

Civil Society

MENTOR MOMS

Udayan fosters new life for children



HALL OF FAME ROCKS WITH RARE CONCERT

Indian Ocean and Santhal musicians enthrall

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MENTOR MOMS

Udayan Care adopts children who have lost their families and have nowhere to go. It reconstructs a family for them with women who take over as mothers. Udayan has such homes in New Delhi.

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Civil Society

READ US. WE READ YOU.

The spirit is everything

THIS magazine has been fortunate to find friends and partners who share in the spirit of what we do. Associations built over the past 10 years define and strengthen us today. We cherish these connections and it is heart warming to see them grow. In much the same way the success of the Civil Society Hall of Fame 2013 and the Everyone is Someone Concert owes much to the enthusiasm which Indian Ocean showed for our kind of journalism and the event itself. Big bands have a lot going for them. But Indian Ocean invested time and effort in working with the obscure Santhal musicians we brought to Delhi. The genuine warmth of the band helped the musicians open up and shed their shyness. The result was two memorable numbers with them and an outstanding concert.

'Everyone is Someone' has been our magazine's slogan almost from the time we started. We believe equal access and respect should be the basis for a modern society. It should also be the principle on which an economy functions and markets ensure fairness. Unfortunately, that is not the way it is right now. India is burdened by a stifling elitism in all spheres. We in this magazine, and many others like us, would like to see that change. The stories we write, the Civil Society Hall of Fame and now the Everyone is Someone Concert are our way of saying that a transformation is possible in our everyday lives. When Indian Ocean plays with Santhal musicians before a huge *Civil Society* audience in Delhi, an inspirational message goes out.

Our cover story this month is on the work done by Udayan Care in rescuing children who have lost their families. We see a model here which should be examined closely and replicated. Our cities have a large number of children who land on the streets for various reasons and need to be rescued. The Udayan model puts them back in society.

It is time the State looked more seriously at initiatives taken up by voluntary organisations. What happens now is that governments abdicate responsibility and expect NGOs and companies to do the work of government. This is neither possible nor desirable. The way forward is really through partnerships in which governments draw on the enterprise and efficiencies of others. Child welfare is one such sphere where the onus should be on the government, but it should look outside for fresh ideas because the backlog is huge and innovative ideas are needed. Udayan's way of creating surrogate families is very similar to the SOS Village model. The difference is that Udayan's work is in the city and less dependent on capital investments in land and buildings. It is more of a distributed model and easier to implement.

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IN THE LIGHT

by SAMITA RATHOR



LETTERS



Hall of Fame

Your Hall of Fame entrants are truly inspiring people. Each has helped to resolve some of the most pressing problems our country is facing. I especially appreciated the piece, Information Gurus, on Chetan Ram and Rawat Ram in Nokha, Rajasthan. It is not easy to work in a small place where vested interests have a lot of power. Exposing corruption in this manner requires a lot of courage.

Ashish Singh

It was really wonderful to read the article, 'Business of Smiles and Hope' that featured the work of Eliazar and Ruth Rose in Andhra Pradesh. I worked with leprosy patients when I was younger in Rishikesh and Dehradun and they are still my friends. I would like to send my good wishes to all at New Hope.

Florence Rastogi

Shree Padre has written a very good article, 'Master of the Pulse,' on Vaidyar Arjunan. The community of healers from all over India will be pleased to know that *Civil Society* has done well in recognising this noble soul who serves the poor and rich alike.

Hariramamurthi G.

The article on Begari Lakshamma, 'The keeper of seeds,' was very well written. The Deccan Development Society has worked to empower small women farmers with extremely fruitful results. Seeds are our traditional heritage. By now this biodiversity would have disappeared. Instead the trend of using local seeds has caught on here.

Narayanan B.

The story of Mangal Singh is rather tragic. That a grassroots inventor should be treated so shabbily by the

NGO sector and a government agency like CAPART is shocking. He should be compensated for all the harassment he has been subjected to and his Mangal Turbine must be promoted.

Devinder Singh

OpASHA

We read your story, 'OpASHA has tech for TB patient compliance.' We are keen to get in touch with them. We also have TB patients and we would love to know more about the Android app.

Keshav Dutt Pandey
To contact OpASHA, speak to Subhika at 08447732004

10 years

Wonderful to see you turn 10 years old. What a nice write up to commemorate it. Keep going...

Mustafa

Kudos. Great and well-meaning effort.

Satish Mishra

You deserve a big round of applause for making a small publication like *Civil Society* such a big success. You have used your modest resources as best as you could – a lesson for other entrepreneurs.

Sushil Saxena

Flood havoc

With reference to your interview with Chandrashekar Hariharan, 'Revere nature first in rebuilding ancient temple areas,' I especially appreciated his suggestion that buildings in Uttarakhand must have lighter roofs and quake proof foundations.

These are words of great wisdom from a person who has walked the talk and demonstrated the relevance of green technology in BCIL. The Uttarakhand tragedy was a man-made disaster. We need to honour and obey the principles of nature and ensure safety. We require many more Chandrashekar Hariharans and BCILs for wise counsel.

Prof. S Shiva Kumar

Skin deep

The interview with Nandita Das, 'Young girls worry more about their skin than skills,' was spot on. The yen to look fair has assumed ridiculous proportions. Cosmetic companies are cashing in on a bad perception in Indian society. In my opinion all fairness creams and products should be banned.

Savita Garg

Letters should be sent to
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HALL OF FAME ROCKS WITH



Entrants to this year's Civil Society Hall of Fame with Aruna Roy, Rita and Umesh Anand

Civil Society News

New Delhi

THE Everyone is Someone Concert saw Indian Ocean give an outstanding performance to celebrate the Civil Society Hall of Fame 2013 and 10 years of *Civil Society* magazine.

The Amphitheatre at the Habitat Centre in Delhi overflowed with people from all walks of life who connected with the spirit of the occasion – giving due recognition to small initiatives and vanishing identities.

A highlight of the evening was two numbers Indian Ocean did with Santhal musicians from Jharkhand playing the *Banam* and the *Tiriyo* – traditional instruments which are dying out.

The Civil Society Hall of Fame is in its fifth year and is a medium for citizens to felicitate citizens. It recognizes people who strengthen democracy and make our world a happier and more inclusive place. It is an initiative of *Civil Society* magazine in partnership with the Azim Premji Foundation.

The Hall of Fame recognises achievers from across India. They live inspirational lives but do so far from the spotlight. This year's entrants to the Hall of Fame are Begari Lakshamma, Eliazar and Ruth Rose, Chetan Ram and Rawat Ram, Vaidya K.P. Arjunan, Mangal Singh and Dr Yaradi Krishna Murty and the Pariyavarna Parirakshana Sangham (PPS). Their profiles have appeared in the Special Anniversary Issue of *Civil Society*.

Of the entrants only Dr Krishna Murty and the PPS could not attend the ceremony because of the devastation caused by the cyclone in Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh.

Presenting the citations, Aruna Roy, RTI activist and MKSS founder, said *Civil Society* magazine had through its journalism drawn attention to the achievements and struggles of ordinary people. It has shown that there is more to society than the rich and influential who usually dominate the media.

“For the people at the grassroots of this country,



Aruna Roy holds the citation for PPS

every day is a struggle for poverty and hunger. A struggle for access to what we in our lives take for granted,” she said. “Yet, people want a democracy and their vote. They want an economy that is answerable and accountable. The only reason why the music of our friends from Jharkhand is less heard is because no one sells it like Western and Bollywood music. Whoever is seen or heard on television or hoardings is heard, others go unnoticed. I am really happy to see *Civil Society* bringing these musicians here to Delhi and putting them together with a big band like Indian Ocean.”

The evening began with a video capsule on *Civil Society*'s 10 years and the highlights of the magazine's journey through spaces often ignored by the



Indian Ocean delivers an unforgettable performance with Santhal

media. *Civil Society* sees itself as the ‘new mainstream’ because of its success in identifying trends and issues and new leaders much ahead of others.

In her welcome address, Rita Anand, Editor, *Civil Society*, said, “People in the Hall of Fame are change leaders in their own right. They are part of the nation building process. They have countered exclusion with inclusion, fought corruption with transparency, conserved our biodiversity, preserved our medical traditions and invented green technology for our small farmers.”

Civil Society had set out 10 years ago to write such stories of change which were going unnoticed. “The birth of *Civil Society* coincided with a decade of intense activism from 2003 sparked by the entry of

CONCERT TO REMEMBER

PICTURES BY JATINDER PAL SINGH



musicians at the Everyone is Someone Concert

activists into the NAC. We found ourselves immersed in campaigns for the right to information, employment guarantee and so many others. You could say we were there at the right time in the right place," she said.

Umesh Anand, Publisher, *Civil Society* spoke about the Everyone is Someone Concert while introducing the Santhal musicians and their musical instruments to the audience. He said, "Everyone is someone is the principle on which a modern competitive economy needs to be built. When I was in Jamshedpur, Biren Bhuta of Tata Steel insisted that I check out *Banam* musicians that the company was supporting. I heard them play and thought we should have them at our next Hall of Fame event in

The Civil Society Hall of Fame is in its fifth year and is a medium for citizens to felicitate citizens. It recognises people who strengthen democracy and make our world a happier and more inclusive place.

Delhi. Then I thought why not have a really big band play with them. Since Rita and I are fans of Indian Ocean I asked them. They said yes sure – just like that!"

Speaking on the coming together of two very different musical entities, he added, "So we now have musicians from a distant corner of Jharkhand playing with a big band in the heart of Delhi. They belong to different cultures, use different technologies and speak different languages. But they are together on this stage. This is how we need to recognise talent and make our society more equal."

The huge audience consisted of entrepreneurs, activists, doctors, engineers, students, journalists and music buffs. They cheered the Hall of Fame



Eliazar and Ruth Rose



Rawat Ram and Chetan Ram

entrants as much as they did Indian Ocean and the Santhal musicians.

The Santhal musicians put their hearts into the performance. The *Banam* is a stringed instrument, which is handcarved from wood by the musicians themselves. The *Tiriyo* is like a flute. Led by Kinu Suraj Tudu, 78, the four musicians danced and sang two songs in beautiful synchronisation with Indian Ocean, *Maaya* being one of the numbers that went really well.

Apart from Kinu Suraj, there was Pradhan Hembrom, Salkhan Soren and Nuna Majhi.

Nuna, just 24, played the *Banam* as well as the *Tiriyo* and was one of the stars of the evening. So was the youngest addition to the Indian Ocean lineup, Nikhil Rao, whose lead guitar is outstanding. Nikhil has replaced the legendary Sushmit Sen who has left the band. So, he has a challenging role to play but measures up to it well.

The success of the *jugalbandi* owes much to Indian Ocean working with the Santhal musicians in preparation for the concert and helping them open up. The band showed a lot of sincerity in this unique collaboration and it finally resulted in a memorable chemistry on stage. The spirit of 'everyone is someone' was alive as they performed and the audience loved it.

Indian Ocean played hits like *Bandeh*, *Maa Rewa* and *Kandisa*. They also did classics like *Bhor* and *Jhini*, which they don't play often. Rahul Ram was lively and entertaining, ribbing other band members and engaging with the audience. Amit Kilam, with the *Gaabgubi*, the stringed instrument from Bengal, in the song *Maa Rewa*, challenged the audience to match his beats with claps. It is a cheeky game that goes really well every time he does it.

The Hall of Fame entrants received their citations from Aruna Roy, after their works and achievements were showcased in short clips. They spoke about their work and their ideals. They were touched and honoured to be feted by an audience in Delhi.

In the Civil Society Hall of Fame citizens honour citizens in a non-official way. One cannot apply to be a part of the Hall of Fame, neither can one be nominated. A nationwide selection process is carried out over the year and people are identified on the basis of the work they do. A long list then goes to a jury. This year's jury was: Anupam Mishra, Aruna Roy, Darshan Shankar, Nasser Munjee, Harivansh and Vir Chopra.

Mangal Singh is a farmer cum innovator from



Rahul Ram



Himanshu Joshi



Amit Kilam



Nikhil Rao

Bundelkhand. His Mangal Turbine makes irrigation easy and cheap. It runs on water and is the low-cost answer to the needs of small farmers who cannot afford to buy diesel. Mangal Singh has installed his turbine in many places in northern and central India. But that is hardly anything considering what it could do for millions of people.

The problem is that Mangal Singh has received

little recognition from the government or society before the Hall of Fame. It has been a long and lonely journey for him. Some of his land has been taken away from him. And there have been attempts to replicate the turbine. But Mangal Singh has battled on convinced about the merits of his invention.

Physician and activist Dr Yaradi Krishna Murty plays an important role in propelling a people's



Mangal Singh



Vaidya K.P. Arjunan



Begari Lakshamma

struggle in Sompeta. The people of Sompeta have been fighting hard to keep a thermal power plant out of their area. They fear the plant will destroy their environment, rob them of their fields and give them nothing in return. Sompeta and 18 villages are part of a brilliant countryside straddling some 5,000 acres in the Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh. There is also the beela, a perennial water body

much loved by the farmers.

When the power plant was sanctioned, this green belt was declared a wasteland. A long struggle over the past four years has been led by Dr Murthy and the Pariyavarna Parirakshana Sangham (PPS). Farmers died in an incident of police firing and many were injured. The agitation has brought out people from all walks of life.

In this age of corporatised science and genetically modified food, Begari Lakshamma keeps scientific community knowledge alive. She preserves traditional seeds and has 60 to 70 varieties in the community seed-bank that she manages at Humnapur village in Telengana, Andhra Pradesh.

Lakshamma learnt the value of native seeds from her grandmother who also used to manage a community seed-bank. Supported by the Deccan Development Society, Lakshamma has an amazing range of native seeds, which include millets, oilseeds and legumes. She is a farmer herself and plants them on the five acres she cultivates. At least 50 families in her village borrow these seeds from her. Lakshamma also makes documentary films and is a member of the Community Media Trust of Deccan Development Society. She has made more than 300 documentaries on farming, seeds and GM crops.

Eliazar and Ruth Rose grew up as the healthy children of patients of leprosy. Their families were neighbours in the Benthany Leprosy Colony in Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh. They saw their parents beg and experienced the stigma that is attached to leprosy. Eliazar and Ruth were lucky to receive an education and had the chance to move on. Instead they chose to help leprosy patients and put their children into the mainstream of society.

They now run two villages under the name of New Hope Children's Village in Odisha and Andhra Pradesh. In Odisha, Eliazar set up a facility for reconstructive surgery. There are clinics where leprosy patients can have their wounds dressed. Several thousand children have got a meal and found shelter thanks to their efforts.

Chetan Ram and Rawat Ram work in a corner of the Thar desert, empowering residents of the Nokha block of Rajasthan to deal with corruption and inefficiency in the government. They have through the Urmul Jyoti Sansthan and its Jagruk Nagrik Manch run a successful citizens' awareness campaign. People now ask questions of local government officials that they never dared ask before.

A Soochna Kendra, located near Nokha's government offices, helps citizens fill forms and make applications. The Soochna Kendra shows people how to ask for their rights. When land records are fudged or dues are not paid, it is the Soochna Kendra that gives simple village folk the courage to fight on. The Jagruk Nagrik Manch has created a culture of accountability by its campaign in villages. Thanks to its efforts, more than ₹70 lakhs paid in bribes have been taken back from corrupt local level officials.

Vaidya Kalyani Parasuraman Arjunan is a low-profile guru of the Siddha system of traditional medicine. He belongs to a family, which has over generations practised Siddha to treat the needy. Arjunan keeps the family tradition alive in Vellore in Tamil Nadu. Over 30 years he has treated tens of thousands of people free. He holds camps in remote areas. His clinic prepares 300 essential medicines.

He has helped the forest department to set up 80 herbal gardens each to educate people. Arjunan is a master at reading the pulse, which is at the core of Siddha practice. It takes him 30 seconds to a minute to read a patient's pulse and diagnose an illness. Arjunan learnt to identify plants and their medicinal properties from his father. Part of the training was to find a plant in the dead of night. ■

The light that never dies

Shayak Majumder
Gurgaon

Dr T.N. Ahojja examines Gyanvati Devi's eyes carefully and assures her everything is fine. Blind in both eyes, the 65-year-old lady from Najafgarh in outer Delhi couldn't see a thing earlier. "Her vision is crystal clear now. She can even see her home from here," says Dr Ahojja.

The Y.P. Mahindru Eye Bank and Cornea Transplant Unit is located inside the Ahojja Eye and Dental Institute in Dayanand Colony, Gurgaon. It is run by the Niramaya Charitable Trust, an NGO managed by a team of doctors. The eye bank stores over 1,000 corneas ready for transplant.

