

Civil Society



IS AN INSTANT SUPERMAN REALLY THE ANSWER TO CORRUPTION?

LOKPAL IN A HURRY



'WHAT WE GET AS NEWS IS A TAMASHA'

Sanjaya Baru says there is need for the media to introspect and set higher standards for itself

Pages 6-7

THE DROUGHT-PROOFING WIZARD

Pages 8-9

BROOMS ARE OUT IN DELHI

Pages 12-13

RETAIL CORRUPTION HAS A CURE

Pages 27-29

KANHA SOUL AT CHITVAN

Pages 34-35

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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CONTENTS



COVER STORY

LOKPAL IN A HURRY

Anna Hazare's fast at Jantar Mantar focused national attention on corruption. But a hasty effort to draft a law on the Lokpal found itself mired in controversies.

20

COVER PHOTOGRAPH: LAKSHMAN ANAND

Dry Tikawara grows a forest	10-11
Anganwadis lag in education	12
'We need strong gram sabhas'	14
Panchayats unite against Monsanto	16
Kashmir's top farmers	18
What Bihar's women want	28
China on tribal wishlist	29
The broken window	32-33
Varanasi's organic restaurant	34
Products: Mat mania	38

Civil Society

READ US. WE READ YOU.

No way to draft a law

SEVEN and a half years ago, *Civil Society's* first issue had Arvind Kejriwal on the cover. It was called *Taxman's Burden*. He was then an income-tax officer on leave from the department trying to implement the right to information (RTI). Hardly anyone was interested in RTI in those days. *Civil Society* was perhaps the only magazine mad enough to do a cover story on RTI's implications, Arvind and his idealistic comrades in Parivartan.

We covered Arvind several times after that first issue and watched him shoot to fame and win the Magsaysay. Over the years our personal affection for him has only grown and we respect his integrity and commitment.

But as we watch the goings-on over the drafting of the Jan Lokpal Bill we can't help but feel distressed. What should have been a serious exercise involving dialogue and debate has now become a shouting match between activists and politicians.

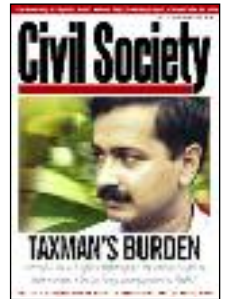
It is saddening that this spectacle should take place despite some very valuable experience in pre-legislative consultation over the past seven years. Laws like the ones we have on RTI, rural employment and forest people's rights have come to us through a lot of give and take.

The Lokpal Bill is far too important a law to be put in a pressure cooker and then plonked on the nation's table. Anna Hazare has said he would cheerfully go on a fast again if he doesn't have his way. We can only request him to think about the merits of such brinkmanship, especially when there is a much larger good involved.

Anna was upset that letters he wrote to the Prime Minister and Sonia Gandhi weren't replied to. They should have replied to him. But it is also a fact that the National Campaign for People's Right to Information (NCPRI) and the National Advisory Council (NAC) were working on a strong Jan Lokpal Bill. So, even if the government's Lokpal Bill left much to be desired, a better and stronger version from the NAC was already in the making. That process needed to continue and not be derailed.

Corruption is rampant and the government has a lot to answer for. But Sonia Gandhi's NAC does provide many opportunities for civil society to bring in serious change. It is thanks to the NAC's unique role that many long-pending social issues are being discussed today. It is also thanks to the NAC that we have a new generation of valuable activists, who, like Arvind, also enjoy the freedom of being critical of the NAC, the Congress and Sonia Gandhi herself.

Corruption is deep-seated not only among politicians but in the middle-class as well. A single law will not make corruption go away. But, yes, a properly empowered Lokpal, with buy-ins from various power centres, will make a serious difference over time. We need to see a Lokpal Bill in the light of its innumerable complexities.



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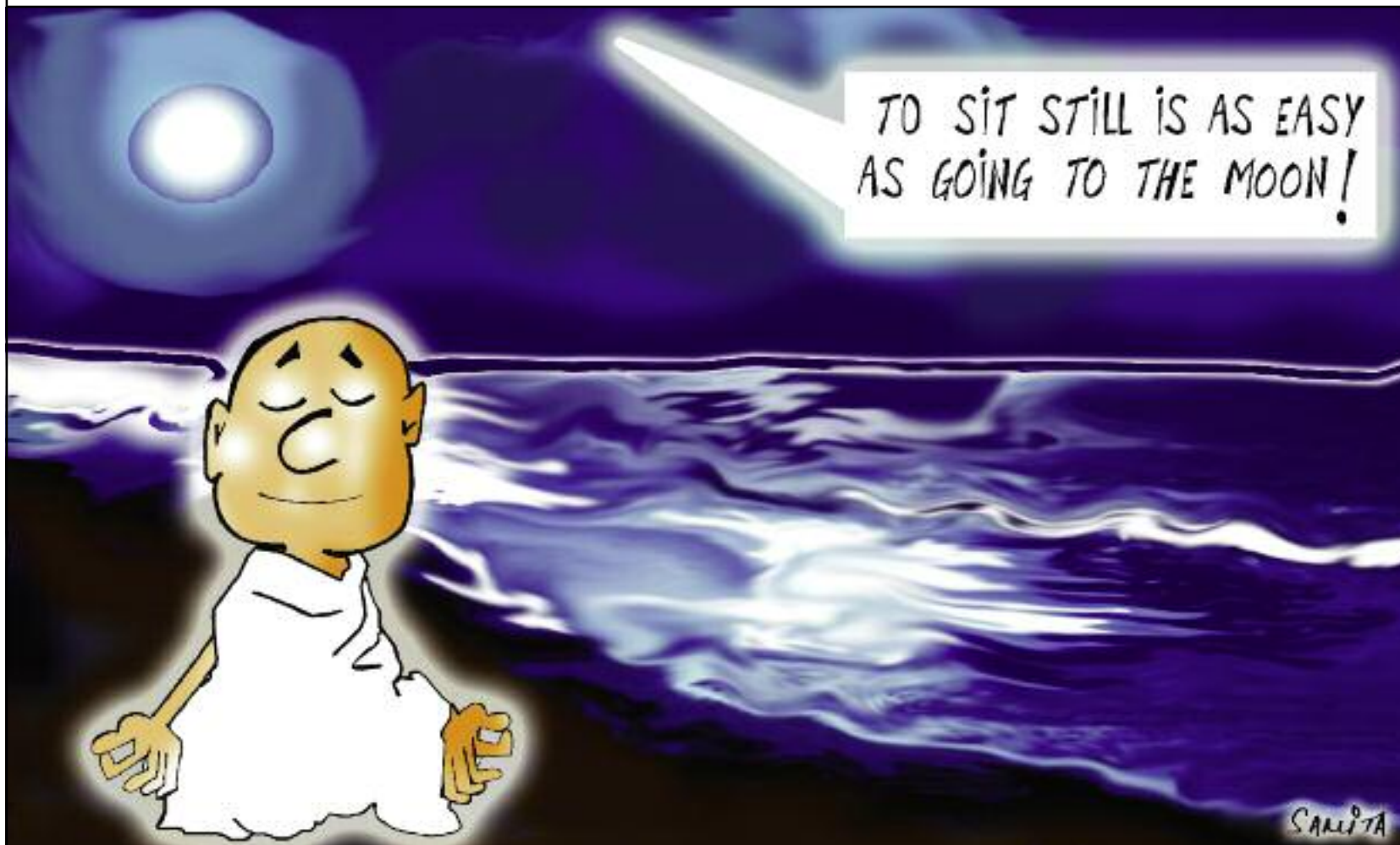
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IN THE LIGHT

by SAMITA RATHOR



LETTERS



Bold new cinema

Many thanks for your cover story on the independent documentary filmmakers. It was long overdue. In the past decade many young people have gone to great lengths to produce films which tell real-life stories. Some of these are ham-handed efforts but some are outstanding. A well-made documentary has more impact than a movie based on fiction.

