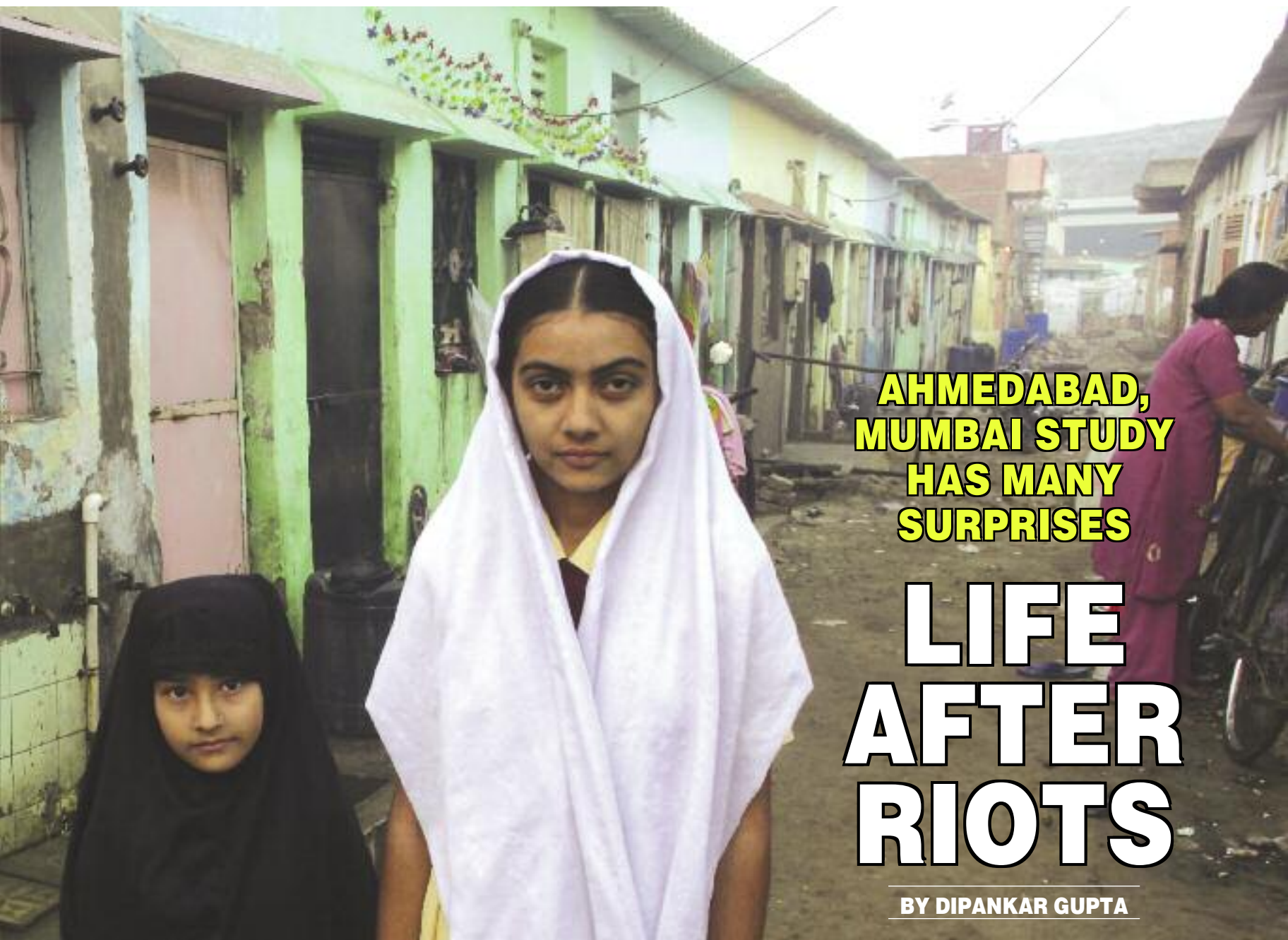


Civil Society



**AHMEDABAD,
MUMBAI STUDY
HAS MANY
SURPRISES**

LIFE AFTER RIOTS

BY DIPANKAR GUPTA



**'NREGA IS
CREATING JOBS
AND ASSETS IN
RURAL INDIA'**

Nikhil Dey of the MKSS assesses five years of the UPA's flagship scheme.

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J&K POLICE NEED REFORM

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MFIs BEGIN SELF-REGULATION

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BE AN ORGANIC CHEF

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Naye AVASAR
Nayee UMMEED
Nayee DISHA

नए अवसर
नई उम्मीद
नई दिशा

India today, plays a significant role in the global economy opening up a world of new opportunities.

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LIFE AFTER RIOTS

A new study in Mumbai and Ahmedabad reveals how Muslims who were victims of riots in 1993 and 2002 pieced their lives together again.

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Civil Society

READ US. WE READ YOU.

*Move on we all
must, but...*

MOVING on is a part of life. Victims of communal violence understand this well – perhaps better than the rest of us who haven't experienced such upheaval. But what do we really know about the myriad ways in which they piece their lives together afresh? What is life like after a riot? It is necessary that we know because communal riots have a searing effect on our social fabric. And it is through the transition to normalcy that we repair the damage and secure the future.

It is common for people to represent victims, speak on their behalf. Assumptions are made. But we should worry that, despite being well intended, the assumptions may be inadequate and even misleading. It is necessary to learn from the victims themselves how livelihoods were revived, schools reopened and houses rebuilt. Even more importantly we should know what expectations the victims have of society and whether their traumatic experience has weakened their faith in the State and the shared values by which we all hope to be governed.

Our cover story this month by Dipankar Gupta attempts to do precisely this. Dipankar has undertaken a much needed study in Ahmedabad and Mumbai. Like his other academic work, this too is grounded in reality. It is based on real research and shorn of biases. He gets out there and looks for detail, brings back voices. You will find the complete version in his book, *Justice Before Reconciliation*, published by Routledge.

The research provides many significant and surprising pieces of information. For instance, both in Ahmedabad and Mumbai the victims are not economically worse off than they were before the riots. Nor have they gone with Muslim fundamentalist organisations. On the contrary, the victims say that their rights as citizens have been infringed and their demand is for justice from the State. It is also crucial to understand that this is complex terrain. There are differences between Mumbai and Ahmedabad which have their roots in history and social structures.

Gautam Singh shot in Ahmedabad and Mumbai to provide the visuals to support the use of the research within the editorial environment of our magazine. Gautam chooses to lie low and stay away from public attention, but he is without doubt one of the most sensitive and well informed photojournalists in the country.

There is a lot else that we have on offer in this issue. An interview with Alok Prasad provides an update on self-regulation in the bruised microfinance industry. Nikhil Dey tells us about the successes and failures of the national rural jobs scheme which has completed five years. We also have a ground zero report on the need for police reforms in Jammu and Kashmir.

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IN THE LIGHT

by SAMITA RATHOR



LETTERS



Gay pride

Your cover story, Beyond Gay Pride, was well-written. It is high time we created a congenial atmosphere so that gay and lesbian couples can come out of the closet. They need to be part of mainstream society and not on its fringes. They should not be forced to live in the twilight zone. This can be done by legalizing alternative sexuality and framing norms which the community can live by. Since every community has

it rules, gays and lesbians should also have their own moral code recognized by law.

Asha Karan

Culture changes with time. No one can stop a culture from changing. It evolves with time. Homosexuality is not against any culture. It is because of our shortcomings, selfishness and hypocrisy that we don't look beyond our own needs and orientation. Science has proved that homosexuality is not a preference but an orientation. Homosexuality exists in animals too. Who decides what's natural and unnatural? When what we do has been named as natural by us, we do not have any right to call what others do differently as unnatural. Homosexuality is as old as the existence of man.

zulfi@indiatimes.com

In India gays and lesbians still lead highly closeted lives. Gay advocacy groups argue that Section 377 has been used by India's police to discriminate against and blackmail India's LGBT citizens.

Salkshi.78@aoc.us

The gay and lesbian community should discuss what exactly they want from legislation, now that this

route has been finally opened for them. How they marry, property rights, adoption, divorce, all the everyday mundane things ordinary people do, they can do too, in the open. Issues which affect them should also be discussed with mainstream society.

Asit

Street vendors

I appreciate Arbind Singh's untiring efforts for vendors and hawkers. Although they are citizens not many political parties take up this cause. The informal sector can only be brought into the formal sector by recognizing that vendors and hawkers have the right to work. If the city allots them zoning facilities with certain rules for health and hygiene, citizens will benefit hugely. The vendors will earn more. The city will have fewer poor people and the government can save its various subsidies and schemes.

Dipanshu Moitra

I found the article very informative and would like to know more about the law which Arbind Singh is proposing for hawkers and vendors. Please keep reporting.

jamal_khan1980@rediffmail.com

Mining and people

I don't think there is anything wrong in the mining industry sharing profits with local people who get displaced or affected by such operations. But what needs to be sorted out is how this money is going to be spent. If the Union government is picking up 26 per cent from the mining companies how will it ensure that this finance goes back to the districts affected by mining? It is a better idea to localize this arrangement. There should be a district committee with representation from the mining company, gram sabhas, local bureaucracy to draw up a development plan, collect the money locally and spend it locally.

Sanjay Asthana

CAMPA funds are collected from mining companies and not spent. What is the guarantee that this 26 per cent will be wisely spent for the benefit of local tribal communities? No process has been put in place.

Isha99@yahoo.com

I would like to know what the government is doing about illegal mining. The money collected goes into the pockets of political parties.

Tashi Wangchuk

INTERVIEW Nikhil Dey on the successes and failures

‘NREGA is creating jobs and assets in rural India’

Civil Society News
New Delhi

IN the five years since it was launched, the UPA government's flagship scheme for providing employment in villages has grown deep roots. A lot of rural India knows today that under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) 100 days of work per household is assured when the fields are fallow or the rain gods fail.

NREGA is probably the world's biggest job creation programme. It seeks to ensure that nobody starves in rural India because work is not available. There was cynicism that it would die a natural death because of local-level corruption. The reality is that activist groups and enthused IAS officers in districts have shown that NREGA can deliver results.

But much more could be done if the Union and state governments showed a greater sense of mission and pushed harder to make NREGA a greater success. There is a need to implement what has been learnt across the country. It is also important to celebrate NREGA's achievements such as the creation of rural assets in the shape of tanks and minor rural roads.

The Mazdoor Kissan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) founded by Aruna Roy, has played a key role in shaping the scheme and then assisting the government in its implementation. We spoke to Nikhil Dey of MKSS to find out what has gone right and what hasn't in the past five years.

It is five years of NREGA. What has been achieved on the ground? Are there instances of NREGA creating assets, improving peoples' incomes, making a dent in poverty?

The most important outcome in five years is that NREGA has become established as a national programme. In the early years the programme existed only in a few pockets. That is not the situation now. NREGA as a programme, as something that people want and are demanding has come to be established.

Secondly, it has made a big impact in many poor places in the country where people are not going to sleep hungry. That does not mean they are getting enough food and nutrition or that they are even at reasonable limits of living and survival. But at least they are not going to bed hungry.

I think NREGA is the only social sector programme in India which has provided a living to large numbers of people. Of course there are still the young who are not eating enough and there are the elderly who can't come to work and there are pockets where the programme is not working as yet. But it has certainly made a huge dent.

The fourth outcome is asset creation. Assets which are productive, useful and environmentally sound have been created, not just in nooks and corners but in large swathes of the country.

What I would like to say very strongly to those people who have been saying NREGA is just an earth digging and filling programme – and this is a contestation – not one of those critics has done a study to show it is only about digging earth and filling it up.

Certainly, anecdotally you can say there are many poor quality assets. But that is actually a question of implementation. I agree the quality of assets as a whole can be improved. But this year we have noted in Rajasthan there is an unprecedented amount of land under second cultivation (*rabi*). True Rajasthan had good rains this year. But such a large swathe of land is under cultivation because water was saved. You had those water harvesting structures built under NREGA



LAKSHMAN ANAND

Nikhil Dey

in place that could save the water, even if they were inefficiently built and there was corruption in it.

Just to give you an example of asset creation, in Andhra Pradesh this year social audit facilitators undertook a survey commissioned by the government where they identified 3.4 million acres of fallow land belonging to SC/ST families. This land will be converted through NREGA over the next two to three years into productive land. Now 3.4 million acres is equivalent to supporting three million families. One acre per family is more than what many families have.

You are linking NREGA to agricultural productivity?

I am not saying everything can be attributed to NREGA. But there is no doubt that NREGA works have fuelled agricultural productivity in an environmentally sound manner. No machinery, diesel or fuel has been used. Ponds have been dug and cleaned. If you are digging out a tank bed or deepening it, that silt is being used for creating good quality land. Topsoil is being provided to

of the UPA govt's flagship scheme

degraded land.

A number of Dalit *bastis* have been connected for the first time. These hamlets are remote and in the interior. Nobody ever bothered about them but now there is this large-scale first generation road-building going on. There are large stretches of pasture land that have been regenerated too.

All these are qualifications. Such works could be better planned and executed undoubtedly. But it is still giving results. The question of it not being productive is rubbish.

NREGA has for the first time very rapidly established minimum wages. And so it has established a wage structure in the country which is not exploitative. The enthusiasts of market forces should be celebrating. By spending a little money and establishing a wage structure you have actually made possible a market intervention. You have increased the earning capacity of people who were completely out of your radar and made them purchasers in the market.

I feel the time has come for NREGA to expand its scope of work carefully.

And you feel if NREGA was in mission mode it would have delivered even better?

Absolutely. And if the government delivered! It's not as if the people are not delivering. It is the government and its executive machinery which are not delivering.

There seems to be a rift between the proponents of NREGA and the government with regard to implementation of the scheme. What are the key differences and how seriously do they endanger NREGA?

They do endanger NREGA. To our mind there are five or six things which are undermining NREGA.

One extremely important issue is of minimum wages. NREGA is an entitlements programme. You cannot have an entitlement law and then not provide it. In an entitlement law if you do not provide minimum wages you are taking away the concept of entitlement because minimum wages is a more basic entitlement than all the others under NREGA. It is a fundamental right. So the complete brazenness with which they have said right up to the Prime Minister's level that NREGA allows us to pay less than minimum wages despite a standing court order against that in the Andhra High Court is completely wrong.

The other issue is late payment of wages. They all say it should be paid on time. But the difference is that there is a mechanism under NREGA which can be made to work and that is compensation for delayed payments. That underscores the bottom line problem – they don't want to be held accountable. If wages are not paid on time, NREGA says you should be paid compensation from 15 days onwards. Now they are not willing to activate that clause because then they would be held accountable.

But in a few exceptions where this clause has been activated, it has worked fantastically. Immediately the system has geared up to deliver. In Bhilwara the Collector said interest will be paid if

wages are delayed and this money will be extracted from the officer concerned. And that has made the whole system work much more efficiently.

Why do wages get delayed?

Because people don't measure the work done on time, the documents don't reach places on time for processing, then banks don't process those papers on time. Banks also deal with each village separately. It is the engineering department, the postal system and the banking system which are causing delays.

What are the other points of difference?

Thirdly, there is the unemployment allowance. If you don't get work within 15 days after you demand it, you should get the unemployment allowance. Again that has not been put into place at all.

Fourth are social audits and transparency measures. They have brought in by stealth an amendment in the Schedule which says that no outsider

'You keep having debates. But the real innovations are taking place at field level. And the great opportunity of bringing in those innovations right across the canvas is being lost.'

can participate in a social audit. There is no concept of an outsider in a social audit. An audit should be open to every citizen. What they have done is closed in a feudal structure. Even a government servant cannot go in and ask a question now. Outsiders can only observe. Therefore the implementing agencies are auditing themselves. The panchayat is the implementing agency and it is assessing itself.

Even in the gram sabha the sarpanch chairs it with no one being allowed to come in or open their mouths. So the sarpanch audits himself!

One very serious problem which we have been talking about and states are very unhappy with is the fund flow for NREGA works. The central government puts all kinds of conditions whenever it wants to. These conditions hamper the programme. The message goes down the line – don't provide works.

So the social audit has come under fire?

The concept itself is not under question. It is a beacon of hope and not an easy thing to do at all. I think what has been done in Andhra is unprecedented in the world and it shows what government can do. What distinguishes a social audit from the public hearing, is that it requires the full

participation of government, self-governing institutions and the people.

The only state to have done it with such participation is Andhra. They identified ₹100 crores of fraud and recovered ₹20 crores. Some 4000 officials were acted against. They have gone through three rounds of meticulous social audits. Now if you don't have social audits in the state the opposition and ruling party get indignant.