It is the only government approved eye bank in Haryana that is registered with the Eye Bank Association of India.

The eye bank has an interesting story to tell. It was founded by late Yash Pal Mahindru, an entrepreneur who set up a technology company which later became a part of the Advance Group of Companies.

In the early 1960s Mahindru noticed that the government carried out campaigns to combat malaria and polio, but did nothing for a curable malady like cataract. Yet, there were thousands of people, young and old, who were suffering from preventable blindness. A socially minded person, he put his heart and soul into organising regular eye camps.

"Those camps were more of a community initiative," recalls his son, Ashok Mahindru, who heads the Mahindru Foundation. "They felt like a weekly family get together. My father would invite his friends and neighbours and together we would join hands in helping patients."

Ashok grew up empathizing with those who had lost their vision. "Our parents would ask us to go and talk to patients at the camps. Listening to their problems and seeing their suffering made us realize the importance of vision," he explains.

At the age of 31, Ashok himself became blind for 14 days. His condition was caused by posterior uveitis, an inflammation of the uvea – the middle, pigmented, vascular structures of the eye. Describing that difficult phase, Ashok says simply that it was a humbling experience.

But it seems to have sparked in him an urgent passion to eradicate curable blindness. By 2015 he hopes to set up 50 eye banks.

"India is home to the world's largest blind population," explains Ashok. "Around 120 million people are suffering from some kind of eye problem. Eighty per cent of these are caused by cataract or refractive errors which are curable." The problem,



A young boy gets his eyes checked at the Ahojja Eye and Dental Institute

he says, is lack of awareness about eye donation.

The eye bank organises *netradaan* or eye donation camps throughout the year. Each camp has a festive atmosphere and includes activities like a drawing competition for children. Ashok describes the eye camp as a "bridge between corporate social responsibility and donors."

In 2010, the eye bank organized a blind walk. Around 4,000 people participated making it the largest event of its kind and winning it a place in the Limca Book of World Records. In 2005, its maiden year, the eye bank registered only 12 eye donations. "Till date we have received about 1,200 eye donations and successfully conducted around 700 trans-



Dr T.N. Ahojja



Ashok Mahindru

One donated cornea can restore vision in as many as four patients thanks to modern clinical technologies and the precision of the operating surgeon.

LAKSHMAN ANAND

plants," says Ashok.

One cornea can restore vision in as many as four patients thanks to modern clinical technologies and the precision of the operating surgeon. "A cornea is made up of five layers. In cataract, one particular layer gets damaged. With precise procedures, we replace the damaged layer. So, from one cornea, we can operate on four different patients," explains Dr Ahojja.

Time is an important factor in corneal transplants. A donated eye can only be retrieved after the donor passes away. The cornea has to be removed within six to eight hours.

"Earlier, we had to commute to AIIMS in Delhi from Gurgaon to retrieve the cornea. The entire process, including the paperwork,

used to take us nearly four to five hours. We did not have enough time for the operation. This is why having an eye bank in Gurgaon is so important," says Dr Ahojja.

Teams from the eye bank venture out to villages and slums to hold regular eye camps. They have visited villages in Farrukhnagar, Pataudi, Mewat and Tauru to identify people with diminished vision, treat them and bring cataract patients to the Ahojja clinic where they are treated free of cost.

The eye bank issues certificates to those who pledge to donate. Sometimes a condolence ceremony is also held for the donor who has passed away. "It is a unique event, organised by the eye bank, to

remember the donor and inform the people of his or her noble deed," says Ashok. "Emotions are high and volatile during these ceremonies. They help to break down myths pertaining to eye donation."

Sadly eye donation in India is frowned upon. It is wrongly believed that if a person donates his eyes he or she will not be able to see in his next birth. "If you go through any of the scriptures, you will find no restrictions have been imposed on any form of organ donation. This is a stigma we aim to fight and eradicate," says Ashok.

The eye bank is also keen to support NGOs who would like to work for preventing blindness. "Through our campaigns, we can provide them a platform and global sponsors. The only criteria is that they must adhere to the norms of quality and guarantee set by us," says Ashok.

Every day the Y.P. Mahindru Eye Bank treats nearly 150 patients, regardless of which class they belong to. They could be schoolteachers or rickshaw pullers. They are all treated with dignity and equality.

"My father, Yash Pal Mahindru, believed that all human beings are like vessels. We must give in any way we can. He began this mission 55 years ago. I am just taking his dream forward," says Ashok. ■

Politics after NOTA



EVMs will now have a NOTA button

Saibal Chatterjee
New Delhi

ON 27 September, in a landmark judgment, the Supreme Court directed the Election Commission to introduce a None of the Above (NOTA) option on electronic voting machines (EVMs) and ballot papers. The verdict implied legal recognition of negative voting as a constitutional right.

The Election Commission, on its part, has since directed that changes be made on EVMs and ballots to enable voters, if they so desired, to exercise the option not to vote for any of the candidates that are in the fray.

Instructions have also been issued for changes in the handbook for returning officers, the manual for presiding officers, the various forms used for counting and the final result sheet. The Election Commission has ordered that all NOTA votes should be tallied and the final count mentioned in the result.

In its order, the Election Commission said: "It is clarified that NOTA has the same effect as not voting for any candidate under the earlier provisions of Rule 49-O. Therefore, even if, in any extreme case, the number of votes against NOTA is more than the number of votes secured by the candidates, the candidate who secures the largest number of votes among the contesting candidates shall be declared to be elected as per the provisions of Rule 64."

Now that Indian voters have access to the NOTA button, what exactly can they expect? While most

'The political class will not do anything on its own,' says Mahi Pal Singh of the PUCL. 'But the NOTA vote could act as a moral force and have an impact in the long run.'

have welcomed it as a step forward, observers and activists are quick to point out that NOTA is only a small beginning because it does not amount to a right to reject.

After the SC judgment, Jayaprakash Narayan, anti-corruption activist and founder of Lok Satta Party, had tweeted: "This is a small, positive step. Only about one per cent of voters typically use the negative vote. (So) it is not a game changer."

"It is a very significant step," says social activist Nikhil Dey of the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS). "It gives the voter the option to show that while he is interested in the electoral process he is displeased with the quality of the candidates."

For Prashant Bhushan, senior Supreme Court advocate and key member of the Aam Aadmi Party, this is an important judgment because it allows people to express themselves against the available candidates. "Although it will currently not have any

impact on the outcome of an election, it is an important first step towards the right to reject," he says.

N. Gopalaswami, former Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) believes that NOTA would need to be followed up with much more to be an effective reform: "From here the next logical step will be one of raising the status of the button to that of negative vote with consequences... a vote for rejection of all candidates, instead of its current status of merely being 'no vote'."

Mahi Pal Singh, secretary of the People's Union of Civil Liberties (PUCL), which filed the writ petition on the right to negative voting, says: "The right to reject will obviously not happen automatically. Pressure will have to be built up and sustained for the NOTA option to lead to something more significant."

"Our next step," he adds, "will be to demand the right to reject and recall. We will work towards that end once NOTA comes into effect in the upcoming state Assembly and Lok Sabha elections and its impact is felt."

Will the availability of NOTA boost voter turnout? Observers believe that low turnouts reflect voter disenchantment. With negative voting being

allowed, people might be encouraged to come out and vote if they feel that the available candidates have tainted backgrounds and are not fit to represent them.

According to Nikhil Dey, when a voter did not exercise his franchise in the past, "no statement was being made". It was attributed either to laziness or a general sense of disillusionment with the electoral system. "Now he has the right of choice and by pressing the NOTA button he will be able to make his displeasure known in secrecy," he adds.

Will the NOTA option also help people build pressure on political parties to put up cleaner candidates? "The political class will not do anything on its own," says Mahi Pal Singh. "But the NOTA vote could act as a moral force and have an impact in the long run."

Says Nikhil Dey: "The NOTA vote will be only a protest vote for now and it will not impact the final results. But even if only 100 NOTA votes are polled in a constituency that should pass on a message to the political parties."

Anurag Mittal of the Association of Democratic Reforms (ADR), which has been in the forefront of the movement to clean up India's electoral system for over a decade, feels a second set of reforms are an absolute must.

"Civil society," he says, "has to be proactive to bring about further electoral reform, including the right to recall. The Election Commission, too, needs to play a proactive role, at least in making recommendations to the government based on their analysis of state Assembly and Lok Sabha elections."

Although Mittal is not all that optimistic about

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the establishment mending its ways and pushing for further electoral reform, he feels that the political parties might to some extent be forced to field cleaner candidates.

In a recent newspaper column, former CEC, S.Y. Quraishi, wrote: "My personal feeling... is that expecting moral pressure to work on political parties is far too optimistic, given their stubborn refusal to debar tainted candidates from contesting, despite a public hue and cry for two decades."

Anurag Kejriwal, Delhi president of Lok Satta Party, points to the possibility of misuse of the NOTA option. "If five candidates of a party vie for a poll ticket, only one will be fielded. The ones that miss out might encourage their voters to opt for NOTA. Distortions could creep in as a result," he says.

'The people will have to play an active role in wresting the right to reject by seeking legislative measures and changes in jurisprudence,' says Nikhil Dey of the MKSS.

Yet, the movement to decriminalize the legislative bodies, which has received a shot in the arm owing to the thwarting of the attempt to reverse through an ordinance an apex court ruling that lays down that a Member of Parliament who is found guilty of offences would be instantly unseated, is likely to receive a fillip.

"The right to reject candidates is very much in the realm of possibility," says Dey. "The people will have to play an active role in wresting this right by seeking legislative measures and changes in jurisprudence."

On 11 October, Dey was part of a Jan Manch in Rajasthan where around 1,000 people turned up and demanded that political parties be brought under the purview of the Right to Information Act.

"They made two key demands: one, *hisaab nahin toh vote nahin* (no transparency, no vote); and two, if any charge-sheeted candidate is fielded, the political party must provide proof to support the claim that he has been falsely implicated," says Dey.

The stage seems to be set for the next big leap. Over 120 million first-time voters will wield the power of NOTA in the next general elections. So, political parties resisting decriminalisation will have to stop dragging their feet and give in to the growing demand to clean up their act.

The writing on the wall is clear. Since the past decade persistent efforts by groups like the ADR have resulted in a number of changes in the electoral system via the Supreme Court – from making it mandatory for candidates to declare their assets to NOTA and the recent order unseating MPs and MLAs with criminal charges.

People want politicians to be free of corruption and to fight elections in an honest way. And they will continue to appeal for this kind of justice. ■

Vapi hellhole gets



Tanushree Gangopadhyay
Ahmedabad

HEMAVATHI Gaunder's husband, S.R. Gaunder, was employed as a labourer for a reputed power company in Ahmedabad. Three years ago, the Occupational Health Centre in Mumbai diagnosed him with cancer caused by excessive exposure to asbestos.

"My husband died leaving me with no support," says Hemavathi sadly. She now earns money by cooking and selling food.

Hemavathi received no compensation. "We can't do anything since her husband was a migrant from Tamil Nadu," says Raghunath Manwar, president of the Occupational Health Association, Ahmedabad. "There are many migrant workers like him who have died due to exposure to asbestos."

Manwar used to work in the same power plant. He says the appalling work conditions in the plant impaired his hearing. The company sacked him when he testified before a committee examining hazards that workers were exposed to in the plant. Manwar is now an Ashoka Fellow and a leader of the Occupational Health Association.

"Workers in Gujarat's 23 government-owned thermal power plants suffer from asbestosis apart from occupational diseases like pneumoconiosis, silicosis, heart disease, lung disease, kidney malfunction, reproductive diseases and skin ailments," he explains.

"Six of the 26 cleaners in Gandhinagar's thermal power plant are afflicted with the dreaded asbestosis disease. None are covered by the state government's Employees State Insurance Scheme (ESIS) since they are all on contract," says the activist.

Several contract workers have died in the past few decades, alleges Manwar. "Most of them were diagnosed with tuberculosis, but we learnt that they were actually suffering from occupational asthma."

Gujarat is India's most industrialised state but its government has turned a blind eye to pollution. The stretch from Vapi to Mehsana is one of the most polluted in India. Ninety-two per cent of industries here are in the informal sector. They are busy processing hazardous chemicals. The Delhi-Mumbai Infrastructure Corridor is likely to worsen pollution. With the march of industry, agricultural lands have turned fallow.

Industry is now expanding into rural Vapi, attracting large numbers of migrant labour and

Campaign launched against

Shayak Majumder
New Delhi

A campaign to change the culture that encourages parents to marry off their daughters below the age of 18 was launched on October 21 by Breakthrough, a global human rights organisation, entitled 'Nation Against Early Marriage'.

Every year, there are more than 20 million young brides in India, which is about one-third of the 60 million globally. Sotuh Asia accounts for 30 million.

Breakthrough's campaign is called 'Nation

Against Early Marriage' and seeks to reverse this trend by creating greater public consciousness. In India, the Child Marriage (Prevention) Act makes marriage of girls below the age of 18 a punishable offence. But social customs continue to encourage child marriage. Intervention by the State results in protests by the community.

Research data shows that early marriage is one of the main reasons for infant and maternal mortality, lack of education, psychological trauma, high rates of sexually transmitted diseases and domestic violence.

Breakthrough is currently working in the districts

worse for migrant workers



Asbestos is also being used by the auto sector in brake liners. The fibre is likely to float around in the factory. However Dr Tiwari from the NIOH denies this. "We have not found any case of asbestosis in this sector," he says.

Jagdish Patel, a well-known occupational health activist, does not agree. "This is a very latent disease," he explains. "We have noticed it among workers after 30 to 40 years. The fibre floats around in the environment. How else can vegetable vendors get the disease?" Another deadly pollutant is chromium. Take Ram Kailash Saroj. At the tender age of 19, Ram Kailash with his father and 14 relatives worked in a chromium chemical company in Baroda.

After a few years this young robust migrant worker from Pratapgarh in Uttar Pradesh got an ulcer on his leg and had to get his toe amputated. "At least two of my relatives died inhaling this chemical. The entire shop floor was full of dust. We could not see each other."

Migrant workers slaving in dirty industries have won a few hard earned victories in their fight for justice.

After a long struggle the Vadodara Kamdar Union (VKU), led by Rohit Prajapati, an environmental activist and Jagdish Patel, managed to get the Gujarat Pollution Control Board (GPCB) to close a polluting chromium factory in Baroda and fine the owner Rs 15 crores under the Environmental Protection Act and the Hazardous Waste Act on 10 August 2010.

The VKU had to file several environment and labour petitions in different courts to prod the GPCB to act. Meanwhile, many more workers died or became very sick.

"ESIS officials detected 35 cases of nasal perforation in a day at our insistence," says Jagdish Patel

who is also the director of People's Training and Research Centre, Baroda. "But they didn't consider nasal perforation a disability merely because there was no visible discomfort."

Patel clandestinely entered the factory on the insistence of workers and saw their appalling working conditions. Around 250 workers are members of the VKU. The ESIS' lethargy in setting up medical boards to assess the health of workers has demoralized the VKU. A few workers were evaluated with just 15 per cent disability.

After the chromium factory closed, some workers returned home and some died. "None of our workers are being employed in the industrial estate due to our tarnished image," says an anguished Ram Kailash who contested the Assembly elections and Parliamentary elections to raise labour issues.

Petitions are pending against the owner in several courts. Fifteen workers won ₹25,000 each as compensation and other allowances. But the owner moved the High Court. Meanwhile two workers died. "Fifteen tribals from Dahod passed away after they returned home. The laborious menial labour they did took a toll on their health," says Ram Kailash.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) lists chrome as a hazardous chemical. It can cause ulceration, dermatitis, acute respiratory and nasal ulceritis, lung cancer and necrosis. The ILO recommends stringent safety measures including a dust free environment and ventilation. Medical surveillance of workers should be mandatory.

But the ESIS bureaucracy is very complacent. Dr Pushpaben Thakker, Assistant Director of the Western Region, who is in charge of the Baroda-Valsad stretch where Vapi is located says: "Our role is very limited. It is the job of the Employees State Insurance Corporation (ESIC), a central government agency, to ascertain disability".

Workers and activists rubbish his remark. Patel says that since workers pay for the insurance, they should be listened to. "The ESIC's role is the most important," he says.

Government agencies should all work together. "Why are medical posts not filled? Why can't we have qualified occupational disease personnel? In the West they have so many," rues Manwar. ■

making monitoring difficult. Despite the courts ordering closure of hazardous industries and improvement of working conditions, not much has changed.

