the jurisdiction of the MCD. Out of these 5,500 are ornamental parks, 9,400 are ordinary parks and just 82 are children's parks. According to the MCD, 'population pressure' makes management of parks a challenging task. Parks require continuous maintenance. "There is hardly any open space left in Delhi's colonies for public use except parks so most residents frequent parks," according to MCD documents.

These parks are mostly in middle-class or rich localities. Unauthorised colonies, slums and urban village areas have no facilities for children to play.

Most MCD parks are small colony parks but the cost of maintaining a small park is the same irrelevant of its size, state MCD documents. The MCD was keen parks be handed over to RWAs and NGOs 'since water is also an issue these days.' The idea, says the MCD document, is to create a 'green environment.'

PICTURES BY LAKSHMAN ANAND



Park taken over by Galaxy Toyota is closed to poorer govt school children



Pragya Prakash

In a city where every inch of land is worth a fortune, the MCD has, over the years, handed over parks and strips of green to just about anybody.

In 2005 the MCD floated a Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) scheme that, by its own admission, failed. It involved paying ₹60,000 per acre per year to the private party for the first year and ₹50,000 per acre for the subsequent years for park maintenance depending on the property tax categorisation of Delhi by the MCD.

By 2008 the MCD had, over the space of a single year, signed MoUs and transferred maintenance of 173 parks to RWAs and corporate houses. And according to some officials, another 212 redeveloped parks were ready to be handed out, if any RWA or corporate house showed interest.

If more money was required it was expected that the RWAs/NGOs would raise it on their own. The scheme was floated in central and south Delhi but not a single park could be managed under it. According to the MCD, the reason was that no advance money was handed over by the MCD to the RWAs/NGOs for maintenance. The

RWAs/NGOs doubted they would get any money at all from the MCD since they were also expected to arrange for water and pay the electricity bill.

So a new scheme was mooted in 2009 to hand over parks less than 0.4 acres to RWAs/NGOs (resolution no 957). Larger parks were also allowed under this new scheme. Basically the MCD and the commissioner would decide which parks would be handed over. According to the terms drawn up, it was stated that 'RWAs/NGOs should take over all the parks in a block unless the MCD decides otherwise.'

This scope was subsequently expanded to include private registered companies, public sector undertakings, any registered society/trust or established industrial houses (resolution number 93). A thick wad of papers was handed over to *Civil Society* detailing the kind of MOUs/PPPs that have been signed by the MCD.

"Sponsorship, adoption would be for the purpose of and include development, beautification, landscaping protection, security fencing of the adopted parks, central verges, roundabouts, roadside plantation and green strips including all green areas as may be specified in the agreements whether an MoU or PPP," states the document.

Sponsorship could also be sought for landscape development, boundary wall, water channel, fountain, street furniture, solar light dustbins and tree guards apart from maintenance of small parks.

The terms and conditions under which parks are handed out are liberal.

The MCD pays for water, electricity and repair of the park's tubewell. The horticulture department is expected to provide plants and manure.

Swings and slides can be arranged by the RWA/NGO/private entity.

The RWA/NGOs/private entity are expected to arrange for gardeners, do day-to-day management and provide general security. They are supposed to be responsible for buying gardening tools and submitting a work plan to the MCD which would be under an annual review.

The MCD is also paying RWAs/NGOs for park upkeep. It pays ₹2,500 per month for 0.4/5 acre per month to the RWA/NGO. As per the RTI document accessed by us, RWAs/NGOs are being paid money varying from ₹4,000 per month to ₹40,000 per month for park maintenance, depending on the size and number of parks being maintained.

The private company is permitted to put up a small plaque advertising its sponsorship or adoption. But the MCD agreement clearly states that the sponsoring agency is not permitted to charge money for entry, it cannot appoint a guard to keep children out, it cannot decide who will enter the park and who will not be allowed and it can only close the park for maintenance for a short while.

The reality is that the private entity does pretty much whatever it likes. There appears to be no supervision though a committee consisting of the deputy commissioner, area councillor, representative of the sponsor and the horticulture department is expected to supervise and monitor the park.

The MCD's horticulture department has gardeners, watchmen and 'chaudhuries' on its rolls. It also employs section officers, assistant directors, deputy directors, additional directors and subordinate officers. The duty of horticulture inspectors is to specifically ensure parks are well maintained and address complaints.

It is unclear whether all these jobs are now redundant since the management of the parks has been handed over.

In a city where every inch of land is worth a fortune, the MCD has, over the years, handed over parks and strips of green to just about anybody – hospitals, religious trusts, private companies, telecom companies, banks, restaurants, shop owners and exporters among several other entities.

So, Crowne Plaza maintains a park behind its hotel, Om Caterers has been given a park in Jangpura, Maruti Service Motors manages one in Okhla, Hot Grill hospitality in Rajender Place and so on.

Galaxy Toyota has been handed over a children's park in South Extension Part 2, which is kept firmly under lock and key, opening only as and when the wife of the company owner decides. Locally it is known as the 'Memsahib's park'. Until a few months ago, a security guard was posted outside to ensure that poorer children from government schools were not allowed inside.

Butterflies and other activist groups have repeatedly expressed concern over the decline in public spaces where everyone has right of access. By handing over parks to RWAs and companies, the MCD ducked its responsibility. There is no supervision of the maintenance agreements and the entities in control do pretty much as they like. But with the MCD having been replaced by three municipal bodies a rethink is needed so that public space can be reclaimed for public use. ■

SA Azad of PRASAR filed the RTI applications on the basis of which this story has been written.

Dalit anger mounts in Gujarat

3 die in police firing, govt looks on

Tanushree Gangopadhyaya
Thangadh (Gujarat)

ON 2 October, Gandhi Jayanti Day, over 70,000 Dalits converged on Thangadh, a small town 180 km west of Ahmedabad. The mood was tense. The Dalits were furious at the police and the Gujarat government. The police had opened fire and killed three Dalit young men and arrested six on 22 and 23 September. Numerous rallies and dharnas followed in Saurashtra.

"How is it that four police officers charged with the murder of these youths have not been arrested while our innocent boys are still in jail," thundered Valjibhai Patel of the Dalit Panther movement at the Thangadh meeting. The fury of the Dalits was so palpable that the police stayed away. A railway line cuts off the Dalit habitation from the rest of Thangadh, known as Gujarat's ceramic town.

The Dalits demanded strict implementation of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, action against the police, arrest of Sub-Inspector KP Jadeja on charges of murdering three Dalits and release of the six youths who were arrested. They also demanded compensation of ₹10 lakhs to each family of the deceased plus five acres or a government job.

Thangadh has a population of around 75,000 dominated by the small but powerful Kshatriya community called Darbars. Then, there are the Bharwads or the shepherd community and the Dalits who comprise around 25,000 of the total population.

The town has more than 300 small units that manufacture sanitaryware, bricks, porcelain, tiles etc that are exported to West Asia, Africa, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The Dalits work mostly in the ceramic industry on daily wages.

In early September, trouble began simmering between the Dalits and Bharwads over allotment of stalls for an annual traditional fair held in Tarnetar, eight km from Thangadh. To promote tourism, the Gujarat government has taken over the holding of the fair. The contract for auctioning the stalls goes to the Darbars but this year the Bharwads got the contract.

The fair ended on 21 September. On 22 September a fight erupted between Dalit youth and some of the Bharwads. The Dalits approached the police station to lodge an FIR. But Sub-

Inspector Jadeja, a Durbar, refused to register their complaint. Instead, around midnight when Dalits were returning home from the fair, he allegedly fired and injured Pankaj Sumra, a student of Class 10. His father, Amarsinh Sumra, said that his son was shot at point-blank range. The bullet hit his chest and his bloodstains are still fresh on a wall. Pankaj died in hospital.

Angry at Pankaj's killing, a group of Dalits went to the police station and had a showdown with Jadeja. But he refused to lodge an FIR. So the next



Dalit women lead a protest in Thangadh

day, a Sunday morning, the Dalits of Thangadh took to the streets. Jadeja fired on the Dalits at noon. Three were grievously injured and taken to a hospital in Rajkot. Mehul Rathod just 17 and Prakash Parmar, 26, died on 23 September. Chhanabha Vaniya, 20, is still languishing in Rajkot hospital with bullets lodged in his abdomen. Many Dalits were injured.

Mehul's father, Valjibhai Rathod, is a ceramic worker. "My son was not a terrorist that he should have been shot dead at point-blank range. The police did not follow any rules. They did not warn the crowd or burst teargas shells. I demand justice."

Instead, six Dalits were rounded up and booked under Section 307 (attempt to murder), Section 120 (criminal conspiracy), and several sections of the IPC. The community was further enraged when the youth were sent to judicial custody.

Dalit militancy has now forced the Surendranagar district police to take action. Raghavendra Vatsa, Superintendent of Police, said he "had suspended Jadeja and three others. The

CID is investigating the incident." Sub-inspector BK Solanki, Jadeja and two police constables were later booked on charges of murder and rioting.

The Dalits pointed out that FIRs against the killing of the three Dalit youths were not lodged until 26 September and that too only when the Dalit Hak Rakhsak Manch went to Thangadh. Raju Parmar, member of the Scheduled Castes Commission, intervened and talked to the Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) and the Collector.

The Dalit Hit Rakshak Manch therefore called

an impromptu meeting in Thangadh. Around 1,500 Dalits from Surendranagar district attended. Much to the consternation of the BJP, Vasram Chavda, municipal president and a Dalit, was also present. So was Bina Chavda, municipal councillor, who led a 500-strong rally of women. Their provocative slogans on placards read: "I am a Dalit, shoot me." "In Modi's rule, Dalits are in jail."

The Dalits of Thangadh have a good reputation. Babubhai Kathi, a Durbar farmer, said, "the Dalit boys are good and never create problems."

The CID in its report presented to the magistrate's court in Chotila on 6 October proposed dropping charges against the Dalit boys who were arrested.

During investigation CID Police Inspector HK Rana found

no damage to public property nor any attempt on the lives of the policemen with weapons or inflammable materials. No weapons were found on the Dalits. "The nature of injury to the policemen was ordinary and hence there was no attempt to murder," said their report.

But the CID found several lapses and misdemeanors in Jadeja's statements and actions. He wrongly mentioned that he had fired five rounds from his colleague, BK Solanki's revolver. He had, in fact, fired from his own service revolver.

"He should be charged with the murder of the three Dalits," said Valjibhai Patel.

Jadeja had been issued transfer orders prior to the Tarnetar fair due to repeated complaints about his anti-Dalit attitude. He was not supposed to be on duty after the fair and hence did not have the authority to issue orders.

What has further angered the Dalits of Thangadh is the response of Chief Minister Narendra Modi. "The Chief Minister did not have a word of sympathy for the bereaved families of the three Dalit youths who died in police firing," fumes Raju Parmar. ■

HELPLINE FOR KIDS GETS BIGGER, SMARTER

Childline takes a tech leap to be in every district in the next five years

Michael Snyder
Mumbai

THE flyover on Tulsi Pipe Road runs along the western side of Dadar station, one of the busiest rail depots in Asia. Beneath it, within shouting distance of the station's 15 platforms and the teeming elevated pathways that connect them, a pair of rooms serves as the local field office for India's first and largest helpline: Childline.

"Our centres are centrally located, so in one centre you'll see every type of case," says Carl Pereira, Childline's Head of Special Projects. The office here, which sits at the juncture of the Central and Western railway lines, is not just central – it sits at the point where all of Mumbai converges and, on the worst days, practically implodes.

The space belongs to YUVA (Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action), an organization that first partnered Childline in 1996 when Jeroo Billimoria, a social worker and then, faculty member at the Tata Institute for Social Sciences (TISS), founded the helpline to provide 24-hour assistance to street children in need. More than a support center or talk-line, Childline would intervene directly on behalf of children and connect them to state resources otherwise difficult for them to access.