What do you think needs to be done to learn from the successes and failures of NREGA?

Experiences are being shared. I think there is greater communication here than in any other programme. It has become a priority for a large number of Collectors and many of them have been very innovative. The trouble is the institutionalising of those improvements. Again I would blame the central government and the ministry. All they keep doing is having this exchange of views but they don't act on those views.

The Central Employment Guarantee Council was meant to be a body that would bring in outside expertise and influence so that you could get a whole lot of ideas from there. Seven working groups were set up. They made several recommendations, many of them very fine.

But the ministry just sits on them. So you keep having debates and exchange of views.

The real innovations are taking place at field level. And the great opportunity of bringing in those innovations right across the canvas is being lost. Districts have innovated. So you will have one district which is very good at convergence, another which is good with women, another which has done very well on audit processes...at state level innovation depends on the commitment of the government to the programme.

What can the Union do to boost the scheme?

The programme should be run in mission mode with an employment guarantee council and with the support of a huge number of people who want to contribute to it.

Never in the history of India since independence have you had so many young people saying we will go out, do surveys and social audits and get involved in NREGA campaigns. Young and old, private sector and public sector are showing an interest in the programme. That energy should have been used.

Conditional cash transfers are being mooted.

There is this danger of one big lobby that wants to replace NREGA with conditional cash transfers. It sees NREGA as a threat. Conditional cash transfers and entitlements are at two opposite ends. There are certain things in which you have to do cash transfers. But the idea of conditional cash transfers especially the way it is being advocated here is that you will close an entitlement programme and replace it with dole.

Also, targeting has never worked in this country. A set of very powerful people are advocating cash transfers. They feel if NREGA fails then it is time for cash transfers.



Anti-corruption rallies bring

Saibal Chatterjee
New Delhi

In recent years, India has seen innumerable well publicised and extensively televised runs, walks, marches, marathons and candlelight vigils. The causes that these 'road shows' have espoused have been undeniably worthy and pretty varied, but the congregation at these events has more often than not been dominated by captains of industry, movie stars, cricketers and celebrities of other hues.

On 30 January, however, something changed. TV-friendly glamour made way for well-directed clamour. Hundreds of thousands of ordinary Indians took to the streets in more than 60 cities of the country to chant a single slogan – 'enough is enough, weed out corruption from public life.'

They were demanding enactment of a Jan Lokpal (People's Ombudsman) Bill as a prelude to setting up an authority armed with clearly defined constitutional powers to investigate, prosecute and punish corrupt politicians, bureaucrats and judges.

In Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Pune, Patna, Jaipur, Chandigarh, Lucknow and numerous other cities, big and small, the 'India Against Corruption' campaigners staged huge demonstrations and closed ranks in a battle to bring about change.

In many places, the marchers took a public pledge not to vote for political outfits that did not do enough to weed out corruption from the system.



Kiran Bedi and Ram Jethmalani at the Delhi rally

But the question is: are the reverberations being felt in the corridors of power? On the ground, the signals are loud and clear: the anti-corruption campaign is poised to assume the proportions of a full-fledged mass movement.

In Kolkata's Burrabazar, an estimated 500,000 people turned up to take part in the anti-corruption

march. In Hyderabad, former Chief Election Commissioner JM Lyngdoh led the protesters who rent the air with angry slogans. Their voices, hopefully, couldn't have fallen on deaf ears.

In Delhi, the campaign took on proportions that could have put a mega political rally in the shade. The anti-corruption activists converged at Jantar



out middle-class

Mantar in the national capital, having marched through an arterial road all the way from the Ramlila Grounds in the old part of the city.

A firm sense of intent coursed through the gathering. They were addressed by retired IPS officer Kiran Bedi, right to information campaigner Arvind Kejriwal, veteran jurist Shanti Bhushan, Supreme Court lawyer Prashant Bhushan, Narmada Bachao Andolan leader Medha Patkar, religious leader Mahmood Madani and noted lawyer Ram Jethmalani, besides respected social activists like Swami Agnivesh and Anna Hazare.

Kiran Bedi put the movement in perspective: "It is time for synergy. No point fighting this battle all alone. We have to come together for each one of us is losing out. Each one of us has become a victim. It's all rivulets right now. The rivulets have to turn into rivers and flow towards the ocean." Only then, she said, will the movement's full force be felt.

The refrain was pretty much the same across all their speeches. The draft Lokpal Bill floated by the government, they said, is not only severely flawed and grossly inadequate it has also, as Kiran Bedi asserted, "been formulated to protect the corrupt."

Therefore, the anti-corruption campaigners, who have come up with alternative Lokpal and Lokayukta Bills aimed at freeing the vigilance mechanism from the control of the government, demanded the creation of an autonomous and all-embracing system that would bring the entire process of nabbing and punishing the corrupt

under the ambit of a single constitutional canopy. In short, they want a complete overhaul of the diseased and much abused vigilance structure.

The activists say the Lokpal structure envisaged by the government will have only an advisory role and will end up curtailing the independence of the vigilance agencies. But that is obviously not what the government thinks. Union law minister Veerappa Moily, addressing the National Conference on Judicial Reforms in Mumbai in late January, claimed that the Lokpal Bill will be an "effective weapon against corruption" and would cleanse the system within a year. But few share the minister's optimism – with good reason.

Arvind Kejriwal, one of the brains behind the 'India Against Corruption' movement, has repeatedly pointed to the loopholes in the government's Lokpal Bill draft. "Indian citizens often complain that the anti-corruption agencies in India are ineffective. If the Lokpal Bill is passed, whatever little chance we have for these vigilance bodies will also disappear," he has said.

The spontaneous popular response to the 30 January march made it amply clear that, at the present juncture, nothing exercises the mind of the common Indian more than the issue of rampant corruption.

It was Mahatma Gandhi's martyrdom day, and the people were seeking a new life for themselves and the nation. Common folk from all walks of life and from all ages were out in large numbers to

throw their weight behind the leaders who are driving the movement.

"The alternative Lokpal Bill is so effective that it will eradicate corruption in the next two to three years. The political parties should support this Bill because the one suggested by the government is only a showpiece," Shanti Bhushan said in his address at the rally.

Expressing his support for the proposed alternative Lokpal Bill, Anna Hazare said: "If MPs oppose this legislation in Parliament, they will only expose themselves and send out the message that they aren't interested in combating corruption. This Bill, once adopted, will help break the corporate-politician nexus that is ruining India."

Kiran Bedi added her voice to the demand. "The Lokpal Bill drafted by the government must be modified as per the Jan Lokpal Bill prepared by civil society groups. The modified Bill aims at making the investigating agencies independent from the government and also includes provisions to recover money from guilty officials," she told the crowd.

Ram Jethmalani exhorted the people to wholeheartedly support the Jan Lokpal Bill. "If you back this Bill, we pledge to bring back the black money stashed away by the corrupt and make sure that they are brought to book."

There is no room for doubt that the people at large are all for a new beginning. It is the men and women who wield political power who might not have the will to go the whole hog. So the civil society activists, under the leadership of Swami Agnivesh, have drawn up a strategy to meet leaders of major political parties and enlist their support for the anti-corruption cause. The battle, which will eventually have to be fought in Parliament, is clearly far from over.



The J&K police just could not handle young, angry stone throwers

J&K police need reforms, not rewards

Syed Basharat
Srinagar

ANY talk of the police in Jammu and Kashmir is invariably about encounters and brutal reprisals. The force is frequently accused of corruption, bias, violation of human rights and lack of due process in dealing with situations.

The worst charge against the police is of fake encounters. Tempted by rewards and promotions, the police are known to have killed innocent civilians in cold blood. Kashmiris naturally do not trust the police.

The lack of procedure and systems often proves to be hugely costly.

One example is the Shopian case in which two women, Asiya and Neelofar Jan, were allegedly raped and then murdered in May last year. The police delayed in filing a simple first information report (FIR). That alone resulted in anger, widespread agitations and the deaths of innocent people across the Valley. Tourism suffered a setback and business is still hit.

During the six-month agitation which took place last year, the police just could not handle young, angry stone-throwers. There have been 114 civilian deaths over the past six months at the hands of the state police and paramilitary forces.

Belatedly, a group of senior officers constituted by the Union home ministry has prepared the draft of a standard operating procedure (SOP) to deal with mob violence with emphasis on the use of non-lethal weapons in Kashmir.

No decision has yet been taken on this draft SOP, but even if implemented it is only a small part of the police reforms which are needed in Jammu and Kashmir.

The state's slackness in implementing police reforms is increasingly being questioned. Responding to a petition filed by GM Wani, an advocate, on 1 July, 2010, a division bench of the J&K High Court issued a show cause notice to the state government expressing concern over the unnecessary delay in implementing Supreme Court guidelines on police reforms in the state.

To recap, the Supreme Court on 22 September,

2006, in the historic *Prakash Singh versus Union of India* case had instructed the Union and states to comply with a set of seven directives for implementing police reforms. These directives sought to achieve functional autonomy for the police and enhance accountability, among other things. Affidavits of compliance were to be filed by the states.

However, on 25 April, 2007, C. Phunsong, then chief secretary, filed an application in the Supreme Court seeking permission to suspend implementation of the court's directives on police reforms. Phunsong had pleaded that the situation in Jammu and Kashmir was quite different from other states and that at least one directive – separation of investigation and law and order – was not feasible. "The separation of investigation and law and order may be counter-productive as it will disturb the existing security set-up in the state," he submitted in his affidavit.

The High Court's notice puts the ball back in the state government's court. Wani had petitioned the court to direct the state government to

implement the Supreme Court's orders on police reforms. Expressing concern over what he called, "mediocre policing," Wani had pleaded that the police in Kashmir be directed to register every complaint in any police station as a First Information Report (FIR).

"Some of the major directives of the Supreme Court as well as the recommendations made by an expert security panel have been agreed to by the government in principle. But when action will be taken is yet to be seen," said a senior officer in the home affairs department of Jammu and Kashmir.

THE DEBATE: Senior police officers agree reforms are needed. But such reforms will need to be relevant. J&K is a border state constantly on the boil. The police are rewarded for dealing with conflict rather than crime and this has its own dire consequences.

"In J&K, the performance of police officials continues to be rated on the basis of the number of 'militants' killed, arms and ammunition recovered, information sought about people indulging in 'anti-national activities' and so on. This system of performance evaluation and rewards has developed a kind of jungle law within the police in this State," remarked a retired Deputy Inspector General of Police on condition of anonymity.

Many retired senior police officers here are of the opinion that police performance should be evaluated on merit. "See, the Model Police Act stresses on a merit-based police performance evaluation. Otherwise, if you reward police officers on mere encounters and arms and ammunition recovered, this system of performance evaluation will be a recipe for gross indiscipline. It will surely undermine the rule of law. In the past, custodial murders of innocent civilians have often been prompted by the lure of promotions and cash prizes. There could be better performance indicators. For instance: busting crimes which impact the lives of common people. Motivation and incentives could be more professional," said a senior police officer who retired as IGP in J&K.

The spectre of fake encounters is particularly worrisome. In 2007 the state police picked up five persons from different areas of south Kashmir and killed them in staged encounters. Ghulam Nabi Azad, who was at that time Chief Minister and is now Union Health Minister, had ordered a high-level probe into this chilling incident. The inquiry revealed that the Special Operations Group (SOG) – a counter insurgency group of Kashmir police – had killed the five innocent civilians in fake encounters, dubbing them as foreign militants. Those killed were actually carpenters, vendors and perfume-sellers.

A carpenter, Abdul Rehman Padroo, 35, who was lured by low-ranking SOG personnel, was killed in this encounter. The SOG mutilated his face with bullets. Later the SOG dubbed him as Abu Hafiz a militant from the Lashkar-e-Tayyeba in Multan, Pakistan. The police also claimed to have found an AK-47 rifle, three magazines and a grenade in Padroo's possession.

Azad's probe revealed that in March 2006 some police officers hatched a conspiracy to stage fake encounters to earn rewards and postings. Those involved in the conspiracy included the then SP Ganderbal, Hans Raj Parihar, Deputy SP (operations) Bahadur Ram Kaith, ASI, SOG Camp

Ganderbal, Farooq Ahmad Padder, driver-constable Farooq Ahmad Gadda and PSO of DSP (operations) Ganderbal, Bansi Lal. All of them are under arrest.

Instead of rewards, what is needed is a stable and transparent system of salaries and promotions. Right now, central forces are better paid than the state police.

"If a constable gets killed in an encounter with militants, the state government pays Rs 3 lakhs. In addition, Rs 2 lakhs is paid by the Union government. "We also pay his family Rs 6.5 lakhs from the police's contributory welfare fund," said Nishan Nathyal, Assistant Inspector-General (AIG), Welfare, Jammu and Kashmir.

How much does the Union government pay to the families of army or paramilitary force personnel who get killed in an encounter in Kashmir?



'The issue is not one of compensation. What is important are the salaries and facilities provided to the state police force.'

When asked, Nathyal said she was not aware.

"The army and paramilitary forces surely get more compensation than police personnel in the state," said a senior police officer posted in the Srinagar headquarters. "But the issue is not one of compensation. What is important are the salaries and facilities provided to the state police force. This is an area which needs to be included in police reforms because in most cases, low-ranking police officials have been accused of luring innocent civilians and killing them in fake encounters to get promotions and perks."

PROPOSED REFORMS: The police need better training for mob control. Police stations need to be well-equipped. Policemen at lower levels should get better salaries and modern gadgets to deal with hi-tech and cyber crimes. All this should be part of police reforms.

As per Supreme Court directives, states were asked to each constitute a State Security

Commission (SSC) to insulate the police from unwanted political interference and make them accountable for their individual actions, overall performance and any misdeeds. Such a commission does not exist so far in J&K.

According to the home affairs department, the setting up of a commission is still at the stage of a proposal. The minimum tenure of police officers of the rank of DGP and IGP is also being discussed..

Another directive was for a Police Complaint Authority (PCA) at state and district level to look into complaints by the people against police officers up to the rank of Superintendent and Deputy Superintendent of Police.

The State Human Rights Commission (SHRC) is also supposed to examine cases of human rights violations by the police. There is no meeting ground between the PCA and the SHRC. "We have seen the credibility of the SHRC in J&K," said a retired SP who has been active in drafting proposals for police reforms in the state. "This commission hardly receives any action taken report (ATR) on its recommendations made to the government. Besides, we have senior police officers as an important component of this commission. So how can one expect fair and proper investigation against the police officers? In the past a few chairpersons have resigned terming the commission a 'toothless tiger'."

The role of the state police is a grey area in the Valley. According to many retired police officers, the police are suffering from a loss of identity since the inception of militancy in 1989. "Earlier there was a definite demarcation between the role of the police and paramilitary forces. But now you hardly find any difference between these two forces. We have always been of the opinion that the relationship between the police and paramilitary force should be clearly redefined in our state. You see in any counter insurgency operation, the police take a frontier role in fighting the militants. Otherwise, there are clear cut rules and various Supreme Court guidelines which draw a line," said an officer who retired as Assistant IGP, Kashmir.

Officers in the state home department negate this theory. They say the police fully adopt a given protocol while performing their duties in Kashmir, though there may be some aberrations. Interestingly, after the six-month agitation the government got time to introspect on what actually went wrong and the Union Home Ministry constituted a group of top level police and security officers for drafting a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to deal with mob violence with emphasis on the use of non-lethal weapons in Kashmir.

But the existing SOP with the police at least for carrying out searches is not observed. For example, the existing SOP says that a police party doing a search should be accompanied by a magistrate. The search party should respect women and if possible be accompanied by a lady constable. The search party should be well briefed by the officer. Harsh language, mishandling, misbehaviour should be avoided. The police search party should arrange for first aid and an ambulance. And the list of the guidelines goes on.

"I have argued hundreds of cases of illegal detention in the High Court. Not in a single case have the police adopted all the guidelines given in their SOP," said a senior lawyer practicing in the Kashmir High Court, pleading anonymity.

Lalaram knocks down feudal lords

Bharat Dogra
Banda (UP)

ABOUT three years ago a hunger death was reported from Lalaram Prajapati's home in Nahri village. Several people came to condone with him. Nowadays, once again people are streaming into Lalaram's house. The reason is different though – Lalaram stood for panchayat elections in October 2010 and won. He is now pradhan of this village. One of the poorest men in Nahri is its leader.

How did this transition come about? Lalaram says the visit of Rahul Gandhi to his home proved to be a big morale-booster. He says, "I started telling myself – if such a big leader from Delhi can come to sympathize with me, why shouldn't I work hard to come forward and do something?"