Nobody knows for sure how many migrant workers there are in the Vapi-Mehsana industrial belt. Since they are on contract they are not covered by any government health scheme. And the factories don't allow any inspection.

Just eight per cent of industrial workers employed in big companies like Reliance Petrol or Tata Chemicals or the multinationals are well looked after.

Savitri Mehra, widow of a former mason in a power company is suffering from asbestosis. After working for 40 years, her husband, Naran Mehra, retired in 1997. The National Institute of Occupational Health (NIOH), Ahmedabad, identified his illness as asbestosis.



Ram Kailash's toe had to be removed

early marriage

of Hazaribagh and Gaya in Bihar and Ranchi in Jharkhand. In all three areas the number of child brides is abnormally high. In Hazaribagh 33.6 per cent of girls are child brides, in Gaya as many as 50.4 per cent of married girls are underage and in Ranchi, 25.3 per cent.

Sonali Khan, Vice President and Country Director-India of Breakthrough says: "We had hoped that with an increase in education levels, this centuries old tradition will slowly fade out. However, that is clearly not the case. The education of girls is usually stopped after primary school and

then they are married off."

Since April 2013, Breakthrough has held awareness sessions with 200 middle and high school students using folk theatre as a medium. The students who undergo these sessions then train other students.

According to Breakthrough, some girls who participated in the training felt empowered enough to challenge decisions regarding early marriage made in their family and community.

Breakthrough also encourages students to ask questions through an open ballot session to measure the impact their training has on participants.

Breakthrough is currently collaborating with the Ministry of Women and Child Development in Jharkhand to reduce the incidence of early marriage.

"We have presented the early marriage campaign to the Ministry's National Mission for Empowerment of Women and are very hopeful that they will adopt it," says Khan.

Breakthrough is working with UNFPA to take this campaign to states where early marriage is a major social issue.

Scaling up the programme and looking for partners is high on its agenda.

"We will also be slowly expanding our Nation Against Early Marriage campaign to other states where Breakthrough is currently working like Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka and Haryana. We will also be collaborating with international organisations who are already working on this issue across South Asian," says Khan. ■

EAST KOLKATA WETLANDS FACE OLD AND NEW THREATS

All kinds of pollution is seeping in

Subir Roy
Kolkata

THE famed East Kolkata wetlands, an internationally recognised Ramsar site that needs to be preserved for its environmental significance, is under attack from several quarters.

The first and oldest enemy is land sharks and real estate developers who are continuing with impunity to drain out water from bits of the designated wetlands and build.

The second enemy is misconceived notions about what is required to be done to preserve the wetlands and how misapplication of theoretical principles can work against recognising and allowing beneficial traditional knowledge and practices to reign.

The third enemy is progress itself. As incomes rise in Kolkata and its environs, the nature of its solid and liquid waste is changing with the proportion of non-biodegradable and toxic elements rising.

The fourth and the least well-defined enemy is a mindset – a reluctance to recognise that today's waste is a problem, unlike yesterdays. Environmental experts who have fought a historic battle to win for the wetlands their legitimate recognition are reluctant now to ring alarm bells.

Kolkata is located in a bowl, running to the east of the Hooghly, a tributary of the Ganga. To the city's east are a stretch of lowlands, created by the shift of another tributary, the Bidyadhari. Here lie the currently designated 12,500 hectares of wetlands that grow 10,500 tonnes of fish per year and 150 tonnes of vegetables per day, providing livelihood for over 50,000 people. Water bodies cover almost half (46 per cent) of the designated wetlands, agricultural land takes up 39 per cent, garbage landfills nearly 5 per cent and urban and rural settlements over 10 per cent.

The solid waste brought to the landfills is composted in pits in the usual manner and used for growing paddy and vegetables. But what happens to the wastewater that comes via canals from the city to the wetlands is fascinating. The raw sewage is first fed into settling ponds where biodegradation of organic components takes place. Then the nutrient rich sewage is transferred into a fish pond where, in sunlight, there is formation of algal bloom and reduction in biochemical oxygen demand (BOD), indicating



A typical water body in east Kolkata: toxic waste is slowly seeping in

improvement in the organic quality of the water. Fish is grown in this pond and the used water is transferred to fields to irrigate crops.

Land sharks: But despite being assured of national and international protection the wetlands remain in good part orphaned. Land sharks are stealing away bits and pieces. The most recent such action has been an attempt to grab a large 43-bigha area near a well-known hospital and school. Towards the end of last year a coalition of land sharks, local politicians and a section of the police allowed the water to be drained out of what is known as the Collector Bheri (a local name for wetland used to grow fish) and a wall to be built around the area. Three stop-work notices, two by the wetlands authority and one by the Kolkata Municipal Corporation, as well as an FIR lodged with the police initially had a perverse impact.

Instead of the work being stopped, it was speeded up and the notices posted at the site torn up.

Eventually, a coalition of forces mounted enough pressure to stop the encroachment. The wall was broken down in late January and a promise has been made to restore the water body. But those who know the reality on the ground are skeptical about the



Fishermen with a rich catch of fish from a bheri

future. It is not possible to make a cause célèbre out of every bit of encroachment that is attempted and the links between the land mafia and the local power structure is robust. With real estate prices in the city soaring and a scarcity of unoccupied land, further loss of wetlands seems inevitable.

Misconceived notions: On misconceived notions, the Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2010, when they were issued by the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests, (MoEF) came as a shock to all involved with the Kolkata wetlands. They prohibited the diversion of sewage into the wetlands and said such practice, if happening, should stop in six months. This struck at the very roots of the wetlands ecosystem which performed the daily miracle of converting dross into gold. Around 680 million litres of sewage is "treated" at the wetlands, not just saving Rs 500 crore annually in treatment costs, but also helping grow fish and vegetables.

After protests from the East Kolkata Wetlands Management Authority, the union environment ministry called a meeting of all states with Ramsar sites and eventually asked each of the states to formulate the guidelines suitable for it for the centre's vetting

PICTURES BY LAKSHMAN ANAND



and final approval. "Saying that wastewater should not be deposited is quite mindless and fails to recognise the uniqueness of the East Kolkata wetlands. The guiding principle for a Ramsar site is that if there is a wise traditional practice then it will prevail," says Dr Dhruvajyoti Ghosh, an ecologist credited with discovering and documenting the resource recovery features of the wetlands.

Downside of progress: Now the third danger. The pollution caused by growing incomes creating more toxic waste and the attempt to contain it has led to adverse consequences.

This is highlighted by the saga of the relocation of the city's leather tanneries, an important export earner. The higher courts ordered decades ago that the tanneries in the Tangra and China Town area of Kolkata be shifted out of the city to contain the pollution caused by them. The new home identified for them was the Bantala leather complex, a modern facility with pollution control mechanisms, next to the wetlands.

The relocation is not entirely complete but the toxic liquid and solid industrial waste that the complex generates and discharges have come to pose a

serious hazard to the wetlands. Liquid and solid effluents from the factories in the complex are finding their way into the water bodies and severely affecting their ecosystem as some of the common effluent treatment facilities are yet to be built. In 2010 the West Bengal Pollution Control Board asked the Calcutta Leather Complex Tanneries Association to clean up its act. It is only early this year that the clean-up work has started.

An empirical 2011 study by Vivekananda Mukherjee and Gautam Gupta published by the South Asian Network for Development and Environmental Economics on the profitability of rice cultivation in east Kolkata offers an insight into the threat posed by industrial waste. It has come up with dual findings.

One, the profitability of plots using wastewater with organic nutrients was higher than that of plots using groundwater. But it also found that heavy metals like chromium, lead and mercury present in the wastewater were having a negative impact. The good news is that the positive effects of organic nutrients still outweigh the negative effects of heavy metal toxicity.

The study confirms the view of local farmers that the profitability of rice cultivation has been decreasing due to toxicity of water and soil although the presence of chromium and mercury still hover around the permissible limit.

The study also draws an interesting distinction between pollution created by the Bantala leather complex and from other sources. Chromium used by the leather industry may not be all that harmful as is the lead and mercury used by other industries like batteries, paint and glass and private households using high lead content items like enamel paint. For the wetlands to continue to remain ecologically and environmentally useful, use of these metals by industry and households has to be controlled. Or else effluents have to be treated at plants before being allowed to enter the wetlands.

Most recently, a three-year study done by the South Asia Forum for Environment (SEFE) into the solid waste management practices of the city has come up with disturbing findings. Only 10 per cent of the city's solid waste is recycled, the rest goes to the landfills next to the wetlands and toxic elements like lead, zinc, nickel and arsenic in them leach into the soil. The study found that wastewater in the canals around the landfill is high in total dissolved

solids and BOD and concentration of zinc and carbon is high.

A mental block: The fourth danger, of being reluctant to acknowledge an emerging decline is captured by a position that Ghosh had taken and the reaction of experts to it.

The wetlands are in all likelihood on a cusp, transiting from 'safe' to 'endangered'. In 2011 Ghosh raised an alarm. The water that feeds the fisheries has undergone a change which is "doing much damage to the fish population," he said. In a letter to the state government he wrote that the "increasing industrial pollution load is changing the biochemical signature of the waste water that flows to the fisheries. A number of scientists have voiced their concern about the quality of fish produced in the east Kolkata wetlands. It is important to look at this threat before it becomes a disaster. Continuous study of wastewater quality, fish, paddy and vegetables should be the basic schedule of work."

This was contested by some experts. Sure there is a bit of pollution in the wetlands but the fish are safe and fit for human consumption, said experts at the Central Inland Fisheries Research Institute (CIFRI). A study already conducted by SAFE has found that lead in fish tissues remains within permissible levels. The fact that the detoxification in sunlight takes place quickly and fish are taken out of the water in less than 12 weeks reduces chances of pollution settling in the fish.

However, "it cannot be denied that the nature of effluents flowing into the wetlands has changed. They are more toxic now. But there has not yet been any study to prove that the fish has turned unfit for human consumption," says B.C. Jha, a senior scientist at CIFRI.

Where does Ghosh stand now? "The good thing about fish is that it is an indicator species. If the water gets too bad for the fish it either moves away or dies. We have not seen any reports of this. A recent study by the Institute of Environmental Studies and Wetland management, West Bengal, has also not recorded any significant changes," he adds.

But by the time all scientists do all their studies, will there be any wetlands left? "A reasonable guess is that less than a quarter of the post-Salt Lake Wetlands has been lost," says Ghosh. So there is hope yet but keep your fingers crossed. ■

SAMITA'S WORLD

by SAMITA RATHOR



How the jackfruit became

Shree Padre
Cochin

THE humble jackfruit is moving around in five star circles. It took pride of place at the Taj Gateway Hotel's Onam feast in Cochin this year. Chefs rustled up jackfruit *avial*, jackfruit beetroot *kootu* curry, jackfruit and cabbage *thoran*, jackfruit *eruserry* and jackfruit *palada payasam*.

"Oh it is so easy! Just like preparing milk from milk powder," exclaimed Jaffar Ali, the hotel's executive chef. "I open the packet, immerse the dried jackfruit in water for 10 minutes and then go ahead and cook it. It is easy to handle, store and reuse."

For the first time in India, online sales of freeze-dried jackfruit, named 'jackfruit365,' started in early October. Two versions are available – ripe and unripe jackfruit.

One by one five star hotels are welcoming the biggest organic fruit into their kitchens. So far they studiously avoided jackfruit because it was a headache to cut and clean the sticky fruit and toler-



James Joseph with freeze dried jackfruit

ate its odiferous smell. Freeze dried jackfruit makes cooking as easy as pie.

The fruit's new avatar is the brainchild of James Joseph, 42, a former Director of Executive Engagement at Microsoft India. Joseph got this idea three years ago when he ordered the same dinner for Microsoft's clients that was served to American President Barack Obama and his wife at the Taj Palace Hotel in New Delhi.

The dish that was really appreciated was the Varqui crab. Joseph felt it could have tasted equally good if it was made with jackfruit. He asked the chefs why they didn't use jackfruit. It is sticky, smelly and seasonal, they retorted.

Jackfruit reminded Joseph of his childhood. His old uncle would say: "Jackfruit extends human life by 10 years by acting as a bottle brush for your intestinal walls."

Joseph thought of the many health benefits of jackfruit and wanted to promote it. He explored several options and finally decided to freeze-dry the fruit so that it would be easy for consumers to use.

The freeze-drying method of preservation is rela-



Chefs of the Taj Gateway Hotel in Kochi with inventive dishes made of jackfruit for the Onam food fest



Jackfruit varqi



Jackfruit kathi roll

tively new in India. In developed countries, it is widely used to preserve fruits and vegetables. The water content of the fresh fruit or vegetable is extracted by freezing and then the ice is converted into vapour. This reduces the weight and volume of the produce. The dehydrated product doesn't require refrigeration. It can be stored at room temperature in an airtight pack.

Joseph outsourced the freeze-drying process to a company in Kerala that had vast experience in doing it. Then he began offering samples of freeze-dried jackfruit to five-star hotels.

"I still remember the look of bewilderment on my chef's face when I asked him to make a jackfruit pie with chunks of dried jackfruit," recalls Jimmy Kuruvila, Food & Beverages Manager at the Leela

Palace, Bangalore. "He tried reluctantly. Behold, he was pleasantly surprised with the result. Then all of a sudden he came up with many more ideas. Eventually, he made Danish pastries, muffins, tarts and much more."

Joseph named his product 'jackfruit365' to emphasize that the fruit is available through the year. He also launched a website, (www.jackfruit365.com) to spread his message. "You can use ripe jackfruit in desserts in place of apple and replace potato with unripe jackfruit," he says.

"Jackfruit is an excellent food if it is packed hygienically and available in a convenient form. Freeze drying technology makes it easy to transport jackfruit long distance. It makes jackfruit available round the year," says Dr N.K. Krishnakumar, Deputy Director

a dainty tart

PICTURES BY SHREE PADRE



General, ICAR (Horticulture), “We have the technology, but we need people like James Joseph.”

The money that a buyer pays for a 180 gm pack of freeze-dried jackfruit goes to Akshaya Patra, India’s largest and most successful midday meal programme for underprivileged children studying in government schools. This money subsidizes five midday meals. So there is a social cause behind Joseph’s business.

Jose Varkey, Corporate Chef at the CGH Earth, a five star hotel, says buying jackfruit from the market is beset with problems. The fruit might turn out to be over ripe or it may be damaged due to a fall. “We can’t be sure about its quality. But this freeze-dried product is standardized and ideal for our kitchens.”

Dr K. Narayana Gowda, Vice-Chancellor, University of Agricultural Sciences, Bangalore, who took the initiative of forming India’s only Jackfruit Growers Association at Toobugere hails freeze-dried jackfruit as a visionary effort. “There is very good scope for promoting this product internationally. If economically strong communities start liking its taste, the jackfruit farming community and people in subsidiary professions will benefit.”

What made Joseph target five star hotels with jackfruit? “That is the community I know well because of my professional background,” he says. “They cater to the most health conscious customers. Just watch the

range of dishes these chefs invent from this versatile raw material. They will show what is possible.”

A marketing expert, Joseph is clear that he wants to sell his product to the elite. The route he has chosen is the five star hotel. “This target group is very health conscious and keen that their children should eat healthy food. But they don’t have time to cook. We are helping them include dietary fibre in their meals by introducing jackfruit.”

Joseph’s next target is the corporate cafeteria. After a certain period, he plans to make the product available at airports in India so that non-resident Indians can buy it on their way back.

By and large, North Indians aren’t familiar with jackfruit as a fruit. They use tender jackfruit as a vegetable. Joseph does have plans to enter the North Indian market.

“In the near future we will introduce galouti kebab made from jackfruit in Lucknowi royal weddings. The galouti kebab was historically invented exclusively for a toothless Nawab. It simply melts in your mouth. Galouti kebab with jackfruit is delicious,” says Joseph.

If jackfruit becomes popular, farmers will benefit. “Creating demand is the primary objective of marketing,” explains Joseph. “If 10 persons offer a product free, will anyone offer to buy it? But if three buyers purchase the product, demand gets created. The question is how much demand can we create through this campaign.”

One thing is for sure: thanks to Joseph’s effort jackfruit will now be available throughout the year in a handy form. People unfamiliar with the fruit will get to know it and taste it. The humble jackfruit is finally growing in stature. ■ Contact: James Joseph - info@jackfruit365.com



Jackfruit tart

No mining inquiry in 3 states

Civil Society News
New Delhi

THE tenure of the Justice M.B. Shah Commission of Inquiry has ended without its investigation into illegal mining being complete.