The model was simple: any call placed to 1098 from a landline phone (typically from a Public Communication Office, or PCO) came embedded with a geographically specific STD code. With that code, the

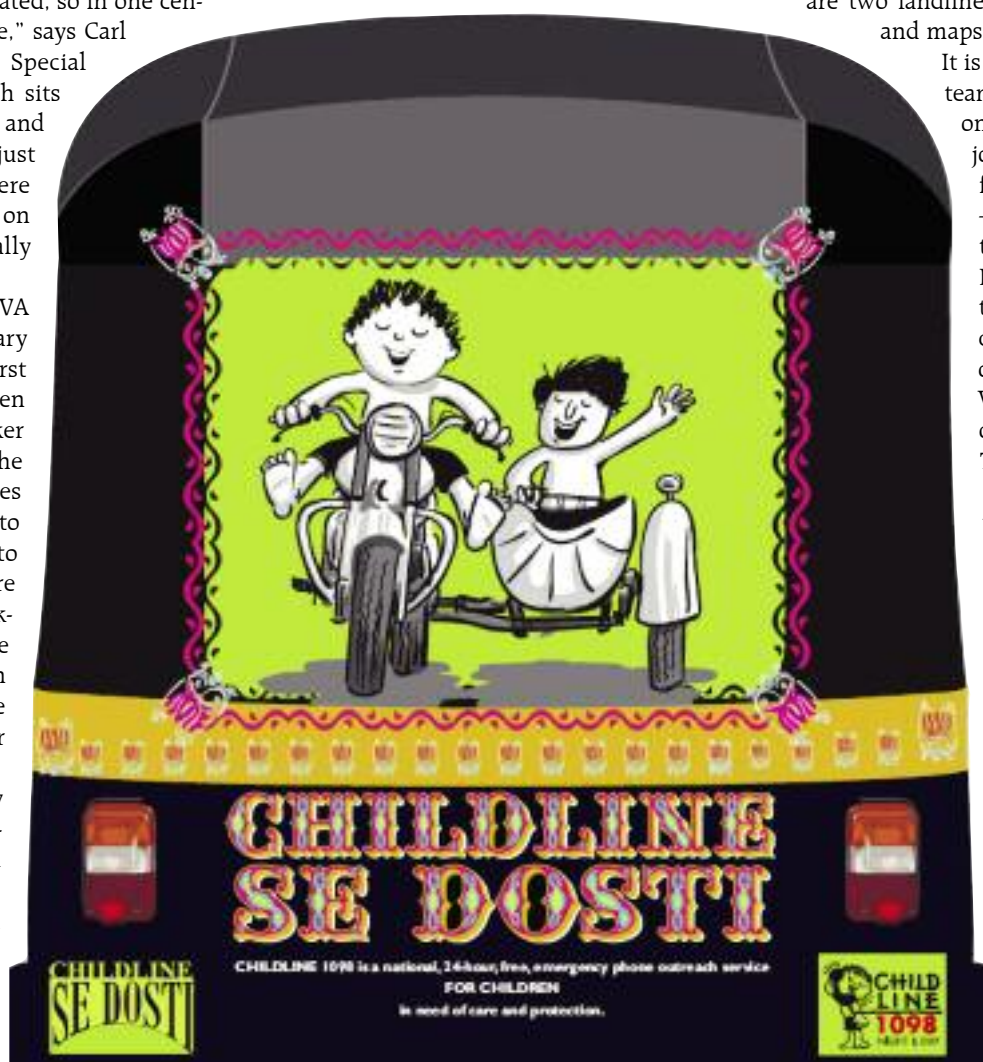
number could be directed automatically to the nearest call centre. In cases requiring direct intervention, volunteers and team members would reach the child within 60 minutes of receiving the call. In this 'distributed model', offices were spaced regularly across India's major metros.

The Dadar office, for example, covers a particularly dense wedge of the island city, ranging from Lower Parel and Cotton Green to Mankhund, Mulund and Mahim. In the smaller of the Dadar office's two rooms – little more than a converted closet near the metal lattice of the front door – there are two landlines, a bulging binder of case files and maps of central Mumbai.

It is a Friday afternoon and of the six team members on the current shift, only one – Deepak Kamble, who joined Childline as a volunteer four years back while in Class 10 – is in the office. The other five team members on the shift, Deepak says, are in the field now, two working on intervention cases, two following up on previous cases with the local Child Welfare Committees (CWCs) and one on a routine outreach circuit. The phones are quiet.

Under the distributed model, the volume of calls terminating at the Dadar branch would have made this impossible. But huge leaps in India's telecom industry over the last several years have necessitated equally rapid changes for Childline, particularly the shift away from the distributed model toward the Childline Contact Centre (CCC).

On a given day, the CCC, which for now covers only the northern and western regions, will field several thousand calls from locations across the northern and western



AKELLA SRINIVAS



A child at one of the field offices

regions. In the same day, the Dadar office will only rarely receive more than four. Technological changes have both streamlined Childline's processes and effectively forced a rapid expansion into previously untouched regions. "At every stage there has been a difficulty," says Shikha Grover, Head of Childline Mumbai. But every stage has also brought a new opportunity to expand Childline's reach.

With its new systems consolidated and a continued burst of expansion ahead, Childline stands at an inflection point in its history, a watershed moment between its humble beginnings and its ambitious plans to enter every district in India within the next five years. How Childline has reached this point, and how it will proceed from here, is intimately tied to the technological growth that has shaped India over the last two decades.

THE EARLY YEARS: When Billimoria and her mentor at TISS, Dr Armaity Desai, established the ground principles for Childline – the conditions under which TISS agreed to host the pilot programme – they agreed that the helpline ought never to create new institutions or systems. Instead, Childline operates as a network of related organizations. Kajol Menon, former Executive Director of the Childline Foundation, describes it as a "catalyzing system."

Rather than distancing itself from government institutions that were, Menon readily admits, "dysfunctional," Childline has worked to make those systems more effective for the vulnerable children they were designed to help. Because street children are migratory, they rarely have stable contact with the allied systems in place to support them. Childline establishes its field offices by partnering with local NGOs that have already demonstrated skill, commitment and financial viability in their communities.

Through these NGOs, Childline establishes a locally sensitive outreach and intervention team. By partnering with Childline, these organizations have a direct line to a population of children otherwise all but impossible to reach. Childline, Menon says, "this one unified, toll-free hotline – acts as the medium for reaching out." With local networks in place, Childline can run awareness and sensitivity programmes targeting community leaders, politicians and the police to help them cope with the needs of vulnerable children. According to Denis Rodrigues, who has worked with Childline for 11 years, the last three

of those in the CCC, Childline really functions as "a network of networks."

"Ultimately, child protection is a State mandate," Menon says. "Unless you have state mechanisms and state officers alongside you, you're not going to reach very far." Childline, however, has. Less than two decades after its founding, Childline operates in conjunction with more than 400 partner organizations in 214 cities and towns spread through 26 states and three union territories. Childline first branched out of Mumbai in 1998 with offices in Delhi, Nagpur and Hyderabad. By 2005, Childline had phones in 45 cities. By January 2011, that number had risen to 125. Today, just 18 months later, the number has nearly doubled. In the last fiscal year, Childline received upwards of two million calls.

Childline's founding coincided fortuitously with the opening of India's state-run telecom monopolies MTNL and BSNL and the PCO boom that followed. "There were street children on one hand and PCOs on the other. Both were crowding the city," Menon says. So long as calls terminated locally, MTNL and BSNL left 1098 unmetered.

The distributive model was established accordingly. Outreach followed suit. "We started by reaching out to children and telling them to go to the PCOs at the railway station, in the bazaar, in the market," says Grover. "The outreach and awareness was to the PCO owner. The outreach

model was based around that."

In 2003, the government passed the National Numbering Plan, which officially classified 1098 as a 'category two' number: calls remained unmetered and access restricted to local use. By then, says Nishit Kumar, Childline's Head of Communications and Strategic Initiatives, mobile operators had established themselves firmly within the Indian market. So while the number remained free, mobile providers had no obligation to carry it.

TECH CHALLENGE: Mobile telephony, which effectively ended easy call mapping, struck at the heart of Childline's entire structure. "It was a very quick change," Menon recalls. "Of course our calls were dropping. These were huge challenges and nobody really understood the technological impact that they were having on us." State operators insisted that all calls had to terminate on

state lines, as they always had, but mobile operators either had no interest in bearing the necessary interconnect costs or were unsure how to do so. Calls placed from mobile phones just did not go through.

"When we realized that connectivity was becoming an issue, teams were instructed to go out there and be in the community more often, and encourage people to use the landline numbers more," Grover says. "Outreach increased at the ground level, but of course the calls suffered."

As the outreach model changed, Childline itself began reaching out to mobile operators. "We went to a telecom conference and made a pitch to the entire telecom sector in India, saying 'you guys are growing, why don't you connect with a child helpline?'" Kumar recalls. Immediately after, Tata and Vodafone both agreed to carry Childline. That left at least four major operators without connectivity. In order to continue offering reliable service, Childline would have to become a category one number – meaning mandatory, unrestricted connectivity.

That process alone took seven years. In the first place, a government concession of category one status was difficult to maneuver. Police lines 101 and 102, Kumar says, are still local numbers; the state government even rejected a petition from the Maharashtra police to establish a single statewide number.

Then came the trouble with cost. Childline would, for the first time, be on the meter. Before, Menon says, "no one knew what the number of calls was, who was calling – it went into a huge black hole and we enjoyed the benefits."

Childline is in the midst of an aggressive outreach and growth campaign expanding by one branch office each week.

AKELLA SRINIVAS



Carl Pereira, head of Special Projects in Mumbai

When Childline received category one status in May 2010, the organization launched a new campaign of negotiations to cover interconnect fees without losing toll-free status. By 2011, the Ministry of Women and Child Development created a grant to cover the subsidized fees.

AKELLA SRINIVAS



Shikha Grover, head of Childline in Mumbai

The surge in calls suggests that well-connected mobile telephony does not depress calls, but rather seems to broaden the demographic of callers into the middle class. Still, fully 41 per cent of calls placed to 1098 in 2010-2011 originated at railway platforms, on the streets.



Now, each call transferred from a mobile phone to a state-run landline incurred a small interconnect fee of 30 paise. All told, that incidental cost would add up over the course of a year to a sum well beyond the means of Childline's modest funds, but mobile and landline operators were unwilling to bear the cost themselves.

When Childline received category one status in May 2010, the organization launched a new campaign of negotiations to cover interconnect fees without losing toll-free status. By 2011, the Ministry of Women and Child Development created a grant to cover the subsidized fees, money that finally became available to Childline in March, the beginning of this fiscal year. Now with ministry support, Pereira says, Childline "basically became a project of the ministry." With that backing, Childline has begun an aggressive outreach and growth campaign expanding, Menon says, by one branch office each week.

The long delays have been frustrating, but they have also given Childline the necessary time to expand its reach while testing and streamlining its most important technological innovation: the Call Centre.

NEW ARCHITECTURE: The Childline Call Centre takes up just 18 seats, buried deep within the calm warren of warmly lit hallways that are in contrast to the bright, light-filled lobby of the Tata Consultancy Services' (TCS) Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) centre in Vikhroli, an industrial suburb in northeast Mumbai.

Despite the 3,000 employees who work here each day, the centre is calm, almost sedated, in the way of well-run corporate offices. Inside the tiny CCC office, Call Centre Operators (CCOs) with postgraduate degrees in social work, sit around a pair of round desks, each with a headset and a computer. There is a separate seat reserved for the Quality Assurance Coordinator, Ami Upadhyay, who files comprehensive reports on each CCO based on the calls recorded and stored in the TCS system. It is a far cry from the dingy room below the Dadar flyover.

Rodrigues, who has supervised the centre for three years, describes the CCC as a kind of filter. "With the CCC, all the calls come in here. So our team there can go into the field and search for children who are in need of care," Rodrigues says.

Since the expansion and publicity push that began in early 2012, the CCC's daily call record has more than doubled from about 4,000 calls per day to as many as 8,500, five to seven per cent of which require direct intervention in

LAKSHMAN ANAND



LAKSHMAN ANAND



can result in future interventions.

"Street children need some people with whom they can talk. It could be a child calls and says 'I've seen a movie' or 'I had good food today,' so they're sharing things as simple as that, or as complicated as 'I want to commit suicide,'" Rodrigues says. With the records created and stored by the CCOs, Childline can better follow-up on cases in progress and analyze call data to determine who is using the service and how.