This determination could be translated into reality due to the significant work done by the Vidyadham Samiti, a voluntary organisation working in Nahri and nearby villages. Nahri is located in Naraini block of Banda district in Uttar Pradesh. The Vidyadham Samiti works in about 45 villages of this block for the rights of weaker sections, for implementation of the government's pro-poor schemes and for improvement of education.

During the worst phase of Bundelkhand's drought, Raja Bhaiya, founder-director of the Vidyadham Samiti, worked day and night to draw the attention of the administration to the survival threats villages here faced. His investigations revealed that as many as nine starvation deaths had taken place in Nahri. When news of these hunger deaths appeared in several newspapers and journals, Rahul Gandhi accompanied by Raja Bhaiya visited Nahri village and Lalaram's home.

When panchayat elections were announced for October 2010, the Vidyadham Samiti began working intensively to ensure they were free and fair. Some of these villages are in the clutches of feudal interests. They do not leave any stone unturned to ensure they dominate local politics and self-governance. During panchayat elections feudal lords use money and muscle to make sure that they or their proxy candidates win the coveted post of village pradhan.

On the opposite side of the fence voluntary

groups like the Vidyadham Samiti strongly believe that the real objectives of panchayat raj or rural decentralisation can only be achieved if genuine representatives of the weaker sections contest and win these elections. So the voluntary group tried to encourage persons of integrity and clean reputation from weaker sections to contest the panchayat elections.

Since the Vidyadham Samiti and its sister organization, Chingari, have done a lot of sincere work among the rural poor, people listen careful-



Lalaram outside his hut



Lalaram at a work site

ly to what its activists say. This time it was clear that their campaign for free elections in which candidates from weaker sections could have a fair chance of winning, was making people think.

Vidyadham Samiti's campaign was further boosted by the Association of Local Governance of India (ALGI) which was also leading a campaign for free and fair elections. ALGI made available to Vidyadham useful literature and posters for their campaign. These booklets and posters explained, in a language the villagers could understand, why it is so important to elect persons who are honest and will stand by the poor in the toughest of times.

In Nahri village this campaign proved so effective that poor people not only spurned offers of money by rich candidates, they even collected small donations for Lalaram once he decided to contest.

Lalaram could fight the election only due to these small donations. When election results were announced, the poor people of this village were very happy to know that Lalaram had won by a substantial margin of 130 votes. Now people have high hopes from Lalaram.

In Naugavaan panchayat of Naraini block another poor person, whose name by a strange coincidence is Lalaram, was able to defeat a candidate backed by feudal forces. So arrogant were these feudals that some time back they told social activists that they won't be allowed to enter this village.

In 2005 the feudal forces of Ragauli Bhattapur had won the panchayat elections by calling in several gunmen to ensure that their candidate got most of the votes. But during the October 2010 elections, a person called Rajaram who had toiled in stone quarries was able to win the panchayat poll.

In 2005 in Bilharka panchayat of Naraini block the seat was reserved for Dalit women.

The feudal forces found a Dalit woman dependent on them to stand as their proxy candidate. Then during the next five years they merrily controlled panchayat affairs using the name of the hapless Dalit pradhan. The Dalit woman pradhan was not even allowed to speak to outsiders. But this time Mangal Singh, a humble worker opposed to feudal might, won the election.

Similarly in Saahpatan village of this block, Harishankar Nishad who did not have any money for election expenses could win the election.

The news of the election victories of poor candidates has come at a time when highly escalating election budgets in panchayat elections are being widely reported. What is even more inspiring is that most candidates in Naraini block have fought against powerful feudal interests. If we also count ward members and BDCs, then the number of such victorious candidates increases significantly. This victory of the poor against the rich, arrogant and feudal forces is a victory not just of these candidates. It is also a victory for India's democracy.

Nonstick jackfruit

Shree Padre
Kasaragod

HOUSEWIVES battling the jackfruit with a knife must have often wished it didn't have so much sticky gum. Well, that wish has come true. A jackfruit variety without gum is now basking in the limelight. Millions of its grafts have been planted in Karnataka and Kerala by interested farmers.

Dr. P.A. Mathew, a horticulture scientist from Kerala Agriculture University says this variety can take pride of place in the jackfruit family.

"It is crisp, tasty and keeps for long. With good marketing skills it can be successfully branded," says Dr Mathew.

The mother tree of this non-sticky jackfruit originates from the Menezes family in Mangalore in the Dakshina Kannada district of Karnataka. Late Timothy Menezes' father had planted it. The old tree died recently.

But for Timothy's relative, William Lasrasdo, this rare genotype might have been lost forever. It was Lasrasdo who arranged for a grafting specialist to propagate this tree before its death.

Except for a few drops of latex in the core portion, the fruitlets of this variety are not at all sticky. In the unripe fruit, the latex gets sucked on maturity. Being without gum is not this jackfruit's only unusual trait.

Krishna Bhat of Coodanahalli Estate in Hassan, Karnataka, is a



A non sticky jackfruit cut in half

farmer who has 50 to 60 trees which yield gum-less jackfruit. "Though less sweet, it's an excellent fruit. It has no fiber," explains Bhat. "Even if you eat a lot, this fruit doesn't cause indigestion or flatulence. We have made chips, payasa, papad and many other products. The seeds of the fruit are also very tasty and cook like potato. But since this variety lacks fibre, it's not suitable for drying or preserving in brine." So far, Bhat has sold over 20,000 grafts of this variety.

Ten years ago he had given a few scions to Sompady Harischandra Shetty, a farmer who passed away recently. Shetty top worked it to an existing tree. As a result, he started getting fruits after just three years. Later, he too popularised it. Today, scores of nurseries are selling its grafts.

Generally, the tree bears medium sized fruits of six to 10 kilos. With proper care, the fruits grow bigger. The colour of its flakes is light yellow. Judging the ripening of the fruit is slightly difficult. The rind is very thin. "This is one drawback. The fruits may not withstand long journeys," observes Dr P.A. Mathew.

According to Harischandra Shetty, the fruit lasts for a month if it is kept in the fridge. Ananthamoorthy Javali, who owns a nursery in Ripponpete, Karnataka, once started cutting this fruit across its axis. Each day, he would take off a thick ring for consumption. "Till the tenth day even at room temperature it remained nice and crisp."

Says Krishnaraj Giliyal, a farmer, "The chips made from gum-less jackfruit are the crispiest and the tastiest I have eaten. Even during the monsoon, the chips stayed crisp for more than three months."

A team of scientists at Horticulture College, Arabhavi, affiliated to the University of Agri Sciences, Dharwar, led by Dr S.L.Jagadeesh, have conducted detailed analyses of gum-less jackfruit. "Except for a lower TSS (total soluble sugars) and unattractive color, it is a good fruit based on many other characters," says Dr Jagadeesh.

Horticulture specialists advocate medium and small sized fruits to cater to small families. But Bhat's experience suggests otherwise.

Middlemen aren't interested in buying medium sized fruits. They prefer to buy the loose fruit and therefore prefer the big fruits. So despite good quality, Bhat isn't able to sell his gum-less jackfruits for a decent price. Supermarkets in nearby Bangalore or Mysore can sell branded gum-less jackfruit by sourcing from such farmers.

Now an urban right to work

Civil Society News
New Delhi

A National Urban Right to Work draft bill has been drawn up by Sajha Manch, a coalition of groups working for the urban poor. This legislation should have been tagged with the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) but has been put into cold storage. It was promised by the UPA government, said Dunu Roy of Hazards Centre, which is a member of Sajha Manch.

The Sajha Manch has drawn up the draft bill after doing six consultations, 14 workshops and 17 research studies since 2005. One more seminar was held on 1 February in Delhi followed by a press conference. The manch has consulted trade unions and activists associated with NREGA.

The coalition recognizes there are stark differences in employment between urban and rural areas. While rural areas suffer from unemployment in between sowing seasons, in urban areas most of the poor are employed. Their problem is they are paid measly wages for long hours of work. This money just about helps them survive. There is hardly any access to proper health, education and housing. The threat of eviction is a constant.

"In the city, people are either in wage employment or they are self-employed, under-employed or unemployed," says Dunu Roy. "Legislation has to cater to all three categories. Hence we specify 'right to work' rather than an employment guarantee scheme and the 'living wages' that every worker should earn."

Informal labour, he pointed out, had no rights. Police and municipalities routinely harassed rickshaw pullers, vendors, hawkers, the homeless and sundry labour. Self-employment in the big city was hazardous and poorly paid.

So the Sajha Manch is rooting for a 'need based minimum wage.' They are recommending that 25 per cent above the minimum wage, as per one Supreme Court order, be recognized as the 'need based wage'.

The city should also have a model for employment. Each city wants certain industries like the IT/BPO sector to provide jobs. Similarly it should factor in jobs for the urban poor. Sajha Manch has done a survey of jobs and work conditions in the city. It is suggesting a model which would boost employment for the poor by changing the norms of the urban development process.

The coalition recommends that every person should be entitled to a labour card. There should also be clear spaces demarcated for housing for them.

The draft also seeks to be comprehensive so that it can address the needs of all categories of workers – rickshaw pullers, vendors, domestic workers, rag-pickers, garment workers and so on. If each category of workers has its own legislation it would weaken the responsibility and accountability of the Labour department, apart from disrupting traditional worker solidarity.

For a 'need based' minimum wage in cities, the minimum wage in rural areas will have to be sorted out first. Nikhil Dey of MKSS pointed out that the correct statutory minimum wage continues to elude NREGA workers. It varies from state to state. The Union government delinked NREGA wages from the Minimum Wages Act and linked it to the Consumer Price Index. Despite this in 11 states the minimum wage is lower than what it should be. The minimum wage should be at least ₹250 per day.

From NGO to RWA

Kavita Charanji
New Delhi

GAUTAM Vohra is a well-known, if slightly controversial figure in the development sector. As founder-chairman of Development Research and Action Group (DRAG), an NGO, he has worked with marginalised communities for over two decades. In his latest avatar, Vohra has taken on the responsibility of empowering a radically different constituency – the privileged residents of New Delhi's Vasant Vihar colony.

Recently voted in as president of the Vasant Vihar Welfare Association (VVWA), Vohra believes his NGO innings have parallels with his new assignment. "Those of us connected with the NGO sector work with the marginalised. That is where you learn that if you want the marginalised to achieve their objectives, you have to strengthen their skills. In a different form I am applying the same principles here. Once you have done capacity building with the community, you leave them to handle each issue directly with the powers that be. Everyone should be able to tackle an issue not just a charismatic leader or president," says Vohra, a former editor of various publications who now runs a small publishing house.



During his first stint as president from 2002 to 2004, Vohra initiated the process of decentralisation by setting up block level committees. Now he intends to encourage the sub-committees to shoulder greater responsibilities.

The committees deal with issues as diverse as a flyover outside Vasant Vihar, to noise pollution by overflying aircrafts, to pruning of trees and ensuring adequate water supply to the colony.

The flyover issue seems to be the most contentious. A long-standing demand of the VVWA has been for a four-lane flyover from one end of Vasant Vihar to the other end on the outer Ring Road so that entry and exit from the colony is made easy. It's not an easy proposition. There is stiff resistance from several quarters, including from residents of swanky Palam Marg, located on the main road of

Vasant Vihar who fear a massive increase in traffic outside their doorstep.

Vohra claims to have made headway. For one he says, the flyover sub-committee members have come up with five concrete ideas, dividing them into short and long term measures. Meanwhile, another member has made the VVWA committee's objections known to the government.

Vohra strongly believes that these actions have

had a far-reaching impact.

"The first thing we did was to get the flyover on the Ring Road converted into two lanes, so that the waiting period at the traffic light going towards Moti Bagh was sharply reduced. So we have been able to have an impact and the government is listening to us, which we never thought would be possible," he says.

Vohra has deployed the Right to Information (RTI) Act whenever necessary. He filed an RTI petition through which VVWA demanded to know how much money was provided by Indraprastha Gas Limited to the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) to redo pavements after the work of laying the gas pipeline was completed. The MCD has given a "vague self-serving reply" says Vohra.

"So we had written to them to tell us which streets and bylanes had been repaired. On the basis of this challenge they have restarted the work."

In the process, he says, the MCD has also begun to remove the *malba* (debris) in the back lanes and roads.

Apart from fire-fighting, Vohra and his team are busy shoring up the VVWA newsletter – not merely as a "complaint box" but with new features like columns dedicated to poetry and profiles of artists, poets, writers and media persons living in the colony. It is a shrewd move to grab the attention of younger Vasant Viharis so that they get involved in their neighbourhood.

Through the newsletter, Vohra hopes to "develop a sense of community and brotherhood." A "cohesive colony" is what he has set his sights on rather than "isolated pockets of high flying individuals." Along the way Vohra's agenda is to increase the membership of the association from the current 2,000 to a more respectable figure.



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Many barriers to forest rights

Civil Society News

Dehradun

INDIA has a long way to go on the road to community forest management if the report of the National Committee on Forest Rights is anything to go by.

The committee, which has NC Saxena as its chairperson, says there has been some implementation of individual claims to small pieces of land around forested areas. But community forest rights have been in limbo. The focus in the next phase should be on helping villages gain community forest rights.

The committee had been formed to examine implementation of the Scheduled Tribes and Other Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006. It is made up of members from the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, (MOTA), Ministry of Environment and Forests, (MoEF), and forest rights activists like Roma of the National Forum for Forest People and Forest Workers (NFFPFW).

The report points out that even getting titles for small plots of land is not easy. The process has been made difficult for people. Officials exercise more power than tribals and villagers and they decide everything.

According to the Forest Rights Act (FRA), gram sabhas should be convened at hamlet/village level to discuss claims. Instead these are being called at panchayat level in Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh. It is more democratic to discuss such issues with small gatherings of people in villages rather than in mass panchayat meetings.

Many claims for small plots are being rejected since inquiries are done in a hasty manner. Claimants are not informed in writing that their claim has been rejected so they cannot appeal.

At the grassroots, the powers of the forest rights committees and gram sabhas which vet the initial claims are being exercised by officials. The committees and gram sabhas have been reduced to being mere rubber stamps.

The State Level Monitoring Committee is supposed to devise criteria and indicators for monitoring the process of recognition and vesting of forest rights. But the whole exercise has been reduced to number crunching and quick disposal of claims.



Forest rights committees and gram sabhas are not empowered. They need maps, documents and evidence to examine initial claims but these are not provided. Only a few states are using PDA or GPS to demarcate boundaries and measure plots for individual rights.

The opinion of forest officials overrides everything. Tribal department officers are disinterested. Revenue officials lack confidence and concern.

Then Other Traditional Forest Dwellers find that they cannot file claims since they have not been included. No rights are being given in

Protected Areas.

So people are being fobbed off with small plots of land.

But the idea behind the Act was to involve communities in protection, management and regeneration of community forest resources to which they had traditional access. These rights include *nistar* rights, (common village land for timber, grass, school, pasture etc) rights for fishing, grazing, minor forest produce, access for pastoral and nomadic communities and so on.

Communities, which would like to claim such rights, do not know how to verify them. There is hardly any baseline information of the existence of such rights or of customary practices on use and protection of forests. In fact, no thinking has been done on the status, management and conservation of forests where the community can claim forest rights.

The gram sabha's relationship with the forest department and other agencies managing forested areas has not been clearly defined. Even existing laws on forest use and extraction clash with each other. There are laws which contradict FRA and give powers to the forest department.

Most communities are not aware that they can claim community forest rights. Those who do, find that government agencies discourage them. All government's schemes historically are aimed at individual ownership and rights. There is no focus on community benefits.

So people now consider community resources as the government's responsibility. There is not much sense of ownership.

If the government wants to involve communities in management and conservation of forests, it will have to start giving them rights, benefits and responsibilities.

SAMITA' S WORLD

by SAMITA RATHOR



MPs perform and perish

Saibal Chatterjee
New Delhi

PERFORM or perish – that would have been the adage in an ideal world. The Indian electoral system is anything but that. So, for our MPs, 'perform and perish' is a bitter truth. Indeed, performance in Parliament does not protect a politician from the prospect of electoral defeat. Six of the 10 top-ranked members of the 14th Lok Sabha failed to win the subsequent general elections and are out of the current House.

The Citizens' Report on Governance and Development 2010 prepared by National Social Watch (NSW) ranked all 545 MPs of the previous Lok Sabha on four parameters – attendance, participation in debates, number of questions asked and number of private members' bills proposed from 2004 to 2009 – only to find that those that made the top 10 list weren't necessarily the most publicly visible and media savvy politicians of the land.