Shridhar Nalapat

Technology has indeed made it possible for young people to produce documentary films. But you need more than that. You need to have an eye for imagery, for a story and the determination to tell that story in the most engaging way possible. Personally, I think, training is needed, apart from passion.

Serah Nephram

University for change

Dileep Ranjekar is right when he says the time has come for a university which will produce change leaders in education and development. We have many motivated teachers who would be very grateful for training. There are very few places they can get technical advice. It is a profession without agony aunts.

Dr Rama Gupta

Corruption

We all support Anna Hazare and Arvind Kejriwal in their movement against corruption and tainted people. We should participate in drafting the Lokpal bill but we should also make sure that it is implemented in the form we have drafted it in. Afterwards, everything will be in the hands of the government and its

associates. They will definitely try to twist the law and make it a joke once again.

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I support Arvind Kejriwal's efforts to get rid of the menace of corruption. He has shown a lot of courage. The campaign has achieved some objectives. The middle-class has been galvanized. The entire nation is aware of Anna's message. I hope a fine Lokpal bill becomes a reality soon.

Asmita

Picking straws

Farmers from Kerala have time and again shown the way forward in the dwindling market for farm produce. The way they have adopted mechanized planting is remarkable.

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The article reflects the need and scope for technical interventions in farming at the grassroots. Technology, especially in agriculture, has to be demand driven to scale up. But generally what is happening is that the research system develops technologies and farmers are expected to adopt them. If they don't, they are classified as laggards. This story is a clear sign that a reverse social

process in the agricultural research system is required for technology to succeed.

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Sure, paddy cultivation has increased a lot in Kerala in the last five years. But we should think about small manual machines for rice transplantation. Those would benefit small farmers. They will not be able to afford these transplanters with engines. The TNAU has developed a manual rice transplanter that would surely benefit small farmers particularly those interested in System of Rice Intensification (SRI).

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Soul value

I was very attracted to Samita's article, Purify your Mind, in the December issue. It had an impact on me. I read that article many times. What she says is absolutely true. This kind of advice is very essential to purify one's thoughts and achieve inner peace. This is Samita's valuable contribution to bring social change. May God bless Samita each and every moment of her life.

Laishram Kennedy

INTERVIEW Indian journalism will be forced to introspect,

'What we are getting as news is a tamasha'

LAKSHMAN ANAND

Umesh Anand
New Delhi

AS Anna Hazare sat on a hunger-strike at Jantar Mantar to demand a strong Lokpal Bill, TV channels and newspapers tried to outdo each other in providing saturation coverage.

Reporters and anchors depicted with fervour a middle-class uprising across the country. There were candle-light vigils and emotional outbursts against corruption.

Anna was painted as a saviour, his draft law as the instrument for solving all of India's problems.

There is little doubt about the national disgust with corruption in high places. But should the media have gone to this length to become a part of the story in its search for viewers and readers?

An editor who stood apart from the frenzy was Sanjaya Baru of the respected *Business Standard*. He wrote an edit titled 'The Hazare Hazard' and dared to ask whether this was the way an important law should be drafted. Baru has previously worked for the *Economic Times*, the *Times of India* and the *Indian Express* Group. Before his current assignment, he was the very successful media adviser to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

Baru recently delivered the H.Y. Sharda Prasad Memorial Lecture on 'Media, Business and Government.' Excerpts from an interview:

You have been very critical of the media. With reference to Anna Hazare's fast at Jantar Mantar, you said that the problem with TV was that it had become part of the story. What is it that annoys you so much?

I have now seen the media from three angles – from the inside as a journalist, from working in think tanks, which are neutral territory, and from being in government. I get angry that often journalists are not giving people value for money. They are not even giving their own publishing houses value for money – though journalists are much better paid today than 10 or 20 years ago.

Two, television has really blurred the distinction between news and entertainment.

The person who first talked about not making a distinction between news



Sanjaya Baru

and entertainment was Samir Jain. I remember him telling us when I was in the *Times of India* that news is entertainment and entertainment is news. They are two sides of the same coin. I think what television has done is to make them both one side of the same coin.

What are we in the media business? Are we in news? Are we a tamasha? Is it our job to keep people happy, entertained, angry? Or is it our job to inform and educate? I think it is time for the media to introspect.

Part of the problem is the way media markets have come to be structured. TV is so dependent on TRP ratings. You had Barkha Dutt and NDTV chased away from India Gate during the Anna Hazare protests on a personal credibility issue. Obviously there is a huge interdependence in these markets.

See, I think we need to introspect. We need internal cleansing. In the past 10 years or so different institutions of society have gone through this process of being questioned – the executive, the judiciary and the legislature. None of them has addressed any of these issues very well but at least these issues have been raised. Of course, now finally we have a situation where a minister is in jail, a businessman is in jail, IAS officers have been jailed. We have had in the past members of state legislatures and MPs in jail.

I don't know if any editor has as yet gone to jail. But I think that day will

mend its ways, says Sanjaya Baru

come when editors and senior journalists will either have to step down or resign their jobs. Forget about going to jail, I don't think that any senior journalist in this country has been sacked as yet for not discharging his or her professional duties. I am convinced this will happen one of these days.

In a sense what you saw during this India Gate protest, people chanting against Barkha Dutt, is a people's court because there is anger against the media's inability to address certain questions on professionalism. She had an opportunity to acquit herself and she missed it and I was involved in that. The feeling was she did not acquit herself. If she had then I don't think this kind of situation would have arisen.

But that is one example. There are others. I think there is a crisis of credibility in the media and that is what we need to address.

The need to be evolved today is much higher because you are dealing with explosive technologies. Consumer interests have changed and the assertiveness is different. On the other side you have media driven largely for profit. What do journalists do in this kind of situation?

Actually this is a very important question. In fact, it is only journalists who can do something about it. Let me give you a parallel from the automobile industry. We have enormous competition in the automobile industry – unheard of in this country till even 10 years back. And yet the cars are of better quality, they meet higher pollution standards, they are safer etc. So an increase in competition and in the number of brands has come with the improved standards that manufacturers of cars now adhere to.

That is not what has happened in journalism. You have more TV channels and newspapers, better technology, but nobody has as yet come forward with standards and implementation of those standards to ensure you have better journalism. Whenever other agencies have tried to do this we in the media have resisted it.

Ten years ago when GN Bajpai was chairman of SEBI, he called a meeting of all the editors. I was at that time with the *Financial Express*. Bajpai said there should be codes of conduct for journalists reporting from the market. The entire media agreed but said, thank you very much, we will come out with a code of conduct on our own. A sub-committee was formed with Pronnoy Roy, Raghav Behl and some others. Nothing came of it. To this day there is no media code of conduct. Individual newspapers and TV channels have it, but there is no publicly stated code of conduct for those who report for the markets, the kind of transparencies and disclosures that are required.

I mean politics is worse. People watch TV channels and read columns not knowing that the writers are actually members of various political parties. N. Ram is editor of *The Hindu*. Everybody believes that *The Hindu* is a highly regarded newspaper. But he is a member of the CPI (M) and he will not allow any criticism of the CPI (M). So that is what Indian journalism is. You are either on the Left or the Right. There are also corporate interests, people with involvement in all kinds of causes.

So, what should journalists do?

What I am saying is that the pressures will mount when the profession will have to come forward with new institutions. There is the Editors' Guild of India. Unfortunately it is a guild of those who are either ex-editors or wannabe editors. I think we need institutions or forums which will insist on journalists being held accountable. It will happen. I am convinced the media will see some cleansing.

The problem with the story of the protests against corruption led by Anna Hazare was that TV became part of the story. We could not look at the story from the various aspects that we needed to. There is after all a major law going to be drafted for the country. What do you think people reporting this story should have looked at?