In 2010, the Justice M.B. Shah Commission of Inquiry was constituted by the Ministry of Mines to inquire into the illegal mining of iron ore and manganese and to recommend steps to curb such activities.

In July this year, the Ministry of Mines extended the commission’s tenure to 16 October so that it had more time to complete its investigation. That deadline is now over and the commission till date has not received any further extension.

But the commission has not as yet visited Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh though all three states were on its agenda. Around 10 per cent of India’s iron ore is extracted from Chhattisgarh alone.

The Chhattisgarh Bachao Andolan has objected to the termination of the commission. Its

spokesperson, Samantha Agarwal, said that Dr U.V. Singh, the commission’s primary investigator, had assured them that illegal mining in Chhattisgarh would be investigated.

In a letter to the Ministry of Mines, the Andolan alleges that in Chhattisgarh violations are taking place with impunity. The National Mineral Development Corporation’s (NMDC) Bailadila mine is continuing to pollute the Indravati, Shankhini and Dankini rivers. In the Dalli Rajhara Mines, the Andolan says 90 per cent of forestland has been converted into open pit mines by the Bhilai Steel Plant leading to disappearance of bore-wells and a severe groundwater crisis.

Most mining leases are for Bastar and Dantewada, both predominantly tribal districts with high forest cover. Twelve out of 18 mining leases are for Bastar alone. The Andolan alleges that Adivasis have been displaced from their land illegally, in contravention of the Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas Act, (PESA), and the Forest Rights Act. None of the gram sabhas have been asked for their permission though

that is a requirement for issuing forest clearances.

The commission’s terms of reference included looking into the overall impact of mining, including its impact on the livelihood of Adivasi and forest dwelling communities.

The Andolan has demanded that the commission visit Chhattisgarh. On 11 October, a delegation of seven people from Chhattisgarh including Narayan Markam, President of Gond Community, Pradip Komra, Secretary of Gondwana Samanvay Samiti, Bhupendra Darro, Akhil Bhartiya Gondwana Gond Mahasabha and members of Chhattisgarh Bachao Andolan, representing 168 villages in all, came to Delhi to demand the commission’s tenure be extended. However, they have not received any such assurance by the Ministry of Mines so far.

Advocate Prashant Bhushan lambasted the ministry for its premature termination of the commission. “There are many commissions which have been pending in this country for so long which have not done anything. But when the government forms a commission that is genuinely concerned with matters of the environment and Adivasi livelihood, it prevents the commission from operating”. He also stated that he is “prepared to go to the Supreme Court on this matter”. ■

CHARKHA



A road destroyed by Maoists

CONFLICT ZONE

Long wait for roads

Asha Shukla
Chhattisgarh

ROADS, they say, connect lives. And, in a geographically diverse country like India, roads play a vital role. They take development to mountainous regions and to people surviving under the dense canopy of forests. A lot depends on roads.

A charming drive through the Keshkal Valley on National Highway 43 introduces visitors to Chhattisgarh's many picturesque waterfalls and forests. The road traverses the southern part of the state from its capital Raipur to Jagdalpur in Bastar.

There is nothing to indicate that anything is amiss. If anything, the pleasurable drive conveys a sense of prosperity and development in this rural belt in India's hinterland.

But turn off the tourist circuit and the picture changes. Questions begin to tumble out: Why are just a few roads in Bastar well constructed and others at their unbelievable worst? Why is the problem of undeveloped roads still awaiting a solution despite the availability of ample resources, as indicated by Five Year Plan budgets?

The answer seems rather evident – Maoist presence. Labelled the stronghold of the outlawed CPI (Maoist), the Bastar region has always lagged behind in development, with roads being the first casualty.

Jairam Ramesh, Union Minister for Rural Development, during his 2011 visit to the region, called for the speedy completion of public welfare projects, primarily rural roads, within three to four years.

But good intentions have not yielded results. According to a statement given in the Lok Sabha this year by Sarvey Sathyanarayana, Minister of

State in the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, over 30 per cent of road projects in Naxal-hit areas are ailing because of law and order issues. Out of 208 projects worth ₹7,973 crore underway in eight States across India affected by Naxalism and Left-wing extremism, at least 32 are still awaiting completion.

And, out of all the Naxal-affected states, Chhattisgarh has the maximum number of delayed projects (26) followed by Maharashtra and Odisha.

"Delays in works are attributed primarily to the law and order problem in left-wing affected areas, and other issues like land acquisition, shifting of utilities, environmental and forest clearance and poor performance of contractors," said Sathyanarayana.

There is more to this situation than meets the eye. A grave issue plagues Bastar, putting it at par with the rest of the country yet making its consequences far more disastrous here – corruption. On the pretext of road construction, several contractors, bureaucrats and politicians have, over the years, garnered massive benefits for themselves.

The National Highway 43 has two partial bridges

In villages that are not affected by the Maoists, corrupt contractors often dump poor quality material on the roadside and get away with it in the name of Maoist terror.

whose construction started a long time ago. Over the years, accidents, traffic jams, diversions and other inconveniences are the only 'benefits' the local people have received from these partial bridges. The road from Kanker to Bhanupratapur in Kanker district is similarly scattered with a number of bridges, some of which were completed after extensions of two to three years, while others are still hanging in the balance.

Poor maintenance of roads between Dantewada and Bijapur districts tell a similar tale. The difficult road journey from Bhairamgarh to Nimedh is dotted with several CRPF camps. Sushila, a young tribal activist from the region, points out that it would be considerably easier to repair these roads if labourers were allowed shelter inside the camps, since they are vulnerable to Maoist attacks.

Reports of Maoists setting ablaze road repair machinery ignore the fact that these rusting machines were doing little for badly potholed roads, anyway. "Such 'dramatic' incidents only whittle away hope among locals that they will get connectivity in the near future," remarks Dev Lal, a tribal youth.

The better-constructed roads in the blocks of Bastar district disprove the belief that Maoist violence is the cause of poor development. The well-established transport nexus is dependent on these few well-constructed roads.

"It is ironical that nothing bars the felling of trees in the name of road construction. But several factors seem to obstruct the construction of roads and the provision of electricity in the interiors," rued Dev Lal.

Maoist presence coupled with corruption appear as major roadblocks. Contractors, it is believed, face threats to their lives by Maoists, even as terrified workers leave the work incomplete. Yet budgets do not go unspent. In villages not affected by Maoists, corrupt contractors often dump poor quality material on the roadside and get away with it in the name of Maoist terror.

In fact, the fear of Maoists becomes a convenient excuse for rampant corruption. Before announcing new projects on road development, the concerned Ministry must check the quality of roads constructed in the state since its birth in 2001.

"Unemployed youth from the communities can play a constructive role in the implementation of these initiatives. They can be posted to areas they do not hail from, thus preventing the creation of a locally-rooted nexus," suggested Sushila. She explained how such a strategy was successfully implemented in the education sector, where improvements have begun to show in the quality of education being imparted.

The fear of Maoist reprisal has been overblown. As a result, officers dread visiting areas even adjacent to roads identified as unaffected by Maoist activity. More than the Maoists, it's the silent, accusatory eyes of the villagers that hound them. Honest officers are not afraid to survey any region, no matter how deeply entrenched they are believed to be in Maoist violence.

A lady officer toured the entire region from Jagdalpur to Orcha and oversaw the construction of a road of good quality in a short time, using strong security surveillance. She was aware of the sensitivity of that region, yet remained unfazed.

Determination like this will help to speed up connectivity in this tribal state and bring it at par with more developed states. ■

Charkha Features

MENTOR MOMS

Udayan fosters new life for children

Vidya Viswanathan
New Delhi

IT is late morning but Gurmeet Udayan is still sleeping. Her mentor mom, irritated by her new habit, wakes her up. Gurmeet ambles out of her bedroom and whiningly asks for a glass of milk. In her black jacket, tube top and track pants, Gurmeet looks like any spiffy Delhi teenager. She lives in New Manglapuri, a middle-class colony in Mehrauli, southeast Delhi.

Clutching her newly acquired cell phone, Gurmeet says her ambition is to become a TV anchor. A mass communications student at Lingaya's Institute, an IP University College, Gurmeet has interned with CNN-IBN for two months. She says she can write well in both Hindi and English.

"I write mostly sentimental stuff in English but in Hindi I can write on social



Madhu Gupta with the boys she looks after at an Udayan Care home



Kiran Modi, in the centre, with the Udayan Care family in Sant Nagar

issues," says Gurmeet, who studied at Sanskriti, an elite school populated by the children of bureaucrats. She was also on the Child Advisory Board of Plan India and helped edit their magazine.

It's hard to imagine that some 10 years ago Gurmeet and her brother were orphans living in an ashram. Their mother, a paramedic, had died. It was Udayan Care, an organisation that runs homes for destitute children in Delhi's National Capital Region (NCR) that adopted them.

As per the Juvenile Justice (JJ) Act, children on the streets picked up by the police are placed before a Child Welfare Committee (CWC) that then decides where to send the child – to a government-run institute or to an NGO. Delhi has five CWCs in each district: north, west, east, south and northeast. Individuals too can approach Udayan Care with a child either abandoned or orphaned but only after legal formalities have been completed.

Started in 1994 by Kiran Modi, Udayan Care has 189 children under its wing. Of these 127 are girls and 62 are boys. Mostly children over six years old are



taken in since children below six have a chance of being adopted. If the child has a sibling younger than six, he or she is also taken in by Udayan.

Udayan Care's 13 homes are located in Delhi's middle-class colonies so that children get integrated into the community. In contrast to bleak government-run institutes, Udayan Care homes are open spaces with no security guards posted outside.

Each home is run independently by a mentor mom and equipped with caregivers, a project coordinator, counsellors and a visiting psychiatrist. The mentor moms running an Udayan Home are older women who have brought up their own children. "Older women feel bad about not doing anything," explains Madhu Gupta who runs two homes for boys in east Delhi. "We have the time, the patience and the experience to take care of the young"

As per the JJ Act children can live in an Udayan Home till they are 18. After that age they can't live with younger children. But at 18 a young adult may not be completely self-reliant. Udayan Care has two 'After Care Units' for children above 18.

EARLY DAYS : Kiran Modi married into a conventional Marwari joint family at 18 and got a PhD in American literature from IIT Delhi after marriage. She then ran a neighbourhood weekend newspaper for 12 years.

But her elder son died tragically in an accident in the US. The Modis found that he had been contributing to certain charities. "He was doing that while in college. So I felt I should do something for society. In fact, Udayan is named after my son," says Kiran. She registered Udayan Care as a trust with three friends - T.N. Seshan, former Election Commissioner, Dr Shiv Sarin, Director of the Liver and Biliary Sciences Institute in Delhi, and G.P. Todi, owner of Ajanta Offset Press.

For over a year and a half Kiran met around 100 NGOs and visited government-run homes. She found that children in orphanages had no sense of identity or belonging. "The feeling of bonding, of being part of a community and neighbourhood was missing since many of these homes were far from urban areas," she noted. "The joint family system that I grew up in helped me think up our model," she says.

Her idea was to buy a home in a modest neighbourhood. A few children would live there just like in a normal home. They would have multiple mentor parents from upper middle class homes who have successfully brought up their own children. In this way, children would benefit from dealing with many personalities, as in a joint family, and one of them would be available on a daily basis. The mentor moms commit to be there for life because the children need that stability.

Caregivers would take care of their daily needs and live with them. The children would go to high-quality schools and be part of the neighbourhood. Just like other middle class children they would play in the local park and participate in extra-curricular activities.

Kiran started her first home in 1996 in Sant Nagar. She was the first mentor mom. The first to call them up were the Delhi Police. They phoned and said there was a little girl crying at the railway station. Kiran hurried to the station but found that the girl spoke only Marathi. Fortunately, she had a friend who could translate. They traced the girl's father. After some persuasion he agreed to come and take his daughter back.

The first three girls who joined Kiran Modi's home came from Village Cottage Home, a government home for children in Delhi.

It wasn't easy starting a home for abandoned children. Neighbours did not want them around. Kiran told them: "Thank God you are not dead and your children do not have to face these issues. This is a chance for you to serve children."

Kiran had to wrangle with the state government. They wanted her to employ a security guard. "There were four houses in the building. Why should my children have a guard? We should learn to trust them. In fact, I felt that a male security guard in front of a home for girls is a threat."

Seventeen years later, the children in the Sant Nagar home are well integrated into the neighbourhood. They go down to play with other children. Neighbours, too, look after them. A few children are learning tennis at the Delhi Lawn Tennis Association. Swasthi, one of the first children in this home, now works for Amazon in Bangalore.

LIFE AT UDAYAN: Gurmeet, too, lives in a home with 12 girls of different ages. Three appeared for the Class 12 board exams this year. The girls have bonded. Salma goes to Bloom Public School in Vasant Kunj. She is a dancer, an artist and passionate about women's issues especially among the Muslim community. Salma wants to study urbanisation and art. She says she stays away from "hi-fi" people and gravitates towards the underdog.

"Gurmeet is our best success," says Aneesha Wadhwa, 35, a mentor mom at Udayan Care's Manglapuri home. "She used to be an angry child and get violent. She just did not want to be at Sanskriti where she had got admission in Class 6. We have learnt to handle anger in children and that is a big thing for us. Dolly aunty, her mentor mom, dealt with her with love and patience," says Aneesha, who is also a trustee at Udayan Care.

Simi wants to be a clinical psychologist. She is bright, hardworking and academically inclined. Pooja, who also goes to Bloom Public School, wants to be in the travel and tourism industry. Mala wants to be a calligrapher. The youngest girl living there is about eight years old.

The 12 girls have a very lived-in home. They have a large living room with sofas, a flat-paneled TV and telephone. There is a library of DVDs and books. The mantelpiece is full of attractive knick-knacks. There is a photograph of all the children at a birthday party in the home. "That was one of the best days of our life here," says Gurmeet pointing to the photograph.

The study has 12 desks and is decorated with artwork and posters. Each child's name is written large in calligraphy. The girls have their own computer. The bathrooms are spotlessly clean. The bedrooms have beds with trundles from which a second bed can be rolled out. The children have birthday parties and get pocket money. They are also allotted duties like making *rotis*.

Gurmeet's home has five mentor moms. "One of us comes here every afternoon," says the elegant 74-year-old Dolly Anand, who started the Manglapuri home with her friends and cousins several years ago. Five of them put in their own money and borrowed from friends to begin the home.

"They were an incredible bunch of five women. There was Usha Pratap Singh, the mentor mom of the house. She got repairs done and bills paid. Some of them are older and cannot come anymore," says Aneesha, who has been with Udayan Care for 10 years now. She had earlier worked in marketing and communications at Discovery Channel. After her marriage she was looking for something more meaningful to do. The older women brought Aneesha in as a volunteer to deal with two teenage girls who were having the usual adolescent issues like boyfriends and clothes.

Dolly Anand runs the home like her own. It is her turn to be there that day. She takes pride in the fact that they are able to find a unique solution for each



The girls grow up in a family environment



Kiran Modi is called 'bua' or aunty by the children

child's problem. Mala, one of the girls living in the home, walks in. She had problems in school with another child who had been bitching about her.

Dolly had advised her to tell the girl: "You must love me very much if you are talking about me all the time". She asks her how her day had been. Mala gushes: "Aunty I told her what you told me to and she was stunned". All the girls speak in English. Dolly attends parent-teacher meetings like other mentor moms.

The children often need tuitions to keep up with the school curriculum. Dolly brings in friends from her Vasant Vihar colony as volunteers to help the children with lessons. Two children with special needs go to the Akshay Pratishthan School and study the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) syllabus. A teacher from Akshay Pratishthan comes to the home after school to help too and the home pays her.

Dolly is what Udayan calls a volunteer-for-life. She has given away several girls in marriage. They call her up for advice when they are pregnant. Udayan does all the ceremonies that parents would do for their daughters. They vet the groom before marriage, arrange the wedding, organise the ceremonies when they are pregnant, when a child is born, on the child's first birthday and so on. "One of our girls is pregnant and she felt like eating *poha*. She called up Kalpana at our Manglapuri home and asked her to make it," laughs Aneesha. She herself often stays overnight. "When my husband takes my two boys out hiking, I head to the home in Manglapuri and have a night out with the girls. It is home for me too," she says.