Continued electoral success, the citizens' report indicates, depends more on exposure on television than on how committed an MP is to his work in Parliament. The report notes: "One of the biggest complaints of the members is that... serious work gets ignored while trivia gets sensationalised. The result of this lopsided approach means the work of those MPs who strive day in and day out to contribute to the functioning of the Parliament goes almost unnoticed..."

None of the previous House's top five MPs – CPI's CK Chandrappan (Thrissur, Kerala), Republican Party of India's (A) Ramdas Athawale (Pandharpur, Maharashtra), Samajwadi Party's Mohan Singh (Deoria, Uttar Pradesh), Biju Janata Dal's Braja Kishore Tripathy (Puri, Orissa) and Congressman SK Kharventhan (Palani, Tamil Nadu) – is in the 15th Lok Sabha. The seventh-ranked MP, SP's Ramji Lal Suman (Firozabad, UP), was the other top performing Lower House member who failed to get re-elected.

Chandrappan, who topped the list scoring 6.3 out of 10, is the secretary of the Kerala state unity of the CPI. He did not contest the last general election. His party candidate lost to the Congress nominee in his constituency.

Although the report does not put a finger on the precise reason why the above MPs faced rejection by their constituency despite their performance in the House, Amitabh Behar, national convenor, NSW and one of the editors of the Citizens' Report, did say while releasing the tome late last year that "it is probably because they are not news-makers and lack attention from the media".

Releasing the report in New Delhi, Union urban development minister S. Jaipal Reddy had said that today's MPs needed to be mindful of publicity, adding that staying in the news could help them when they seek re-election. The minister admitted that he did not know many of the 10 MPs who topped the list.

The report alludes to the "constant refrain of Parliamentarians themselves" that "there is no recognition for good work done and only those who



Members of the Left agitating outside Parliament

are glamorous or seen as powerful get noticed" in the media and the public sphere. Chapter 1 of the Citizens' Report, titled 'Parliament: Challenges of Three Rs – Representativeness, Responsiveness and Responsibility' also points out that in the view of the MPs, "the advent of 24-hour news channels... while bringing limelight on them has however also resulted in trivialisation of their work."

It is against the backdrop of this growing misgiving that the annual Citizens' Report decided, for the first time ever, to assess the actual performance of the MPs as objectively as possible on the basis of a path-breaking methodology evolved by NSW. The report says: "For the first time ever in Indian Parliamentary history, we have been able to evolve this method, which has assisted in rating the MPs based purely on their performance in the House."

The four MPs from the top ten list who made the 15th Lok Sabha cut were Shiv Sena's Anandrao Adsul (Budhana, Maharashtra, Rank 6), SP's Shailendra Kumar (Chail, UP, Rank 8), BJP's Hansraj Gangaram Ahir (Chandrapur, Maharashtra, Rank 9) and CPI(M)'s Basudeb Acharya (Bankura, West Bengal, Rank 10).

NSW is a network of organisations, citizens and communities monitoring governance in the country through the prisms of rights, development, freedom and security. This is the seventh report brought out by the NGO. It evaluates the functioning of four key institutions of the government – Parliament, judiciary, executive and local self-government during the pendency of the 14th Lok Sabha, which came to an end in mid-2009.

Besides assessing the performance of MPs in Parliament, the latest citizens' report, also for the first time, went into the question of 'conflict of interest' among parliamentarians. It states: "... If there is anything that can derail democracy and replace it with crony capitalism, it is the misuse of power for personal aggrandisement rather than for public good."

In this context, the report found that 128 members, or 25 per cent, of the Lower House and 28 members, or 10 per cent, of the Upper House are industrialists and corporate players, many of whom are members of standing committees related to policy-making fields that have a direct bearing on their business and commercial interests.

As part of the assessment, NSW observed that over the past decade the nation had witnessed "an exponential growth in (the numbers of) industrialists, businessmen and others from allied communities getting elected to the Lok Sabha as well as occupying the hallowed precincts of the Rajya Sabha."

Drawing upon news reports, NSW gave specific examples where a "conflict of interest" could arise. At least three members of the Standing Committee on Health run medical education institutes – BJP's Prabhakar B. Kore, Janata Dal (S)'s MAM Ramaswamy and Datta Meghe of the Congress.

Similarly, the Standing Committee on Finance "is virtually a who's who of industry" comprising, among others, venture capitalist Rajeev Chandrasekhar (Independent), industrialists Jawahar Darda, Sambasiva Rayapati and Magunta Srinivasulu Reddy, all from the Congress, and Jaganmohan Reddy, who has since quit the Congress.

Refraining from jumping to any conclusion, the citizens' report did assert that the potential for conflict of interest in the current situation could not be underestimated. Membership of crucial standing committees could allow industrialist MPs to influence public policy to serve their business needs.

The citizens' report also revealed the number of sittings in 2009 had declined in both the Houses. The Lok Sabha sat for only 64 days while the Rajya Sabha did so 63 days. The number of Bills passed witnessed a decline from 47 in 2008 to 41 in 2009, with the two houses of parliament spending less than one-fifth of the total time on legislative business.

computer definition:-

computer is an Electronic data processing machine (E.D.P) It takes the user's data and gives the



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GROUND REALITY**MUSLIMS ARE READY TO MOVE ON**

PHOTOGRAPHS BY GAUTAM SINGH



A class in progress in Gujarati at the Farooq-e-Azam Primary and Girls High School at Juhapura, Ahmedabad

The search for a ‘new normal’

LIFE AFTER RIOTS

By DIPANKAR GUPTA

AFTER a brutal ethnic attack can a ravaged community ever attain a “new normal”? Accepted that returning to the old one is unlikely, but must they always live in fear? When they go to bed at night can they be reasonably sure about the morning? Will it be placid, normal and everyday, or will the violence suddenly descend?

So many questions, but we never quite have the answers to them. In the immediate aftermath of an ethnic carnage, the attention of activists, NGOs,

reporters and academics is sharply focused on the here and now. Lives have to be saved, fires to be doused and the victims hand-held back to their homes.

An ideological war too must be fought against sectarian crusaders. They have to be politically exposed and their evil machinations broadcast. But when these tense and fearful days recede, as recede they must, our minds and energies wander off to the next tragedy.

As a result we know little of how those brutally affected gradually get back to a “new normal”. When we think of them, after a lapse of time, we imagine them as they were in their darkest hour. That was when we knew them

BUT THEY WANT THEIR RIGHTS AS CITIZENS

closely, but in the meantime they have moved on, and so have we.

Lacking a clear awareness of how ethnic victims find their way to a "new normal" we tend to be haunted by images and fears of the past. Perhaps, destitution is still hurting them the most? When we last left them they were in dire economic straits. There was that other danger too: has the anger, which was so obvious then, become fundamentalist on the recoil?

In order to address these concerns a study was conducted on how victims of the ethnic carnages in Mumbai, in 1993, and Gujarat, in 2002, have fared over the long-term. Their initial wounds may have healed; the scabs may have fallen off, but what about the hurt inside? How have they dealt with that?

Some broad findings need to be off-loaded quickly so as not to burden the rest of the story. First, getting out of poverty is not easy. No sleight of hand or wave of wand will accomplish that. Rehabilitation efforts can temporarily ease economic distress, but if the victims were poor to start with then these measures will not help them walk out of poverty.

Even the fear that ethnic victims would turn fundamentalist is essentially untrue. This nightmare scenario has no real co-ordinates on the ground, not in Mumbai, nor in Ahmedabad. Neither is the dream that they have found their old groove again, any closer to reality. Taken together this should not mean that efforts to economically help victims of ethnic riots are unnecessary, or that religious passions should not be calmed.

Doubtless, these are important considerations, but they should not obscure the fact that what the victims want most is justice. Whether Ahmedabad or Mumbai, unless citizenship is substantially restored to them, they will never be at peace: either with themselves, or the world outside. The calls to abjure fundamentalism, or the drives to reduce poverty, do not answer this felt need. And that is where the rub lies.

CONTEXT MAKES THE CONTENT

Even as we go through the similarities between the reactions of victims in Mumbai and Ahmedabad, the differences are crying to be heard. When examined in depth, each of the general conclusions mentioned so far require a lot more finessing. It is only when the contents are framed within their contexts that the minutiae stand out.

We now discover that there is no *one* Muslim reaction to ethnic violence. Much depends on where it happens, and on the nature of the administration there. In other words, there are Muslims and Muslims, for there are contexts and contexts.

Angered by the 1993 Babri Masjid demolition, the first round of street violence in Mumbai was started by Muslims. Matters seemed to cool down soon after, but that was a deceptive calm. In little over a month Hindu groups, led by the Shiv Sena, launched a massive attack on Muslims in different parts of the city. After that a series of blasts shocked Mumbai to a standstill. When the smoke cleared and a tally of the damage was done it was discovered that for every Hindu that died in that week of violence, more than two Muslims had lost their lives.

The government of the day in Maharashtra was a coalition between the National Congress Party and the Congress. Shiv Sena activists were not in

authority positions, but were the most organized force on the streets. The Srikrishna Commission, that was set up to enquire into the violence, made this point most authoritatively. It also indicted a number of police officers for being indifferent to the plight of Muslims in Mumbai, if not actually Shiv Sena partisans.

Though Shiv Sena activists are powerful in Mumbai, it is not as if they can dominate the political and cultural character of this metropolis. This city has for long been India's undisputed commercial capital and its many features bear testimony to this. It has an established history of trade unionism as well as of secular civic activism. What should not be forgotten either is that Mumbai is also home to a strong Muslim business and political elite.

When in 1993, the Shiv Sena and its allies went on a rampage against Muslims, these secular forces in Mumbai combined to contain the damage to



Tarkash Bibi in her shop at Naroda Patiya in Ahmedabad. Tarkash returned after the riots to reopen her shop.

a certain extent. They not only provided the affected people with shelter and economic assistance, but also shielded them from Hindu mobs. Distinguished police officers like Julius Ribeiro and Satish Sahani; activists like Sushobha Barve and eminent Muslims like F.T. Khorakiwala came forward, with hundreds of others, to help the city slowly return to business as usual.

Khorakiwala, of course, is a household name in Mumbai. He started the city's first major department store in the Fort area which has since attained iconic status. Coincidentally, he was also Sheriff of Mumbai when violence erupted in the city in 1992. Besides him there were other affluent Muslims, like Feroze Mithaiwala, Zakulla Siddiqi and Wahid Ali, who also contributed liberally towards the rehabilitation of the victims. Prominent Muslim politicians, like Nawab Malik, Gulzar Sheikh and S.R. Jamkhanwala played a very positive role in restoring the political climate of the city. All of these efforts combined to help the distressed Muslims of Mumbai. This reduced their dependence on both the government as well as on Muslim faith based organizations.

Before long, Muslims were again moving about freely in the city, though

not everyone went back to their old jobs. Most returned to their homes, and even young girls from affected families resumed school. Since then, the Shiv Sena too has studiously stayed away from attacking Muslims. Though this assertion is impossible to confirm, there are many who believe that the Mumbai bomb blasts punctured the confidence of Hindu activists. What remains incontestable, however, is that Mumbai Muslims do not look fearfully over their shoulders the way Muslims of Ahmedabad do.

In Ahmedabad the killings were completely one-sided; not even a token gesture of Muslim reprisal. After the Godhra incident in late February, 2002, Muslims did not stand a chance in this city. As they ran desperately from the killing fields they found no embankment, no shelter. Naroda Patiya in Ahmedabad revelled in Hindu mayhem and bloodshed. It was saturnalia unbound. Why?

All said and done, that Maharashtra did not have a BJP or Shiv Sena government made a big difference to the context of violence in these two cities. The Srikrishna Commission severely castigated the government for not taking appropriate action, but at no point did the parties in power openly support the Hindu ethnicists. It is one thing to dither and look the other way, as the Congress-NCP coalition did, and quite another to be actively in the chase, as the BJP was in Gujarat.

In Gujarat (and Ahmedabad) it was the BJP that was in the seat and they were clearly abetting the murderous activities of Hindu sectarians. While Narendra Modi justified the attacks against the Muslims, no member of Maharashtra's government even remotely suggested such an idea, at least, not in the open.

This also accounts for the fact that the violence in Mumbai soon came to a halt. In Gujarat, on the other hand, it raged on for more than three months, forcing thousands of Muslims to leave their homes. Ten years have elapsed since those killings, but there are many in Ahmedabad who continue to live in resettlement colonies. They are still too scarred and scared to return to what was once their home.

The activists who came forward to help the Muslim victims in Ahmedabad were constantly in fear of what the government might do to them. At every step they were thwarted by the BJP administration; some even faced unconcealed threats from the police. Unlike Mumbai, there were no mohalla or neighbourhood reconciliation committees in Ahmedabad that could help the frightened Muslims. In Mumbai these committees were established by distinguished members of Mumbai's elite, and they belonged to all religious groups.

The situation in Ahmedabad, on this count again, was very different from that of Mumbai. Neither Hindu nor Muslim notables of Ahmedabad could stand up to the determined onslaught of the BJP government. Consequently, the only assistance the affected Muslims received was from Muslim faith-based organizations viz., the Jamaat-i-Islami Hind, the Jamiaat Ulema-e-Hind, and to a certain extent, the Tablighi Jamaat. In stark contrast, organizations of this kind had little relevance in Mumbai. Their impact could barely be felt at any time: before, during or after the violence

BACK TO WORK

After a lapse of over eight years in Ahmedabad and nearly 18 years in Mumbai, the economic pain seems to have eased. There is little evidence to show that the vic-



Shehnaz stands outside her house in a lane flooded with sewage and water in Noman Nagri, adjacent to Citizen Nagar in Ahmedabad.



Sheikh Mohammad, 24, (left) and his friend Sajid at Tulsiwadi, Mumbai. He was six years old when the riots occurred.



Ragpickers sift through a garbage dump. Citizen Nagar is in the background.

tims of ethnic violence in these cities are still hurting economically. This goes against a large section of popular opinion and is, in fact, quite startling. Violence robbed many Muslims of their job and source of income, but both in Mumbai and Ahmedabad they are back at work again. Some of them have experienced a fall in standards of living, but in general, they have moved from one kind of poverty to another.

The situation between Mumbai and Ahmedabad, however, differs in some very interesting ways.

We ought to remember that Muslims everywhere are generally self-employed craftsmen or traders, big and small. They are under-represented in agriculture as well as in government jobs. Yet, in Mumbai, quite uniquely, a large number of Muslim victims were employed by the municipality and they were the first ones to get back to work.

There are large swathes of Mumbai where commercial activity is almost entirely in the hands of the Muslim community. Muhammad Ali Road, Bhandi Bazar, Chor Bazar or Khoja Chawl, are places where it would be hard to find a shop, or enterprise, which is not run by a Muslim. Many of those who lost their livelihood in the violence of 1993 found jobs in the thousands of Muslim establishments in these neighbourhoods of the city. They were not always happily at work, but it is hard to argue against money at a time like this.

That most Muslims are self-employed or earn their living as mechanics and craftsmen, probably helped them recover quickly. As Nawab Mallik, an important Congress functionary and once Maharashtra's Cabinet Minister said:

"After a riot we Muslims may be out of a job for some time. Hindus may frighten us to move to another place. But in the end, the same Hindus come to us for services....That is why we economically resettle ourselves without anyone's help."

There is no one Muslim reaction to ethnic violence. Much depends on where it happens, and on the nature of the administration there. In other words, there are Muslims and Muslims, for there are contexts and contexts.

When the air-conditioner or car malfunctions, it will be the Muslim mechanic round the corner who will set the machine right. For weddings and other occasions, it is the Muslims again whose skills will be in demand. Members of this community are more than well represented in artisan trades, including textile weaving and fabrication. In other words, you cannot keep a good, hard-working Muslim down!

Also, as Muslims are good craftspeople, technicians and so on, they are good with their hands. This skill helps them to switch more easily from trade to trade across sectors. When their shops were burnt and their earlier businesses gone, they recovered by going into some other line of activity. An embroiderer became a tailor, a taxi owner became a scooter-rickshaw driver, and a car mechanic began fixing air-conditioners.

Occasionally, they also strayed well out of their acquired skill sets and did something unrelated to their earlier occupations. A once prosperous trade merchant who had lost his entire inventory was forced to work as a watchman on daily wages; a cigarette vendor became a house painter; some even moved from textile fabrication to construction. These job crossovers happened in a number of places, particularly in areas like Pratiksha Nagar, Tulsiwadi, as well as in sections of Dharavi.

The important point is that almost all those who lost their jobs on account of the violence found another one within about a year.