First of all newspapers and TV must report events as they happen and separate reportage from opinion. In print it's a very visible separation between views and news, though it has got blurred in some cases in magazines. Unfortunately, on TV there is great blurring of this distinction. People present views as news. And prime-time news,

'You have more TV channels and newspapers, better technology, but nobody has as yet come forward with standards and implementation of those standards to ensure you have better journalism.'

what you see at eight or nine at night, is all expression of various views. There is very little actual news there. It's all opinion all the time.

So, first of all, I would like to see separation of reportage – this is what is happening, these are the groups that are demonstrating, this is the response of the government. Then, should come a balanced discussion of views with all being present. What we saw was TV anchors becoming part of the drama. There was someone on *Headlines Today* saying: I am standing on ground zero! It was as though he was a part of the news, not a journalist. A lot of this is happening on TV and it is disturbing.

Second is the question of editorial control. What is 24-hour TV all about? When does reality TV end and news begin? In print there is the last page and the front page which newspapers produce at a particular point in time and it is available in the morning. Till the next morning there is no product. TV is constant. You switch on the camera, you hook up with satellite and its there on the TV screen. A lot of people are seeing visuals without being given a framework or a perspective to understand those visuals. One of the ABCs

of all visual communication is that the frame which contains the visual is the entirety of the information available.

You can show a frame with 100 people, and say this is a million man march, which is what happened with Telengana. The media said it was a million man march, which is the way the organisers described it. Instead the question that should have been asked was: where are the people? These are complicated issues which worry me about TV.

So if technology has brought us to the point where 100 people in a room look like a 1,000 or more, is there an ethical challenge linked to journalism which now needs to be met?

I think the biggest challenge is editorial control. I take a conservative view of this, not just because I am an editor. I think editorial control is fundamental to professionalism in journalism and I am completely opposed to this business of citizen journalism started in the US which our TV is imitating. Citizen journalists are not journalists. There are letters to the editor. All kinds of opinions are given. But at the end of the day, in print, the editor decides what will be published. You read stuff on the Internet. It's like citizen journalism. Everything goes. And 'anything goes' cannot be professionalism. So please don't call it journalism.

I think we need to define what journalism is. What is journalism? Journalism is a professional way of looking at reality and reporting it to people. And reporting should be done by journalists who are trained in the profession and their work should be guided by an editor in a hierarchical structure.

You can't be a cook without knowing how to cook. Anybody can produce something edible by throwing some ingredients into a pan. But that's not cooking.

I keep asking TV anchors whether they have control over what appears on their channels and, I tell you, most of them say they don't. You cannot have control over a 24-hour channel where cameras are picking up images which are being telecast live. Nobody is actually looking at those images before they go to the viewer. So, when there is no control, then don't call yourself an editor. Why do they use the term editor on TV? They are not editors of anything.

TV is an easy whipping boy. You say there should be editorial control. Now *The Hindu* has a lot of editorial control but it still runs a lead story on Julian Assange commenting on the Prime Minister. Which self-respecting newspaper in the world would run such a story?

The Hindu is like a party magazine, N. Ram being a member of the CPI(M). I think of editorial control within a framework of professional values. Journalism is not a new discipline. It has been around for a long time and its been fairly well defined. You need to adhere to those professional values, which, unfortunately, *The Hindu* does not.

I think Indian journalism is at a moment when it will be forced to introspect and mend its ways.

Mallanna saves farmers from the

The Nagaral family propagates traditional ways of drought-proofing



Mallanna Nagaral near a drop inlet spillway. Run-off from the upper fields will bring topsoil and fill the land around this structure.

Shree Padre
Bagalkot (Karnataka)

IN 2003, when Hungund taluk in the Bagalkot district of Karnataka was hit by a severe drought, farmers did not have to buy food grain from the market. Nearly 90 per cent of them had built bunds and conserved topsoil using traditional techniques of drought-proofing which have their roots in this district.

Three generations of the Nagaral family have diligently and magnanimously educated farmers in an ancient method of drought-proofing. They are the repositories of this knowledge, which they not only willingly share with farmers but propagate innovatively.

"If fields don't have bunds, we won't have money in the country," says Mallanna Nagaral, 60, breaking into poetry. He is a third generation Nagaral and is much sought after for his expertise in conservation even though his formal education is only upto Class 10.

On an average, Mallanna spends two months a year helping fellow farmers with his expertise. Though he spends long hours under a scorching sun out in the fields, he doesn't charge for his services. He doesn't even ask for reimbursement of his travel expenses.

"If I ask for money, then that is not service.

This year I got a bumper crop in groundnut. Mother Earth is giving me, no? If I get a few bags more from my field, I feel I have been compensated," he explains with a carefree laugh.

Mallanna was supervising construction of a *dundavarthi* (drop inlet spillway) on a farmer's field when I met him. "I have spent 15 days here. We need another 10 days to complete this work," he says.

The saga of the Nagaral family's remarkable knowledge of soil and water conservation goes back to Mallanna's grandfather, Sanganabasappa. He happened to read a manuscript written by a seer 175 years ago.

Moved by unprecedented drought, named *davagi bara* (skull drought) because thousands of people had died from hunger, the seer wrote a manuscript on agriculture and drought-proofing for drylands titled, *Krishi Jnana Pradeepike*. This handbook contained many practical lessons.

Sanganabasappa started testing the drought-proofing practices prescribed in *Krishi Jnana Pradeepike* sometime in 1913. Impressed by the results these experiments yielded, he started popularizing them. His son, Shankaranna Nagaral, made it his life's mission to spread this knowledge. By the time Mallanna took up the mantle, in addition to the written knowledge he had, he also acquired knowledge that came to him by word of

mouth from two generations of his family.

The seer's manuscript was eventually published as a book. It became very popular and has seen eight editions.

LITTLE RAIN: Bagalkot district receives less rain than other regions of Karnataka. On an average, the district receives 543 mm. The soil is black with patches of red earth. In a span of five years, a farmer can expect an average crop yield for just two years. One year will definitely be a drought year with no yield. For two years rainfall will be scanty therefore crop yields will be thin.

Mallanna's methods tackle the rainfall deficit. He has been constructing field bunds and doing soil and water conservation since the seventies. He was just 20 years old when he started working in his own fields.

The system followed sounds simple but is in fact very intricate.

Two kinds of interventions are carried out. First, a *thala oddu* is built. This is a broad-based bund placed at the lowest elevation of a field. Second, the field is levelled, divided into portions and additional bunds are built on their lower elevations. A spillway is constructed in the middle of the bund. The purpose of all this is to catch enough rainwater and, at the same time, not allow any topsoil to erode and wash away to lower fields.

"We won't allow the topsoil to run away from our fields. As for the rainwater, it has to take our permission before running," explains a local farmer humorously.

It is complex to understand, judge and implement such a system. First, one has to assess the runoff from the upper fields down to the lower fields. The height of the broad-based bund should be just enough to check the outflow of water. The mouth of the spillway has to be positioned such that it does not permit any topsoil to escape. At the same time, it should not permit the water to pass through without holding it for sometime to facilitate percolation.

Mallanna has perfected the art of assessing the gradation of the slope. By just looking at the site he can tell you which portion of the field is slightly low-lying and which is above the average height etc. He makes his estimations accurately without

cruel sun

any technical gizmos, a feat which has amazed university graduates and professors.

The Nagal family's own fields are the best examples of what academics call 'inter-plot rain-water harvesting.' Mallanna recalls that he has never had to buy foodgrain from the market. This is an achievement because total and partial crop failure is very common in the district.

He says his two most challenging assignments have been Sarangimath's fields in Banahatti in Hungund Taluk and Pattanashetti's fields in Basavanabagewadi in Bijapur district.