Those figures are themselves striking. Despite having been built on the PCO boom, Childline fielded just six per cent of its cases in 2011 via PCO. Another 26 per cent came through other landlines. Fully 45 per cent of all cases came from mobile calls – up nine per cent from 2010 – while the remaining 23 per cent came through outreach, referral, or direct interaction with ground staff. How these numbers will change with the CCC calling surge for now remains unclear.

The surge in calls itself suggests that well-connected mobile telephony does not depress calls, but rather seems to broaden the demographic of callers into the middle class. Still, fully 41 per cent of calls placed to 1098 in 2010-2011 originated at railway platforms, on the streets, in slums, chawls and police stations, typical call locations for marginalized children.

RURAL EXPANSION: Expansion of the call centre model is the next challenge, with plans to redirect calls in the north to a new centre in

the field. The CCC has facilitated a boom in calls registered while also allowing greater freedom for field representatives. It has also generated a new problem: diminished initial contact from within local communities.

Drawn from the communities they serve, team members at distributed field offices typically shared both a mother tongue and local geographic knowledge with their callers. Not so in the CCC. To confront this problem, TCS developed a unique infrastructure that would support outgoing and multi-party calls. Using this technology, CCOs can rope in team members from a caller's local office when the language barrier proves insurmountable, or when geographic information is unclear.

CCOs use Customer Relation Management software developed by Bangalore firm Taliska to record information and, in the case of intervention calls, pass along this information to the relevant field office within 15 minutes. Field staff – whom Rodrigues describes as "the face of Childline" – carry out intervention and follow-up work on the ground, still within the original 60-minute timeframe.

"This kind of social intervention model, from the technology side has a lot of possible applications," says Nitin Desai, a Senior BPO Manager with TCS who has worked with the CCC since its inception. "If you can do it in India," he says, "you can do it anywhere."

Few calls, though, go past the CCOs. Adults – who constitute more than two-thirds of all callers – and children will call to learn about welfare resources; some call to vent their frustrations by volleying abuse at the CCOs (using words, Rodrigues says, "you've never heard in your life"); others share the most mundane features of their days. Still others call and remain silent in what CCOs classify as 'confidence-building calls' whereby the caller confirms that Childline is real and trustworthy. These calls

Delhi, and to create for the first time centres to cover the east and south out of Kolkata and Chennai, respectively. In the meantime Childline staffers spend roughly half of each year on the road vetting organizations for new branches, or conducting seminars and workshops for existing ones. Dilkesh Wakeel, a Programme Assistant for the Western Regional office, has personally inspected as many as 20 to 30 organizations in a single week for a new branch.

Largely rural, these new branches also require a different methodology. "As we are moving into more rural areas, you don't find street children there, but definitely you find children who need care and protection," says Pereira. "In rural areas, it is more preventive work," he adds, aimed at changing attitudes toward child labour and early marriage. Intervention remains an important Childline service, but in rural communities where child welfare is itself a new concept, outreach and cultural impact are the essential first steps toward catalyzing lasting change.

That change is already underway. The Juvenile Justice Act and Juvenile Justice Police Unit set up in 2000, the Ministry of Women and Child Development in 2006, the passage of the Integrated Child Protection Scheme in 2009 – these new systems may be flawed, but their existence points to an encouraging trend. Having overcome the initial challenges presented by the advent of new technologies, Childline now has the opportunity to refocus its energies toward stopping abuses of children before they begin. That in itself is a sure sign of progress.

"In the last two to three years, personally I see that there is a shift in attitude, that people are understanding child welfare," Menon says. Circumspect, optimistic, not at all boastful, she shrugs: "I think Childline has played some part in catalyzing that." ■

LAKSHMAN ANAND



Childline told telecom operators, "You are growing why not connect with a child helpline?"

'Child protection comes first'

Michael Snyder
Mumbai

KAJOL Menon, former Executive Director, Childline Foundation, spoke to *Civil Society* on the rapid technological changes Childline has undergone, its plans to expand into rural areas and the challenges it faces in reaching out to India's troubled children.

You have successfully used technology to upgrade and centralize Childline's operations. What other technological advances do you plan to implement?

Basically, with centralization, although it seems simple, there are a whole host of things – getting the software, getting it into a cloud centrally where all the data is on a real-time basis, back-up to manage for disaster – so there's been two years of only that. And you know we're not really trained in understanding technology, so it's been a lot of trial and error and learning through it. We've worked very closely with Tata Consultancy Services. They have been a very good partner for us. We've been very direct in saying 'this is what we want and we'll figure out how to get it.'

Who are your field staff now? Are they volunteers?

They are given some very nominal remuneration. Earlier the model was that the people we would have manning the phones would be from the community, because they would understand the caller. We said even if they're not past Class 8 or Class 10 it was fine because they would respond better, the empathy would be better, because they'd gone through a lot of life situations like that. The idea was not that it was a job – they should not look at it as a job. They could do it for two or three years and then move on. And that's what happened.

That model is still there, but the kind of team that we require now really needs understanding of child protection and child legislation.

It's hard to imagine thinking in terms of creating a permanent, complete solution. Do you think of this as a long-term process?

It is a long-term process. But I think, over the last two or three years, I definitely see that in the child protection scenario there is more understanding. See, when you're talking about nutrition, food, it's here and now. Whether it's education or nutrition, people understand that if you

don't give a child food there's going to be starvation and death, or with education and development needs, it's going to affect my economy.

But with protection... it's far away, it doesn't happen in our families. Abuse, violation –

ple were not reporting on sexual abuse or any of those issues. They were quiet, those were things that were buried deep. But with the environment changing, I think we had to also deepen our intervention.



Kajol Menon

that's a common, everyday occurrence. People think those needs come in only when the other needs are sorted. What we say is, if you have not protected children then they cannot benefit from the other efforts that you're making in education or health or any of that.

What are Childline's long-term goals?

Our biggest challenge has been expansion. So, in the last two years we have rapidly scaled 100 per cent. We were there in 81 cities, which have still not changed on our website, and we've scaled up to 210 over the last two years. So, our challenge has been, with the breadth of our expansion, the geographical expanse, to reach out to every corner. There is a need for a service like Childline. Because it's not just a government service, because there is a civil society influence in it, it's a service that still works.

So while we are expanding geographically, along with that and the kind of complex cases we're getting, we've realized we need to deepen our intervention. Earlier the cases we were getting were shelter cases, medical cases – peo-

AKELLA SRINIVAS

Initially we began by saying Childline flew on the wings of difference. If I had 20 partners, and one was very good with child labour and understood that issue, Childline in that area flourished. All those cases were intervened well. Some of our partners were housed in hospitals and they were very good with health issues – so we really drew energy from there.

Today we realize it's become too large, too massive, too pan-India, and therefore we now need to standardize our protocol, like in any big scale-up, without losing the initial energy and entrepreneurial ability of Childline. How to keep the tight balance between these two is, I think, our biggest challenge. Are we going to turn into this huge, monolithic organization? Are we going to lose our fire? Are we going to forget the child and get involved in processes? But we're still pretty tight-knit. The foundation has only 90 people, even today.

That's still quite small.

And that was our intention. We're not going to be setting up mini-offices everywhere. That shouldn't be our course. We need to catalyze the systems in the areas, so it's a lot

of work. Most of our team travels about 165 days a year out in the field. So that's the idea, that if you're not going to catalyze the system there, and if you're going to create whole new structures, it may operate very well, but it's not cost effective in a poor country like India with 444 million children, and however good a programme is, it will still remain a boutique programme.

How do you standardize the intervention process if you're working with different NGOs in different places?

One of the jobs of the Childline India Foundation is spreading knowledge, creating content, so we come out with protocols and standards for things that we then share with our partners. We have intensive training programmes. The directors will be met at a policy level once a year. The coordinators will be met because they are doing execution. Team members will be met for skill-building. Plus we do a lot of in-house training. Our team goes and visits these places twice a year for about five to seven days. It's about as hands-on as we can get. ■

Business

- Enterprise
- Inclusion
- CSR
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Mee Seva makes it yet quicker

Andhra improves on its e-governance



Chief Minister Kiran Reddy inaugurating Mee Seva

T.S. Sudhir
Hyderabad

WHEN US President Bill Clinton visited Hyderabad in March 2000, what bowled him over was how he got a driving licence in 15 minutes. The then Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, Chandrababu Naidu, used the tech-gesture to emphasise that Hyderabad, and not Bangalore, was India's IT capital.

Twelve years later, Hyderabad is once again making efforts to seize the crown of e-governance from Bangalore. Its 'Mee Seva' initiative, which is

an upgraded version of the e-Seva platform that Naidu had rolled out amidst much fanfare, is now being feted as the model that India should follow. The e-district project of the Government of India (GoI) has in fact incorporated all the features of the Mee Seva initiative. If e-Seva was the iPhone, Mee Seva is iPhone 5, is how a bureaucrat in the IT department colourfully described it.

For people in Andhra Pradesh, used to visiting e-Seva centres to pay their utility bills for electricity and water and municipal taxes, Mee Seva may appear to be just Congress packaging for a Telugu Desam initiative. But probe deeper and you will

residence and caste certificates. "Due to heavy demand and short time, all these officers had to work overtime. This overload of work combined with lack of transparency and monitoring in the processing of requests, began to breed corruption. It was presenting the government in a bad light. Mee Seva has changed all that," says Jaju.

The proof that Mee Seva has clicked with the people of Andhra Pradesh is in its outcome, namely the number of transactions. Inaugurated in November last year, 5.7 million transactions have been recorded till October this year. There

find that while e-Seva just scratched the surface of e-governance, Mee Seva, is easier and faster.

"Mee Seva offers complete seamless integration end to end," says Sanjay Jaju, IT secretary in the Andhra Pradesh government. "The idea is to cover the entire gamut of G2C – the government to citizen spectrum – using web-based architecture and linking it to databases across all departments."

Jaju explained that earlier citizens had to run to the same office several times to get different types of documents they needed. They would fall prey to touts. There was no stipulated time-frame of delivery nor any system of monitoring their requests. Likewise, during the admission season, there would be queues of students asking for income,

Continued on page 24



Mee Seva has increased the number of transactions significantly

are over 5,000 Mee Seva centres including e-Seva centres in urban areas and kiosks in rural areas, in a 20:80 ratio. Together, they record 60,000 transactions every day and provide over 40 services, ranging from payment of utility bills to land records to encumbrance and caste certificates. By the end of the year, the plan is to bring 100 services under the Mee Seva umbrella, with 100,000 transactions daily.

Ashok Selvan is one such user. He pays all his utility bills at the nearest e-Seva centre in Hyderabad but he would prefer to do it from his laptop or even better, his mobile phone. "E-Seva if you notice has a paper environment because the centre still accepts paper applications," he says. For people like Selvan, who would prefer a paperless way of life, Mee Seva is the answer as the new services under it are completely in electronic form.

Since land records form a bulk of the transactions, the IT department along with the Revenue Department has digitised 40 million land records in the state. Officials say most records were in bad shape with many of them in contentious and impure form. This meant they had to be validated on the ground with elaborate fieldwork. Once that was done, all land records were signed digitally by the tehsildars concerned. Officials say Andhra Pradesh, therefore, is the only state in the country where all land records are digitally stored and have been signed digitally.

The challenges have been many. Although tehsildars were happy that their work was getting easier and there were no longer queues of people waiting to get their paper certificates, it took some convincing to get the departmental heads to come on board. But now that has been done, Andhra Pradesh is home to a virtual room of records concerning citizens, and what's best, completely tamper-proof.

The effort was worth it. Thirty-three per cent of all transactions daily pertain to land records, with income and caste certificates coming a close second. Citizens pay user charges of ₹25 to ₹35 to get certificates of various kinds from different government departments.

'We want to eventually usher in a cashless revolution in rural areas, where even without banks or ATMs, transactions are possible.'
Sanjay Jaju, IT secretary.

The next step is to make citizens like Selvan feel at home while paying bills. The first step in that direction has been taken with a tie-up between Mee Seva and Airtel, which has a 40 per cent market share of the telecom market in Andhra Pradesh. "This is the right time to join with e-Seva to make it Mee Seva. Now it will truly become mobile-enabled," says Sharlin Thayil, CEO of Bharti Airtel in Andhra Pradesh. This would mean Airtel customers in Hyderabad will be able to pay 12 different utility bills through Airtel Money, initially.