It would be an incredible feat to find two volunteers-for-life like Dolly and



Aneesha Wadhwa, a mentor mom, with her children at an Udayan Care home



Boys attend private schools and have a middle-class upbringing

Aneesha. Not only have they put in their money and time, they are also fundraisers for the organisation. But Udayan has 33 such volunteers. The magnet that attracts such passionate, capable, dedicated people is Kiran Modi. The lady is a dynamo and brims with ideas. She starts work at 8 am and finishes at 10pm.

“Just a telephone conversation with her was enough for us to invest our money and dedicate the rest of our lives,” laughs Dolly. Kiran is so committed to the programme that she has decided to stay back in Delhi even though her husband and son’s family have moved to Baroda where they now run their business. “I am with them 10 days in a month. My husband is very supportive,” says Kiran.

BOYS AT UDAYAN CARE: Madhu Gupta ran a boutique and The Heels, a shoe store in Connaught Place. But she had this desire to work for underprivileged children. So she started a small school in her driveway, even providing midday meals from her earnings.

She was saving money for a bigger project and looking around for assistance. “I went to NGOs, Cheshire Homes, the Blind School... but I realised that it wasn’t what I was looking for.” Then her daughter got a job at Udayan. When Kiran heard of Madhu’s desire, she phoned her and took her across to see the Sant Nagar home.

“I was instantly comfortable,” says Madhu. “I bought an apartment in Mayur Vihar in 1999 and I told Kiran that I would start a home for destitute boys. But I would not be able to sleep there at night since my daughters would be alone.”

Kiran, who initially wanted to just support girls, met her trustees and they

decided to go ahead and open a home for boys.

Today, Madhu runs two homes in Mayur Vihar for 30 boys. She is in the process of starting an after-care centre for boys in the same neighbourhood. “My boys go to elite schools like Genesis Global and to some lesser known schools in East Delhi. Genesis Global has admitted three of my boys because Raja, the first boy I enrolled, won six medals on their Sports Day, just six months after joining. Now they admit our boys and fund everything: school fees, uniforms, books, commuting, etc,” she says.

Madhu looks for schools according to her children’s needs. Two boys study at a special education school. Four boys have moved out. Some are studying engineering, hotel management and law.

But Udayan’s children face problems when they grow up. They don’t have a birth certificate. The police do not bother to find out the child’s background. It is difficult for the children once they become adults to get passports. Madhu suggests that orphaned children be given special consideration by the government.

HEALING TOUCH: One of the aspects of mainstreaming these children is a comprehensive mental health programme. Many children arrive emotionally distressed and traumatised. Some have been physically or sexually abused. Each home has a professional social worker who is responsible for counselling, legal work, home administration, group activities and group sessions.

“Every morning I talk to the caregiver in the home. For example, a child could have had a nightmare. A group of children could have been chatting and giggling even after the lights are switched off and some might have had exams the next morning. I see how the caregiver handled it. I talk to the children too,” says Rahul Sharma, the social worker attached to the Udayan Care’s boy’s home in Mayur Vihar.

He is responsible for 29 boys. He also maintains a quarterly report on each child’s progress. The report, which is a requirement under the JJ Act, has 10 sections for each child, including hygiene, education, health, etc. “For example, a new six-year-old boy might not be brushing his teeth before going to school or missing a bath. This is part of hygiene and we have to work on that,” he explains. It is also his job to produce the children before the CWC and a magistrate every four months, as required under the JJ Act.

Dr Deepak Gupta, an adolescent psychiatrist at Ganga Ram Hospital, heads Udayan’s mental health programme. He visits one home every Tuesday evening and talks to the children and the caregiver. All the social workers from different homes meet him on Tuesday morning. “I am also available on call in an emergency,” he says. They discuss issues facing each home. Dr Gupta has helped Udayan Care for over nine years and held several training programmes for mentor moms too.

A SECOND HOME: “Kiran feels that every person who wants to do something does not have to start an NGO. We have the model. They could start a home and we will take care of the legal aspects and administration. They can do what they are best at. We are open. It could be an Udayan Home or with our technical assistance a home in some other city under their own name,” says Dolly.

Somehow every time there is a need, a person arrives like the missing piece in a jigsaw puzzle. Kiran has this ability to spot the right person and integrate her into Udayan’s team. “I feel it is karmic. When I need someone or something, it just happens. A person comes along. It is not me, it is divinity,” says Kiran.

The homes are run independently. “We could give you a handbook on how to run a home. The space required, the staff, the process, the bedsheets, the menu, the works. We have it all documented,” explains Aneesha.

Functions like fundraising, HR, accounts, legal work and volunteer management are centralised. All the volunteers raise funds through friends, family and corporate contacts but the funds are routed through Udayan’s head office which monitors each home.

Kiran has worked at making Udayan Care a professional outfit. “We have volunteer human resource people who are functional heads of large companies. I meet them after their work to improve our systems,” she explains. Kiran organises training programmes for all staff and volunteers on a variety of issues – entrepreneurship, fundraising, counselling, handling epilepsy and, most recently, using social media. The caregivers have been trained in first aid, cooking and conflict resolution. Udayan Care is particular about documentation. Qualified volunteers write their handbooks and manuals. A detailed report is published every year. “Our annual report has got awards for being the most transparent for two years by CSO Partners,” says Kiran.

Kiran already has Vision 2017 in place. She will have 35 children’s homes with 12 children in each by then, she says. She is often asked why she spends so much on one child. “We believe in giving each child the highest quality of life. I want every child to get the same education and opportunities that I would want for my own children. I am not in the numbers game,” she says. ■

BUSINESS

ENTERPRISE | CSR | ICT | GREEN TECH

‘Regional brands understand poverty and rural markets’

MART makes a mark with unusual strategies

Arjun Sen
New Delhi

PRADEEP Kashyap is founder and CEO of MART, India's pioneering rural marketing consultancy. He has been called the 'father of rural marketing in India' by no less a person than Prof. C.K. Prahalad, late management guru and author of the famed book, 'Fortune at the Bottom of the Pyramid'.

MART is now 20 years old. It has been working with companies, governments, international agencies and non-profits, acquiring a lot of experience and knowledge. Some noteworthy rural marketing initiatives it has designed and implemented include Project Shakti with Hindustan Unilever and Arogya Parivar with Novartis. MART has also helped rural women in Odisha reach lucrative markets for their produce.

Kashyap has achieved global recognition for his work on rural inclusive marketing and bottom of the pyramid work in India.

He has worked as a marketing advisor for the Union Ministry of Rural Development and served on several committees on rural development set up by the Prime Minister's Office and various Chief Ministers. He is a consultant for the World Bank and the United Nations. Kashyap has also served as Chairman of the Khadi Commission National Marketing Committee and as a member of NABARD and SIDBI national advisory committees.

In this interview Kashyap spoke of MART's work and his personal commitment to rural development.

What are the services that MART provides to clients?

MART is India's leading rural consultancy working in the corporate and social sectors. We provide a range of integrated services beginning with research leading to strategy and then implementation as well as training. We do all kinds of research – consumer research, brand research, demand estimations as well as value chain and livelihood studies. Our research is aimed at developing a strategy for marketing of goods and services from and to rural India. What is unique about us is that we work for both corporate and social sector organisations.

What sort of work do you do for companies? Can you give us an example?

There are many examples. Some are very well known such as Project Shakti for Hindustan Unilever or



Pradeep Kashyap at the MART office in Noida

Arogya Parivar for Novartis. But let me talk about the work we did with Shell Foundation for their Indoor Air Pollution programme. A WHO study showed that rural women inhale more carbon monoxide while cooking on poorly designed traditional *chullas* than someone smoking a packet of cigarettes.

The project was rolled out in two states – Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. Our research aimed at understanding the cooking habits, different kinds of cooking stoves and the variety of cooking vessels used in poor, rural homes. We helped to develop specifications for an improved cooking stove such as its height, as all cooking is done on the ground and not on kitchen countertop as in urban areas, and the opening at the top since the utensils used are bigger and so on.

On the basis of our specifications, Shell's engineers designed the cooking stove. We then did a

pilot study to field test these new cooking stoves in some selected rural homes and provided feedback to the engineers who further improved the design. We then developed a marketing strategy – what should be the price of the stove, what should be the distribution system, and so on. We then helped Envirofit, the implementation agency appointed by Shell, to market the stoves through women's Self Help Groups (SHGs) and appoint dealers in small towns who were selling similar products. We helped them identify local manufacturers for the stoves too. We started in 2007. In six years, the agency has sold half a million stoves starting with those two states and now they are selling in Punjab and a few other states as well.

Can you explain your work in the social sector?

We worked on a project for tribals in Odisha through the state government. The objective was to

'Our deep knowledge of rural India has helped us to develop distribution, communication and promotion models using existing social infrastructure.'

enhance the incomes of poor tribals who grew maize, cashew nuts or collected mahua, chironjee and other forest produce. Earlier, the women sold their produce individually to traders who visited the village. They got low prices and were often cheated on the weight.

We formed a collective marketing model with 7,500 women from 500 villages in Kandhamal, Koraput, Bolangir and Kalahandi districts. We trained a few of them on basic marketing. We helped them set up drying platforms with funds from the project and we introduced sorting and grading. We took them first to the nearby town trader, a few months later to a bigger city trader, and finally they sold 400 truckloads of maize to Godrej Agrovet.

The group's annual turnover is now ₹12 crore and their profit has gone up by 25 per cent. So, we have not only enhanced their incomes and developed robust value chains but also empowered the women who are now handling the marketing themselves. For this work we had to go to the individual villages, talk to the women, organise them and gradually empower them. We started in 2007 and exited in 2010 and now they are continuing on their own.

What are some of the unique aspects of rural marketing consultancy that you offer?

Our understanding of the rural environment and rural consumers comes from our work with communities in the social sector and with NGOs, UNICEF programmes, World Bank and government programmes – so our understanding is at a grassroots level.

We also offer a comprehensive range of services under one roof. Moreover, we have acquired a considerable body of knowledge over the last two decades – we started in 1993 and completed 20

years two months ago. As we work both in the corporate and social sectors we are uniquely placed to create Public-Private-Partnerships (PPPs), and we have developed several sustainable business models.

Our deep knowledge of rural India has helped us to develop distribution, communication and promotion models using existing social infrastructure to improve economic viability. For example, the last mile distribution Project Shakti we co-created with Unilever where we appointed 50,000 women as dealers using existing SHGs thus minimizing investment by the company, is now a case study at the Harvard Business School.

Similarly, we worked with Novartis to tackle TB in rural India by creating a private delivery channel – private doctors, private testing labs and private chemists. We appointed health entrepreneurs in villages who earn their livelihood by selling medicines to their allotted 30 patients. This model, Arogya Parivar, has impacted three million people in five states and Novartis has now taken this successful model to five other countries.

What are the key differences between rural and urban markets in India?

The first key difference is that the level of awareness of brands is low. The challenge is communication as the poor do not have access to mass media such as print or TV. We ran a major awareness campaign for Tata Steel's corrugated tin sheets for rural homes. We participated in 5,000 weekly *haats* over a four-year period and exposed the product to three million people. Sales went up from ₹280 crore in 2006 to ₹420 crore in 2010.

The second key difference is that affordability is also low because incomes are low. For example, while doing a project with HP LPG gas we realised that even after introducing five kg cylinders instead of the standard 14 kg ones and bringing down the total initial cost for a connection to ₹1,000 not many could afford it. So we used the microfinance group platform where each member contributed ₹100 per month and a lottery draw selected one lady in the group who bought the connection. In this manner, over a 10-month period, all the women got a connection.

The third key difference is accessibility. HUL distribution had reached the larger villages but they did not have a viable business model to reach the smaller villages with a population of less than 2,000. Project Shakti helped them to reach the smaller villages.

A lot of wealth has been generated in rural India in the last 10 years because of several initiatives by the government in agriculture, infrastructure and non-farm employment. Rural families now consume all kinds of products including premium products such as flat screen TVs, Maruti cars, Dove soaps etc.

What kind of products do BPL families buy?

BPL families go for sachets and single serve packages and these days even some no frills durables. But they prefer regional brands because of price considerations and the fact that these brands understand the needs of the poor. For example, in Uttar Pradesh, Jolly brand TVs sell more than the bigger MNC brands because they offer a battery and inverter with their TVs. In rural areas where there is no power at all or even if there is, it is not available for more than half the day, big brands go dead but Jolly TV works. Regional brands understand poverty and can provide solutions. ■

LAKSHMAN ANAND





Nitin Pamnani with his wife Jia

Dastkar at iTokri

Shayak Majumder
New Delhi

ONCE a year Dastkar, a reputed non-profit that works with artisans, hosts a shopping festival called Nature Bazaar in New Delhi. A jumble of stalls springs to life selling an array of crafts and natural products. So popular is this shopping festival that nearly a million buyers visit it. Sadly, it is just an annual event. So if you missed it you would have to wait a whole year.

But not anymore. Devotees of handicrafts can now shop anytime, anywhere, at iTokri.com, an e-commerce site that sells products from Dastkar's vast network of artisans and NGOs from all over India. You can buy clothes, accessories, jewelry, fabric, scarves, dupattas, T-shirts, home décor products and more from iTokri.

Artisans sell directly to buyers via iTokri, and get the price they want.

"There is a high demand for handicraft designs and clothes. Sadly, so far there was no worthy online portal available. We act as a bridge between the consumer and the artisan," says Nitin Pamnani, director of iTokri.

Pamnani, a former documentary film-maker, started iTokri about a year ago with an initial investment of ₹1 crore. His wife Jia is his business partner. She is founder of Jalpari, an organisation that produces handmade jewellery and accessories which are sold on the iTokri website.

The site's support system is the artisans and the NGOs who sell their products on it. "The brand value of revered non-profits like Dastkar and its network of artisans add to the bona fide outlook of iTokri," says Pamnani.

Not only is the artisan given full credit, the buyer is provided complete details of where the product comes from, what goes into making it and why it's special. "Indian craft is all about stories – stories of the work behind the craft and stories of the people mak-

ing it. So we tell those stories to everyone and our consumers like it," says Pamnani.

The website is lively, entertaining and tongue-in-cheek. Spiked with Hindi words to give it a desi touch, it has amusing sections. There is the 'Jaane bhi do Yaaro' section that features naturally dyed T-shirts. 'Angry mom ka cool ghar' sells décor and dining products and 'Bachna ae haseeno' sells clothing for men. Buy jholas at 'NGO Types' and products for singles at 'Happily Unmarried'. There are



The iTokri team

sections devoted to women and children also.

"We add a personal touch to e-commerce. We ensure that the portal is consumer friendly and fun to surf," says Pamnani.

Over 500 designs of unstitched dress material from Dastkar, Bindaas Unlimited, Malkha, Mrignayanee and others can be bought from the site.

Also available are ipad bags, incense sticks and fridge magnets. Documentary films from the Public Service Broadcasting Service (PSBT), School of Media and Cultural Studies and a plethora of independent films and art can be purchased.

Books can be bought too, mostly stories and poet-

ry, from Aadhar Prakashan. On offer, are Indian food products: kaju barfis stuffed with dry fruit, pethas from Agra and namkeen from Gwalior and Chennai.

Most of the products featured on iTokri are unique. Unlike other commercial products, only a specific number of these are produced. "Though it gets difficult to manage such products consumers are happy to own a one of its kind piece. And if customers are happy, we are happy," says Pamnani.

Middlemen continue to cut into the profits of artisans and small producers. Pamnani explains that such producers don't know how to move their products across the country. They aren't adept at pricing their work either. "This makes it easier for middlemen to exploit them," says Pamnani. "We want to do away with this problem. So we buy the products directly from artisans and small producers at the right price and sell them on iTokri, ensuring complete transparency in the process."

In just a year, iTokri has developed a dedicated list of buyers from all over the world. Pamnani says foreign markets are the biggest consumers of Indian handicrafts. On a daily basis, iTokri gets nearly 2,000 hits. The e-commerce site receives around 80 orders per day. "At times the number of orders goes up to 100. So, we can say that we are doing well," says Pamnani.

Currently, iTokri is working with 100 vendors, including artisans and designers. Within a year, with a little more funding, Pamnani expects that number to rise to 500. "We are still at the first level of our operations. We wish to grow big. We also want to reach out to more producers of handicrafts and perhaps train them in understanding markets, logistics and price structures, thereby empowering them in the process."

iTokri has lined up a range of products for the festive season. "We are introducing a special line of winter products," says Pamnani. Shawls from Kasauni and organic woollen garments from Himachal

Pradesh are slated to be the highlights of their winter range of clothes.