Sarangimath's fields receive a huge run-off from around 400 acres. Pattanashetti's fields receive run-off from only 100 acres. But since the water originates from a steep hillock it comes down at great speed. Both were challenges which Mallanna dealt with.

ODE TO SOIL: Long before the phrase 'drought-proofing' got popular with rural development experts, the Nagal family was popularizing the concept with innovative methods. Their first slogan was, *Ara baradaaga entaane bele*, which means 'the eight anna crop.' They were telling farmers that during a drought or scanty rainfall year they could still get at least 50 per cent of their average crop yield by drought-proofing.

Shankaranna wrote catchy *vachanas* or prose texts to market this technique. *Vachana* means 'that which has been said.' Mallanna has published a book of selected *vachanas* of Shankaranna. He has inherited the art of writing impromptu *vachanas*. In fact, what most of these *vachanas* preach is soil science.

LR Mali Patil, a retired Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) of Hire Otageri in Hungund Taluk, got Mallanna to drought-proof his 28 acres three years ago. The work cost him ₹2.5 lakhs.

"We constructed the broad-based bund and spillway only," he explains. "Another two years are required for the runoff from above to fill the lower areas of our field. But our yields have already increased by 30 to 35 per cent."

Guru Ganiger of Kandagal village has only four acres. He got two acres treated three years ago. It cost him ₹30,000. "The money I had invested is already giving me returns," he says. "Mallanna offers free service without differentiating between class or community. He is great."

"One has to think 10 times before investing big sums in dry lands like ours," says Dr MD Kachapur, a retired agronomist. Nevertheless, he got his 14 acres treated by Mallanna. "Once these measures are implemented, our farmers are able to reap a crop even with timely rain of just six to seven centimetres."

In 2005, under the dynamic leadership of District Collector KS Prabhakar, a water awareness programme, *Jaljatha*, was organized. The 12-day event covered 120 villages. In the course of

this programme, Prabhakar came to know about the Nagal family.

Mallanna was at once invited to be a resource person. He became much in demand at village meetings. Prabhakar planned to put on video Nagal's techniques and introduce his drought proofing methods in other areas as a best practice. But he was transferred before he could implement his ideas.

RECOGNITION: In 2006 the University of Agriculture Sciences (UAS) in Dharwar conferred on Mallanna an honorary doctorate in recognition of his contribution. After this, Mallanna became even more popular. He finds it difficult now to meet the demand for his services.

Though the university's watershed department is active in these areas, it has a paltry budget of Rs 6,000 per hectare. They can raise only field boundary bunds with that amount.

"The inter-plot rain harvesting Mallanna is advocating would require an average of ₹50,000 per hectare for the first stage of work – that is, construction of the broad-based bund and spillway. For the second stage of drought-proofing,



A bountiful crop in the Ramavadagi fields

which is division and levelling of land, much more money would be required," says Dr MB Guled, Principal Scientist, Regional Research Station (RRS), Bijapur, who is working for the All-India Coordinated Research Project for Dryland Agriculture at the UAS in Dharwar.

Dr Guled says that if just the first stage of the Mallanna method of drought-proofing is done, a family gets enough to sustain itself even with very low rainfall. The Karnataka government has announced crop loans with one per cent interest through the cooperative sector.

"If a long-duration loan scheme for drought-proofing in drylands is introduced, it would help to catalyse drought-proofing work and thereby ensure livelihoods here," says Dr Guled.

Summer is the right season for soil and water conservation works. But because money is needed, farmers get the job done in a phased manner.

HISTORICAL RESEARCH: For nearly 100 years, the Nagal family has been perfecting its techniques through ongoing research and development on a 28-acre field called Ramavadagi.

Mallanna's grandfather, Sanganabasappa, started his experiments on these unfertile lands a century ago. At that time, his fields were so severely

damaged that a person standing in its eroded furrows wasn't visible from outside! Mallanna hasn't stopped experimenting. Levelling, bunding, incorporation of organic material, in situ sheep manure and other activities continue. This land used to yield hardly a quintal of crop per acre.

Now the yield is eight to nine quintals, equal to the best fields of the area.

Mallanna calls his family's drought-proofing techniques, '*hola tidduvudu*', which roughly translated means 'correcting the fields.' He says despite the crisis in farming interest in drought proofing is on the rise.

"My taluk spends approximately ₹50 lakhs of the farmers' hard-earned money every year for this purpose. Out of this, around ₹5 to ₹6 lakhs of work is executed under my supervision," he says.

According to Dr Guled, this method of drought-proofing is relevant for eight Karnataka districts that have 80 per cent of black soil like Bagalkot, Bijapur, Gadag and Koppal, parts of Raichur, Bellary, Dharwar and Chitradurga. All these areas together form the northern dry zone of Karnataka.

Since the last three to four years, machines have replaced labour in soil and water conservation work. This has speeded up the process.

In an unusual development the RRS at Bijapur and Mallanna are now working together for land improvement in this region. While Mallanna takes care of planning and supervising the soil and water conservation work, Dr Guled and his RRS colleagues advise farmer on soil health, corrective measures if any needed and crop selection and crop combination. This is a classic case of scientist-farmer collaborative development.

Dr Guled is of the opinion that the increase in yields starts from the very first year after drought-proofing is carried out thanks to the high moisture

retention in more areas. "In a matter of three years, the entire expenditure is recovered completely provided the farmer chooses the right crop combination." For Bagalkot conditions, RRS advises chilli, onion and cotton for the *kharif* season and sorghum for the *rabi* season. Sunflower for *kharif* and chick-pea for *rabi* is another set of options.

It is over several decades that the Nagal family's drought-proofing formula has spread in Bagalkot and Bijapur districts. Now it is making inroads into Raichur and other belts. Mallanna, during his discussions with farmers, keeps telling them the dos and don'ts for soil and water conservation.

One important advice is not to use black soil for building bunds. Once a bund cracks in summer and sheep stamp on it, it collapses and gets washed off.

"None of the farmers who spent money used black soil for the bund," he emphasizes. "Show me a bund done by the government department that has lasted more than five years. But hundreds of bunds built with traditional knowhow have remained intact for centuries."

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Dry Tikawara grows a natural



Women were employed to grow the forest

Bharat Dogra

Tikawara (Rajasthan)

TIKAWARA'S awesome forest has native trees like *babool*, *khejari*, *neem*, *sheesham* and *keekar*. There are birds and blackbucks. Astonishingly, villagers will tell you that this forest was just a barren patch of land 25 years ago. What is even more unbelievable is that this greenery was achieved in the midst of a prolonged period of drought in Rajasthan.

Tikawara village is located in the Silora Block of Ajmer district. Most plantation efforts go awry in spite of wet weather. Yet a whole forest was raised in dry, dusty Tikawara village – a stupendous achievement.

The entire effort started in 1987 when the Barefoot College responded to a proposal of the Government of India and the Central Wasteland Development Board to take up afforestation on barren, degraded land. Once the project was approved, the local panchayat transferred a patch of 50 acres classified as pasture with not a single tree in sight, to the Barefoot College. The Wastelands Development Board sanctioned a financial grant for afforestation.

Known for its meticulous planning with the close involvement of villagers, the Barefoot College lost no time in constituting a Charagah Vikas Samiti or Pasture Development Committee. It sought the advice of experienced villagers and allocated responsibilities.

Then started the groundwork without which any planting for this parched land would not have succeeded. Contour bunding was carried out and trenches were dug so that rainwater could be conserved and collected. At one end of this land there is a tank which was cleaned and deepened. The

more fertile soil. Some compost was mixed in. The saplings were then nurtured tenderly.

A lot of thought and discussion went into choosing the right species of indigenous trees. The hardy ones needed to be selected so that they could withstand drought conditions. For fencing, some exotic species were chosen. But they proved to be troublesome so the idea of planting more of them was disbanded. Everybody approved of guava trees. Unfortunately they could not withstand the stress of drought and had to be dropped.