"We want to eventually usher in a cashless revolution in rural areas, where even without banks or ATMs, transactions are possible. We think many more telecom service providers too want to join and help the government deliver cash through a cashless system," says Jaju.

The cost incurred on going digital has been minimal as Mee Seva has made good use of the existing Andhra Pradesh state data centre and its statewide area network. The kiosks were built on a public-private partnership model. The only expenditure was on capacity building which cost around ₹10 crores.

The effort has paid off with Mee Seva winning two national awards in September – the Skoch award instituted by the Skoch Development Foundation for its contribution as a programme of national significance and the India-Tech Foundation's excellence award. ■

Bandhan

Subir Roy
Kolkata

THE big challenge before microfinance institutions (MFI) is not what they do but what they don't. Even the most successful MFIs, who are good at doing their own thing, giving small loans to the poor, soon realise that helping poor people earn more is not enough to ensure that they permanently escape the clutches of poverty.

Access to affordable health care is essential as a health emergency is the single most important reason why some families, which have escaped poverty, slide back into it and even become destitute. So offering healthcare is a vital weapon in the armoury needed to effectively fight poverty. Once into the area, MFIs realize that the best way to minimize healthcare costs is to emphasise preventive healthcare practices. And there is no way a person can earn more unless she has some skills and earning aptitudes.

Historically, many Indian MFIs have first begun as NGOs serving diverse social causes and then taken to microfinance. And once this has happened, the NGO part of the work has declined. Some MFIs, like the highly successful Bangalore based Ujjivan, have, on the other hand, begun as MFIs and then addressed a wider canvas.

Bandhan, the leading MFI in Kolkata, has evolved an institutional structure which seeks to permanently balance the two needs. It began as an NGO and then detached its microfinance work into an MFI. But in doing so, it ensured that its NGO work did not suffer by ensuring that five per cent of the profits of the MFI would be earmarked for social work. As a result "last year the two societies (NGOs) which are part of the Bandhan family spent ₹10 crore," says Chandra Shekhar Ghosh, founder and CEO of Bandhan.

A key early initiative of Bandhan from its NGO days was addressing rural health needs through the Bandhan Health Programme started in 2007. It conducted a study in Baruipur in West Bengal and found that a family could end up spending up to ₹500 a month on healthcare. A major cause was lack of awareness and no health information, particularly for mother and child. Another early learning was that a newly wedded rural woman couldn't discuss her problems with anyone and so ended up going to the local quack. Usually, it is the men folk who went to a proper doctor. If a pregnant woman needed money she ended up approaching the money-lender.

Repayment led to running down the family's meagre capital stock, affecting future

lends more than just money

PRASANTA BISWAS



Chandra Shekhar Ghosh

gives technical support. The plants are run by Bandhan with the running cost coming out of the revenue. A 20 litre jar of water is priced at ₹5. "There are many offers from municipalities but we want to remain focused on villages," adds Ghosh.

A healthy borrower is able to earn a living but to do that she needs to acquire a skill. While traditional microfinance loans are for activities like selling vegetables or acquiring a cow, Bandhan is now helping family members of borrowers earn higher incomes by enabling them to set up businesses like repairing mobile phones and beauty parlours – apparently now a rage in the countryside! This is apart from providing traditional support for training programmes like plumbing and electrician work.

earnings. MFIs don't lend to pregnant women. So Bandhan decided that a good way to secure a loan was to lend an expectant mother up to ₹5,000 at concessional rates. This came to be known as its Suraksha health loan.

But they also had to ensure that this money was not spent on quacks. Hence the need to have rural health workers who also performed the role of health counsellors, advising visits to a doctor in case of need and arranging appointments with the doctor. So in 2007 Bandhan started with health workers called Swastha Sohayika. They paid home visits with kits that had basic medicines, then contraceptive pills, condoms and pregnancy test kits. The health workers are given an initial kit and then income comes from further sale of items in kits. They get a uniform and an umbrella, giving them an identity and local recognition.

Bandhan also trains traditional birth attendants who are given a kit of basic disinfectants so that a new born baby's umbilical cord can be safely detached. These trained birth attendants are a hit in the rural areas. Bandhan's branches now organise one health forum a month and a 16-day training programme. Over time infant and child mortality rates have gone down in areas served by health workers. Now there are

1,500 of them and over 15,000 village health forums have been conducted so far. Each branch spends around ₹30,000 a month and has around 25 to 30 health workers. There are medical officers who provide training and focus on issues of concern. Currently emphasis is being laid on recognizing the symptoms of dengue and its treatment.

Bandhan soon realised that the key enabler of good health among borrowers is to help them live under good sanitary conditions. So the health loan has been increased to ₹10,000 provided a family goes in for a pucca toilet. The health worker gets an incentive of ₹25 per sanitary toilet installed through this loan.

If sanitation is an enabler of good health then the need to ensure safe drinking water cannot be far behind. Most present sources of drinking water – river, pond or underground – are at least partly polluted. So Bandhan is addressing the need for clean drinking water by entering into a partnership with Eureka Forbes to set up two drinking water plants in Murshidabad and South 24 Parganas districts of West Bengal with a daily capacity of 10,000 litres to serve 500 families each. Bandhan provided the land and shares the ₹5 lakh cost of the plant equally with Eureka Forbes which supplies the plant and

courses to impart training in more advanced areas. The first course is to teach interested rural youth how to operate the popular accounting software Tally. The second course is in sales. The most recent initiative of Bandhan in helping the self-employed is to start a marketing operation for handicrafts like saris, decorative items and gifts.

Perhaps the most far-sighted recent initiatives of Bandhan are in the field of pension and life insurance. From 2010 it started offering pension services for the new pension scheme introduced by the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority. The pension becomes payable after the age of 60 and a member who contributes ₹1,000 a year earns a government contribution of a matching ₹1,000. Altogether 1.4 lakh Bandhan borrowers have now joined this scheme. Most recently, last year, it received a licence from the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority to offer life insurance services.

These are some of the elements that make up Bandhan's holistic attack on poverty so that a beneficiary does not only graduate out of income poverty but beats poverty for good by being in good health and able to earn a livelihood from skills for which there is a demand. ■

Mandya's fine jaggery

SHREE PADRE

Shree Padre

Mandya (Karnataka)

It's a sweeter life with jaggery, say farmers in Mandya district of Karnataka. In recent years jaggery powder has emerged as the new sweetener in Karnataka with consumers dunking it into coffee with relish.

Increased demand is boosting supply. More farmers are converting to organic sugarcane farming so that they can produce jaggery powder free of pesticides and charge a higher price.

Mandya is Karnataka's 'sugar district.' Around 7,000 hectares are devoted to sugarcane cultivation. There are 2,000 jaggery units here churning out around 2,000 tonnes of jaggery per day. The district is the biggest supplier of jaggery to Karnataka and other southern states. Mandya's jaggery is sent all the way to Gujarat. Most of the jaggery is of the moulded type or the 'bucket' variety. But powdered jaggery is now gaining ground because of increased demand from urban consumers.

More farmers in Mandya are taking to organic sugarcane cultivation. Currently, around 100 acres are under certified organic cultivation. This means that about 400 tonnes of organic jaggery are being produced every year.

Ganadalu Chikkabasavegowda Swami, 41, or Ga Chi Swami, an organic farmer in Mandya, has reserved half his three acres for sugarcane, for the first time. Packaging options are more hygienic, he says. Since the powdered form has a longer shelf life it can be sent off to distant consumers. "This will ensure we make more money," says Ga. Chi. Swamy, smilingly.

All these years, Swami was producing bucket jaggery with his conventionally produced sugarcane. The problem with bucket jaggery is that it attracts moisture and becomes gooey. Then it begins to ferment. The quality of the jaggery deteriorates. Bucket jaggery doesn't last for more than a few months. And handling melting jaggery is uncomfortable. Fingers get sticky, for one. The rainy season is the worst time for it.

On the other hand, jaggery powder can be kept longer because of its low moisture content. It can be added, just like sugar to coffee or any other dish that requires a dash of sweetness.

Ramesh Raju, an innovative organic farmer in Mandya district has been producing jaggery powder since eight years. The Yamakanamaradi Organic Food Club near Belgaum is another group that has been making organic jaggery powder and sending it to various Indian cities including in northern India.

The process of making jaggery powder is almost the same as for the bucket variety. The difference is that the thick syrup is not put into moulds but taken out of the oven a little earlier to be converted into powder.

Every year, Swami converts his sugarcane into five or six tones of bucket jaggery. But this year he plans to produce around 10 tonnes of jaggery powder. Bucket jaggery fetches him ₹35 per kg whereas



Farmer Ga Chi Swamy with his organic jaggery powder

the powdered version will sell for ₹45 per kg. Swami makes packets of one kg and half kg.

His wife Revathi says its not that easy to make jaggery powder. "The final process of turning the syrup into powder is laborious. Making bucket jaggery is easier," she says. For each quintal of jaggery powder, Swami has to pay an extra ₹150 for labour.

It would appear that jaggery powder provides more profit to the farmer since there is a margin of ₹10 for each kg sold. But that is offset to some extent by labour requirements. Overall, the farmer makes a profit of about ₹5 per kg.

"In Bangalore consumers are ready to pay far more than ₹50," says Ramesh Raju. "But we have to improve our production technology to cater to a bigger market. If organic jaggery powder is made properly and kept packed in air-tight containers, it can last for a couple of years".

Three areas need improvement.

Since jaggery powder is produced manually there is no uniformity in jaggery powder crystals. Some big chunks remain inside the powder. Though manual straining is one solution, this is a cumbersome process for large-scale production.

The right moisture and consistency need to be maintained. So it is important to be able to judge exactly when the jaggery should be taken out from the oven and poured into trays.

Hygiene is another issue. "Hygienic methods must be used right from crushing the sugarcane to

converting it into powder. There are many drawbacks in our method right now," admits Ramesh Raju.

Mechanisation of the entire process and scientific packaging to ensure a longer shelf life are two more areas in which research and development are essential. Ramesh Raju has been travelling across the country searching for improved methodology.

"Once we get the appropriate technologies and guidance, I want to install an improved system that becomes a model for our fellow farmers," he says.

Mandya's organic farmers have formed a collective called the Shri Kamadehenu Krishi Parivara Trust. Two years ago they started a shop in Mandya town called Shri Kamadhenu Amrutha Bindu.

Says its manager, RK Gowda, "We are getting good enquiries for organic jaggery powder. That's why I advised Swamy to convert at least half his jaggery into powder. Though it requires experience, we can learn through trial and error."

Indicators are that jaggery powder will become more popular with urban consumers in the coming years. Bucket jaggery uses many unhealthy chemicals. Organic jaggery has many benefits and markets. It can be used for Ayurvedic medicine preparations too. Mechanisation of the production process and hygiene are important for farmers and consumers. ■

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Insights

- Opinion
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Fair value good for business

RAM GIDOOMAL

I was a visit to the slums of Mumbai during a business trip in April 1987 that was a turning point for me. I was then UK Group CEO and Group Vice Chairman for the Inlaks Group of Companies. I left my air-conditioned hotel and as an interested tourist was shown the worst slum in Asia – Dharavi – where *Slumdog Millionaire* was later to be filmed.

I did not touch my champagne and caviar on my return First Class Air France flight and by the time I got home to Perth in Scotland, I had decided to resign as UK Group CEO and work in the public, charity sector.

With a few friends we set up Christmas Cracker and between 1987 and 1994 we mobilised over 50,000 young people in the UK. We raised over £5million for causes in the two-thirds world. It was during this project that I came across Traidcraft, which I was appointed chairman of in September last year.

If you mention the word Traidcraft it is likely that people will immediately associate it with Fairtrade. Not surprising because that is the most visible aspect of our work. Our trading company, Traidcraft plc, sells over 700 Fairtrade food and crafts products. Geobar is the most well-known. We offer more products than any other fair trade organisation and are rightly seen as one of its pioneers. We have been working as an independent entity for over 30 years, since 1979. Traidcraft set up Cafedirect and the Fairtrade Foundation. So we played a key role in the growth of fair trade sales in the UK to £1.2 billion and 4,500 products.