Though the eventual outcome was more or less the same in Ahmedabad, the road was much rougher. The attacks against Muslims in this city were more intense because they had no place to duck and take cover. Many Cheliya Muslims thought that if they gave their restaurants very Hindu sounding names like "Ashish" or "Tulsi" it would save them from destruction. They were wrong! A large number of such establishments were burnt to



Children play in the courtyard of Siddiqui Bath, a resettlement colony in Ahmedabad.

the ground: their Muslim connections were widely known.

Several expensive Muslim-owned showrooms too attempted to disguise their ownership in the same way. That did not save them either from being razed or ransacked during that period. Hindu groups, likewise, attacked Muslim transport companies and inflicted severe losses on them by burning their buses and trucks. The Muslim elite of the city did not have the clout and influence that their counterparts in Mumbai had to blunt any of these assaults.

In such a situation it is indeed surprising that after the storm was over 40 per cent of Ahmedabad's affected Muslims could return to their earlier poorly paid jobs. Many others were forced to travel longer distances to work as their new homes, in resettlement colonies, were at a greater distance from the city centre. But through it all, after nearly eight years now, they are not much poorer today than what they were before.

True, the economic status of Ahmedabad Muslims, post-carnage, is not as stable as of those who came out of the 1993 violence in Mumbai. To a significant extent this is because Ahmedabad lacks a significant Muslim political and economic elite. There are no solidly Muslim commercial districts here comparable to those in Mumbai. There is no Chor Bazar, Bhendi Bazar or Muhammad Ali Road in Ahmedabad. The closest is, probably, Relief Road and Sarangpur; but they are not nearly as affluent.

Even so, over the long-term, Muslims in Ahmedabad, just as those in Mumbai, are now back to work. They are certainly not richer, nor even significantly poorer, but they are earning a living again. Echoing somewhat the views of Nawab Malik, Mohammad Shafi Madni, Ameer-e-Halqa of Ahmedabad's Islamic Relief Committee, said:

"Our brothers found jobs in other places, but more or less doing the same

After a lapse of over eight years in Ahmedabad and nearly 18 years in Mumbai the economic pain seems to have eased. This goes against a large section of popular opinion and is, in fact, quite startling.

thing...It can never be the same as before, but we are a hardy people."

THE FUNDAMENTALIST FEAR

Unlike Mumbai where Islamic organizations did little to provide relief, the bulk of the help that Muslims received in Ahmedabad, and all of Gujarat, was through the front organizations of Jamaat-i-Islami (JI) and Jamiaat Ulema-e-Hind (JU). Modi's government gave

practically no assistance to the relief camps, whether in the Shah Alam Mosque, or elsewhere in the city. That story is well-known and need not be recounted again.

We need to focus elsewhere instead. Though Islamic faith based organizations were the major source of relief in Ahmedabad, this has not advanced religious fundamentalism in this city. In Mumbai, there were other established secular parties and influential mainstream Muslims that helped absorb the shock of Shiv Sena violence. These features were absent in Ahmedabad. It also has a very different history from that of Mumbai which is why Muslims here lack the support structures that Mumbai readily affords. Nor can we forget that Modi has shown neither remorse nor repentance at what happened in the state post Godhra in 2002.

Yet there is no fundamentalism in Gujarat. In fact, as will be soon described, on occasions the Muslims in this city have been quite hostile to Islamic clerics.

The Shah Alam Mosque was where the largest number of Muslims sought refuge in Ahmedabad. This large Sufi shrine gave shelter to thousands of victims who abandoned their homes with practically nothing in their possession. Their experience had been so terrifying that for months they refused to leave these refugee camps, whether in the Shah Alam Mosque, or elsewhere.

Gradually, most of them went back, but it took them a long time before

they could summon up the courage to do so. Sometimes, they lingered on in the camps for over a year. During this period the JI and the JU, with the help of their front organizations, the Islamic Relief Committee and the Gujarat Sarvajanic Relief Committee, respectively, constructed one room units where many of these victims could make their new home.

These quarters are far from prepossessing. They are actually quite ugly, very basic, and lack proper amenities. The JI funded Citizen Nagar, notwithstanding its grand name, is actually on the edge of Ahmedabad's biggest rubbish dump. The mound of garbage rises not far from the doors of this settlement to a height of over a hundred feet and is several miles long. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged, that if these Islamic organizations had not swung into action many of these homeless Muslims in Ahmedabad would never have found a home. Instead of being eternally grateful to the clerics who set up these buildings, they are often very critical of them. This is hardly what you would expect after doing somebody a good turn.

Take Madninagar, in Ramola, Ahmedabad. This housing colony for the refugees was built by the JU. There are more than a hundred residents living here and nearly all of them are very angry with the JU and the Maulana in charge of this establishment. They loudly complain that he runs this colony in a corrupt and highly autocratic fashion, not unlike "a Hitler."

The residents allege that the many locked rooms in the colony have been kept that way for years as the Maulana is looking for the highest bidder. Instead of giving them to needy Muslims, he is using them for commercial purposes. They also accuse the cleric of putting them on display when he receives foreign guests. Like a beggar who bares his open sores, the Maulana uses them to wring money out of his visitors.

It is easy to believe these accusations as rows of locked doors confront one in this colony. The lavishly built mosque, with its huge archways and solid stone façade, does not sit very well next to the very Spartan dwellings for the refugee residents. Once criticisms of the Maulana begin it is hard to restrain the flow; there is so much pent-up anger against this man.

Even the JI, which built Citizen Nagar, has come in for a fair bit of criticism. The residents argue that they have not been given ownership papers to their units though they have been living there now for nearly a decade. The JI, for its part, does not want to give up its ownership of the Citizen Nagar dwellings for they fear that they may be re-sold by the residents. Be that as it may, this is a source of some tension between the JI and the Citizen Nagar inhabitants: between the benefactors and the beneficiaries.

In the sleepy, non-descript town of Modassa, anger against the Maulana there has taken an even stronger turn. This time the cleric is not from the JI or JU, but from the Tablighi Jamaat. The Muslims of Modassa find the Maulana difficult to accept as he is too exacting in what he considers to be proper Muslim practice. That he also sternly disapproves of Sufism only adds to their resentment against him. In their worst days, they argue, the Sufi shrine of Shah Alam gave them refuge. How can they now turn against the Sufis?

Over time, their anger against the Maulana escalated to such an extent that for nearly a year they refused to pray in the well-appointed Tablighi mosque. Instead,

they strung up a yellow tarpaulin tent adjacent to it and used that for their religious services. There has since been some rapprochement between the Maulana and the people of Modassa, but it is an uneasy truce.

If these examples are of any relevance, they show that far from being under the sway of Islamic clerics the Muslims of Ahmedabad (and Gujarat) are actually quite wary of them. It is not uncommon to hear them say that while the Maulanas know of what happens "above the ground and under the ground, they have little knowledge of what happens on the ground."

In all fairness, neither the JI nor the JU, the two most prominent Muslim organizations in Ahmedabad, advocate fundamentalism. This too is an "on the ground" reality. For instance, neither the Muslims of Ahmedabad, nor these faith based organizations in the city, are in favour of pure religious education in schools. Even the ones set up by the JI and the JU teach subjects like mathematics and science; they also actively seek government recognition for their curricula.

Nor do they insist that Urdu should be the medium of instruction. Muslims in Ahmedabad want their children to learn Gujarati well and speak it fluently so that they are not identified primarily by their religion. They



Saiyad Mohammed Ishaq, 55, works on his sewing machine at his flat in the Ekta Row House Colony given to him by a relief committee in Juhapura, Ahmedabad. Ishaq used to run a shop that employed four tailors in Ogruj village. Now he sews clothes alone to earn for his family.



Muslims from resettlement colonies wait at a market square in Ahmedabad looking for work.



Ruksana Rashid Qureshi, 28, (right) looks on as Ishrat Jehan speaks. Both want justice to be done. They have testified in the trials and have been given police protection.

Muslims in Ahmedabad want justice that is legitimately available to all 'citizens'. This demand for justice is more profound than is often imagined.



Nazrana makes incense sticks outside her home in Naroda Patiya in Ahmedabad.

would like their grasp of Gujarati or even English, to be so complete that not a chance Urdu phrase, or word, would escape their lips. There are also many Anjuman run schools in the city that do not allow Urdu to be spoken in their premises; so strong is the felt-need to merge with the mainstream.

Very clearly, fundamentalism is not in the picture. As with other communities, the Muslims too judge doctrines in terms of their efficacy "on the ground".

THE CALL FOR JUSTICE

These conclusions then are contrary to the many popular opinions regarding how Muslims have coped with their tragedies over the long-term. As should be clear, Muslims have neither suffered insurmountable economic losses nor given in to fundamentalism. These fears can now be set to rest.

They are, however, most concerned about justice.

Interestingly, while the attacks against them by the majority community are in the name of the "people", the minoritized victims always respond as "citizens". That the JI established refugee colony is called "Citizen

Nagar" is an illustration of how strong this sentiment is among the Muslims who have been hurt by the carnage.

Even though nearly a decade has passed, Muslims in Ahmedabad still liken those dreadful days of 2002 to the "toofan". They fear that this toofan may strike again without any warning unless those who have been guilty of ethnic crimes are not tried and sentenced by law. They do not want kangaroo court justice, but the justice that is legitimately available to all "citizens".

This demand for justice is more profound than is often imagined. The victims of these attacks are willing to move on, and they want to move on. But they find the memories of the past difficult to erase in the absence of justice. As those who killed, maimed and looted them are still unpunished, they feel their citizenship status has been deeply violated.

The depth of their call for justice can be gauged from a single incident. When an eminent and sympathetic lawyer once suggested that the victims of the "toofan" drop minor cases and concentrate only on murder and destruction of property, he met with widespread criticism. The aggrieved Muslims did not want to overlook even the theft of their refrigerators or TV sets. As one elderly Muslim woman said:

"I would feel terrible if I knew that somebody else down the street was watching a movie on my television and I am sitting here in the dark. How would you feel if the goonda over there was drinking cold water out of your refrigerator and your throat was parched in the hot summer months?"

If this is their attitude towards things, imagine their hurt when it comes to lost lives.

In the absence of justice the Muslims of Ahmedabad are afraid to send their children to good government schools as so many of them are in Hindu neighbourhoods. In the absence of justice again, they do not want to go too far from their homes in search of a better job. Their demand for justice is, therefore, not in the abstract. It critically affects their everyday lives.

In Mumbai Muslims want justice too, though not with the same ferocity with which it is evident in Ahmedabad. But even in that huge megalopolis, Muslims resent the fact that the recommendations of the Srikrishna Committee have not been implemented. If the edge of this anger is not as sharp as in Gujarat it is because Mumbai Muslims, as we have detailed earlier, have always been more self-confident and assured than those in Ahmedabad, or in the rest of Gujarat. The history and the sociology of the two cities are so different.

Thus while the Muslims of both Mumbai and Ahmedabad have attained a "new normal", it is one that is still fraught with tension. In this "new normal", it is not jobs or religious anger that dominates. Instead, it is the yearning for justice that occupies their minds. This "new normal" will continue to extend itself everyday, but it will always be tinged with fear and alienation.

Without justice there can be no reconciliation.

Justice Before Reconciliation by Dipankar Gupta is published by Routledge



Anushka Rai, Age 6, Zed resident.

My Story of ZED

Bina Rai can't stand the heat. She needs the AC always on, in the 'chill' mode. "Friends say I should live in a freezer!" She didn't bother when her power bill soared. With 100 pc power back-up at her apartment, the need to 'switch off' was never felt.

But something stirred in her one day. "You're a careless mother," declared her daughter on return from school. "Teacher says we've to be careful about using electricity. We make 'dirty things' when we produce power. It fouls the air we breathe, makes us sick." Little Anushka started switching off lights and fans at home. "I was actually ashamed," says Bina. "She made me feel like I was personally shoveling pollution into the air." For Bina, the 'awakening' came in the shape of her daughter.

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LAKSHMAN ANAND



Alok Prasad

‘MFIs need a livelihoods approach’

Civil Society News
Gurgaon

THE microfinance business has been hit by various controversies. For long it has been accused of charging excessively high interest rates for the small loans it disburses to the poor. In recent years its exponential growth has been in step with the investor interest that microfinance institutions, or MFIs, have been attracting.

SKS Finance's success in raising billions of dollars from the stock market proved to be the trigger for accusations that financial inclusion was being used as an excuse for amassing personal fortunes. There have been questions about fat compensation packages and lack of transparency in how trusts and NGOs have transformed themselves into companies to get listed on stock markets.

Are such charges entirely fair or have the excesses of a few been visited on the microfi-

nance sector as a whole? Far from the limelight, the Microfinance Institution's Network (MFIN), which represents 46 non-bank financial companies (NBFC-MFIs) has been working to restore a balance and ensure that the microfinance industry does some soul searching.

Civil Society spoke to MFIN's chief executive officer, Alok Prasad, a veteran banker, on how MFIs were looking at ways of regulating themselves, becoming more accountable and working more closely with communities.

There seems to be a process of self-regulation which has begun in right earnest in the microfinance industry. Could you please tell us what this process is?

There has been a lot of talk of microfinance not being regulated. But the fact is that NBFC-MFIs account for 85 per cent of the sector and have been regulated all along by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

The question now is that within this framework where does self-regulation come? To my mind what we need to be cognizant of is that microfinance companies are working in a market space which is very sensitive. So while what companies are doing may be legally correct, someone could raise moral or ethical issues. For instance, should you be charging an 'x' rate of interest because the customers are very poor?

The central bank does not believe in interest rate regulation. But as good citizens we have to ask ourselves what is the correct thing to do. There are so many elements to the business which, given the fragile and sensitive nature of the clients we are dealing with, places a responsibility upon us to do it right. And that 'do it right' means going beyond the mere letter of the law. It is this which makes self-regulation very critical for microfinance – much more than in other industries.

In that context, I would focus on what we might describe as responsible lending. We as lenders must lend responsibly because the borrowers are vulnerable and, for the most part, semi-literate. Money is a great tool with which you can do various things. But as lenders we have to protect people against how they use the money. This is what makes it more complex and, therefore, more interesting. And, it is here that self-regulation becomes more critical.

What do you feel hasn't been looked at adequately in terms of the special character of the microfinance industry?

I would go back to what I said earlier – that we are dealing with a very vulnerable section of the population.

But that is generic.

When we say we are microfinance institutions, we are today really only micro-credit institutions. There is a need to go beyond micro-credit and extend a much wider range of financial services to this segment of the population. In doing so the industry needs to align itself well with the larger inclusion policies of the Government of India and the RBI, at the macro level. Second, it has to be a livelihoods approach. We have to work much more closely with our clients. There are a few companies which are trying to do that. Basix is a good example. But, I think, as an industry we have to be far more embedded in the lives of our clients. We can't merely give people money and ask them to give it back to us. We have to make ourselves more relevant both to their livelihoods on-site and in society at large.

Are you saying there is a need to redefine microfinance?

Not redefine microfinance. But, yes, redefine ourselves so as to go beyond micro-credit.

So while going beyond micro-credit there is a need for a greater degree of self-regulation?

We need self-regulation any which way.

You need self-regulation while providing micro-credit, but more so when going beyond it. The need now is even greater...

That is correct. Not only that. Now as an industry we are under far greater scrutiny than ever before.

Just in terms of micro-credit where do you think there could have been better self-regulation?

The way micro-credit has evolved in this country, the tested model involved working with the clients, providing some amount of financial literacy and actually working with JLGs on what they can do and how they can use the loans.

But, as the industry grew very rapidly – over the past five years it has had a compounded annual growth rate of 70 per cent – the classical model and what was the reality became very different things. Micro-credit became giving the money and taking it back. It no longer involved, to the extent required, knowing how the money was used, asking whether the customer was being over-leveraged or whether there had been multiple lending and so on.

'We as lenders must lend responsibly because the borrowers are vulnerable and, for the most part, semi-literate. As lenders we have to protect people against how they use the money.'

These are many of the things that we needed to have dealt with. That is why we now have a code of conduct which focuses on these aspects. For instance, we say not more than three lenders should be lending to a single client. Then we say that the aggregate lending to a single client should not exceed ₹50,000 so that the client is not overburdened with debt.

What about interest rates?

The largest single component of pricing is the cost of bank funding which is around 12.5 to 13 per cent. Let's assume 13 per cent. Then we have our operating costs which are say 10 per cent. There are studies to show that the Indian microfinance industry is among the most efficient in the world. Hence, this 10 per cent is a very reasonable number.