The final list included *babool*, *khejari*, *neem*, *sheesham* and *keekar*. Such trees not only yield fodder and fuel but food as well. *Khejari* is a much cherished local tree in Rajasthan. It provides, fuel, fodder and *sangria*, a much relished vegetable, as well as edible gum. Wood from the *khejari* tree is burnt on sacred occasions for havan, (ceremonial fire). *Neem*, of course, is famous for its many medicinal qualities. It also provides organic pest repellants.

Wood from dead and dry trees can be used for construction and for making furniture.



Thousands of indigenous species were planted

recharge from this tank would help to make available more water to a well which was dug specially to serve this tree planting effort. A network of underground pipelines was created which carried water from the well to small storage tanks. Thousands of earthen pitchers were bought from local potters which, when placed near the roots of the trees, provided drip irrigation making optimum use of scarce water.

Nearly 100,000 saplings were raised by the Barefoot College and by villagers. The voluntary organization bought the saplings grown by the villagers. Meanwhile, pits for planting trees were dug and the soil extracted was replaced with

Sheesham is valued for furniture. *Babool* is highly valued for making agricultural tools. The wood of *Eranj* trees is also prized.

By planting diverse indigenous species, the Barefoot College and the villagers of Tikawara raised a man made forest which closely resembles a natural forest.

As the saplings started growing, the Barefoot College shifted its field centre to Tikawara to keep an eye on the upcoming forest. "As the trees grew, decisions were taken to open up different parts of the afforested land to farm animals for grazing. At a certain stage, open grazing had to be stopped. Then, at another stage, only cows and

forest

buffaloes were allowed in. At other times the more numerous goats and sheep were also allowed," explains Kalavati, the coordinator of the field centre who ensured that the newly planted trees were protected.

Kalavati spoke to the villagers and obtained a consensus on grazing practices. She had a tough time chasing away people who were damaging the plantation. People were permitted to take away dry fallen fuel wood but some villagers were cutting branches causing harm to trees. Others wanted to take away *ber* bushes for fencing their farms. Somehow Kalavati and her colleagues succeeded in keeping tree damage within manageable limits.

The weather proved more intractable. Periods of prolonged drought hit the plantation. In fact, the rain gods obliged very rarely. Despite valiant efforts to save trees a few of them dried up and were lost. Out of 40,000 trees planted, over 30,000 trees survived and blossomed. Thanks to rains this year many new plants have sprouted. The quality of soil is also improving.

This oasis of green is a grazing ground for nearly 700 sheep and goats and around 70 cows and buffaloes. Forty blackbucks (*neelgai*) have made this forest their home along with rabbits, hyena and other wild animals. This plantation shelters a diversity of birds like the Ramodi (small pigeon), sparrows, parrots, teetars, pigeons, mynahs, crows etc.

Out of the total project cost, a major amount was used to provide wages to villagers in need of work. Elderly women like Kaushalya and Golko said that this employment came in very handy during the difficult drought years.

In 2012, the 25-year lease given to the Barefoot College for this land comes to an end.

A big question hangs over the future of this forest. The sarpanch of the village, Maina Devi, says she is very happy with the way the plantation has been looked after by the Barefoot College. Her husband, Radheyshyam, who was the previous sarpanch, also says that he has full faith in the voluntary organization but the permission of other elected members has to be obtained to renew the lease.

Villagers have expressed fears that since the quality of the soil has improved devious efforts may be made by some people to occupy this land. According to Ramkaran, a leading activist with the Barefoot College in Tilonia, in Sardar Ki Daani village good plantations were created but these were destroyed at the behest of powerful people who deliberately encouraged villagers to cut trees and sell them.

It may be necessary for the Barefoot College to continue managing the forest for a longer time so that the hard gains of creating this greenery can be protected.

Villagers would prefer such an arrangement. They offer their services with a smile. "Whenever we are needed," said Gaiko, an elderly village woman and her grandson Ram Babu, "we will come and protect this forest which provides us fodder and protects the land."

NCPCR' s one-year report card

Civil Society News
New Delhi

THE National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) held a press conference in New Delhi to explain the headway it had made in implementing and monitoring the Right to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act which came into effect a year ago on 1 April, 2010. As a quasi-judicial body the NCPCR enjoys autonomy and authority to protect child rights. It has been given full freedom by the Union government. Noted activist Shantha Sinha has been appointed chairperson.

Sinha said in the past one year the commission had confronted many issues – lack of access to schooling for children with disability, corporal punishment and poor infrastructure. There was need to provide autonomy to gram panchayats to monitor RTE in villages.

The NCPCR has set up a separate RTE Division. Kiran Bhatta, coordinator, said they had 'learnt and unlearned' a lot in the past one year. Some implementation methods have been borrowed from the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) in Rajasthan like social auditing, public hearings and wall writings.

The commission wants people to monitor RTE at the grassroots. The problem is that many villages have not heard of the RTE and even teachers have scanty knowledge. In urban areas more people knew about this law.

The NCPCR is planning a mass awareness drive. Meanwhile, it has been promoting wall writings on government school buildings with details of the RTE Act to get the message across.

It has also been lobbying for panchayats to designate a special day to discuss RTE so that people could bring education issues to the notice of the panchayat. The Ministry of Panchayati Raj was in favour of this suggestion.

The RTE Division plans to boost School Management Committees (SMCs) of parents to monitor RTE. It has also been appointing state representatives to be the 'eyes and ears' of the commission. The job of the representative is to bring all stakeholders together and organise Shiksha Samvads where government officials and the people could interact and provide feedback to the commission.

The commission was keen on doing social audits in 10 states with civil society groups. Bhatta said these social audits would be a means of mobilising people, telling them about their

rights, activating SMCs and getting district officials to act on complaints.

The RTE Division has held public hearings in Bhopal, Alwar and Chennai. In Rajasthan, people complained about poor school infrastructure and exclusion of children from backward communities. The NCPCR got the government to issue an order for new schools and facilities. In Chennai, parents complained that their children were being routinely tortured in school. The police response was prompt, said Bhatta.

In Haryana, parents said they were being made to pay fees randomly to government schools. The commission summoned the relevant department. The state government returned each and every paise it had taken even going door-to-door to give back the money and collect signatures. Altogether it returned some ₹10 crores to parents.

Bhatta said the commission was hamstrung since there was no grievance redressal system in place. It was unclear where parents could complain. The commission wants to link a grievance redressal system to panchayats, the SMCs and relevant government departments. The commission has drawn up a draft law to set up such a mechanism synergising it with laws like the Juvenile Justice Act.

A second glitch was that the current policy on child labour was not stringent enough to ensure all children went to school instead of slaving away in fields and factories. The shift has to be from implementation to enforcement, said Bhatta.

Another major roadblock was that just six out of 28 states have notified the Act. These are Sikkim, Orissa, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan

A possible reason could be financial, said Vinod Raina, since teachers would need to be hired and this would require funds. Around ₹30,000 crores have been set aside to implement RTE but the money required is to the tune of ₹45,000 crores.

Raina said it was still early days. The RTE's targets were three years for states to provide neighbourhood schools and five years for teachers to be trained.

In Delhi alone, he said, the State Committee to Protect Child Rights had looked into 65 complaints in just one year. States also had to legislate to make some important changes.

These included fixing the age for admission to Class 1 at six years, changing the definition of a dropout and fixing the student-teacher ratio at 30:1.

The NCPCR is planning a mass awareness drive. It has been promoting wall writings on government school buildings with details of the RTE Act.

Anganwadis lag in pre-school education

Civil Society News
New Delhi

Research shows, by and large, the quality of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is poor in rural and urban India. So children are not prepared for primary school and have difficulty keeping pace in class. The result is a high dropout rate.

How does the education provided by the government's anganwadis under the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) fare in comparison to private schooling?