The website has marketed itself through word of mouth, postings on Facebook, recommendations by customers and a transparent buyer-dealer relationship. iTokri is likely to expand rapidly in the coming years since there is a large untapped market for handicrafts.

"We are just like your neighbourhood shop," explains Pamnani. "At iTokri you can rest assured you will get the right product at the right price. We are here to serve our customers and assist them in every way possible." ■

Website: www.itokri.com

INSIGHTS

OPINION | ANALYSIS | RESEARCH | IDEAS

Hawkers remain in limbo

LAKSHMAN ANAND



Women shoppers at a stall on a footpath in Kolkata

SUBIR ROY

THE future of hawkers or street vendors and prospects of a reasonable life for those living in urban India hangs in limbo. A bill to lay down a clear regime for hawkers which will give them legitimacy and free them from harassment by the police was tabled in Parliament last year and has been passed this year by the Lok Sabha.

But it is yet to be passed by the Rajya Sabha. Given the low volume of business transacted by Parliament lately and assuming that with the rise in political temperatures in the run-up to the general elections next year, disruptions in Parliament will increase, there is no knowing when the Rajya Sabha will find the time to pass the bill.

However, even if the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Bill takes some time to get passed, a state government which is keen on being fair to everybody – hawkers and others – can pass its own law along the lines of the central legislation. Also, the latter provides that those states which already have their own hawkers' legislation, which is not inconsistent with the Central Act, can apply the Central Act to their state.

Irrespective of how long it takes for Parliament to

eventually enact the law for hawkers, the mere fact that such a law has been a subject of public discussion for long and has eventually taken some shape indicates that a degree of national consensus on hawkers has emerged. This acknowledges two contesting realities between which a balance has to be found – the hawker's right to ply his trade (thereby earn a minimum livelihood) without facing harassment and extortion and the public's need for roads where vehicles can move and pavements where people can walk.

A reasonable and well-regulated regime for hawkers means freeing up not just road space for vehicular traffic (hawkers often spill onto carriage-

Will everything be alright for hawking in a state once some kind of a bill comes into existence? No. The real challenge will be to agree on a plan for demarcation.

ways) but, what is far more important, pavements or footpaths. With the rise in consciousness over the need to curb global warming and auto emissions, as also the realization that walking is about the best medicine for curbing lifestyle diseases, the importance of walking has gone up manifold.

The hawkers' bill provides for registration of hawkers by a town vending committee, at least 40 per cent of whose members will be from among hawkers. The committee will issue certificates and identity cards which will be a passport for hawkers to ply their trade where they are allowed to.

Virtually anybody above 18 will be able to operate as a hawker with a certificate which indicates a stall and the nature of vending to be undertaken. A hawker will be able to appeal to an appellate authority on any vending committee decision affecting him and must be heard before a ruling is issued. There are also provisions for fine and cancellation of certificate if a hawker breaks rules.

Equally critically, all urban public space will be demarcated in one of three ways – where hawkers can ply freely, in a restricted way and not at all – by the local authority which will prepare a street vending plan every five years to promote an environment supportive of vending. But there will be no permanent right to vend and a vendor can be relocated. The administration's ability to enforce this plan, which has to be approved by the state, will be critical.

Will everything be alright for hawking in a state once some kind of a bill comes into existence? No. The real challenge will be to agree on a plan for demarcation – where a hawker can ply his trade and where he cannot – and enforce it. There is a key conflict. Public places like important intersections and approach roads to railway stations, hospitals and the like need to be kept free for both vehicles and pedestrians. But this is also prime space for hawkers.

Kolkata offers good examples of how an unbearable situation emerges and how sometimes a solution is found. Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee intervened to enforce relocation when she found hawkers demonstrating against their relocation needed to keep the approach road to the SSKM Hospital unclogged. Hawkers in the area, including those relocated, have thereafter been given better looking

Continued on page 28

LAKSHMAN ANAND



There has to be a basic design to meet the minimum needs of all hawkers with place to display, store, awnings or flaps to provide cover from rain and sunshine, and wheels to move.

carts and the whole area is kept rigorously clean by municipal sweepers. (Remember, the Chief Minister drives to work that way every day.)

In contrast take the approach road to another city hospital like the Chittaranjan National Medical College Hospital. It is virtually clogged and the hawkers' association chief has said that this was not the case till 2009 and he blamed the police for it.

Where to draw the line, literally, is found in a plan for hawkers that West Bengal's earlier Left Front government formulated just before the last Kolkata Municipal Corporations elections but was not implemented as the Left lost the polls. It laid down a rule. Hawkers cannot take up more than a third of a pavement and no individual hawker can occupy more than 40 sq ft of space. This seems sound. So in key areas, municipal staff have to use

measuring tape and paint to draw lines on pavements indicating where a hawker can station himself or his cart. The police have to enforce this Lakshman rekha.

Next comes the issue of hygiene. Hawkers and their association must keep the places where they ply their trade clean. This is particularly important where food stalls operate. They should have the areas swept several times a day and the garbage carted off to the nearest collection point (vat) from where municipal trucks carry the garbage away. Hawkers have every right to earn a living but no right to create and add to filth. They have the responsibility to clean up the waste generated by their trade.

Finally urban areas can look different, bright and pleasant if their carts or stalls are redesigned. A

Danish firm has done so for Kolkata but it costs ₹60,000. Design improvements are needed to bring down costs and also to follow a modular approach. There has to be a basic design to meet the minimum needs of all hawkers with place to display, store, awnings or flaps to provide cover from rain and sunshine, and wheels to move off at the end of the day or for itinerant hawkers. Various designs can be developed on the basic one to sell different wares like clothes, utensils, knick knacks, ready-to-eat stuff like soft drinks and easy to prepare snacks like tea. There is a case for starting a national competition to design these hawkers carts.

A key issue which needs addressing is whether meals should be allowed to be cooked on pavements. In Kolkata vegetables and fish are cleaned and cooked and puris fried right on the pavement in central areas like Chowringhee and Camac Street. On the other hand there are hawkers selling biryani from huge containers, the stuff being cooked elsewhere and brought by van periodically.

My son and I are great lovers of street food (we are minor authorities on it) and being able to lunch on street food is critical for a lot of office staff. But we have to draw the line somewhere. Can five hawkers in a row run a common van which brings cooked food to them from their kitchens located elsewhere by the hour?

So getting a bill passed is just the first step. ■

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Niyamgiri is a turning point

KANCHI KOHLI

FOLLOWING a Supreme Court directive, the state government of Odisha undertook an exercise seeking the verdict of 12 gram sabhas (village assemblies) on whether or not bauxite should be mined from the top of the Niyamgiri hills in August. As reported in the media, all 12 gram sabhas rejected the proposition that the special purpose vehicle (SPV) set up by the Odisha Mining Corporation (OMC) and Sterlite Industries Ltd should carry out mining activity. Statements made during these gram sabhas reiterate that extraction of bauxite would impact the socio-cultural ethos and fragile ecology of these mountain ranges running across Rayagada and Kalahandi districts of the state.

Since 2004, Niyamgiri and the Dongria Kondh tribals have been in the news. It was at that time that Sterlite Industries Ltd (part of Vedanta Resources plc) plans to mine in the Niyamgiri hills and use the bauxite for its alumina refinery at Lanjigarh were first disclosed. Three sets of cases were filed before the Supreme Court's Central Empowered Committee (CEC) highlighting that the work on the refinery had started without the request clearance for the mine. The clearance is an integral part of the project as stated in several documents including the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) report. This, combined with a strong local struggle against the project, gradually took the Niyamgiri narrative to the international stage.

Niyamgiri's future has been spoken of throughout the social movement's history in many forums. However, the role of the Supreme Court (SC) of India has been decisive in this battle since 2007, when it first paved the way for the SPV to bring in their proposal for mining instead of the parent company Vedanta. In August 2008, the SC sent the proposal for forest diversion to mine Niyamgiri back to the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF). What is important to note is that in early 2008, both the area and the issue also received strong political attention when the Congress, and in particular, party general secretary Rahul Gandhi, promised to back the Niyamgiri issue and the Dongria Kondhs.

The present process of taking the opinion of the gram sabhas before deciding whether bauxite mining should replace the existing lives, cultures and livelihoods of the communities who call Niyamgiri their home, comes following the 18th April 2013 judgment of the SC.

This time the court's jurisdiction was invoked not by the affected people or concerned citizens but by those who continued to push for mining in Niyamgiri. They were challenging the decision of the MoEF taken on 24 August 2010 to disallow mining in Niyamgiri in the light of several key

upon to decide the older and newer claims under the FRA and the right of the Dongria Kondh, Kutia Kandha and other communities to worship the Niyamgiri hills. The decision of the MoEF needs to be based on what the gram sabhas have to say.

Even as the 12 gram sabhas were being held



The Dongria Kondhs protesting

issues, but centrally the one which attracted the provisions of the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 (FRA).

The rights of the Dongria Kondhs had not been recognised under the FRA. MoEF's 2010 order had stated: "Their dependence on the forest being almost complete, the violation of the specific protections extended to their "habitat and habitations" by the FRA is simply unacceptable. This ground by itself has to be foremost in terms of consideration when it comes to the grant of forest or environmental clearance."

The 18th April judgment by the SC stated, amongst other observations, that: "The Forest Rights Act has been enacted conferring powers on the gram sabha constituted under the Act to protect community resources, individual rights, cultural and religious rights." The issue of cultural and religious rights is significant as it has been one of the mainstays of the local struggle and global support. Niyamgiri hills is considered sacred by the Dongria Kondh tribal community and is the abode of their god, Niyamraja. The SC while upholding the role of the gram sabha and the cultural and religious rights of the community vested them with significant powers to decide whether or not mining should take place in the hills. The gram sabhas were called

between 16 July and 19 August, the Union Minister of Tribal Affairs, V. Kishore Deo, stated that limiting the consent process to only 12 village assemblies would be against the SC's judgment and that all villages in the Niyamgiri hills cutting across the two districts of Odisha should have the right to be part of this process and their consent should be sought. Meanwhile, Anil Agarwal, Chairman of Vedanta Resources plc, in his public statement on 1st August stated that while the unsettled and fresh claims of local communities were being placed before the local village councils, the final decision would be that of the MoEF.

The SC had given three months to the Odisha government to complete this process, after which the ball is back in MoEF's corridors. It is to be seen how much the Minister of Tribal Affairs will be able to push this process of seeking consent and establishing rights under a national law. It cannot be denied, however, that the process undertaken in the Niyamgiri's case is unique. It challenges the extent of democratic decision making and the limits of a law like the FRA. But, as much as the process is intriguing, what would be the political next step by the MoEF now that the 12 gram sabhas have cast their verdict? The world is still waiting for the ultimate outcome of the current process which will deeply impact India's political history. ■ kanchikohli@gmail.com

Politics is for the youth

ARJUN SHEKHAR &
POOJA MALHOTRA

ALTHOUGH we never got around to actually interviewing M.S. Gill, the 73-year-old former Union Minister of Sports and Youth Affairs, we carried around the transcript of an imaginary interview we had done with him, for a long time.

It began by asking him a simple question.

“Sir, how are you able to connect to a Constituency which is half a century younger than you?”

There were many replies we concocted on his behalf to this ticklish question. But the one we liked best was this: “Men will always be boys at heart. Don’t judge a book by its cover. I’m forever young!”

In a way, he is absolutely right. Why should age be a marker for what is essentially a bunch of psychological qualities bunched under the term youth hood? Why should people be excluded from the epithet of young just because they have crossed a certain age? Aren’t ‘old’ and ‘young’ just words after all? For instance, if we take mental and physical energy as key differentiators of what it means to be young, then many ‘young’ people would be disqualified. On the other hand, many ‘old’ folks, Mr Gill is a case in point, could pass off as a quarter of their age.

So, is it okay then to have only 6.3 per cent of young people (between 25 and 40) in the Lok Sabha when 50 per cent of our population is young? And should we not be concerned that our Union Cabinet has an average age of 60? We believe the debate is not about age alone but about generations. When the rulers are an era apart from their followers, there is bound to be a mismatch of aspirations, fears, dreams, and hope. Youth hood is unique in being a special age and time for an individual’s quest for identity. As an adult, you have already made many choices. Your identification with a certain way of life has become a habit. You are not ready to try new identities as easily. Young people’s dreams for the country, too, are very different from that of an adult.

In this neoliberal and post ideological age, media commentators lament the cynicism of young people and low voter turnout. Almost every day, some politician or activist urges youth to do their bit for the country as if it’s their duty. They are reminded that as citizens they are expected to put in their drop in the ocean.

On the contrary, Amitabh Behar, Executive Director of the National Foundation of India

(NFI) says that instead of putting in their drop, young people should jump into the ocean itself. He says that young people should get actively involved in politics. “When I say politics, it is not just restricted to electoral politics because I believe politics is everywhere. The real arena of politics starts from our homes and extends into streets, cities...and the broader framework. We should not shy away from mainstream politics because politics is not about power – it’s about our ability to influence power...our ability to make and influence

We needn’t go very far. The most commendable example of ‘mass participation’ is the contribution of the masses in India’s freedom struggle! It is also well known that young people came forward in droves to participate in politics after their youthful energy had routed the British Empire and launched the new ship called India. They came as crew for the new vessel – as many as 26.3 per cent of the first Lok Sabha in 1950 were young people between the age of 25 to 40 years. This representation by youth swelled to 32 per cent in the second

Lok Sabha.

Those were the days when politics hadn’t become a four-letter word and cynicism hadn’t ravaged the country, the days when the dreary sands of habit hadn’t crept into the hearts of young people.

How did it all change? How did youth representation dwindle to just 6.3 per cent in the current Lok Sabha? How did young people decide to give up their voice? When did the crew become passengers?

One of Gandhiji’s little known exhortations provides us a clue. Shortly after India attained independence, he said, “It’s time the youth of this country goes back to their studies and careers now.” He might as well have said, “Thanks for your energy that helped topple the British but now run along sonny, go play with your books, we have a country to run.”

An outcome of this thinking was that the first Union Cabinet comprised of MPs whose average age was 54. Only one minister was between 25 to 40 years old although 26.3 per cent of Lok Sabha members were of that age.

Do you now see how the voice of the youth got drowned? How the crew was turned into passengers? The immense energy of young people helped us get freedom; many of them were the natural choice of leaders selected by the public. But the elders, with all due respect to them, succumbed to the age old tradition of denying young people a right to govern their own future. Denied real power, young people went back to their ‘studies and careers’ and political affairs went off their radar.

As Amitabh puts it, “We could continue to blame our elders for the low interest of youth in politics, but it’s high time that young people took responsibility for their actions. They should get out of their comfort zone and get actively involved in reclaiming spaces – public spaces, streets – and reclaim their place in Parliament. Public pressure and mass participation are the answer to creating accountability and making a difference!” ■

Arjun Shekhar & Pooja Malhotra are from ComMutiny – The Youth Collective



LAKSHMAN ANAND

We believe the debate is not about age but about generations. When the rulers are an era apart from their followers, there is bound to be a mismatch of aspirations dreams and hope.

changes,” he says.

He thinks that even if young people don’t join electoral politics, it should become part of their lives. “In a country like ours the only thing that can make a difference is mass participation. Active engagement of the masses, especially young people in electoral politics, their involvement in selection of electoral candidates, being aware about party manifestos, canvassing for the ‘right’ candidate...are steps towards making a difference. The important aspect here is that in order to create an impact, these steps should be taken in an organised fashion.”

LIVING

BOOKS | ECO-TOURISM | FILM | THEATRE | AYURVEDA

Palakkad's historic villages

Experience ancient rural life

SUSHEELA NAIR



Rural houses in Kalpathy with pretty kolams at the entrance

SUSHEELA NAIR

Susheela Nair
Palakkad

LOCATED on the banks of the Kalpathy river, a tributary of the Bharathapuzha, Kalpathy village is acclaimed as the oldest agraharam or Brahmin settlement in the heart of Palakkad. As we ambled around in this old agraharam, we caught a glimpse of village life, half-frozen in time for nearly 1,000 years.

We observed houses in rows with wooden shutters and metal grills in each lane leading to a temple. We overheard Tamilian Brahmins conversing in Thalayalam, a smattering of Tamil and Malayalam. We stumbled upon Brahmin priests chanting Sanskrit slokas, women clad in their traditional nine-yard saris drawing kolams in front of their houses or engaged in a music session. We also saw aunties and uncles seated on thinnais, a seating space outside every front door, chatting to their neighbours across the road.