A smaller number of people may be aware that our mission is in fact broader than fair trade – fighting poverty through trade – and that we have a development charity, Traidcraft Exchange, which works in wider fields of trade justice and promoting responsible business practice, as well as helping poor producers around the world build sustainable businesses to serve their local markets.

Taken together these two operating arms are from a moderately sized business with a turnover of about £22 million and 150 staff. But it is a business that punches above its weight and can capi-



talize on the benefits of being a real trading company and a real development agency – a unique and balanced perspective on issues of trade and development.

What attracted me to Traidcraft was the way in which it sought to demonstrate that it is possible to put ethical principles into action in the world of business.

The principles that drive Traidcraft are similar to the principles that underpinned my policies in my London Mayoral campaign. Our manifesto focused on six principles. May I briefly summarise them for you?

One: Social Justice. How do we create a fair socie-

ty in which justice is given to all, not just to a favoured few who have justice by power or by wealth?

Two: Respect for Life. How do we protect the most vulnerable people in our society – the unborn, and those who are at the end of their lives? And how can we ensure that the value and dignity of every individual is respected and that all are enabled to become what they are capable of becoming?

Third: Reconciliation. The world cries out to be reconciled! And how greatly people need to be brought into right relationships with each other.

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The television is as full of programmes about warring neighbours arguing over a Leylandia hedge that has grown too tall, as it is of stories about nations sending huge armies against each other to dispute ownership of oil wells or bitterly contested territorial areas and natural resources.

Fourth: Active Compassion. It is not enough to pay lip service to the need for social justice and all the rest. We have to do something about it. And that might include enabling people who need empowering, who are denied basic rights by our modern society.

Fifth: Stewardship of Resources. Ours is a greedy hemisphere. The media is full of heartbreaking news about yet another disastrous famine. And we all know that many of these are not only caused by natural disaster but made much worse by human greed. The facts are bald and simple. There is more than enough for all. But some of us want most of it for ourselves.

Lastly: Empowerment. Many people living in the two-thirds world do not even know that they can set up their own businesses and play their part as full members of the global business community. One of Traidcraft's objectives is to strengthen the supply chain from the two-thirds world by empowering local businesses.

These are six key political values derived from biblical principles but honoured, however they are called, by men and women of good will everywhere. My mayoral campaign as a candidate for the Christian Peoples Alliance was supported by Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims, Jews and some prominent media personalities who described themselves as having no faith at all.

The Fantasy Mayor website set up in 2000 by the *New Statesman* created quite a stir. On entering the website, 3.5 per cent of visitors indicated their intentions to vote for me and 56 per cent indicated their preference for Ken Livingstone. Fifteen policy questions to do with a wide range of issues were then posed – from health, transport and education, to disability, unemployment and policing. The results, on the basis of responses of visitors to the website, were surprising. My policies came out on top matching 24 per cent of the responses of the visitors. Ken Livingstone's policies matched with a mere 6 per cent. *The Times* said that if this election were to be fought on policies alone, Gidoomal would win by a landslide!

Yes I could have been proud that I had the best policies, but I believe there is a far more significant message from this result. People out there want ethical and moral values to drive public policies but don't know it. I did take heart from those results – not to mention the immense publicity it gave me from New York to New Delhi!

So, what does it mean for Traidcraft to think of itself as an ethical organisation?



First, there is an underlying concern for the marginalised and a bias towards the poor. Traidcraft actively creates opportunities and promotes equal treatment of women, the disabled and other marginalised groups.

We have a commitment to ethical standards in business and value human well-being above pure materialism, with relationships being a major theme. The organisation also has a concern for the environment, respecting creation.

We address the issue of salary inequality, which is currently in the headlines, by ensuring that the highest-paid person in the organisation receives a salary no more than six times that of the lowest paid. This constraining formula helps to ensure that there is a fair pay structure in place.

We operate best practice policies when it comes to treating staff fairly, responsible stewardship of resources, and Social Accounts that have both transparency and honesty – we were the first plc in the UK to do audited Social Accounts in the early 1990s.

Traidcraft has ethical business processes that have a concern for the marginalised at their heart, and aim to create sustainable livelihoods for economically challenged communities, whilst respecting the environment.

With all this in mind, I would argue that Traidcraft can be viewed as a real life example of an organisation that embodies ethical values in the way that it operates and structures itself and puts moral principles into practice in the world of business.

In doing this, Traidcraft is able to offer a business model to society that uses ethical principles, whilst supporting economically-challenged communities – who are the producers of Traidcraft's goods.

But more than this, Traidcraft has the opportunity to try to influence more mainstream companies and other businesses to take on ethical values to influence the business world for the better.

So, for example, we can campaign for regulation in order to curb the negative tendencies of business to maximise profit at all costs. These regulations could include laying down rules on child labour, pollution standards, or worker protection.

We can promote social reporting – to set up vol-

untary accountability – in order to get businesses to measure their impacts, set themselves public targets and subject themselves to scrutiny and processes of learning.

We can also create a business case for change, demonstrating by example how an ethical and businesslike approach can go together, for the benefit of all. Consumers can be strong advocates here, as the trend continues for responsible and ethical consumerism.

In this past year we have continued to see the switching of major brands into Fairtrade. Following the example of Cadbury's Dairy Milk and Nestle's KitKat, with which we are all familiar, we have now seen Mars entering the fray by taking

Maltesers Fairtrade!

I am told this means that three out of the top five chocolate confectionery products in the UK now carry the Fairtrade mark. I understand that if all Fairtrade products were a single product, they would now constitute Sainsbury's second biggest brand.

This is a tremendous success, and we should welcome the involvement of big companies in Fairtrade because they can bring a scale of market access that would be quite beyond Traidcraft alone, offering hope to millions more producers. Achieving this sort of change was why we were one of the founders of the Fairtrade Foundation in the UK.

And it's why we can be proud that the Fairtrade mark can now be found on 4,500 products in the UK, with sales last year amounting to £1.3 billion, up more than 10 per cent. To put that in context, 10 years ago the figure was a mere £50 million: from £50 million to £1.3 billion in a decade. And the Fairtrade Foundation reckons that some seven million people – producers and their families – are now benefiting from Fairtrade.

All this has been achieved thanks to the persistence and faithfulness of ethically conscious customers. Without Traidcraft and our supporters and campaigners we would never have got to this point. As I often say, it is a remarkable – and hugely encouraging – instance of how ordinary people can change the world against what might seem like overwhelming odds.

So, how far can we realistically live up to our ideals in the midst of the challenges of running a successful business?

In many ways, this is a very personal question which relates to the way we live our lives. If we hold ourselves accountable for our thoughts and actions, then it is easier to hold each other accountable. If we make a personal decision to say no to greed.

Businesses are finding, more and more, that it is impossible to separate personal ethics and values and corporate ethics and values. Corporate greed and corruption will only occur where there is personal greed and corruption. As Mahatma Gandhi said – 'There is enough in this world for every man's need but not for every man's greed!' ■

The tussle over coal

KANCHI KOHLI

PRASANTA BISWAS



Coal mining near Jharia

EVEN as the country grapples with corruption scams over coal block allocations along with debates on whether natural resources should be auctioned or how land acquisition laws are being twisted to serve private interests, I am going back to a critical issue which is currently on the media backburner. It reconnects the dots of the Coalgate scam with the forests of the country and the people who live in them.

For a long time we have debated on the ideal definition of a forest. Different people continue to attribute different meanings for it. Depending on what a forest ecosystem is visualised as, its contours keep getting boxed into singular or multiple narratives. In recent policy discourses, forests are being viewed as monolithic resources. They are being valued for their tree density, for the minerals they hold underneath, or for their critical energy reserves to be tapped now or held for the future. Forests are also being viewed singularly for the coal beneath their surface.

There continues to be a tug of war between agencies which want to increase the extraction of this mineral and regulatory bodies which either want to minimise extraction or don't want to let it go cheap. The jostle between the Union Ministry of Coal (MoC) and private operators on one side and the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) has appeared in audit reports, parliamentary stand offs, media highlights and expert meetings in the corridors of power. The appointed mediator for this until a few months ago, was a special Empowered Group of Ministers (EGoM) headed by Pranab Mukherjee. This EGoM,

set up in February 2011, had been steering discussions between the two ministries on the future of some high investment projects and the extent of regulation that the coal sector should be under.

With the coal sector wanting the least regulation and faster approvals, the MoEF has repeatedly responded by undertaking zoning exercises to try and keep some forest areas out of the purview of coal mining. Earlier this year, the MoEF had appointed a committee to identify criteria for classifying forests as inviolate and good forests. Nothing much has been disclosed to the public. But it appears that it is essentially reputed institutes in the forestry and the wildlife sector along with the forest wing of the MoEF who are in the thick of this planning. It is not surprising then that the criteria being developed is reportedly based on protected area status, crop diversity, biodiversity richness and the number of species in the forest.

One wonders then how this criteria can apply to a forest like Mahan in the Singrauli district of Madhya Pradesh. With close to 14 villages dependent on the Mahan coal block for their livelihood and traditional forest rights, the conventional definition of what is 'inviolate' is unlikely to apply.

The EGoM has recently given the go ahead to the Mahan coal block despite the Ministry's Forest Advisory Committee (FAC) recommending against it primarily due to its good forest density and dependence of forest dwelling and tribal communities in July last year. After a site visit to the area in March 2012, and discussions with the

EGoM, the ministry appears to have changed its mind.

The MoEF has tried similar zoning exercises in the past. Back in 2009, discussions around 'go' and 'no-go' areas were initiated by the MoC and MoEF to identify which blocks in India's existing nine coalfields could be allowed to be mined and which would remain untouched to be used as strategic energy reserves in the future. Mind you it was never said that these forests would remain untouched for mining. This classification was largely based on the singular attribute of the density of the forest. So if a forest, no matter how diverse, had less than 10 per cent density, it could be mined. Ironically, in the first identified criteria the Mahan coal block was in the 'no-go' list. As part of negotiations the 'no-go' list continued to shrink and individual projects continued to be pulled out of the overall policy.

What then is the future of the inviolate areas exercise being led by the current environment minister, Jayanthi Natarajan? The earlier 'go' and 'no-go' exercise during Jairam Ramesh's tenure was tampered with several times and never saw the complete light of day. But these issues are not being discussed

at a time of financial scams. What is important to note is that with thermal power plants already being approved and invested in, the companies continue to use a fait accompli argument to seek allocation of coal blocks even if they fall within potential inviolate or 'no-go' zones. The Coalgate scam might have tightened scrutiny on the environment and forest clearance for now, but it might just be a matter of time when things go back to business as usual.

What is important to note is that there isn't broader ownership of these criteria and zoning exercises. Cliched as it may sound, it is significant to reiterate that these allocation exercises are being done with designated experts who apply their mind at a distance from the people and forests which will be impacted by their decisions. Moreover, with these zoning exercises only applying to coal blocks, there is a complete disconnect with all the ancillary activities which take place. So linked to thermal power plants are approvals for forest diversions for roads, conveyor belts and other related infrastructure.

A regulator for the coal sector and a special coal regulatory authority is in the offing. It isn't clear what the criteria for inviolate areas is likely to be. According to the grapevine the MoEF is happy to put the criteria process in cold storage, but evidence of such a likelihood is hard to come by. Even if people's concerns find some place into the development of criteria for the coal-forest trade-off, there is no guarantee that an empowered body will not efficiently put them aside for the sake of India's coal drive. ■

In J&K, children work to learn

PIR AZHAR

MOHAMMAD Aslam goes to school every day like any teenager, attends class, studies hard, plays with his friends and waits eagerly for the school bell to ring to call it a day. After that he rushes to the nearest bus stand and begins work. Unlike his school friends, Aslam sells bags at the bus stand to earn money that will fund his right to education.

"The results for Class 8 were to be announced so I rushed to my school a little early. I wanted to know if my hard work had paid off. To my delight, it had. I was overwhelmed when my class teacher announced that I had been promoted to the next class with flying colors. More than the results, I was happy that my work had not affected my studies," gushed Aslam, a child labourer from the border district of Kupwara in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). In a fraction of a second, though, his moment of joy dissolved into worry. "How will I manage to buy books for Class 9?" he says.