The Centre for Early Childhood Education and Development (CECED), Ambedkar University, and Galli Galli Sim Sim, the Indian version of Sesame Street, have done some good research at the grassroots assessing pre-primary education and how it can be improved. Galli Galli Sim Sim is currently providing educational toys and material to anganwadis in Maharashtra.

The two organisations shared their findings at a workshop in New Delhi, chaired by Dr Shreeranjana, joint secretary, Union Ministry for Women and Children and attended by researchers, academics, NGOs.

Shubhi Sachdeva and Aparajita Bhargava from CECED presented findings from their preliminary study on the quality of ECCE in three districts of Rajasthan, namely Alwar, Dungarpur and Banswara, and two districts in Andhra Pradesh, Medak and Rangareddy.

They found that Rajasthan had more private schools than Andhra. The anganwadi was sparingly used. Children were enrolled in anganwadis but they were also enrolled in private schools and went briefly to the anganwadis for food. The emphasis was on nutrition. Out of 39 centres visited in Rajasthan, just three anganwadis had a pre-school component. The curriculum was ancient and parents preferred sending their children to private schools.

In contrast, nearly 60 per cent of children were enrolled in the anganwadi centres in Medak and Rangareddy districts of Andhra. The Andhra Mahila Sabha has been working with anganwadi workers on a consistent basis and the curriculum has been upgraded. The anganwadi here is no longer called the 'upmawadi'. In both states parents placed high value on learning English. But only in Andhra anganwadi workers taught children English rhymes which they recited back to their pleased parents.

The researchers found that the perception of parents that private schools were better was misplaced. The private schools began the tiny child with rigorous formal education. The child was expected to learn a mindboggling syllabus, mugging tables and numbers, doing sums and cursive writing. Their fees ranged from ₹75 to ₹150 per month.

The schools run by NGOs provided the best edu-

cation. They involved the community and emphasised school readiness. Teachers of the Bodh Shiksha Samiti, which ran schools in Alwar district, would be called into meetings with communities where they would explain what exactly had been taught to children.

Urban parents too didn't have the right notions about education. The schooling component of the anganwadi wasn't taken seriously. Ameena Batada, director of Galli Galli Sim Sim, presented their research titled, 'Mind the Gap.' They explored the perception of parents/caregivers who were sending their children to anganwadis in Mumbai. The parents were mostly around 29 years old. Two-thirds had completed Class 5 or Class 8.

Only one in 10 parents gave their child educational toys like blocks and puzzles. The most common toy was a ball. The parents agreed that education began at home but said teaching began in formal schools. They expected children to sit quietly upon entering Class One. They overvalued reading, writing and formal education skills and undervalued social skills or readiness for school skills.

Another worrying factor which hindered children from learning was poor health. Professor Adarsh Sharma and Mukulika Dadhich of CECED were requested by the Aga Khan Foundation to suggest ECCE interventions for Nizamuddin *basti* in Delhi where a project for the restoration of monuments is underway.

CECED conducted its research from January to June 2010. It took a long-range view, seeing the situation of the child right from zero to eight years of age. The researchers talked with pregnant women, caregivers and young mothers. They found that malnutrition and anaemia were high among women and children. The result was children had stunted growth which in fact got aggravated at the age of three.

The Nizamuddin *basti* had seven anganwadis which were dysfunctional. Just 11 children were enrolled. No services were provided. The anganwadi functioned out of rented accommodation. Workers used electric stoves which were unsafe for children. Children with disability did not have access to the anganwadi.

"We need to influence the quality of demand," said Vinita Kaul.

Shriranjana said it was untrue that India was spending a whole lot on the ICDS. Around ₹15,000 crores has been earmarked for the anganwadis but the spend works out to very little per child. There has been an exponential increase in the number of anganwadis but many don't have their own buildings. They pay a rent fixed by the government, which is ₹250 for rural and ₹700 for urban centres.

He said we are yet to work out models for anganwadis which are a combination of crèche and anganwadi. Anganwadis weren't attuned to attending to babies.

The brooms

Civil Society News
New Delhi

In recent months, the BJP-dominated Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) and the Congress-led Delhi government have been outdoing each other in floating proposals and schemes for better governance. The MCD is in the throes of implementing a new Residents' Welfare Committee (RWC) scheme. Not to be left behind, the Delhi government has hurriedly announced draft legislation which would cut the MCD into five councils, each with its own mayor and commissioner.

Both parties claim their exertions will improve delivery of services and promote people's participation in urban governance. But the reason for this flurry, it appears, is that municipal elections for councillors are due next year. Both parties are wooing the middle class through Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs).

It was Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit who first got the middle-class to participate in governance through her Bhagidari scheme. Under Bhagidari, RWAs were invited to meetings where they could interact with civic agencies and tell them about their concerns related to electricity, water, roads and so on. Sometimes the Chief Minister herself presided over such meetings. The Bhagidari scheme improved the Chief Minister's popularity and was an important reason for the Congress repeatedly returning to power in Delhi.

Over the years, RWAs have proliferated and become politicised. There are now two large formations – the Delhi Resident Welfare Associations Joint Front (DRWAJF), which is perceived as pro-Congress, and the Urban Residents Joint Action (URJA), a partner of People's Action, an NGO which is headed by Sanjay Kaul, a member of the BJP. URJA-People's Action has signed a MoU with the MCD to help facilitate the RWC scheme.

Prithvi Raj Sawhney, former Mayor of Delhi, who launched the RWC scheme in end-March, said it would boost public participation in civic decision making. The scheme has its own logo, website and a slogan: 'Citizens make a city.'

The MCD wants to set up in each of Delhi's 270 wards an RWC consisting of the councillor, a junior engineer, sanitary inspector, section officer (horticulture) and one member of each registered RWA in the ward. To get it off the ground an RWC Management Cell has been set up under the mayor's office. People's Action will get the RWAs registered, coordinate between the councillor, mayor and RWAs and do 'capacity building' of the RWAs and the councillor.

"The scheme will put all components of the ward on one table," says Kaul. "There will be a meeting every month and minutes will be sent to the Mayor's office."

By getting RWAs and the councillor to sit across the table, Kaul feels that funds in every ward would be spent in a more equitable manner and common problems a ward faces would be tackled. "The RWAs will prioritise funds. Otherwise piecemeal work is done. If the main road to a ward is broken or there

are out in Delhi now



Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit on a clean up drive is waterlogging it should be a common priority to fix it," he says.

He says People's Action is just implementing the spirit of the 74th Amendment to the Constitution which talks of empowering local urban bodies. Kaul confesses it had been difficult to get councillors on board. They were hesitant to meet RWAs which hadn't voted for them in the last election.

The RWC scheme is being seen as a sort of rival to the Bhagidari scheme, a move to wean away RWAs from the Congress. DRWAJF finds it suspicious. "The concept of ward committees is good. People's participation should exist in decision-making. But formation of such a committee on the eve of councillor elections and the involvement of URJA is objectionable. It makes us feel this is a political move," says Pankaj Agarwal, general secretary, DRWAJF. "The Delhi government is already run-

ning a Bhagidari scheme. This merely duplicates such efforts. It is an utter waste of resources."

Agarwal fears the RWC scheme would inject more politics into the RWA movement. Bhagidari, he says, was an apolitical platform. Any RWA could attend those meetings. "The BJP dominates the MCD. Those associations which are aligned or sympathetic to the BJP will benefit. The scheme is not even a permanent feature. It could very well be dumped, post elections," he says.

One alternative often discussed is of empowering RWAs and bringing their powers at par with village panchayats. This would allow RWAs to directly access funds and carry out development works in their colonies. Agarwal says such a scenario is unlikely. For one, it is difficult to empower RWAs. Any group of people can register under the Societies Act and start an RWA. As he sees it, RWAs do not

have the wherewithal to participate in governance. "For recognition, accountability is needed," he says. "You need to hold elections, submit your accounts as is done under the Cooperative Act. There are residents who refuse to even pay their membership fees. There is no regulatory system for RWAs. We need an RWA Act."