PRESERVING CULTURE: Realising that old village houses were fast giving way to modern architecture by a younger generation, the state government of



A row of houses on a typical street

Kerala declared Kalpathy a Heritage Village some years ago to conserve its unique culture, tradition and lifestyle. The agraharams are now recognised as heritage sites and major architectural changes or rebuilding are banned.

Kalpathy agraharam, a Brahmin settlement, consists of five villages – Chathapuram, Old Kalpathy, New Kalpathy, Govindarajapuram and Vaidhyanthapuram. It was founded in the 12th century by migrant Brahmins from Thanjavur. A rich amalgamation of Tamil and Keralite culture is palpable. The Palghat Brahmins, or Palghat Iyers as they are commonly known, have a distinct personality. They brought with them their own culture and lifestyle which continues to flourish and gives Palakkad its inimitable character.

The streets, with houses abutting on both sides and a temple for each settlement, are a typical feature of agraharams. Toilets are generally not situated inside the main house, but located in the *randam kettu* (second section). Over the years, the *pathayam* or the granary has disappeared and the cowsheds too have been relocated. Uniform *thinna*s were built, each with an identical *kolam* slot in front. Some residents have retained the old frontage, but they introduced sanitation and other improvements inside.

The Brahmin residents of Palakkad agraharams were remarkable people noted for their intellect and diligence. The brainy Iyers migrated to far flung areas of India, and flourished as efficient bureaucrats and stenographers. Some of the stalwarts in the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) trace their origins to Kalpathy.

New Kalpathy village was steeped in Vedic culture and the Sanathana dharma. It boasted of a large number of scholars of the Vedas and Vedangas. The residents of this village were well known scholars of the Vedas and Shastras and priests well known in their profession. Most of the surrounding villages of Palakkad town depend on them for conducting the Vedic rituals.

FESTIVE TIME: Kalpathy comes alive during the Kalpathy Theru or Chariot Festival, with music concerts and street fairs. Some of the best names in Carnatic music hail from this region. The agraharams also produced outstanding Carnatic musicians – Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagawathar, M.D. Ramanathan, Palakadu Mani Iyer, Palghat Raghu, Kalpathi Ramanathan, Subba Iyer, Rama Bhagawathar, Anantarama Bhagavathar, Alathur Srinivasa Iyer and several others.

The Thyagaraja Aradhane is conducted every year at the Ramadhyan Madhom. Carnatic music is very bhakti-oriented and was probably the reason why so many temples congregated in the agraharams. The elaborate pujas on every festival day, the annual car festival, the sparkling sandal paste applied to the idols of goddesses on Fridays and the fragrance of incense and flowers, add to the exceptional ambience and charm of the place.

The Kasi Viswanatha Temple whose origin dates back to 1425, is a Tamil Nadu style temple. The deities are Kasi Viswanatha and Vishalakshi. Other sub-shrines inside the temple are of Vinayakar, Subramaniam and Kala Bhairavar.

There is also the Kanaka Sabhai where a dancing idol of Nataraj can be seen. The temple here is called Kasiyil Pakuthi meaning 'Half Benares' because its location on the river is reminiscent of



Gateway to the Kasi Vishwanatha temple

the Benares temple on the Ganges.

Over the years, the Car Festival of Kalpathy has become famous. It is centred around the Viwanathaswamy Temple which was built by Itti Kombi Achan, the Raja of Palakkad. The temple plan is of Dravidian style with a sanctum that is square and has a pillared portico in front. Profusely carved wooden columns enclose the entire temple. A pillared nandi mandapam is outside the entrance and there is a flag post in front.

Pilgrims and visiting relatives congregate at the Siva temple in November when the village plays host to the spectacular Kalpathy Theru or Car Festival. The chariot festival is based on Vedic Tamil Brahmin culture. The main centre of the festival is the Kalpathy Sree Viswanatha Swamy Temple. During this week-long festival, the deity from Viswanatha Swamy Temple is taken out and installed in the chariot. There are three chariots, one for the main deity, Sree Viswanatha Swamy and the goddess Parvati, the second for Visweshwara and the third for Lord Subrahmanya Swamy.

Thousands of devotees drag the huge, intricately carved, bulbous domed chariots bedecked with flowers and flags through the streets to the sound of Vedic recitals and chants. Another highlight of this annual festival is the week-long classical music performances with eminent artistes participating. This festival is unique as influences of Tamil culture can be seen in the celebrations. ■

FACT FILE

Getting there: The nearest airport is in Coimbatore (64 km). Palakkad is well connected by rail and road. Best time to visit is from September to February.

What to buy & eat: Try the Brahmin cuisine famed all over the south. There are Brahmin messes that serve typical vegetarian food. Ensure you carry home Kalpathy's condiments like pickles, savouries like *murukkus*, spices and curry powders that are made in almost every one of the old homes. There is indeed a great demand for these. Although prices are high, no one bargains since the quality is consistently good.

For details contact: District Tourism Promotion Council, West Fort, Palakkad

Evoking

Compelling film on 3 legends: Bose, Raman and Saha

Saibal Chatterjee
New Delhi

SITTING through a nearly hour-long film on three legends of Indian science might be a touch daunting for some. But those that have the requisite patience are bound to be repaid handsomely: *The Quantum Indians* is neither intimidating nor drab. Raja Choudhury's 52-minute documentary delivers an engaging story narrated in a precise and aesthetically appealing manner.

In fact, the film delivers three disparate stories that add up to a compelling composite narrative about a watershed period in Indian science during which a towering trio made waves around the world although the nation was still over two decades and a bit away from Independence.

The Quantum Indians, produced by the Public Service Broadcasting Trust (PSBT) and screened in its annual Open Frame festival in September, is a tribute to the singular achievements of Satyendra Nath Bose, Chandrashekar Venkat Raman and Meghnad Saha, three men who rewrote the history of physics virtually at the same time – a period of about 10 years.

The film emerged out of the initial research that Choudhury did for a film that he proposed to make on Bose after hearing about the Higgs-Boson in 2012. "I discovered that Calcutta University was an incubation cell for a new kind of Indian revolutionary. Three men emerged from it at the same time in different ways," says the filmmaker who divides his time between New Delhi and New York.

"Bose and Saha," says Choudhury, "had been great friends and rivals. In some ways, Raman had been their nemesis. But all three were geniuses in their own right and all three affected the world of physics in the same 10-year period. I was hooked once I discovered all this."

The Quantum Indians works as a film primarily because it reflects all the joy that the filmmaker would have derived from the act of delving into the lives and work of the three iconic scientists and sifting out known and not-so-known anecdotes from their eventful careers.

Did we know, for instance, that Bose, a man of science who played the *esraj* (Indian harp) and flute, wrote an important scientific paper that he specifically wanted to share with Albert Einstein

India's radical scientists



Three scientists who placed India at the forefront of physics

but tore it up and threw it into the wastepaper bin when he learnt of the death of the legendary theoretical physicist in 1955?

Prof. Partha Ghose, one of the several contemporary experts interviewed extensively for the film and also Bose's last PhD student, describes his mentor's final paper as an "unfinished symphony", alluding to the great physicist's passion for music.

Or, how many of us are aware that Raman, on receiving his Nobel Prize in 1930, had shed tears on the stage and said that he regretted that "we do not have a flag of our own" and that "I can't claim I've come here as an Indian?"

Raman, of course, did not squander the opportunity to dedicate the prize "to the freedom fighters of India who are spending the golden years of their lives in British prisons".

Stories such as these bring out the human facets of driven men who devoted their lives to extraordinary scientific pursuits. *The Quantum Indians* also draws its appeal from the sheer range of ideas at play within its overarching central theme.

"The story was a perfect mix of genius, heroic individuality and brilliance, patriotism, idealism, revolutionary out-of-the-box thinking and science," says Choudhury, adding that "it would make a great feature film too."

He elaborates: "The period between 1917 and 1930 was one of the most important periods in India's freedom movement as well as a great period in science and quantum physics... This captured a great period of our history in an unusual way. I was lucky to find three such great protagonists."

Choudhury, inspired no doubt by the distinct fields that the three men worked in, gives each of them a clear identity in his film. Bose is "the man



Prof. Partha Ghose

Calcutta University was an incubation cell for a new kind of Indian revolutionary, according to Choudhury. Three men emerged from it at the same time in different ways.

who counted photons," Raman "the man who scattered light" and Saha "the man who fingerprinted the stars."

The emphasis is throughout on their personalities. "From the start these men and their personali-

ties were the main crux of the story," explains the filmmaker.

He adds: "They were like a three-headed man in a way – one a theoretical genius who loves music and had nine children, one a brilliant experimentalist and egotist who knew his genius and insisted that the world recognised it as well, and the third a great Indian builder who gave up his natural genius for physics and instead built institutions and wanted to realise a great nation."

Choudhury interviews Bose's grandson Falguni Sarkar, who takes viewers on a tour of the family's ancestral home in Calcutta, a city that was not only the nerve-centre of the Bengal Renaissance but also of the golden era of Indian science that ensured a permanent pride of place for the nation in the global annals of physics.

Raman is projected as a man of "many contradic-

LAKSHMAN ANAND



Raja Choudhury, director of the film, in Kolkata

tions" – a great teacher but an intolerant perfectionist, a simple man at heart but a supreme egotist, a recluse who loved children and teaching, but without doubt a genius.

On the other hand, the film sees Saha, who brought nuclear physics to India when the world was just beginning to discover it, as a "fighter" who "right from childhood fought against poverty, against the apathy of the society initially in the education system and also for basic research." Like the Rajput warriors of history that he admired, Saha died in harness of a massive heart attack that he suffered on the stairs of the Planning Commission in New Delhi.

Choudhury, who has been creating cutting-edge digital media since 1993 through films, websites, installations, events and social media, has put *The Quantum Indians* on YouTube. In two months, the film has recorded 18,000 views. "We are working on international distribution," he says. "We plan to show it on PBS in the US and in colleges and schools across India and the world."

Choudhury adds: "I have two primary target audiences in mind – first, the international scientific and think audiences to celebrate what Indians can do given a chance; and second, young Indians to inspire them to pursue science and leave a great mark like our three protagonists." ■

Muslim women and love

Civil Society News

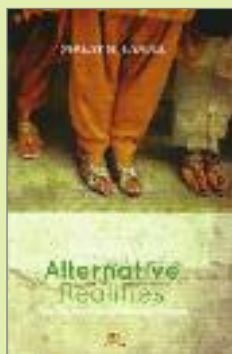
New Delhi

NIGHAT M. Gandhi is South Asia's roving soul. Born in Bangladesh, brought up in Pakistan and married to an Indian, Nighat sees herself as a citizen of the subcontinent, one among a small tribe for whom borders don't make much sense.

Her recent book, *Alternative Realities: Love in the lives of Muslim Women*, is an absorbing investigation of romantic love and its many shades. Peppered with poetry and sparks of humour, each chapter profiles women in different situations, different locations.

Muslim women in South Asia have often been stereotyped as 'oppressed, veiled and victimized.' Nighat breaks this myth. Within the confines of tradition and social norms, Muslim women seek the freedom to love and marry the man of their choice. Often, they try to negotiate this right. Sometimes, they have the gumption to break free.

Nighat's women don't belong to one genre. In *Dilli se Lahore*, she profiles Ghazala, married to a married man, content with her status because it gives her the freedom she wants. In *The Straight Path*, Nighat meets two women, Nusrat and QT - they are married to each other. In *Rakhi Sawant of Sind*, Nisho, a transgender, talks about the love of her life. Firdaus, a feminist who walked out of her first marriage, recounts her story in *Love is a*



Spiritual Experience.

Nighat's own life puts to rest fictitious notions of Muslim women. In the first chapter she writes about how she defied her father to marry the man she loved. She is clearly a seeker and a woman of courage. Nighat has journeyed to villages and towns in South Asia, notebook and camera in hand, to meet women who don't normally feature in literature. She provides a rare window on their lives. Nighat spoke to *Civil*

Society long-distance:

You travelled across South Asia talking to Muslim women facing different situations: a lesbian, a transgender, women living in what is seen as the heartland of fundamentalism... Yet, is the idea of romantic love virtually the same?

The joys and jealousies, the trials and tribulations of love, are the same universally and across time. The feeling of being in love for a transgender isn't very different from what it is for a lesbian or a straight woman, though how their love plays out in their lives might have vastly different trajectories depending on social and cultural dimensions, and other intersecting dimensions such as gender, sexual orientation, the rural and urban divide and so on.

Whom did you enjoy writing about the most?

There isn't a particular person I enjoyed writing about more than others. What I mean to say is that writing was the hard part. It wasn't joyous

work. But I enjoyed meeting people and talking to them and the ones I enjoyed meeting the most were the ones with whom I got to spend a long time...like Laila or Tara. That was the most enjoyable part. Putting together a story from my messy notes and observations and recordings and memory - that was another back-breaking labour.

How do you see the South Asian Muslim family? Is it a blend of tradition and modernity that still makes it possible, perhaps inadvertently, for women to negotiate some freedom?

The South Asian Muslim family isn't that different from South Asian families in general. The same sorts of transformations, contradictions and paradoxes we see in families everywhere are also at work in Muslim families - a desire to stick to tradition while modernity relentlessly knocks at their doors, the inequality and discrimination, patriarchal values, limitations on women's freedoms, limits set on self-determination....and so on. And yes, women negotiate their freedoms within this matrix of powerlessness and personal agency just like women do everywhere.

Even in the restricted spaces they have, most women in your book quietly assert their right to love. What gives them this courage?

What gives anybody the courage to assert their right to love?

Was it difficult to write about your own fight with your father to marry a Hindu?

Yes, in a way that chapter about my own life was

Why the cycle won the race in UP



MANISH Tiwari and Rajan Pandey travelled all over Uttar Pradesh (UP) to gauge the political temperature in the state a year before the 2012 Assembly elections. The outcome is an engaging book, 'Battleground

UP: Politics in the land of Ram.'

Tiwari and Pandey used every mode of transport to cover more than 15,000 km and 350 constituencies in over 60 districts in India's most politically significant state. Tiwari is a journalist and a researcher and Pandey is interested in politics.

Theirs is the worm's eye view. The two spoke to ordinary people at teashops and chowks in UP's mofussil towns and villages. The book is full of anecdotes and chit-chat and brings to the reader all

the noise and bustle of political campaigning.

Tiwari and Pandey describe political rallies with their bandwagon of film stars and helicopters. The rally is a stage-managed event, dramatic with as many eye popping crowds as the party can rustle up. It is meant to be a show of strength.

They look at 'war rooms' the critical space from where political parties manage their campaigns at ground level. Another chapter explains why mighty Mayawati crumbled like a pack of cards.

There is also introspection on why smaller parties like the Peace Party failed to make a mark in the 2012 elections. Read, also, the

image of a typical UP politician, his sartorial sense and the kind of fearsome impression some strive to make with gun toting guards and clunky SUVs. There are also some good politicians around, surprisingly.

There is a chapter on the Gandhis whose con-



Akhilesh Yadav with his cycle and red cap



Nighat M. Gandhi

The joys and jealousies are the same... The feeling of being in love for a transgender isn't very different from that of a lesbian or a straight woman.

the hardest one to write. But once I wrote it and got over the emotional humps, I felt strangely liberated.

In which country or situation did you per-

sonally feel a sense of freedom?

I feel freer to travel alone as a woman in India. Fewer questions asked. But there was a strange kind of freedom I also glimpsed in Pakistan, which I can only describe as spiritual freedom, especially in the small towns in Sind.

And in Bangladesh, the freedom of transcending a sense of belonging and longing for my past and not finding it and learning to swallow that lump in my throat and move on.

The inner freedoms grew as I travelled and took breaks to write the chapters and with each journey I found this inner freedom growing, expanding, and taking me to deeper places within me. So the external travel was happening, but parallel to that, there was also the inner quest for self-knowledge, a corresponding journey taking place in the innermost heart.

Does the notion of South Asian solidarity help women gain more freedom?

I wish, I wish we were doing more to value and promote our South Asian solidarity. It would be liberating for women as well as men. But alas, we don't have such a composite identity yet. We're still divided into nations at war with one another, or if not outright war, then domination of the less powerful by the more powerful nation. But peace, lasting peace, will come when we transcend patriarchal notions of nationhood and womanhood.

At present, I can only imagine what such a state of peace and mutual co-existence would be like. But if we give precedence to our creative imagination, amazing things can and do happen. ■

Tranquebar ₹350

stituencies in UP bring the state into the limelight. The last chapter is an assessment of 100 days of Akhilesh Yadav as Chief Minister and how far he has fulfilled his promises.