Keeping his need for more money in mind, Aslam set off on a new job hunt with several fears weighing him down. "People at times don't employ me because of my age, or pay me less wages. But I have no choice. I will have to accept whatever work or wages I get in order to keep my studies going."

A resident of Marhama village, Trehgam block in Kupwara, Aslam dreams of following in the footsteps of Dr. Shah Faisal, the first IAS topper from Kashmir who hails from the same district. However, Aslam is not considering the fact that Dr. Faisal's mother was a teacher who single handedly raised and educated her children after her husband was killed. She dedicated herself completely to the future of her children.

This little boy, on the other hand, works as a labourer and has no one to help him realize his dreams. A half-day of work earns him a meagre amount that barely meets the expenses of his school fees and books. The irony is that in this quest to achieve his dream, he is sacrificing the dream itself. He should be devoting himself to his studies. Instead he is using his precious time to sell bags at the bus stand and make ends meet.

There are hundreds of cases of child labourers like Aslam in Kupwara district. Many children can be easily spotted at the Kupwara bus stand, bartering away their childhood. They are well aware that their impoverished parents cannot afford the luxury of educating them. Even they don't expect that in this fight for survival, education will defeat hunger. But they have faith in themselves.

Some of these children, studying in private schools, earn their fees by selling plants or handmade bags. Their entire hard work is just to fund their own education, for the joy of learning. Not even a single penny is wasted on anything else by these little champs. "I earn roughly ₹70 to ₹120 every day by selling bags at the Kupwara bus

Some of these children, studying in private schools, earn their fees by selling plants or handmade bags. Their entire hard work is just to fund their own education.

stand. After appearing for my Class 5 exams, I am using my holidays to sell these bags. This will earn me my school fees," says Sheikh Munir Ahmad, just 11, whose father sells buttermilk at the same stand, but never earns enough to pay his child's school fees.

The zeal of these children indicates the grave situation of child labour in J&K. According to an independent survey conducted by Prof Fayaz Ahmed Nikka, the state has as many as 2,40,000 child labourers. Srinagar and its surrounding well-off localities, employ children as domestic help. Most of these children are from the backward dis-

tricts of Kupwara and Rajouri.

Child labour is an age-old issue bedeviling the Union and state government as well as NGOs. Under the Child Labour Act of 1986, the government has identified sectors where the highest number of children are employed and those where children are working in hazardous conditions.

Under the National Child Labour Policy and the Indus Project, the government has directed district magistrates of identified districts to make utmost efforts and use their authority to curb child labour. Various recommendations have been made like conducting special schools, providing financial aid to the families of child labour and not allowing children under the age of 18 to work anywhere in the country.

The Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) of 1975 has also been very useful. Under ICDS measures have been taken for the physical and mental growth of children 0-6 years old. In 1995, the midday meal scheme was introduced in schools and in 2001 an effort to spread education amongst the downtrodden was made under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (Education for All Movement). The Right to Education (RTE) law, introduced in 2010, could be termed a milestone. It provides for mandatory and free education to every child from six to 14 years of age.

On one hand we have extensive laws and recommendations and on the other hand, we have children like Aslam and Ahmad. Implementation of these policies on the ground with utmost sincerity is lacking. There is no link between laws and beneficiaries. As a result, the lives of several Aslams are at stake. Such children not only put in physical labour they also undergo a lot of anxiety.

Lack of implementation denies children the right of equality. Children under the age of 14 are legally barred from working. They have the right to free education. But as none of these laws seem to apply to the lives of those selling their childhood at the Kupwara bus stand, one can simply hope that their dreams of getting an education come true! ■

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PICTURES BY LAKSHMAN ANAND



Ride the waves at Arugam Bay

Civil Society News
Colombo (Sri Lanka)

LOCATED about 320 km from Colombo, Arugam Bay is one of the top five surfing destinations in the world. The waters here are just right for riding the waves. You can see surfers from all over the world, boards tucked under their arms, striding purposefully into the sea. The warm waters of Arugam Bay are seductive. Surfing devotees from Australia, Southeast Asia and Europe succumb to its charms.

While India endures a searing summer and then a wet monsoon, the surfing season begins in Arugam Bay. From April to October is the best time to visit but you can come anytime. Arugam Bay is located on the southeastern dry zone of Sri Lanka's coast so the weather is balmy most of the year.

As the sun sets a meditative calm descends on Arugam Bay. Nothing disturbs the sound of the sea. The beachside is close to a fishing village away from the bustle of the nearest town of Pottuvil. You don't hear the rush of traffic zipping across.



Surfers from all over the world come to Arugam Bay

Hectic tourism hasn't as yet landed on Arugam Bay. Most hotels are small palm thatched huts and cottages run by families. There is a little market where you can hire a surfboard and find a tutor to teach you to surf. You can also buy slippers, beachwear, clothing, jewelry and ethnic products. A couple of restaurants offer a variety of Sri Lankan and European cuisine. Bicycles are available on hire.

The best place to stay is a hotel called Stardust. It is situated on the beach so you get a lovely view of the sea always. Stardust has cabanas, a villa and a restaurant. It is spotlessly clean and attractively designed with eco-friendly material. A Danish lady, Merete Scheller, runs it.

Scheller says it was her late husband, Per Goodman, who fell in love with Arugam Bay and decided to start a hotel. She is an architect and her husband was a restaurateur. They were interested in Buddhism and invited a monk to build a stupa in Denmark. Out of that emerged friendship and the monk invited them to visit Sri Lanka. Scheller and

Continued on page 32



Villas, cabanas and rooms are available



Merete Scheller

Goodman were interested in organic food especially Sri Lanka's nutritious red rice. They came to the island and began a business exporting red rice and grated coconut. When Scheller and Goodman discovered Arugam Bay, they changed their plans and decided to open Stardust.

Friends in Colombo helped with masons and carpenters. Scheller used local material, avoiding cement. The floor tiles are all made of clay in pretty earthy colours.

Hot water is provided by solar energy. There is no air conditioning. "You don't need it," says Scheller and she is right. The villa is spacious. It has two bedrooms, a kitchen and an expansive verandah, all tastefully designed.

Stardust opened in 1984. Because of the war Scheller and Goodman had to close Stardust from 1986 to 1987. They reopened in 1998, closed it again but now things are on a steady course.

Stardust soon began attracting a steady stream of visitors from Australia, New Zealand and Europe. Surfers and tourists stay at their hotel.

But on 26th December 2004, Scheller lost her husband to the tsunami. She still recalls those days with anguish. She could have given up. Instead, Scheller bravely rebuilt Stardust from scratch, employed local people and got them trained by chefs from all over the world.

The restaurant serves European and Sri Lankan cuisine. The food is freshly cooked for every meal. You will be asked what you would like to order an hour before your mealtime. Every dish is wholesome and tasty. The fish is straight from the sea. Cakes and ice creams are made by Scheller. The palmyra ice cream, coconut ice cream and apple pie are delicious. You don't need to buy bottled water since all the water is treated through an RO system.

Scheller's young manager, Henry, who is from Germany, helps out. He used to work for a restaurant back home. He came to Sri Lanka and says he was fascinated by Arugam Bay. "This place is still a hidden beauty," he says. "People have not found out but Arugam is lovely, unspoiled. It is full of migrant birds too."

Arugam Bay is surrounded by wildlife sanctuaries. There is the Yala National Park nearby and the scenic Lahugala National Park. The Kumana Bird Sanctuary is a paradise for bird lovers. So, there is a lot to explore.

Take a meandering route by road to Arugam Bay from Colombo via Kandy and Nuwara Eliya. The trip is a delightful romp across the island. The landscape changes at every twist and turn. Kandy has a pretty lake and the Temple of the Golden Tooth with its fabulous Kandian dancers. The road to Nuwara Eliya is dotted with tea plantations set among tall trees and gushing waterfalls. Enjoy fragrant tea, chocolate cake and a splendid view. Spend the night at the magnificent Grand Hotel still stamped with regal splendour and run with genteel efficiency. Set off the next morning for Arugam Bay passing through sanctuaries, dense forests and lumbering elephants till the magnificent sea opens in front of you on this gem of an island. ■

Hoysala's bucolic magic

Enjoy bullock cart ride, food, farming...

Susheela Nair
Bangalore

It was a pleasant drive on the Bangalore-Hassan National Highway, cruising across Karnataka's beautiful countryside with its silvery fronds of sugarcane, emerald fields of paddy, banana plantations and coconut groves. En route we stopped for breakfast at Channarayapatna. We enjoyed steaming idlis and hot vadas washed down with a strong dose of South Indian filter coffee. As we approached the hamlets of Hassan, carpets of yellow sunflower and vistas of orange marigolds welcomed us. Further away green fields of ragi and ginger loomed into view.

We checked into Hoysala Village Resort at noon. Tucked away from the hustle and bustle of small town Hassan, the resort is an excellent base to explore the country delights of Hassan district.

The resort has rooms sprinkled across the property ranging from 30 superior cottages to four deluxe suites. All rooms have small outdoor patios facing the garden. Trees, shrubs and flowering plants adorn the pathways. As part of the resort's Go Green concept, most plants and trees have plaques enumerating their species. What is eye-catching is the sprawling garden with verdant lawns, flowering varieties, carefully nurtured trees, shrubs and indigenous plants. It is green beyond imagination and as colourful as a spring garden. A 15-year old transplanted cactus immediately catches your attention.

The resort captures the essence and flavour of a typical traditional Indian village. The exterior of the earthy terracotta cottages have a rustic touch. But the rooms are spacious, comfy and elegant with all modern amenities. Choose from Vattara (colony), a cluster of seven standard rooms in one unit; Maney (home) with three

SUSHEELA NAIR



Hoysala Village Resort

SUSHEELA NAIR



The crumbling ruins of the ancient Shettyhalli church

suites and two standard rooms; Hatti (small hut), a unit with seven standard rooms; Nilaya (abode), that has one suite and four standard rooms; Agrahara (traditional Brahmin quarters) that has six individual rooms; and Koplū (rustic huts), which is a set of standard rooms. Agrahara is reminiscent of community living. Most of the rooms have antique furniture and heritage floor tiles. Warli art graces the walls of some of the rooms.

The resort's multi-cuisine restaurant called Belur is beautifully styled with a central skylight. It offers a variety of tandoori and Continental cuisine with a gamut of local delicacies. Eating at the Hoysala Village is an experience that will linger in your memory. "Our speciality is the traditional Malnad cuisine with ragi rotti (millet bread), neer dosa and nuchhina unde. Another interesting item is the jackfruit dosa served on turmeric leaf," said Shyam, the general manager of the resort.

SUSHEELA NAIR



Bullock cart ride. Enjoy.

Resembling a local hamlet, the resort exudes rustic ambience and charm and has something for everyone. There are activities galore in and around the resort. You can lounge in the Karanji Bar or have a relaxing swim in the pool or take a leisurely stroll in the garden. And if you need to drain away stress and relax your tired muscles, chill with a refreshing massage at their Ayurvedic centre. A leisurely stroll in the spice garden is sure to dazzle your senses.

At the Hoysala Village Resort one can have a typical rural Indian experience. You can indulge in rustic activities like milking a cow, organic farming, visit a farm, or bike around the countryside. Bullock cart rides are also on offer. The relaxed pace of the cart, moving to the jingle of the bullock's neck bells, took us back in time. A cozy tree house overlooking a lake outside the resort is a great vantage point for watching birds or the setting sun. Those who are artistically inclined can try their hand at pottery making, rangoli or carving slate artifacts. You can also learn a trick or two from the resort's magician who will enthrall you with his antics.

Conceived by K.R. Alva, the affable managing director of Hoysala Village Resort, the property exudes the true spirit of rural India. In keeping with its eco friendly status, all efforts have been made to retain the gifts of nature. No chemical pesticides are used in the resort's garden. Instead, natural bug repellents such as neem and lemon grass oil are sprayed which give a refreshing aroma and keep insects away. Eco friendly toiletries are used. A cover of three to four inches of leaf litter in the garden reduces water consumption.