RWAs are also often squeamish about handling funds. Consisting mainly of the elderly, many of them say they are happy to monitor and be involved in decision-making. Governments too have not been keen to do capacity-building. "If stakeholders become powerful, governments get nervous," remarks Agarwal.

The Delhi government's decision to bifurcate the MCD has not got an enthusiastic response from DRWAJF. The infrastructure costs would go up five times, says Agarwal. Citizens fear they will have to deal with more officials, councillors and mayors. "It is sheer torture for a citizen to get any work done by the MCD," says Agarwal. Palms have to be greased. The corporation has a surfeit of wishy-washy people who are rude and lack training.



Sanjay Kaul



Pankaj Agarwal

"The MCD needs re-engineering," he says. "They should do a cost-benefit analysis and become much more efficient." Departments like education and hospitals need to be taken out of the corporation's purview. The MCD constantly complains of revenue shortages but it does not collect its taxes efficiently. Out of 550,000 houses in Delhi, only 100,000 pay house tax.

The city already has too many agencies working at cross purposes. It takes three departments of the MCD to clean a drain or build a footpath. Infrastructure does not respect jurisdiction. So roads, drains, water pipes, sewage facilities run through several colonies. Having five councils would merely exacerbate problems of jurisdiction.

"We feel better results could be achieved through decentralisation, by delegating more power to Zonal Commissioners," says Agarwal.

Bifurcation of the MCD would be preceded by a delimitation exercise. The government wants to increase the number of wards from 272 to 400 so that each ward has fewer members enabling the councillor to work better. Just a few years ago the Delhi government had done delimitation. Citizens say while that increased the population of councillors it hasn't improved services in any way.

"The Delhi government should discuss this issue with RWAs but they have gone ahead and taken the decision," says Agarwal.

"What will it achieve?" asks Kaul. "The corporation's governing principles will not change. The question is, do we need to spread inefficiencies around? People's consultation is needed."

For once both DRWAJF and URJA are on the same page.

'We need strong gram sabhas'

Civil Society News
New Delhi

INDIA'S villages have been mostly bypassed by development. Panchayat raj legislation raised hopes that villages would be empowered to plan and implement development projects for themselves. The gram sabha – an assembly of all villagers – was seen as the best group to decide how money should be spent. But panchayat raj has yet to fulfill such expectations in a meaningful way.

As a staunch proponent of panchayat raj, Dr George Mathew, director of the Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi, has lost count of the number of initiatives he has been involved in to strengthen panchayat raj and rural decentralization. He is a member of the Rajasthan State Planning Board and Chairperson of the Task Force on Panchayat Raj, Bihar. He has assiduously strived to make rural decentralization a reality.

In an interview to Bharat Dogra and Reena Mehta, Dr Mathew spoke about the special role of the gram sabha and the need to strengthen it particularly in tribal areas.

The empowerment of gram sabhas has been emphasized time and again. The government even celebrated 2009-2010 as the year of the gram sabha. Yet in reality gram sabhas are still weak and do not function effectively. What is the reason for this?

Several people think of democracy in terms of five year elections – whether to Parliament, State Assemblies or Panchayat Raj Institutions. But this is a very narrow view of democracy. However, if we think of democracy in terms of genuine participation of the people including the poorest, then gram sabhas emerge as the most important institution of democracy in India with its large number of villages. Direct democracy which can emerge in gram sabhas is no less important than the representative democracy which we hear about all the time.

However to make the gram sabha function as the foundation of democracy a lot of spade work has to be done.

It is not merely by enacting laws and rules that suddenly gram sabhas will function effectively in millions of villages and hamlets. Actually there are strong cultural adversities to be overcome. Most cultures do not allow for all communities including the poorest and the weakest to sit together and decide village affairs on the basis of equality.

So a lot of work has to be done to overcome the cultural, social and other barriers to enable gram sabhas to emerge as the base of India's democracy. But this hard work has simply not been done. What we see is callousness and indifference towards such important tasks. Potentially useful ideas such as celebrating the year of the gram sabha simply remain on paper. A very strong and consistent campaign is needed for empowering

gram sabhas. Yet this has never been attempted.

The reason is that there are very strong vested interests who do not want rural communities to be empowered in the form of strong, effective gram sabhas. The political will for strengthening gram sabhas simply doesn't exist.

Is this the reason why PESA (Extension of Panchayat Law to Scheduled Areas) has not been effectively implemented?

Yes, what I said about the lack of political will is particularly true in the case of PESA. This is a very good law and much was expected from it. Here there is greater space for empowerment of gram



Dr George Mathew

sabhas in villages where many Scheduled Tribes live. So we at the Institute of Social Sciences put in a lot of effort in the form of conferences and valuable studies which we hoped would contribute to the good functioning of PESA. But I am extremely sad to say that although so many years have passed, there is not a single state where this law has been used in the right spirit.

These tribal areas are full of natural wealth – forests, minerals, rivers. There are strong vested interests in the form of big capitalists, industrialists, contractors as well as officials and politicians in collusion with them who have their eyes on these minerals and forests. They don't want the village communities and gram sabhas to have the final say on how this natural wealth should be used.

So what I said about the lack of political will in empowering gram sabhas is even more true in the case of PESA areas.

Is this one of the main reasons why it has not been possible to implement the Forest Rights Act in the right spirit?

Yes, absolutely. This law has rightly given adequate rights to gram sabhas as the competent authority to decide about forest rights – individual land rights as well as community forest rights. But, in practice, the gram sabha's authority has not been respected and the bureaucracy tries to acquire a decisive role. Such experiences lead us to the conclusion that the forest bureaucracy itself has emerged as a very strong vested interest which tries to have near monopolistic control over vast forest areas. Such tendencies drive this bureaucracy towards opposing the aspirations of tribals and forest-dwellers for land and forest rights. Even if serving officials cannot openly oppose a law of the government, retired officials were brought in to oppose this law. At one stage there were several cases in the courts filed by retired officials against the Forest Rights Act.

I think the government has to make some special effort now for ensuring that the Forest Rights Act and PESA are implemented in the right spirit.

Are there some examples where gram sabhas have functioned effectively?

In some parts of Kerala I've seen that gram sabhas are able to function in a more effective way compared to many other parts of the country. One specific example that I would like to give is of gram sabhas near Palakkad where a Coca-Cola plant created pollution, health problems and resulted in the lowering of the water table. There was a successful struggle against this which had its roots in the effective functioning of gram sabhas in this area. There are other examples from which we learn that where gram sabhas are empowered, it is much more possible for village communities to protect their interests.

It is also true that in the case of many projects which cause massive displacement or serious health hazards, gram sabhas have not been consulted adequately and properly?

I am not against modernization but I would like to emphasize that where displacement is unavoidable, displaced people should be given such rehabilitation opportunities that their material life becomes somewhat better than before. This is the least that can be done to compensate them for the emotional stress caused by uprooting them from their ancestral villages. People from within the community should be selected to give proper, balanced knowledge about projects and resettlement to affected people.

Keeping in view the poor experience so far with the functioning of the gram sabha, do we need a change in the existing panchayat raj law?

Our existing laws may not be perfect but they are very good laws. As I said earlier, what we lack is the political will to make the best use of these laws to empower the gram sabhas.

Why Kashmir erupted in June

Civil Society News
New Delhi

FROM June last year the Kashmir Valley became a battleground as protestors clashed with the security forces. There were smoky images of young stone-throwers taking on armed but nervous security personnel. Kashmir entered a cycle of violence in which 120 deaths were officially reported.