Then, since the loans are unsecured, we need some reserves on the balance sheet which would be two per cent. This brings us to 25 per cent. Now investors would want a modest return on capital of, say, two per cent – that gives us 27 per cent. The industry benchmark is an interest rate of 24 per cent! That is the interest rate story.

You know, when one looks at the compensation paid in some MFIs, this math that you speak of

seems to have another side to it.

It may be the perception, but the reality is actually different. There have been some outliers. There may be some stray cases of individuals receiving compensation which can be described as excessive. But the microfinance industry reality is very much one of a benchmarking to the NBFC sector, overall. You could go to the websites of MFIs and check the CEO compensations and that is the reality. I can also share with you that we are initiating a compensation survey for the industry.

To understand how people in the industry are paid?

Not just the CEO, but also the senior management, middle management, field staff and so on.

Will the microfinance industry continue to attract equity investments or will it recoil given the recent experience?

Look at it this way. There is a very large market. There have over the years been a host of policy interventions to try and have the mainstream financial institutions reach out and meet the needs of this market, but without success. Microfinance meets some of the demand. But assuming you have even a 100 million borrowers waiting to be served, the capital required is huge and this is where the capital markets come in.

Do you think microfinance needs to make obscene profits or be highly profitable to succeed or do we, given recent experience, need to take a fresh look at this whole thing?

When we talk of obscene profits, I think this is an impression driven by a few outliers. Has the industry made obscene profits? I would say no.

But everything gets defined by what outliers do.

Well let's take a hard look at what the industry gets and not define the industry by the outliers. And, if the outliers have gone a certain way let's ...

Which is the question I'm asking you. When we look at this experience today and when we talk of self-regulation how do we factor this experience into self-regulation?

We have a whole bunch of things that we are doing. MFIN is just about a year old. I'm barely six months old in the organisation. Yet what we have achieved is worth talking about. Our focus on responsible lending, a code of conduct, a mechanism for enforcing the code of conduct, a credit bureau which is almost up and running, fixing benchmarks for pricing, looking at benchmarks for the appropriate profit levels...I do believe that in a very short time we have done a lot.

There are concerns over how NGOs become companies and then go to the stock market and that the people in the original trusts are not equipped to understand these transitions and their rights as shareholders. MFIN is said to be probing Spandana, SKS and one other MFI. What can you tell us about this?

Any due diligence that we do will not be limited to these two or three companies. It would be for the sector as a whole. It would be a part of a larger effort to ensure greater accountability and transparency in the way in which the sector functions.

Bee buzz in Valley

Syed Basharat
Srinagar

UNEMPLOYMENT in Jammu and Kashmir is a bitter reality. Creating new businesses which need people is one way out. Honey production has of late been attracting a lot of attention because the humble bee is seen as having the potential to create thousands of jobs.

Beekeeping can be a vibrant option, say scientists of the Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agriculture Science and Technology (SKUAST), Srinagar. In fact Kashmir because of its location in the heart of the Himalayas could be one of the most important bee-keeping zones in India.

The state government is making an effort to boost honey production. Alongside, an international development agency called Mercy Corps has launched a pilot under its Bees 4 Business project. It is teaching bee-keepers in Kashmir how to manage honeybee colonies. The payoff, the agency says, could be huge.

Dr Manzoor Ahmad Parry, senior scientist in the entomology division of SKUAST, says Jammu and Kashmir needs about 600,000 bee colonies but right now it has just a few thousand.

A tentative calculation by scientists at SKUAST reveals that 600,000 honey bee colonies can produce 45,000 tonnes of honey every year. "This will fetch hundreds of crores of rupees annually at a modest rate of ₹150 per kg. Also, bee wax is in high demand. It is used for making some 300 items." If 20 bee colonies are allotted to each unemployed youth, about 125,000 persons have the opportunity of finding employment – assuming, of course, that they want to get into the bee business.

Not just that. Dr Parry says if the plan takes off, 460 honey houses will be needed to test, process, bottle, store and market the honey.

"Each honey house can employ 150 persons. Fabrication of apiary applications like bee veils, gloves, smokers, queen excluders and so on will create more jobs. And bee activity will improve crop yields by nearly 100 per cent," Dr Parry said.

Since bees act as pollinators, apple, mustard, alfalfa and almond production will increase hugely. But right now the honey industry is at a nascent stage.

It doesn't have bee colonies, bee-training facilities and bee nurseries. There is a shortage of disease investigation facilities, marketing strategies, apart from indiscriminate use of pesticides and rising cost of beehives, says Dr Parry.

Mercy Corps says the \$1 billion global honey industry represents a huge business opportunity for Jammu and Kashmir. The agency wants to change local perceptions of beekeeping.

Since November 2010, Mercy Corps is piloting a 'honey value chain development model' with 50 youth entrepreneurs in a cluster of five villages in

North Kashmir's Bandipora district and one hamlet on the outskirts of Srinagar. "The focus is to increase the technical and business capacity of these youth beekeepers along the honey market chain in the region," says Firdous Ahmad Ganaie, agriculture consultant of Mercy Corps.

Six bee-colonies/beehives have been provided to every beneficiary. The agency will pay 60 per cent of the expense and the rest will be contributed by the individual beneficiary.

Mercy Corps is working closely with the State



Agriculture Production Department. "We conduct technical training and business training for the trainee beekeepers. During the honey production season, we focus on technical training and in winter on business training. The project is for 14 months. We have selected people between 18 and 29 years of age," Ganaie said.

The agency hopes to create 50 small youth businesses in honey production. Later, Mercy Corps will support these businesses in marketing and branding. "We will engage an experienced private outfit which can help the 50 businesses to export honey. The project will create links between these agri-businesses and public service providers so that the beekeepers get access to technical services required for scaling up these businesses," said Ganaie.

The pilot will spread information to those in the honey business, in the government and potential investors about the opportunity, approach, model, success and lessons learnt.

"Usually, bee-keepers use traditional methods and get low yield from their bee colonies. If they adopt new techniques and management, as envisaged by the Bees 4 Business Project, the yield and quality of the honey will increase significantly," the Mercy Corps official said.

Usmaan Ahmad, director, Mercy Corps, says the bees will help pollinate local orchards. Also, ancillary businesses in making wax candles and lip balm, perhaps for skiers who visit the snowy slopes of Gulmarg, can crop up.

The aspirant bee-keepers are being trained by Mercy Corps on how to handle bees and their

hives and deal with non-native bee mites that have caused the dramatic and sudden collapse of bee colonies across the US. They are being helped to shape business plans and improve supply chains.

Mercy Corps shows the trainees pictures of organic food store shelves in the US stocked with 500 ml honey jars selling for more than \$15 a piece. "It shows them the potential," Ganaie says.

A recent controversy about the presence of antibiotics in honey sold across India has had a terrible impact on the honey business. Dr Parry explains that Kashmir Apiaries, which allegedly had antibiotics in its honey jars, is a Punjab-based company which exports bee products.

"This business house moves its bee colonies to Kashmir and other parts of the country around the year. As a result there is greater apprehension of disease epidemics. To safeguard its Kashmir apiaries and bee colonies they use terramycin powder at the rate of .25 to .4 grams in five litres of sugar syrup or liquid terramycin at the rate of 15 ml per 100 litres of sugar syrup or streptomycin at the rate of .05 to .15 grams per litre of sugar syrup as a preventive measure. This may be the reason for contamination of their honey. They have used our

trade name," said Dr Parry. The scientists have objected and written to the Vice-Chancellor, SKUAST.

In 2005-2006 the Kashmir honey industry suffered a huge jolt. Nearly 26,000 bee colonies were killed by the parasitic mite (*Varroa destructor*). Dr Parry said that the bee colonies were treated with formic acid which is a natural ingredient found in honey and is not a public health concern.

"This parasite attacked *apis mellifera* bees and wiped out over 70 per cent stock. Pollination efficiency worth millions of rupees was lost. And honey production worth crores of rupees was wiped out," Dr Parry said.

The state department of agriculture is also providing assistance to beekeepers. Last March it distributed 107 beekeeping units to unemployed educated youth in Kashmir. Alongside, the department has started implementing a national scheme the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana to increase honey production in the state.

"There is tremendous response to beekeeping in the Valley," says Abdul Rahim Samoon, Apiculture Development Officer who looks after the entomology division.

Under the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana, the department provides a 90 per cent subsidy which works out to ₹20,000 per unit of beekeeping. An unemployed person has to pay only ₹2,360 for his unit. "If the beekeeper manages his unit well and the weather is good, he can multiply his colonies and earn a good livelihood," said Samoon.

Insights

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One building, many uses

V RAVICHANDAR

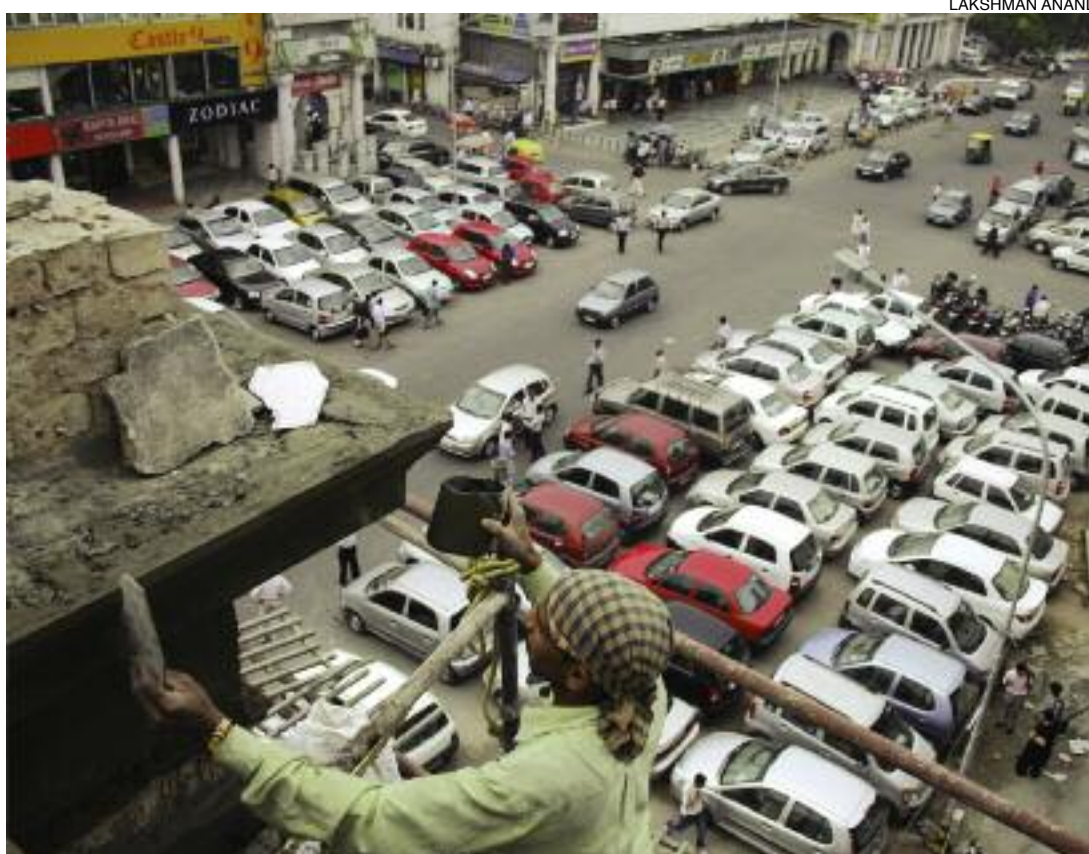
RECENTLY, the *New York Times* carried an article about a Miami public parking lot that also doubled up as a banquet, wedding hall. Apart from the fabulous view of the city, it came with the added attraction of abundant parking space for any visitor to the event! In a comparable case, the success of the Indian IT outsourcing sector came about with the key insight that technological advancements allowed Indians to turn in their work while the West slept, effectively making a 24x7 global cycle feasible. This makes one wonder – why can't we sweat our public assets in a similar manner for better returns on our investments?

Some years ago, I recall Nandan Nilekani weaving an interesting imagery about how India makes its infrastructure investments in an interview to the *Wall Street Journal*. If China follows a massive public investment drive in the belief of 'build it and they will come', India prefers a 'wait and watch' policy and delays investments until absolutely necessary. So we have a situation where we give aviation licenses for low cost airlines to many players and the planes take off. It's then that we realise that there are not enough air fields for them to land and we all scramble around to build those airfields for those airborne planes!

One saw at close quarters what our myopic policy outlook about green field airports brought in its wake when the new Hyderabad and Bangalore airports were opened a few years ago. The then aviation policy said no new airfield could come up within a 150 km radius for the next 30 years and all existing airports must be closed down with immediate effect.

So in a poor, developing country like India the government chose to close down usable assets like the Begumpet and HAL airport for commercial air traffic allowing them to deteriorate. Some of us went to Court (judgement still awaited) making the case that the State's interests are better served with multiple airports, particularly those that were working assets. The counter argument was the limitation due to the then ruling Civil Aviation policy and the need for the private operators to make a decent return on their spending.

The Civil Aviation policy giving unbridled rights to the new operators of green field airports was



LAKSHMAN ANAND

If China follows a massive public investment drive in the belief of 'build it and they will come,' India prefers a 'wait and watch' policy and delays investments until absolutely necessary.

unwarranted. The recent sale at premium valuations of the BIAL airport in Bangalore to GVK shows that there are few investments on par with allowing a private sector monopoly with restrictive conditions on competitive offerings. To many of us it did not matter who ran the older airport – it could well be the new airport operator under mutually discussed terms. It was just a crying shame that the State allowed an existing working facility in the City Centre to go unleveraged in its potential for attracting investments and job cre-

ation.

Another area crying for innovative solutions on use of existing assets is the government school infrastructure in our cities. They languish for want of funds for better facilities, teaching aids, and in their ability to attract quality teachers. These schools are spread across the city and consequently there is scope to package public private partnerships that help them access infrastructure improvements and quality teachers in lieu of

Continued on page 31

The POSCO jumble

KANCHI KOHLI



Protestors breaking the barricade at Balitutha

AMID much controversy, the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) on 31 January announced its revised decision for the two projects of POSCO-India Pvt Ltd. The note put out by the ministry set out the next steps for environment and forest clearances for POSCO's proposed operations related to its steel-cum-power plant and a captive port located in Jagatsinghpur district of Odisha. On the one hand, this note upholds the highly contentious set of environment clearances granted in 2007 and on the other, puts its faith back in the Odisha government's assurances of addressing the rights of forest dwelling communities before granting final forest clearance.

The investment of the Indian subsidiary of this South Korean company is claimed to be India's largest Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) at \$ 12 billion. When POSCO first signed its Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Odisha government in June 2005 it listed a range of activities



that its existence would bring in starting with captive mines to meet its iron ore requirements, an integrated steel plant, a captive port with road and rail support, an integrated township and a water supply project.

Even though the location of all these projects had not yet been decided, POSCO began seeking approvals from the MoEF for setting up of its captive port and steel plant. As per mandatory procedures under the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) notification, 2006, the company contracted the preparation of EIA reports for the two projects.

In April 2007 a joint public hearing for both these components was held and subsequently separate environment clearances were granted in May and July, 2007. This was despite the fact that there existed very critical irregularities in the way the impact assessments were carried out and the public hearing was held amidst police security. The process of seeking diversion of forest land was also initiated through the Odisha Forest

Department as a procedure required under the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980.

However, POSCO did not reveal to the MoEF that these projects are only part of a range of activities which they have in mind. MoEF's expert committees which recommended the environment approval, overlooked this issue completely despite submissions before, during and after the public hearing. This was, most importantly, applicable to the mining component of POSCO's investments for which till date the company does not have a clearly allocated and approved site.

It was during the clearance for the diversion of 1,253.255 ha of forest land for the setting up of the steel plant and port that the issue of the linked mining component was recorded officially. The Central Empowered Committee (CEC) of the Supreme Court on forest matters, which at that point was reviewing POSCO's forest clearance, took a strong view on this. In one of its recommendations to the court in 2007 the committee said that the piecemeal diversion of forest land without complete assessment of impacts including that of mining activity proposed in Khandadhar hills in Keonjhar district would not be in order. However, the Supreme Court's decision in August 2008 put the ball back in MoEF's court.

Even as the clearance rigmarole continued, a huge groundswell against the setting up of the projects grew stronger. And there were very substantial reasons for the agitation. POSCO's activities are likely to inflict irreparable damage to local livelihoods and the fragile ecosystem of the site of the projects.