"Trees are revered and worshipped. Offering puja to the trees is a regular feature in our resort. The New Year begins with planting a sapling. We are sensitive to the needs of local communities and committed to their empowerment. Ten per cent of our net profit is allocated for charity and adoption of villages. Cows are donated to women and revolving credit is given to villagers for business development," says Alva.

EXCURSIONS: The best way to savour the quietude of Hassan district is to amble around or drive up to see the monuments and temples. The Belur, Halebid, Sravanbelagola circuit is a must on the itinerary of every tourist visiting Hassan. It is hailed as the Golden Triangle of South Karnataka. This heritage sojourn takes you from the simplicity and asceticism of Sravanabelagola, a prominent Jain pilgrim centre, to the architectural extravagance of the Hoysala temples of Belur and Halebid. You can discover the bewildering wealth of detail in the ornate carvings on these temples and pay homage to the monk atop the hill. The resort also arranges trips to neighbouring tourist attractions. Around 25 km away are the enormous crumbling ruins of Shettyhalli church which has emerged from the Hemavathi River. One can also discover lesser known architectural gems of the region like the twin temples of Mosale and the three Shiva temples built in Hoysala style in Koravangala. ■

FACT FILE

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Dark side of Delhi's land deals

Saibal Chatterjee
New Delhi

DELHI has been the backdrop to many a successful Hindi film in recent years. But Sidharth Srinivasan's *Pairon Talle* is anything but the sort of Delhi film that audiences are accustomed to. It brings to the fore in bold relief an ugly facet of urbanization that we have never seen before on the screen.

Shady land deals, illegal mining, honour killings and rampant lawlessness have become part of the Delhi-NCR's (National Capital Region) daily reality. Srinivasan weaves his stark, unflinching narrative around these very issues and goes where no Delhi film ever has.

"Matters have only gotten much worse since I began making this film," says Srinivasan, 37, who was away in Mumbai for seven years. "When I returned, I found that Delhi-NCR had changed. It was in the grip of a wave of crime. This film is my reaction to the transformation of my city," he adds.

"Gurgaon and Noida are symbols of the new emerging India," he explains. "But here, tradition is at odds with modernity and a feudal mindset is still deeply entrenched as land ownership has steadily changed hands. My film describes the gruesome brutality of this apparently shimmering landscape."

Srinivasan's film pulls no punches. It zeroes in on a morally anarchic edge of a bleak, lustrous urban expanse that is fast spinning out of control as land sharks and patriarchal impulses ride roughshod over humanity with complete impunity.

The narrative pans out in a physical space that is, on the face of it, a picture of serenity. But it is anything but tranquil – an undercurrent of malevolence courses through this terrain like contaminated blood through the veins of a decomposing body.

Pairon Talle, Srinivasan's first theatrical feature, unfolds around a derelict silica mine on the fringe of the city. The abandoned premises are occupied by a servile low-caste watchman, Bhanu Kumar, (Dibyendu Bhattacharya), and his young wife, Saroj (Saba Joshi). The guard keeps fierce vigil over the property and does the owner's bidding unquestioningly.

The master, Lakshmidhand Ahlawat (Avtar Sahni), exploits both the watchman and his wife without any qualms even as he prepares to barter away his own daughter, Twinkle (Geeta Bisht), to an elderly entrepreneur to entice the latter to buy the decayed silica mine.

But Twinkle is in love with a Delhi University student and runs away with him. A nameless hired killer, his face hidden behind a white swathe, is in pursuit of the lovers. They seek refuge in the mine. Bhanu reluctantly agrees to hide the pair for the



Sidharth Srinivasan shooting *Pairon Talle*

night at his own grave peril, unaware that the girl is his master's runaway daughter.

This is a world that is completely out of joint. Nobody is safe here, not even a corrupt, heavily compromised policeman who seems to be the only individual whom Bhanu can trust. But when push comes to shove, neither the watchman nor his wife have a hope in hell of surviving their never-ending ordeal.

Pairon Talle is certainly not an easy film to watch. It articulates bitter truths that our cinema usually tends to either brush under the carpet or cloak in crowd-pleasing narrative devices. Srinivasan attempts exactly the opposite: he paints an unrelentingly grim portrait that is depressingly dark and bereft of any hope.

"As a paradigm of growth," he says, "Delhi-NCR is full of distortions as land is being acquired rapidly from the traditional holders, leaving a huge void at the very heart of the urbanized villages around the city."

Pairon Talle, a completely self-funded film, was commercially released in October in Delhi and Mumbai as part of PVR Cinema's 'Director's Rare' programme, which is designed to showcase the work of independent filmmakers who work outside the mainstream distribution-exhibition system.

"I was pleasantly surprised by the general response," says the Economics grad from St. Stephen's who served as an assistant to Kumar Shahani before making a

digital video, *Divya Drishti*, about a decade ago. "Despite the complete absence of publicity, *Pairon Talle* garnered nearly 70 per cent occupancy on the opening weekend at PVR Director's Cut in Vasant Kunj and went into a second week."

Cast primarily in a social realist mould, *Pairon Talle* uses genre elements in order to heighten the vicious nature of the violence that it depicts. "I deliberately wanted to subvert the norms of cinematic social realism," says Srinivasan.

Pairon Talle works on several levels. On one, it is a study of the master-slave dynamic in a social milieu still rooted in the medieval past despite the rapid material changes that are sweeping the landscape.

Bhanu's plight is a metaphor for the sheer helplessness of the disempowered. His dignity is constantly violated by the mine owner. By the time Bhanu is angry enough to strike back at his tormentor, it is too late. His final act of rebellion can only end in tragedy.

On another level, *Pairon Talle* is woven around the chain of horrific events that regressive mindsets can trigger, especially in an environment in which land is power and women are mere pawns in the hands of men driven by greed and lust.

The film also alludes to the ecological damage caused to the Aravallis by illegal mining. We are told that Bhanu's father, who also worked in the silica mine, died of a lung disease. The barren land that is now up for sale stands mute testimony to all that has gone wrong in this part of the world.

For Indian independent filmmakers, too, much has gone wrong, feels Srinivasan. "In this country, we have no alternative paradigm for cinema. My film is painted with the same brush as a Salman Khan film by exhibitors. We simply cannot because publicity is extremely expensive," he says. "Hundreds of such films are lying in the cans."

Negotiating a space for small, independent films in a system where the law of the jungle – might is right – applies, says the maker of *Pairon Talle*, it is difficult to find "a halfway house" for cinema that is provocative and does not play by the rules of the marketplace. But Srinivasan definitely isn't giving up the fight. ■



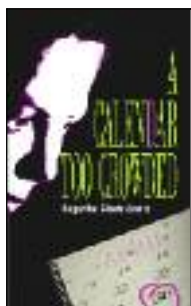
Saba Joshi



Dibyendu Bhattacharya

'I don't believe in days and dates'

Sagarika's stories comment on empty celebrations



**A CALENDAR TOO
CROWDED**

Sagarika Chakraborty
Niyogi Books

₹ 295

Kavita Charanji
New Delhi

TWENTY-eight-year old Sagarika Chakraborty's first foray into fiction aptly titled, *A Calendar Too Crowded*, takes every day devoted in the calendar to women's issues and converts it into a wry story. The book consists of 25 stories and poems.

Each year we pay lip service to women and children by crowding the calendar with special days for them. So we have a Widow's Day, an Anti-Child Trafficking Day, an Anti-Selective Abortion Day, an Anti-Sexual Harassment Day and a month dedicated to Violence against Women.

Sagarika's story on Anti-Sexual Harassment Day, which is on 24 June, is about a woman who is raped and then judged by the police and society by her clothes and her decision to go out and drink with her friends. Then, there is a story about a prostitute mother striving to save her daughter from the brothel and another on a widow who decides to run away from the treachery of Hindu laws.

Sagarika has an MBA from the Indian School of Business, Hyderabad, and studied law at the National Law School in Jodhpur. The book is an outcome of her own experiences.

"My first internship from law school with a leading Supreme Court lawyer was an eye opening experience. I learnt about refugees, met many of them, fought for child rights and filed petitions against child marriage – it was enriching and empowering. Various workshops with battered women made me take up gender studies seriously and slowly I fell in love with the genre," explained Sagarika.

She now works with a digital marketing firm in Mumbai. "I am wrapping up the edits of my second book, preparing the layout of my third, freelancing for a cause and yes, also falling in love with Mumbai all over again," she told *Civil Society* in an interview.

What inspired you to write this collection of short stories and poems? Are the characters drawn



Sagarika Chakraborty

from women you have encountered?

During the last eight years I have met women and families for my non fiction research - they all had a story to tell. I listened mainly to help them open up before I could get them to answer questions pertaining to my research. My work was getting noted in intellectual platforms. But, when I asked myself whether I was doing enough, there wasn't any affirmative answer. Somewhere I knew that the topics I was working on, the realities I was trying to portray, weren't reaching the masses.

The women in my book are nameless. But a majority of them are real. The situations in my book will make you remember a similar situation that you perhaps read about or faced.

However, the story spinning is fictional barring a few which pertain to incidents from my own life. I chose not to name my characters because I wanted the readers to recall a particular name and face while reading a story and feel a connect. I want them to reflect on whether the woman deserved what she got, whether they could do anything and mostly where is our society headed?

You often refer to mythological women characters from the Mahabharata. How do these characters relate to contemporary woman?

I have been brought up by two women who had quite a task when it came to keeping me engaged

and interested. My mother and my grandmother both believed in the experimental way of teaching and always encouraged me to discover. Also, as a child I was very logic-oriented and would not take anything at face value.

So, whenever I was told of customs I wanted to know the reasons behind them. This made them explain to me in detail the mythological connections and scientific explanations. I was fascinated.

I realised that what we harp on as modern technology has already been written about in mythology. Be it surrogacy, artificial insemination, rights of LGBT's everything!

The characters in those texts – I have read almost all major scriptures connected to India – made me study the people around me. I found a deep connect and I still do. It was but natural that when it came to penning down stories my love for mythology and my awe of those characters would be reflected in my book.

What is the objective of the book?

I have never believed in the concept of dates on the calendar. The fascination to celebrate Women's Day, give in to commercialisation on Mother's Day and take to the streets – and in turn leave all the litter behind on World Population Day – has always irked me. It saddens me when I look around and see people blindly celebrating days without understanding the cause and the ethos behind the date. In this era where dates are losing significance the best I could do was to spin stories that are antithesis to the core idea behind the celebrations and thus leave a mark.

The stories on the grandmother-grand daughter relationship and that of the prostitute and her daughter are very moving. What would you say were the most challenging stories for you to write and why?

Well, you have just pointed out two of my most challenging stories, thank you! The grandmother – granddaughter story was very emotionally challenging as it is based on the beautiful relationship I had with my grandmother. She has been the biggest influence in my life and the book is dedicated to her. The young child of the prostitute reminded me of a similar child I once taught in a makeshift school at Kolkata.

What else are you working on?

I am working on a lot of literary projects. A few of my short stories are in anthologies which bear the works of people like Gulzaar Saab. I am also planning to start my own research based organisation on health care management – another topic close to my heart. On a lighter note I want to learn baking professionally and complete my professional salsa training. ■

Curb hair loss

Dr G. G. GANGADHARAN

GREEN CURES



AYURVEDA identifies every condition in terms of dosha prakriti and hair fall is due to the vitiation of pitta and vata.

• Pitta vitiation is caused by stress, consumption of yeast, meats, sugar, fast foods, alcohol,

medicines, smoking and excess intake of tea and coffee. • Vata vitiates due to dry food, insufficient quantity of food, excessive exercise, a cold climate and lack of sleep.

Women are naturally more worried about hair loss. Ayurveda offers effective ways to curb hair fall and hair loss by delving into the basic dysfunction of the individual body.

Poor eating habits that contribute to the increase of pitta and vata in the body should be identified first. Such foods have to be replaced with healthy alternatives especially foods that increase kapha and are rich in fibre and protein.

HERBAL REMEDIES: The goal of Ayurveda is to help you adopt a balanced lifestyle. It is an effective way of hair loss management. Hair loss in women can be very trying and Ayurvedic remedies offer the best solutions.