Reading through the book it's easy to figure out why Akhilesh Yadav, son of political stalwart Mulayam Singh Yadav of the Samajwadi Party won an impressive victory and became India's new political star. His red cap and cycle and his agenda caught people's imagination.

Akhilesh began early, outrunning his political rivals. He sent out a clear message, promising good governance, development and security. He also had the best 'war room' which micro managed elections. A dedicated young cadre entrenched in colleges took the fight to street level, led by Akhilesh.

Mayawati's social engineering collapsed. Her lavish birthdays and parks caused resentment. But, like in West Bengal, it was the farmers' agitation against land acquisition that proved

to be her Achilles heel.

The BJP lacked an imaginative agenda. It took up the tired Ram Mandir issue, went on boring rath yatras and bickered endlessly.

The Congress was the worst off. Rahul Gandhi raised emotive issues and did a breathless 211 rallies in 42 days. But he had no control over infighting. Candidates were poorly chosen, there was confused messaging and their war room was pathetic. Another chapter details the disconnect of the Gandhis with their constituency.

The people of UP gave Mayawati a resounding victory five years ago although she didn't have a defined agenda. Disappointed by her performance, they turned to Akhilesh. If his party doesn't fulfill its promises history might well repeat itself.

This is a well-written, unbiased eyewitness account of the run-up to the UP elections last year and worth reading. Buy it. ■

Tranquebar ₹350

Delhi's changing political landscape



SANJAY Kumar's book, 'Changing Electoral Politics in Delhi,' is a well-researched and timely book. Delhi's voters go to the polls in December and campaigning is on full swing.

Till 2008, Assembly elections used to be a face-off between the Congress and the

BJP. The entry of the BSP converted it into a three-legged race. With the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) joining the fray, the election battle for Delhi has become more heated.

As Kumar's research reveals, a lot has changed from the old days.

Delhi is now divided over class not caste lines, he writes. There is the upper class, the middle class and the poor. The rich Dalit is likely to vote like the rich Punjabi and the poor Punjabi will probably vote like the poor Jat.

The original vote bank of Delhi comprised of Punjabis and Jats. But migration from UP and Bihar has reduced its importance. It is Delhi, not Mumbai, that attracts the most migrants. The Dalit and Muslim voters count more than the Punjabis and Jats.

Dalits comprise 17 per cent of the population, Muslims 12 per cent, Brahmins 10 per cent, Punjabis seven to nine per cent, Jats and Gujjars around five per cent, Vaishyas, seven to eight per cent and Sikhs around four per cent.

Broadly, Punjabis, Brahmins, Jats and Vaishyas tend to vote for the BJP. Dalits, Muslims and Gujjars vote for the Congress. But there are no hard and fast rules. In the 2008 elections, Dalits and Muslims voted for the BSP too. The Sikhs, contrary to perception, are split between the Congress and the BJP.

The vote share of the Congress has declined but votes have migrated to the BSP and not the BJP. Also, lesser votes haven't dented the Congress because Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit has made up this loss by successfully wooing upper class voters with her mantra of governance and development.

The old notion that the upper class lived in central and south Delhi and the poor in east Delhi has also changed. Over the last 20 years localities have become much more mixed. East Delhi is dotted with middle class housing societies. Muslims have migrated from the Walled City to northeast Delhi. Delimitation has changed the character of Delhi's colonies with slums being included in what were middle class strongholds.

The exodus of the middle class to Gurgaon and Noida has been replaced by the growth of slums. There are around 1,600 slum colonies in Delhi, mostly consisting of people from UP and Bihar.

Delhi has 12.79 million people and the middle class is 42 per cent of the population. Delhi also has a significant population of the homeless who have been left out in the cold. They don't vote since most of them don't have voter ID cards.

Is there hope for the AAP? Delhi voters are not conservative. As early as 1993, about 20 per cent of the electorate voted for smaller parties and independents, enabling seven candidates to win. Outer Delhi, the nerve centre of the poor, and east Delhi, voted in the last election for the BSP. It won two seats and became a runner up in seven constituencies. ■

Sage Publications ₹450

3 pillars of health

Dr G.G. GANGADHARAN

GREEN CURES



AYURVEDA touches all aspects of life – the mundane and those beyond physical existence. It perceives the gross and the subtle at different junctures and proffers advice according to one's propensity to align with them. To the seeker, Ayurveda makes

available a comprehensive worldview for enriching one's life. If one wants to limit oneself to the physical existence, the person is entitled to that too. Knowledge available in Ayurveda is an ocean that can be accessed by the user according to his or her need and ability – sparsely or copiously.

Ayurveda perceives the human being as a combination of body, mind and soul existing in a given space and time. Actually, this body communicates through five sense organs that are representatives of the five great elements in nature – prithivi, ap, tejas, vayu and akasa. The human body is, in fact, a combination of these five elements plus mind, soul, time and space. This totals nine elements that are the basis of the whole universe according to vaiśeṣika philosophy. This also states the nexus between the living being (microcosm) and the cosmos (macrocosm).

The body, which is the seat of the mind and soul, maintains its optimum health by regulating ahara (diet), svapna (sleep) and abrahmacharya (conjugal life). These are the three pillars of health according to Ayurveda which regulate the body by virtue of their actions in the body. Ayurveda delineates each of these elements elaborately.

Ahara: The food we take is important not just for the body's health but also for a sound mind. The gross part of food becomes the tissues and the subtle part becomes the mind. So from a non-physiological point of view, food can be classified as Sattvik, Rajasik and Tamasik. The Bhagavad Gita explains the qualities, characteristics and attributes of these three types of food which are especially important for people who pursue the spiritual path. Physiologically, food can be divided into six tastes (svadu, amla, lavana, tiktha, usna and kasaya) and according to digestibility into two (guru and laghu – heavy and easy to digest). According to potentiality, food can be categorised into two (usna and sita – hot and cold). Some foods are tissue-building and some are body depleting.

The body, which is the seat of mind and soul, maintains its optimum health by regulating ahara (diet), svapna (sleep) and abrahmacharya (conjugal life). These are the 3 pillars.

Food ingredients have been labeled as sakavarga (leafy), phalavarga (fruits), dhanyavarga (cereals and pulses) dravavarga (liquids like milk etc.) and mamsavarga (non-vegetarian).

It is very interesting to see how meticulously our ancestors reflected on different food types. They have developed seven types of processes for changing food qualities which include heat application, pulverizing, retaining food raw with preservatives etc. Food is also classified according to its action on the organs of the human body. Some of these are hrdaya (for heart), chaksusya (for eyes), tvacya (for skin), varnya (for colour of skin) etc.

The characteristics of the six seasons and foods suitable for consumption in those seasons are well established in Ayurvedic tradition. In summer light food is preferred as the agni (digestive fire) is low. In winter heavy food can be ingested as the agni gets rejuvenated and can digest higher quantities of food.

Svapna: Like food, proper sleep at the proper time and in a proper posture is very important for good health. Like dinacarya, Ayurveda also speaks of raatricarya. Raatricarya includes proper sleep of seven to eight hours continuously without any dreams. Sleep is contra-indicated at daytime for healthy people, but children and the elderly should sleep at daytime. Others are permitted only a nap of around half an hour in summer during daytime. A good sleep indicates one's body and mind is in good health. The best sleep is the one without any dreams.

Abrahmacharya: Proper conjugal life is the basis of healthy living. Ayurveda explains how sex has to be consummated, the ideal time, the frequency, the age factor etc. This itself is a great subject for learning. According to Ayurveda, a male at 25 and a female at 18 are apt for marriage. Of the six seasons in a year, in all other seasons except winter, sexual conjugation should be regulated to the limits of one's strength. In winter, no limit is prescribed. Sex with proper rejuvenating agents is advised. Nights, excluding sunset and sunrise, are the preferred time for sexual union. Sex should not be indulged in sacred places, public places and unfamiliar places.

The above brief information about the three pillars of mundane life are given just to educate the common man about how elaborate and meticulous our ancestors have been in reflecting about every aspect of daily life. You can read more from a well-written book by Dr. M. S. Valiathan – 'Introduction to Ayurveda.' ■

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WONDER PLANT

Heady Mahua

THE beauty and delicacy of the musky-scented Mahua flower has been praised by Sanskrit poets of the past. Tribal communities in India consider the tree sacred. The first brew from the Mahua flowers is offered to their God before consumption. Oil too is extracted from the tree's flowers and seeds and used to treat skin diseases, headaches and rheumatism. Mahua works as a laxative too, and is considered excellent for lactating mothers.

Mahua or *Madhuca longifolia* belongs to the family *Sapotaceae*. It is extensively used in traditional systems of medicine. The flowers and seeds of the Mahua tree help lactating mothers to increase breast milk. Mahua flowers are edible and are used as food by tribes. Also known as the honey tree or butter tree, mahua has several health benefits. The oil obtained from Mahua's seeds is used as an ointment against rheumatism and cracked skin. The flowers have healing, appetizing and astringent properties. They are also fermented to produce country liquor.

Mahua is a large and deciduous tree with a thick, grey bark that is vertically cracked and wrinkled. Most of the tree's leaves fall between February and April. After that its musky-scented flowers appear in close bunches of a dozen or so from the end of the tree's

gnarled, grey branchlets. The tree blooms at night. At dawn each short-lived flower falls to the ground. A couple of months after the flowering period, the fruit opens. These are fleshy, green berries, quite large and containing from one to four shiny, brown seeds.

Location: Mahua is a frost-resistant tree of the dry tropics and sub-tropics. It is also found in the deciduous forests of Gujarat, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Southern India.

Properties: Mahua is mentioned in all the ancient scriptures of Ayurveda. The flowers, seeds and seed-oil of madhuka have great medicinal value. Seed-oil is very effective in alleviating pain externally. It is beneficial as a nasya (nasal drops) for treating diseases due to pitta, like sinusitis. Seed-oil is also used for manufacturing soaps and as edible oil.

Internally, the decoction of Mahua flowers is a valuable remedy for pitta diseases. The decoction quenches thirst effectively because of its astringent properties. In raktapitta, the fresh juice of flowers is used with great benefit to arrest bleeding. The flower plays an important role in augmentation of breast milk in lactating mothers and in boosting the quantity of seminal fluids. Madhuka is an excellent nervine and very helpful for curing diseases due to vata. A

FEEL GOOD

Avoiding allergies

AYURVEDA attributes the cause of allergies to toxins that are created in the daily process of digestion and metabolism. Depending on the tissues where they are stored, these toxins spark a reaction when they exceed a certain threshold. Hence, regular detoxification and rejuvenative therapies play an important role in managing and preventing allergies.

Here are a few basic tips:

- Avoid food, drinks and habits which can cause allergies including exposure to cold wind, air-conditioning and cold water baths.
- Eat wholesome nutritious food that is warm, well cooked and

freshly prepared. Have a hearty lunch but light dinner.

- Include lots of vegetables, fruits, pulses, fibre etc. in your diet. Avoid baked foods, salty, oily deep fried items, curd, junk food and refrigerated, cold and fermented drinks. Following a proper diet regimen will solve most problems caused by allergies.
- Low immunity triggers allergies. Hence along with a healthy diet, exercise in the form of walking, yoga and pranayama are beneficial.
- Drink warm water adequately. This along with a healthy diet will help in detoxifying the body.
- Spices like ginger, garlic, cardamom, turmeric added to food

are beneficial in the right quantity.

- Avoid sleeping during the day and staying awake till late into the night. Sleep is important for the body to get its dose of energy. Early to bed and early to rise is a good dictum to follow.
- Avoid excessive physical strain and stress since it lowers the immune system and makes it vulnerable to infection.
- Maintain hygiene and keep your surroundings clean. Seasonal fluctuations can trigger allergic reactions. So cultivating the right lifestyle and diet modifications will help in the long run.
- Ensure you have proper bowel habits every day.

Dr Rekha Ramankutty, RMO, IHC



powder of the bark is given along with ghee and honey to improve vitality and sexual vigour.

Gardening: Mahua can be grown as an avenue tree or as a single specimen in your garden. Since its canopy is large, people prefer to grow it in a place where it does not block the view. Mahua provides abundant shade and an ambient natural environment. Its flowers are creamy-yellow with fleshy scented corolla, which attracts several natural guests like birds, bees, butterflies and squirrels. When the tree flowers it exudes a heavenly sweet perfume. Growing Mahua in the garden with fresh seeds has proven to be conducive as it has an 80 to 100 per cent success rate of germination.

Self-help

For lactation: Crush a handful of Mahua flowers or seeds and boil in a glass of water till you get a decoction. Filter. Nursing mothers can consume this decoction once before bedtime.

For orchitis or inflammation of the testes: Mahua leaves are boiled and padded onto the testes for relief from orchitis.

For rheumatism: A decoction is prepared by boiling the bark of the Mahua tree in water. This is consumed to get relief from rheumatism. Oil obtained from seeds can also be applied on the affected areas.

For piles: Oil extracted from Mahua seeds has laxative properties which helps cure chronic constipation and piles.

For eczema: Mahua leaves are effective in the treatment of eczema. The leaves, coated with sesame oil, are heated over fire and applied on the affected area as a poultice.

For bleeding and spongy gums: Four ml of the liquid extract obtained from the bark is mixed with 300 ml of water and used for gargling or as a mouthwash. ■

Dr. N. M. Ganesh Babu

ORGANIC CHEF

Paratha & Puttu

LAKSHMAN ANAND



knead to a soft dough.

Stuffing: Grind all the stuffing ingredients to a paste. Heat ghee in a vessel and fry the beetroot paste on a low flame. Cook covered, till the mixture is almost dry. Remove from heat.

Divide the paratha dough into small balls. Roll out each ball into a small puri, put a little beetroot filling in the centre and seal the edges. Roll out into parathas. Heat tawa, spread some oil and fry the parathas till light brown.

RAGI PUTTU

Ingredients:

- Ragi flour: 1 cup
- Rice flour: 1 cup
- Coconut shredded: 1 cup
- Salt: To taste
- Water: A little

Method: Mix the ragi flour and the rice flour together. Mix salt in water and add the water little by little to the two flours and mix. Put the flour to the puttu maker adding shredded coconut in between and steam cook. ■

Dr Rekha R, Resident Medical Officer, IHC

BEETROOT PARATHA

Ingredients:

- Wheat flour: 2 cups
- Salt: To taste
- Ghee: 2 tbsp

Stuffing:

- Beetroots: 2 cups grated fine
- Onions: 4 medium

- Chillies: 4 green
- Ginger: 2.5 cm
- Garlic: 4 flakes
- Garam masala powder (if desired)
- Salt: To taste
- Ghee: 3 tbsp

Method:

Dough: Mix all the three ingredients well. Add enough water to

Priceless sari

MOHAMMED Nasim Warsi is a traditional weaver from Benares who spins the very special Jangla sari. A lot of nimble hands go into making it. The purest silk is used. Intricate zari work is woven with real gold and silver threads. The Jangla sari takes two or three months to produce and costs not less than ₹80,000. Warsi has received a National Award for this heirloom sari.

"I make it only on order," says Warsi sitting behind stacks of cloth in his stall at Dilli Haat in New Delhi. He gets a few orders for the Jangla sari during the marriage season. Before getting down to work he holds in depth discussions with his client on colour and design.

To earn more money, Warsi now spins scarves, salwar kameez sets, saris and fabric in a range of prices. There is no compromise on quality. "We are earning more," he says. "Exports have picked up and the Union government has helped us." ■

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Girl power

THE Anupshahr tehsil of Bulandshahr district in Uttar Pradesh is emerging as a centre of girl power. This backward region is being transformed by the efforts of the Pardada Pardadi Education Society (PPES). Founded in 2000 by Virender (Sam) Singh, after he retired from Du Pont, PPES has expanded from one school and 45 village girls to four educational institutions and around 1,200 enthusiastic students.

PPES not only provides a quality education, paying girls to complete school, it helps them to become economically independent by teaching them valuable skills.

After Class 10 students can opt for textile production. They learn to do delicate embroidery, appliqué work and block printing on cloth. This is then used to create tablecloths, duvets, sheets, curtains, picture frames, trays, diaries and coasters. There are also attractive wine covers, gift bags and calendars on offer. The products are sold through PPES' online boutique, From the Village to the World. Gift a friend a lovely PPES product this Diwali and light up a little girl's life. ■

Contact: Pardada Pardadi Educational Society, 114/B Khirki Village, Malviya Nagar, New Delhi- 110017 Phone: 011-29542966, Mukesh: 09540969674, Indu: 09268563312. Website: www.education4change.org

PICTURES BY PPES