While the official figure of families being affected is quoted as "up to 400," according to local leaders of the movement the entire population of 22,000 in the area will be affected due to the displacement of livelihoods based on a thriving agricultural economy. There will, in addition, be a huge degree of damage that will occur in the mining area. Apart from paddy cultivation, cultivation of paan or betel leaf provides the most critical livelihood support. There are a total of 5000 vines in three panchayats. The daily sales figure by 10,000 betel wine owners is estimated to be

₹30 lakh leaves generating ₹7.5 lakh worth of income. Also, the port proposed at the mouth of the Jatadhari creek will ravage sand dunes almost 20 feet high which are the spawning and breeding grounds of several fish species, a fragile estuarine stretch and much more.

Even as local resistance continued to hold its ground despite the aggressive stance of the state government, the step-by-step approval for POSCO kept coming from the MoEF. In December 2009, the ministry granted the final forest clearance to the company for diversion of forest land for non-forest use. This came less than five months after the ministry itself had issued a circular on 3 August, 2009, stating that the forest diversion proposals should only be finally approved once the state government encloses evidence that the settlement of rights under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Forest-Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act 2006, or FRA, is underway or will be initiated and completed.

Projects like POSCO which require forest clearance under the Forest Conservation Act, 1980, had to abide by this procedure from the time the FRA had been enacted and its Rules formulated. However, MoEF's forest diversion approval for POSCO came without this process being completed and tagged with a condition that it will be subject to the completion of processes under the FRA. This clearly contradicted and violated the ministry's own circular.

Mid-2010 began with a flurry of activity around the project again. In June 2010, the MoU that POSCO had signed with the Odisha government finished its five-year stipulated time frame. People's resistance and civil society support had ensured that POSCO made no headway in beginning construction work. With pending issues like the FRA process unresolved and questions around existing approvals pending resolution, the MoEF in July 2010 (with revised terms of reference in August 2010) set up a four-member committee to investigate and review compliance of the FRA process, environmental approvals, as well as rehabilitation related concerns. The committee was ironically chaired by Meena Gupta, who was secretary, MoEF, when the clearance was first approved.

When the committee submitted its report in September 2010 it brought out systematically the mess that surrounded POSCO's approvals. Overall there was a consensus on the gross violations of laws and related processes despite which approvals were granted. But the committee was split on its recommendations. While three members submitted their majority report asking for withdrawal of environment and forest clearances of the project, the chairperson's report sought a comprehensive assessment and listing of additional conditions for issues to be addressed. On the issue of the FRA, the committee clearly indicated there existed a lack of diligence in settlement of forest rights.

In October 2010, the Forest Advisory Committee (FAC), which had initially granted forest clearance to the project, now observed that unless the state government provided evidence of serious intent for carrying out the FRA process, it would be regarded as breach of law. It recommended the temporary withdrawal of the forest clearance till there was compliance with the FRA.

So what are the implications of the 31 January decision of the MoEF? The final words of the environment minister's note regarded POSCO's projects as undoubtedly of considerable economic, technological and strategic significance. With this justification, the note upholds the environmental laws of the country by listing an additional set of conditions over and above the existing approvals. These conditions, along with reposing faith in the Odisha government that it will follow due process in recognising forest rights, is enough for the MoEF's green flag to be waived in favour of POSCO.

People in Dhinikia and other surrounding villages who will be impacted by the project have already begun strengthening themselves to deal with any situation of conflict. Reactions from civil society groups have come in the form of statements, media reports and letters. But POSCO's story has once again revealed that environment and social issues can be conveniently set aside when questions of FDI and large projects are of concern to the establishment.

The author is member of Kalpavriksh Environmental Action Group and is based in Delhi

One building, many uses

Continued from page 29

using their space for defined alternative uses in the evenings. To pull this off there has to be desire on the part of government leadership (including the City Corporators) to be open to doing the right things by the poor students and craft appropriate MoUs that can be monitored and made to work.

Loss in lease rentals from government properties is another scam that is all too common across our cities. There is hardly any city in the country that maintains a transparent inventory of government owned assets (particularly the City Corporation) and details of rental agreements, amounts, etc. This is due to a cosy arrangement between government officials and the lessors whereby side deals are struck on a low rent payable to the Corporation and an 'adjustment fee' to the officials. In Bangalore we have had sit-

uations where the differences in Corporation and private property rentals have been five to one. Just imagine the loss to the city's coffers!

Some cities like Pune and Bangalore are blessed with a significant presence of defence services with their wide swathes of open spaces so sorely needed in these cities. Given the haphazard growth of civilian areas, it would be fair to conclude that defence has saved these cities for future generations. In Bangalore the State government decided to allow a civic park near the Vidhan Soudha to become a memorial for war victims and recognise the contribution of soldiers.

This snowballed into a major row among those who wanted this done to those who felt that this would shrink existing public spaces. A defence memorial in a civilian space is a great gesture but it would help if the defence services too threw open some of their parks to citizens for regular

use. This is another instance of possible dual use of our public assets.

It is not necessary to think that 'sweating' assets needs to be restricted to government properties. Do spare a thought about the parking woes in our cities. Now in our mixed use neighbourhoods, many apartments and commercial complexes coexist. During the work day, residential apartment vehicles leave for work leaving many vacant parking slots in the apartment complex.

If companies in office complexes could craft appropriate MoUs with apartment owners for use of their parking lots during the day both parties stand to gain. Companies will get badly needed parking spaces while apartments could get lease rentals which can be used for maintenance expenses. The MoU can set out the terms of use and ensure aspects of security, vehicle/driver authentication, etc.

V. Ravichandrar, Chairman, Feedback Consulting, believes that sweating our assets further is an innovation whose time has come.

Women and peasants united

BHARAT DOGRA

WHEN Meera Devi's husband died she did not know where to go with her two small children. She was an orphan. Her husband's family had never fully accepted her and were even less likely to do so now that he was dead. Her entire world seemed to crumble. However, some kindly neighbours in Sultanpur Chilkana village of Saharanpur district where she lived guided her to a voluntary organization, Disha. Today not only has she stabilised her own family but she has been able to help several women almost as helpless as she was at one time, something that has given her tremendous satisfaction.

Another case is that of Naseema. When she came to her husband's home she hoped to get a reprieve from the ill-treatment her foster mother meted out to her. But her husband beat her even more. Naseema was illiterate and did not know where to turn to for help. Then she heard of Disha and joined its literacy classes. She learned to read and write and even imparted literacy to her husband (despite all his beatings). She became a full time activist and worked in several villages of Saharanpur and Dehradun districts bringing help to many other women facing injustice.

These are only a few examples of women in difficult situations who not only found new hope for their own lives but also took this flame of hope to many other women after joining Disha, a leading voluntary organisation active in Western Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

Disha's founder and secretary, KN Tiwari, says, "For mobilisation against socio-economic problems we tried to pick those women as activists who had suffered a lot due to these problems. Later, as activists, it appeared to them

that they were working to help women whose sufferings were similar to their own. This feeling increased their dedication and commitment as activists."

Perhaps this is one reason why Disha's women activists have become well-known for their courage. Even after they were beaten very badly by policemen during an anti-liquor agitation and many of them were hospitalised with serious injuries, they did not think of withdrawing the movement. Their agitation was eventually successful.

Again when the women protested against the humiliation of Zeenat Naaz, a political leader who showed exemplary courage in defying fundamentalist elements in her community to contest and eventually win an election, they faced police lathis and rifle butts with rare courage. Such repression and serious injuries did not deter them and after recovering they continued to work with the same dedication as before.

This courage spilled over to village level committees, to the *mahila jagriti samities* (women awakening committees) which Disha had set up in several villages and which met regularly. In Sultanpur village the discussion shifted to the increasingly difficult livelihood prospects as women farm workers earned only around ₹8 per day in agricultural work. They worked as hard as male workers but they got less than half of what male workers got (around ₹20 per day). They raised the demand for a similar wage and in the year 1989 went on a strike to press for it.

Disha extended full support to this strike and its activists helped spread the message to a wider area. This resulted in a ripple effect. Big landowners did not succeed in getting workers from other areas to carry out farm work. On the

other hand, when landowners placed restrictions on women workers to obtain fodder from their fields, workers from other areas offered to provide them fodder or look after their cattle for some time.

Some women workers were beaten up. Big landowners went to the extent of trying to implicate Disha's secretary KN Tiwari in false cases and allegedly planned an attack on him. But the women workers carried out big protest demonstrations to show their unity and strength and prevented such attacks.

As the days of the harvesting season were passing, the big landowners started getting increasingly restless about the economic losses they were likely to suffer if crops were not harvested at the proper time. Finally, after a four-month struggle, they agreed to pay the women workers the increased rate demanded by them.

To build on these hard earned gains Disha decided to form a Front of Women Workers and Small Peasants. Jahnvi, an activist of Disha, says, "During the agitation we became aware of the need to keep small peasants on the side of workers. Only then can a broad unity be established which can be effective in standing up to the powerful big landowners. So much so that during the agitation workers even offered to work for a lower rate for small peasants."

The first mass meeting for the formation of this front held in December 1989 was a great success as nearly 10,000 persons took part. The majority of them were women. Consequently, a strike by women workers led to the formation of a mass organisation which continues to be a major force for farm workers and small peasants in this region. The front has units in about 80 villages.

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Films from the fringe



Sisters in Law
Saibal Chatterjee
New Delhi

Documentaries from around the world, two lively seminars, a half-day workshop and a continuous and free flow of new ideas: Magic Lantern Foundation's four-day film festival, 'Persistence Resistance: Edge of Visual Narrative 2011', added up to much more than the apparent sum total of its components.

Driven by the dynamics of a larger movement to popularise films from the margins of mainstream culture, the festival brought together a fascinating array of cinematic expressions and approaches informed with deep social and political concerns.

The fourth edition of the annual event, held between 7 and 10 February at Max Mueller Bhavan and the India International Centre, New Delhi, took a significant step forward in fulfilling its avowed mission of bringing independent documentary filmmaking out of the shadows for Indian audiences weaned on candy-floss and popcorn.

In the words of curator and festival director Gargi Sen, Persistence Resistance 2011 was a celebration of "films that engage in a personal search for many truths" rather than of those that "claim to state the truth or represent given actualities."

Not every film screened as part of the festival



You Don't Belong



Divorce Iranian Style

may have necessarily been on the cutting edge of visual narrative practices, but Persistence Resistance 2011 did provide the audience a fair idea of how diverse and dynamic documentaries can be in underscoring personal, social, cultural and political issues that usually elude the superficial universe of films geared towards mass entertainment.

The principal idea behind the festival, says Sen, is to dispel the misconception that documentaries are boring. "We are seeking to create a public opinion about documentary cinema in India," she explains. "The festival is not simply about screening films but about documentary practice itself. We are trying to create an active documentary culture in this country."

The festival had enough for Canadian filmmak-

er Peter Wintonick, one of the world's most celebrated documentarians, to say: "I wish it was longer. Three days are simply not enough for a festival of this kind."

It was, therefore, probably no coincidence that several of the films were about music and aspects of popular culture. The festival opened on the evening of 7 February in Max Mueller Bhavan with the screening of two films. First up was Paromita Vohra's *Partners in Crime*, an exploration of the haze that surrounds copyright and anti-piracy laws in India.

It was followed by Spandan Banerjee's *You Don't Belong*, a lively probe into the multiple manifestations of a song written by maverick poet Arun Chakraborty as it journeys from its traditional moorings to various popular interpretations 'authored' by, among others, a Paris-based Baul singer (Paban Das Baul), a Bangla band (Bhoomi) and a protest musician (Prabuddha Banerjee).

Also in the riveting mix was Saba Dewan's two-hour documentary *The Other Song*, which travels to Varanasi, Lucknow and Muzzafarpur in Bihar in a voyage of rediscovery of a lost Rasoolan Bai thumri, *Lagat karejwaa mein chot/phool gendwa na maar*, which she recorded in 1935. The journey takes in its grand sweep memories and histories, the past and present of the tradition of the *tawaif*.

Continued on page 35



Brunton Boatyard Hotel

The elegant nautical hotel

Susheela Nair
Kochi

MOORED on a historic stretch of Kochi's famed harbour, Brunton Boatyard Hotel was resurrected from the remains of a shipyard. Currently, this elegant nautical inn belongs to a small Kerala chain called CGH Earth founded by Dominic Joseph Kuruvinkunnel in 1957 and run by his sons. Every plank of this venerable boatyard is steeped in history.

The genesis of Brunton Boatyard Hotel can be traced back to over a century ago when George Brunton set up a boat-building facility in Fort Kochi. The company became one of the finest shipbuilders in India. According to old timers, the British during the Second World War used some of the ships built here. Due to vehement protests from competitors, the business deteriorated over a period of time. With the passage of time and the inclement weather, the shipyard fell into disuse. Finally it was closed down and the building abandoned.

The hotel was designed by Swiss architect Karl Damson to imitate the early Dutch and Portuguese architecture of the Fort Kochi area. Strolling into Brunton harks the visitor back to the days of the Raj. Today, Brunton Boatyard's walls echo history and its character reflects a proud past that was instrumental to the evolution of Kochi.

The lounge is massive. On one side is situated

the front office staff behind a reception desk looking rather small. On the other side, all along the wall right up to the tea lounge area, are large framed sepia prints of stern looking men. Among them are Vasco de Gama, Alvares Cabral, HRH Sakthan Thampuran, Samuel Koder... all people who in their own way shaped the history of Kochi.

The hotel has wide corridors which surround a large central grassy courtyard leading to a pool on the waterfront. Brunton Boatyard resembles a white-washed colonial warehouse style building with sloping tiled roofs and blazes with terracotta tiles and burnished teak. Fashioned from brick, lime, wood and terracotta, the authenticity of the building is unquestionable. Its open corridors circle a magnificent rain tree. The rooms are spacious and airy in this 'boutique' hotel and furnished with antiques to authenticate the colonial style.

The *pankajs* or antique fans which hang overhead in the lobby are impressive. So are the round black switches. The hotel's interiors have huge walls, high ceilings, endless passageways,



Antique four-poster bed

SUSHEELA NAIR

SUSHEELA NAIR



View from rooms facing the Kochi harbour

comfortably deep armchairs, gleaming brass and shuttered windows. Its nautical past seems to follow you around. Navigation devices, like a huge rusty anchor the only relic of the boatyard, holds its ground firmly in the lawns. Portuguese muskets and Dutch maps sprawled across the walls point to the colonial history of this fabled spice-trading port.

The hotel encircles a rectangular courtyard. Its rooms are at the back of the structure. Due to this, every room has a spectacular view of the sea. The period feeling extends to the rooms where ancient looking four-poster beds have footstools to climb onto them and there are spacious window seats to sit and read a book.

There is never a dull moment out there for boats of all sizes and hues slide along these waters. There are also mammoth ocean liners which silently glide past just outside the window. From the sea-view balcony, one can see ferries passing by, transporting people to nearby islands, large commercial barges, container ships cruising the distant depths, a freighter that seems almost in touching distance, and lots of small fishing boats with flat nets, which are dipped into the water repeatedly to haul up the fish catch.

The restaurant, called The History, gives you exactly what its name suggests. The menu incorporates dishes and influences from the culinary legacy of the foreigners who visited Kochi. The hotel bar

is worth a visit just for a look at the menu alone! At the Armoury Bar, you can enjoy a sundowner with wild, old Portuguese breastplates and muskets for company. But there is something that you absolutely must have while at Brunton. Called Cardamom, there's nothing to beat this simple, elegant and totally refreshing drink. Quite like the place itself. Inside the restaurant, chefs cook up sweet and savoury delicacies from a mix of Portuguese, Dutch, Jewish and English cuisines.

The 'Earth' of CGH denotes the family's commitment to responsible tourism, a pledge to clients to respect and preserve the cultural heritage and natural environment in their work. Eco-practices include the use of recycled paper for gift bags. Wooden pens are supplied in the rooms, together with handmade jute slippers. In the restaurant area bamboo has been used, and wooden utensils and salvers are provided.

The roof water is directed into percolating walls and stored in the ground. The sweet rain water pushes

away the subterranean saline brackish water due to the differences in gravity, so that an unlimited quantity of sweet water is stored underground.

A sewage treatment plant and oil separators remove and treat contaminants in wastewater from the toilets so that purified water can be used for gardening. Solar panels heat water. This 'boutique' hotel deserve green points for rainwater harvesting, planting a hardy lawn made of buffalo grass, using cloth laundry bags and paper pouches to hold newspapers, and leaving a discreet water-use table in each room to remind us how much water we send down the drain when we shower.

Address: Brunton Boatyard Hotel, Fort Kochi
Email: contact@cghearth.com

Films from the fringe

Continued from page 33

and the moral policing of female sexuality in the early 20th century.