Use chemical-free products and avoid shampoos and conditioners because they contribute to the rise of pitta. Use water warmed to body temperature for washing your hair. If you wash your hair in very hot water, your hair loss will be accentuated.

If you use any herbal products to wash your hair, make sure that the product is free of harsh chemicals like SLS (Sodium Laureate Sulfate) and is purely herbal without any additives.

Pre-treatment – Hair wash formulations:

- Take sesame seeds in the morning and drink lots of water to flush out toxins that have accumulated in the body.
- Mix Triphala (the three myrobarns - Terminalia chebula, Terminalia bellerica and Phyllanthus emblica, Ritha (Sapindus trifoliatus) and Neem (Azadirachta indica) leaves. Boil the herbs in water. Wash your hair with this mixture.
- Boil 30 gms of dried pomegranate rind in water. Use as a hair wash.
- Boil 50 gms of Kachora (Hedychium spicatum) roots in water. This too is an effective hair wash.

Treatment – Use of oils and massage:

- There are different types of medicated oils useful in treating hair fall like amla oil, brahmi oil, neelabhringadi oil etc.
- 30 gms of dried pomegranate rind boiled in water is an excellent hair wash.

- 50 gms of Kachora (Hedychium spicatum) roots boiled in water aids hair growth.
- Burn a hard shell of coconut till it reduces to ash. Filter it through a fine cloth and store in a glass bottle. Mix some amount of this ash every day with coconut oil and apply on scalp. Wash after a few hours. Regular use of this mix prevents hair fall and helps treat alopecia (hair fall in patches).

• Collect 20 gm of hibiscus flowers (white), 20 gm of jasmine flowers, 20 gm of tuberose flowers and 20 gm of brahmi leaves. Extract juice of all four. Add an equal quantity of gooseberry juice (Amla - Phyllanthus emblica). Mix this with an equal quantity of virgin coconut oil and boil over a low flame till the succulence evaporates and only oil remains. Filter and store in a clean glass bottle. Massage your scalp with this oil and retain overnight. Do not wash your the hair next day. On the second night apply the oil again. Wash your hair on the third day with any herbal home-made shampoo as detailed below:

HERBAL SHAMPOOS : • Soak 20 gms of fenugreek seeds and 30 gm of curry leaves in water overnight. Next morning grind the mixture to a fine paste. Apply the paste to the roots of your hair. Wash your hair after 30 minutes. Regular application prevents hair loss.

- Boil 50 gms of curry leaves and 50 gms of drumstick leaves in 60 ml of coconut oil till it reduces to a black residue.

Regular application of this grease helps prevent hair loss and promotes growth.

Other Ayurveda therapies that require medical counselling and supervision:

- Nasya or nasal errhines is a panchakarma treatment that helps to treat alopecia and assists hair growth.
- A full purification in terms of Vamana, Virechana and Basti as part of Panchakarma also keeps the metabolism fire good and promotes youthfulness.
- Certain Ayurveda preparations like Lohaasava, Kasis Bhasma, Ashwagandharishta, Bhringarajasava help.

Post treatment : • After washing, rinse hair in water in which neem leaves have been boiled. Such neem water helps to clean the scalp and promotes growth of hair follicles.

DIET - Food : • Avoid excessive intake of green chillies, brinjal, curd, peas, peanuts and bakery products.

- Use salt sparingly.
- Eat more pulpy vegetables (gourds etc) than leafy vegetables.
- Use fresh spices for seasoning.
- Stay away from readymade garam masalas or other spices. Do not use processed spices that are more than three months old. ■



WONDER PLANT

Fragrant Murva

OUR traditions have always placed conservation on a high pedestal. We have been preserving our natural resources since time immemorial in revered spaces like sacred groves. Sacred groves are the best model of traditional conservation. Such forests maintain a perfect balance between man and nature. The germplasm of thousands of species including medicinal plants have been identified in sacred groves by several researchers. One such important, highly medicinal and endangered species conserved in the sacred groves of the Western Ghats region is Chonemorpha fragrans, belonging to the Oleander family, Apocynaceae. In Ayurveda it is known as Murva.

Chonemorpha fragrans is a large, woody shrub, often climbing to the top of the tallest trees. All parts of the plant exude milk when crushed.

Location: In the wild, this species prefers to grow in moist, deciduous and semi-evergreen forests. In India, Murva has been sighted in the Western Ghats (Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Goa), in northeast India (Assam, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh), Uttar Pradesh and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Ayurvedic properties: Murva's roots are reportedly used as a laxative, astringent, carminative and expectorant. The roots of Murva are primarily used to treat inter-

mittent fevers, skin diseases, leprosy, constipation, cardiac debility, bronchitis, jaundice, cough and diabetes. Roots are also useful in vitiated conditions of vata and kapha, syphilis, stomach ache, acidity, colic pain, helminthiasis, hyperdipsia, urethrorrhea and hyperacidity.

Gardening: Murva is a perennial plant and a very heavy climber. Hence it can only be used on a strong support structure such as larger trellises or columns. It can be allowed to ramble over tall, strong trees or on high compound walls. Murva is a disease-free, quick-growing, deciduous climber that usually sheds its leaves in winter and prefers partial shade to full sun. Loamy soil is best for this species. Murva does not thrive in poor soil. It requires less water – just once in three days – as soon as it gets established.

Chonemorpha fragrans is a splendid vine that flowers almost throughout the year but most profusely from May to July. Murva sports large clusters of exuberant blooms with a delicious, rich scent that keeps the whole garden fragrant. Large, pure white, twisted-back corolla with a stunning yellow centre make this climber awesome. Even without its flowers, this climber is eye-catch-



ing and decorates garden fences and sidewalls with large, shiny, velvet-hairy leaves with prominent, raised veins.

Murva's gorgeous twining habit with numerous, large showy flowers and very long fruits can soften and convert any hard surface or ugly view into a glorious, greenish-white landscape. Dull gardens can be brightened and highlighted by planting this twiner! Murva can also be a great backdrop for lawn gardens. This lovely and fragrant climber can be used to grace any part of the garden but it should not be planted near the kitchen and dining hall as the plant's seeds are tipped with copious silky hair that are carried by the wind.

Murva is propagated through both seeds and stem cuttings. Seeds are collected directly from the fruits when they develop dehiscent slit (without waiting for the complete dispersal of the seeds). Collection of fresh seeds is carried out from July to September. These seeds should be sown within two months from the collected date to achieve the best germination results. Sowing is done in sandy, raised mother beds. It takes 15 to 20 days for germination. The obtained percent of germination is 70. Seedlings of five cm height can be transplanted to the containers or polythene bags. Softwood cuttings of pencil thickness measuring 10 to 15 cm with minimum two nodes are selected for vegetative propagation. Stem cuttings are planted in raised, pure sand beds without mixing any fertiliser in mist chambers from January to March. Sprouting starts within 20 days but rooting is initiated only after 30 days. Three-month-old cuttings can be transplanted in containers or directly to the main field.

Self-Help

For constipation: One teaspoon of root powder is boiled in a glass of water till the quantity of water is reduced to half a glass. Cool, filter and then consume this decoction at night for seven continuous days. The juice of the root is taken orally thrice daily as a purgative.

For swellings and bruises: The milky latex is applied externally on swellings and bruises. ■

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

LOOK GOOD

Fighting cold

THE common cold is a regular feature every season. Each one of us suffers from it at some time in our lives. The common cold is usually relieved within a week. Loading the body with antibiotics is not necessary. Some simple home remedies and Ayurveda medicines can help you fight cold and cough with ease.

Ayurveda considers the doshas (Vata, Pitta, Kapha) responsible for causing imbalance in the body. Cold that is due to Vata is usually dry with less mucus discharge, hoarse voice, headache and body pain. Cold due to Pitta causes fever, burning eyes and little blockage in the nose with yellowish or greenish mucus discharge. When Kapha is the reason for cold symptoms will be thick whitish mucus discharge, heaviness in the body and head and severe blockage of nose with cough.

Things to avoid:

- Cold drinks and eatables
- Fried foods
- Bakery and milk products
- Sweets and chocolates
- Exposure to cold breeze and rain
- Cold showers
- Fans and air conditioners

Things to do:

- Drink warm water
- Vegetable soup
- Light diet
- Hot milk with a little turmeric and quarter piece crushed ginger
- Wear a sweater
- Plug ears with cotton
- Hot water bath
- Steamed vegetables
- Gargle with warm salted water

Home remedies:

- Juice of tulsi (basil) leaves with 1 tsp honey eases cold.
- Dalchini stick (cinnamon) boiled in a glass of water with a pinch of pepper and honey relieves sore throat and prevents the cold from becoming chronic.
- Ginger tea with honey is an excellent remedy for cold and cough with sputum.
- Inhalation of the fumes of eucalyptus oil will ease breathing.
- By following a healthy diet one can remain robust throughout the seasons. ■

Dr. Ashwini V Konnur, BAMS, YIC, CFN, Reiki
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ORGANIC CHEF

Healthy sweets



PUMPKIN HALWA

Ingredients:

- Grated pumpkin: 3 cups
- Palm sugar: 1 cup
- Cardamoms: To taste
- Cashew nuts: 10
- Ghee: 3 tsp
- Honey: 5 tsp

Method: Steam the grated pumpkin. Drain excessive liquid from it. In a saucepan, heat half a teaspoon of ghee. Add the steamed and mashed pumpkin to it. Then add the powdered palm sugar and stir continuously on a low flame for five minutes. Add two teaspoons of ghee and stir well. Place on a low flame till the ghee floats.

Roast cashew nuts in one spoon of ghee and add to the halwa. Take off from flame. After the halwa has cooled, add honey and mix well.

Properties: This halwa is cooling. It improves memory and intellect. Acts as an aphrodisiac. Balances Vata and Pitta. Helps to increase weight. Helps to relieve white discharge from vagina. Reduces body heat

MUNG DAL PAYASAM

Ingredients:

- Mung dal: 1 cup
- Chickpea: quarter cup
- Jaggery: 1 cup
- Cardamom powder: 1 spoon
- Cashew nuts: 8
- Ghee: 1 spoon

Method: Cook green gram and chickpea in water. After it has become soft, mix in the jaggery. Boil till the jaggery dissolves. Add one teaspoon of cardamom powder to this mix. Roast the cashews in the ghee and add. Now the tasty payasam is ready and can be enjoyed.

Properties: This payasam is easy to digest. It balances pitta and kapha. Relieves burning sensation in the stomach. Good for anemia. Ideal for bleeding disorders. ■

Dr. Rekha R, RMO, IAIM Health Care Centre, Bangalore

PRODUCTS

LAKSHMAN ANAND

ICONIC BAGS

THE Amarkutir Society for Rural Development in Birbhum is probably the oldest producer of the classic Shantiniketan bag. Sushen Mukherjee, a freedom fighter who was inspired by the Swadeshi movement, founded Amarkutir Society in 1923. Looking for a way to raise money to support Amarkutir, Mukherjee learnt batik print making on leather goods from Malaysian and Indonesian traders and taught the technique to artisans. Rabindranath Tagore's Viswa Bharati University honed the skills of the artisans. Amarkutir Society now employs 80 artisans. The bags are eye catching and find ready buyers. "That's because we are constantly updating our designs," says Bikash Roy of Amarkutir. The artisans are experienced and absorb new knowledge quickly. They get provident fund, bonus, gratuity and health benefits. The managing committee provides voluntary service. ■



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Bikash Roy: 094752243101

LAKSHMAN ANAND



SARI MAGIC

THE Bishnupur Handloom Cluster, started by the West Bengal government, is a cooperative of 500 weavers who manufacture Baluchari and Swarnachari saris. The designs retain their traditional appeal. There is a range of colours to choose from. The Baluchari sari is famous for its delicate weave. It is Bengal's pride and as essential to the Bengali bride's trousseau as the Benarasi sari.

"The West Bengal government has helped us in every way," says Pradip Nandi, a member of the cluster. "We get a grant and we are being helped to construct a building for our weavers in Bankura." He says the government has been helping them find markets by sending them to other state capitals when fairs take place. Nandi says the traditional Baluchari could be altered to current fashion trends. The weavers want more sales and they say fashion designers, aggressive advertising and marketing would help them greatly. ■

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