At the other end of the spectrum was Anwar Jamal's *Harvest of Grief*, a portrait of despair set amid suicidal peasants and their dependents in the Lehar and Moonak subdivisions of Punjab's Sangrur district. The grave agrarian crisis in India's supposedly most prosperous agricultural state has rarely, if ever, been at the centre of the national discourse revolving around farmer suicides. *Harvest of Grief* plugs that hole and not a day too soon. The festival showcased many films never screened before in India, including premieres of the latest work of a few of the country's leading documentarians. Besides the two opening films, Persistence Resistance 2011 unveiled Gregory French and Sudhir Aggarwal's *It's Cricket, No?*, a 30-minute short celebrating the aspirations of the Indian national cricket team of the visually challenged.

Seven films by internationally acclaimed British documentarian Kim Longinotto, including her latest, *Pink Saris*, set in India, underpinned the retro-

spectives section of Persistence Resistance 2011.

Also in the Longinotto package were lauded films like *Divorce Iranian Style*, a study of women negotiation marital laws in a Tehran family court, and *Sisters in Law*, about two activist judges in Cameroon harnessing legal provisions to empower the dispossessed.

The festival also hosted retrospective presentations of the work of two leading Indian documentary filmmakers, Rahul Roy and Arun Khopkar. The latter, a veteran Mumbai-based filmmaker who specialises in films focussed on various art forms and their exponents, had six documentaries in the festival, from 1990's *Figures of Thought*, a 30-minute short about the outputs of three contemporary Indian artists, Bhupen Khakkar, Vivan Sundaram and Nalini Malani, to his latest *Volume Zero* (2009), an hour-long video on the life and times of architect Charles Correa.

Also screened in Persistence Resistance 2011 were Khopkar's two 30-minute films on Indian music, *Rasikapriya* and *Lokapriya*, the latter dealing with Hindustani classical and the latter with

the Hindi film form.

The retrospective of Delhi's Rahul Roy had four films that, each in a unique way, explored the filmmaker's pet themes – masculinity, sexuality and gender relations against the backdrop of the larger issues of communalism, class divides and urbanisation.

A seminar on 'Gender and Governance' was woven around the themes addressed by the films of Longinotto and Roy. But nothing captured the spirit of the festival better than the keynote address delivered on the first morning of the festival by Supreme Court lawyer Colin Gonsalves on the "right to freedom of speech and expression and the law of sedition", which needless to say was firmly focussed on the plight of Dr Binayak Sen.

"The sedition law has been repealed in most countries... but India continues with a very archaic and very dangerous law," the advocate said. Wintonick, who also participated in the festival's opening session, pointed out that "sedition is connected with royalty."

"Why India continues to persist with the law is beyond me," the Canadian stalwart says. And that was one of the many questions that Persistence Resistance 2011 sought answers to.

RANDOM SHELF HELP

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

**YOGA IN THE WORK-PLACE**

Shameem Akhtar

Westland

₹ 295

YOUR life span will shrink if you lead a sedentary life and suffer from stress, warn doctors. Research indicates that even if you work out but spend the day stuck on a chair, you will die before your time. You can get around this problem by following Shameem Akhtar's advice: do a little yoga at your work station.

In this convenient pocket sized book Akhtar explains and illustrates yoga *asanas* you can do near your desk. You don't need to descend into a yoga mat in office. Using desk and chair you can exercise. The *asanas* have been adapted for an office environment. You need a few minutes. You could also space out your office yoga routine.

Akhtar starts with toes and ankles and works her way up to neck, shoulder, back, arms and hands. These are all parts of the body which suffer the most stress from chairs, desks, computers and oily lunches. By doing some yoga, she says, you can zap chronic fatigue, red eyes, acidity, headache, backache and all those other ailments associated with routine, sedentary work.

Akhtar is a yogacharya trained with the Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Center, Kerala. Her book is nicely illustrated. You can surely use some of her tips. Of course, there is no guarantee that you will be able to stand on your head like she does on the book's cover. For a sound yoga practice, turn to your yoga guru.

**HUMAN RIGHTS IN A GLOBALISED WORLD AN INDIAN DIARY**

Mukul Sharma

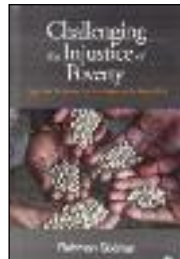
Sage

₹ 395

THIS is a comprehensive book which examines all aspects of human rights – civil, political, economic and social. Such rights have become the subject of intense discussion and concern because of terrorism and counter terrorism operations, economic globalization and subsequent marginalization of local people.

The book has a section on human rights violations by America and Europe in their war against terror. It also has chapters on companies and abuse of rights and a series of essays on the scenario in South Asia and China. With a

focus on India the book examines Dalit rights, forest rights, minority rights etc. The book is enlightening but the picture which emerges is that we have a very long way to go in establishing a world free of violence.

**CHALLENGING THE INJUSTICE OF POVERTY**

Rehman Sobhan

Sage

₹ 895

SOUTH Asia is home to the largest population of poor people in the world. Despite efforts, the path to prosperity for the poor is filled with hurdles. The author is chairman of Centre for Policy Dialogue, Dhaka. His book says the fundamental flaw is that the social order itself is unjust and it excludes poor people from participating in development and decision making. The result is that it is nearly impossible for them to climb out of poverty and government schemes and projects are ineffective. The book suggests several measures by which governments can build a more participatory and poverty free society.

**PROTECTION OF HIMALAYAN BIODIVERSITY**

Ananda Mohan Bhattarai

Sage

₹ 1100

Climate change is already changing the biodiversity of the Himalayas, a resource base for nearly 80 million people. It is crucial to conserve this great region for South Asia's economy and ecology depends on it. In six neat chapters the author, an eminent jurist, has analyzed in great depth the need for conservation and the steps which could be taken.

The book discusses the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and subsequent developments. The author focuses on issues of access and benefit sharing. Although conservation depends on local people, little has been done to ensure they too benefit. The book pleads for a regional approach to laws on access and benefit sharing and conservation. While each nation can make laws specific to its own grassroots, the broad legal framework should be a common one. The Himalayas are after all a contiguous region covering several countries in South Asia.

How to be

**EARTHBOUND**

Navdanya's Guide to Easy, Organic Cooking
Compilation: Lata Sharma and Reetha Balsavar
Food stylist: Rushina Munshaw
Ghildiyal Westland

₹ 350

ORGANIC food stores are mushrooming in Indian cities. Long lost foods which our grandmothers cooked are being rediscovered. But many of us can't distinguish *ragi* from *jowar*. We know amaranth is great for health. But what do you do with it in the kitchen?

Navdanya's *Earthbound* comes to your rescue. The book is a collection of recipes which tell you how you can cook organic food like your grandmother, almost. Some recipes are traditional and some modern. There are Western recipes with an Indian twist. And you don't need to collect a mountain of ingredients. This is uncomplicated cooking.

Navdanya is now an established brand name in the organic food business due in no small measure to its founder, environment activist Vandana Shiva. She has devoted her life to passionately espousing organic agriculture. Shiva's group does not deal with food in a piecemeal way. They conserve traditional seeds, help farmers, take their produce directly to the consumer and now through this book tell you how to cook. So you could say Navdanya completes a rather complex food chain.

In *Earthbound* you will find recipes for all meals: breakfast, lunch, dinner, snacks, breads, chutneys, desserts and sweets. There are pictures too so you can check if your final effort matches up in looks.

The book begins with a little education. In the first chapter we are introduced to grains and cereals, some forgotten ones. You get to know what exactly amaranth, sorghum and buckwheat are. There are short bios on nutritive content, history, source of origin and use. There is a chapter on vegetables as well. From *baingan* to *arbhi*, you will know the background of whatever *sabzi* you are putting in your mouth.

Regional cuisines from all over India have been tapped into reflecting India's amazing agro diversity and cuisines. The recipes are inventive and flavourful. A few unusual ingredients added here and there make all the difference. For breakfast there is a line-up of varied recipes – high protein breakfast cereal, Bhajil poha, pancakes, dumplings, ragi idli, dalia upma etc.

For lunch or dinner you can pick delicious dal and vegetable dishes. Some of these are: dal, bati churma, spicy yellow lentils, chickpeas, sweet and sour, chana dal Bengali style, mung and spinach soup, lobia palak and more. There are vegetable recipes like okra in tamarind gravy, cabbage with fennel and onions, plus a variety of pulaos like Kannadiga tomato rice and Vangi bhath. There are also Western recipes like mashed potatoes, stews and bakes with a local touch. Try the vegetable au gratin with whole wheat sauce and cottage

an organic food chef

PICTURES BY MRIGANK SHARMA



- 1 medium onion finely chopped
- ½ inch piece ginger, grated
- 1 green chilli, finely chopped
- 2 cups chopped mixed vegetables, boiled
- ½ tsp salt
- ¼ tsp freshly ground black pepper/kali mirch
- 4 cups milk
- 1 tbsp grated cottage cheese/paneer

Sift the flour into a dry pan. Place it over low heat and toss till you get the aroma of roasted wheat. Do not let it brown. Remove the flour from the pan and set aside till cool.

Put the oil in the same pan and place it over moderate heat. When hot, sauté the onion till translucent. Sprinkle the flour and stir and cook over low heat for 2-3 minutes. Stir in the ginger and green chilli. Add the vegetables, salt and pepper.

Pour in the milk and stir vigorously till the sauce is smooth and without lumps. Continue stirring till the sauce comes to a boil. Lower heat and simmer till it is thick stirring continuously.

Taste and add more salt and pepper if required.

Transfer the contents of the pan to a shallow ovenproof dish. Sprinkle cheese on top and allow it to cool completely.

Bake in an oven preheated to 200 C for about 15 minutes till golden brown on top. Serve hot.

Amaranth apple bake

6-8 servings

- 8 apples chopped without peeling
- ¼ cup amaranth flour/ramdana ka atta
- ½ cup arrowroot powder/paniphal
- 1 tbsp honey
- 1 tsp powdered cinnamon/dalchini
- 2 tbsp popped amaranth seeds/ramdana

Place the apples in a pan with ¼ cup of water over moderate heat and cook till they are soft. Drain, peel and mash. Sift the amaranth flour and arrowroot into the mashed apple and fold them in.

Add the honey and cinnamon and mix well.

Spoon the batter into a lightly greased baking dish. Sprinkle the popped amaranth on top.

Bake in an oven pre-heated to 175 C-180 C for 20 minutes. Serve immediately.

Ragi roti (finger millet bread)

Makes 10-12 rotis

- 2 cups finger millets/ragi/nachni ka atta
- ¾ cup whole wheat flour/atta + extra for rolling

Sift both the flours into a bowl. Gradually add about ½ cup water and knead to prepare a stiff dough. Divide the dough into 10-12 balls and roll into five inch round rotis on a lightly floured surface. Put a tawa or griddle over low heat. When hot put a roti on it and roast on both sides till reddish brown spots appear on the surface.

*Navdanya has organic food stores in Delhi, Dehradun and Mumbai.
www.navdanya.org*



In *Earthbound* you will find recipes for all meals: breakfast, lunch, dinner, snacks, breads, chutneys, desserts and sweets. There are pictures too so you can check if your final effort matches up in looks.

cheese. It tastes good and is easy to prepare.

Mashed potato with chilli and ginger is surprisingly flavourful. Here is the recipe.

Mashed potatoes with chilli and ginger

4 servings

- 4 large potatoes cut into 1 inch cubes
- 1 ½ cups buttermilk/chaas or yogurt/dahi
- 1 green chilli chopped
- 1 tsp salt
- ½ tsp black pepper/kali mirch
- ¼ cup ghee
- 1 inch piece ginger, minced
- Garnish
- 2 tbsp chopped coriander leaves/hara dhania

Cook the potatoes in a large pan of boiling water for about 15 minutes, till tender. Drain the potatoes and return them to the pan. Mash them coarsely with a potato masher.

Add the buttermilk or yogurt and green chilli and mash till smooth. Season with salt and pepper.

Heat the ghee and ginger in a small pan. Cook over low heat, stirring occasionally for about three minutes. Stir the contents of the pan into the potatoes. Garnish with coriander leaves and serve hot.

Vegetable au Gratin

6 servings

- ½ cup whole wheat flour/ gehun ka atta
- 2 tsp oil

Deal with anger

SAMITA RATHOR

SUFFERING is a reality and part of human existence just like happiness. If we deny the existence of suffering we will never be able to get out of it. It will be like living in a prison cell. Our delusions will surround us like barbed wire.

But what is delusion? Delusion is a state of mind that has the effect of causing the mind to be disturbed. Delusion disturbs peace of mind and creates false beliefs. Our problems are always in relation to others. There are antidotes which we can apply to our lives to eradicate delusions. Delusions are mental toxins.

The three principle delusions are:

- Anger/Hatred ● Attachment/Desire ● Ignorance
- In this piece let's address anger first. We will continue with attachment and ignorance as we go along.

DEALING WITH DELUSIONS: When we deny the existence of delusions, they slowly build up and one day, explode. This could lead to physical and mental sickness, sometimes with disastrous consequences. Sometimes we suppress and deny emotions in order for people to accept and like us. That fear always lurks somewhere beneath that if we display certain emotions people may reject us.

- The first step is to acknowledging the existence of delusions and disturbing emotions.
- The second is to transform such thoughts in our mind slowly to a state that is peaceful and accepting.

ANGER

- Anger is a mental factor. It focuses on some object and sees that object as negative or bad.

SOUL VALUE

- Aversion tends to exaggerate the object and make it look much worse that it already is – as something that is really bad and unlikable.
- Anger if very strong can harm the object it is projected upon. This may not happen deliberately or consciously.
- Aversion, impatience, irritation, a judgemental attitude and unnecessary criticism are all subtle forms of anger.
- Full blown anger is when we really lose it.
- Denying and suppressing anger is not going to make it go away. It will return – in a stronger way.
- Addressing anger is a good way of dealing with it.
- It takes time for the direction of the mind to change. We all have a long history of anger. The pace of change is purely dependant on how much the angry person wants to let go.
- Anger requires patience, perseverance and a lot of working on to be able to let go of it.
- Anger should never be justified. It is difficult to rationalise anger.
- Anger is unhealthy, unwise and unskillful.
- To see and accept that anger is harmful is very important.
- Anger has a long lasting unpleasant effect on our physical and mental faculties.
- Verbal and physical anger in relationships is like a lethal poison laden arrow.
- When we get angry with someone we never try to see their point of view as the mind gets clouded with delusion.

ANGER ERADICATION METHOD

- When angry do not take decisions.
- After you have calmed down try and generate some compassion towards yourself and the person you are angry with. Both are suffering. Both may be going through a difficult situation.
- Anger is caused by delusion. Delusion is a mental disease. We feel sad for a person who is mentally ill. Similarly we can feel sadness for an angry person.
- We see faults in others because we have those faults ourselves. That is the reason we feel annoyed. Anger is an internal emotion. If we accept we have those very same faults it will be easier for us to start working towards eradicating anger.
- Accepting and forgetting will automatically make us less angry people, but that is a long conditioning process and requires not just focus but also a commitment to oneself to be a better person.
- Seek help of someone who has gone through many bad experiences and overcome the delusion of anger. That person may be in a better position to help than someone without any bad life experiences.

Our great Indian Buddhist scholar and philosopher Shantideva says:

*"Whatever joy there is in the world
All comes from desiring others to be happy,
And whatever suffering there is in the world
All comes from desiring myself to be happy."*

www.samitarathor.blogspot.com

LAKSHMAN ANAND

PRODUCTS

STRAPPY SLIPPERS

Prahlad Regar, a cooperative of leather workers, produces strappy slippers in a range of colors and styles. Ideal for a summer day these *chappals* are pretty comfy. You can wash them too. Prices are reasonable. The leather retains its natural quality. There are *jhootis* too in tiger stripes and in smaller sizes for children.

Prahlad Regar is located near Rajasthan's famous Ranthambore Tiger Sanctuary, in village Kundera. This artisanal group consists of 20 families who earn a living by making slippers in between the *rabi* and *kharif* seasons. They have small fields which don't yield abundant crops. Water is scarce and there isn't much to do once the harvesting season is over. Each family earns a decent income and the work ensures they don't need to migrate to cities or kowtow to upper castes. The Regars are Dalits, historically oppressed with low incomes. They would like more bulk orders for their slippers which Bhagwan Das, a senior member of their outfit, assures they can pack and send you.

Contact: Bhagwan Das Regar: 09950891726, 09887804279