An independent fact-finding mission consisting of Bela Bhatia, Ravi Hemadri, Sukumar Muralidharan and Vrinda Grover went to Kashmir at the end of October 2010 to find out why so many people died in this mass agitation. Their report published at the initiative of The Other Media and titled, *Four months the Kashmir Valley will never forget*, was released in New Delhi.

The four investigators met the families of 40 of those who were killed or grievously injured by the security forces during this agitation. They have reconstructed in detail the events and aftermath of nearly each tragedy. The investigators visited villages and towns in five districts of Kashmir – Baramulla, Anantnag, Pulwama, Badgam and Srinagar. Their objectives were to understand the genesis of the protests, why youngsters took to stone-throwing, the strategy of the security forces in controlling the protests and its repercussions.

Their report says there were early signs of an incipient agitation gaining ground in 2008-2009 during the protest over transfer of land for the Amarnath yatra and the Shopian murders. But no 'healing touch' was offered.

The agitation, which lasted four months, was sparked by the cold-blooded murder of three civilians in Machil in April 2010 and the killing of Tufail Mattoo in June by the security forces. Youth took to the streets in protest with the only

weapon they had – stones. The *sangbaaz* or stone-pelter was born. The movement was given direction by the Hurriyat leader, Syed Ali Shah Geelani's protest calendar.

At Logripora village, Sopore, two young men, one of them a carpenter, were killed by the CRPF in a shootout. They were merely travelling to the neighbouring town of Bomai. The firing was unprovoked, there was no stone-pelting. Then even the funeral procession was fired upon,



resulting in 20 injuries. The FIR took seven days to be registered. There is no word of compensation. But most families don't want 'blood money'. They want justice.

The pattern repeats itself. Tajamul, a Class 10 student, gets shot during a protest. A Class 9 boy goes to collect his cow and is picked up. Young Yasir Rafiq, quietly watching a game of caroms, is hit by a volley of pellets and dies. Mubina Akhter, 21, is chatting with three friends one evening after a protest and is hit by a CRPF bullet and dies. Eight-year-old Samir is killed while playing in the

back alley of his home. Mudassar Bashir Kachru, 20, a software engineer and star footballer, is the first victim to be killed by pellet guns fired by the CRPF. And the Tufail Mattoo tragedy became the tipping point.

What is equally horrifying is that hospitals, ambulances and doctors have been attacked by the security forces. On July 30, 2010, the CRPF entered Pattan Hospital in Baramulla district, breaking doors and windows, destroying medical equipment and threatening a senior surgeon. Getting the injured to hospital is difficult as roads are blocked, curfew imposed. Ambulance drivers are beaten up.

There are a large number of youngsters who have been grievously injured by the security forces but there is no compensation for them. Khushal Mattoo in Sopore district is one such place. It is a working class neighbourhood where so many have been injured that the investigators found it difficult to record each one's testimony.

What emerges from the report is that the security forces have unbridled power. The political leadership's authority does not extend to the Army. Confronted with even a small protest, the jumpy security forces use maximum force and random fire.

The security forces use of 'non-lethal weapons' is very lethal. Young Kashmiris have lost their eyes and their lives. As one doctor noted, pellets fired at close range lodge in vital organs and cause death – probably more devastating than bullet injuries.

The people are tired of their loved ones, their precious children, being killed or tortured by the security forces on mere suspicion or for some petty reason. Adults now help each other. So if a child is picked up by the security forces, the entire village gets together to protest. This is why funerals are being attended by so many. It's a form of solidarity, an emotional outpouring of people raging against the security forces.

SAMITA' S WORLD

by SAMITA RATHOR



Panchayats unite against Monsanto



Panchayat representatives condemning the Rajasthan government's MoUs with multinationals

Bharat Dogra and Reena Mehta
Jaipur

ON 8 April, panchayat representatives and social activists from various parts of Rajasthan gathered in Jaipur to discuss the dire ramifications of several Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) which have been signed by the state government of Rajasthan with a clutch of multinational and other big agribusiness and biotechnology companies.

Such agreements in the crucial area of seeds and farm research can greatly increase the control and influence of these companies over the agriculture sector in India's biggest state.

This conference of panchayat leaders, social activists and organizations of small farmers was organized by the Association of Local Governance in India (ALGI) and Rajasthan Samagra Seva Sangh (RSSS). ALGI has been working for strengthening Panchayat Raj at the national level. RSSS is a leading Gandhian organization in Rajasthan.

Several speakers expressed grave apprehensions that the collusion of public sector farm research establishments with giant multinationals like Monsanto will be destructive for agriculture and the environment. The easy access being given to the government's farm research facilities and agriculture universities can in the near future prove to be detrimental when clearances start being given to such companies for their seeds at a

national level. As a result of the influence gained by these agreements it will be possible for companies like Monsanto to spread genetically modified (GM) crops much more rapidly. In the short term, scarce government funds will be diverted from essential areas to benefit these companies.

A careful perusal of these agreements justifies the fears of farmers, social activists and panchayat leaders. For example, the MoU for Public-Private-Partnership between the Rajasthan government, Monsanto India Limited and Monsanto Holdings Private Limited says, "The Government of Rajasthan will make available land and facilities, wherever feasible, for Monsanto to undertake proposed activities on terms and conditions to be specifically agreed upon for every location/site. Monsanto will be helped in the establishment of infrastructure towards the fulfillment of the collaboration objectives, through access to relevant capital subsidy and other schemes of the Government of Rajasthan."

In addition this document provides for wider policy changes. This document says: "the Government of Rajasthan will help create an appropriate package of policies, rules and incentives to attract the necessary investments from private sector players."

At least people should have been informed. Such an agreement with its wide-ranging impact on public interest should have been widely debated at all levels. But amazingly this agreement is

based on high levels of secrecy. The document signed by the Rajasthan government with Monsanto goes on to say: "The contents of this MoU shall be kept confidential and the parties shall not make, use, disclose or disseminate, or in any way share any Confidential Information to any person without the prior written consent of the other party."

In other words, before the Rajasthan government gives information about this agreement to the people, it has to take the "prior written consent" of Monsanto!

Another important concern is that while the Rajasthan government has always expressed its commitment to panchayat raj and the transfer of important subjects like agriculture to panchayats, such agreements make a complete mockery of rural decentralisation and in fact intensify the process of over-centralisation.

Shankar Singh, senior activist of the Mazdoor Kissan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) said that the way in which decisions on these agreements had been taken shows how rural decentralization has been reduced to a farce. A decision which impacts the lives and livelihoods of villagers and farmers very deeply was taken without any discussion or approval of any gram sabha, panchayat or farmers' organization.

Several sarpanches (mostly women) told the conference that they will be taking up the issue of these agreements in gram sabhas and panchayat meetings. They hoped that resolutions against these gram sabhas would be passed in their panchayats. Activists Bhagwan of the Kisan Seva Samiti and Alok Vyas said that in the villages where they work, several panchayats had already passed resolutions against these agreements and these are in the process of being forwarded.

Sawai Singh, coordinator of the Rajasthan Samagra Seva Sangh, said that due to protests against these agreements the government had informed them that these agreements are being 'put on hold' or 'frozen' till all the involved issues are closely examined. However activist Virendra Vidrohi from Alwar said that once MoUs have been signed by both parties, then 'freezing' them has no meaning till these are actually cancelled. Virendra said there is evidence that behind the façade of a freeze the agenda of these agreements is actually being pushed ahead. Renuka Pamecha, chairperson of Vividha, said that as these agreements are fundamentally flawed, tinkering makes no sense. These agreements need to be fully cancelled.

The conference was attended by 112 panchayat leaders, mostly women, social activists and farmers' leaders. It adopted a unanimous resolution that these seven agreements with Monsanto and other agribusiness companies should be cancelled as early as possible. The resolution also demanded that panchayats, gram sabhas, ward sabhas and farmers' organization should be fully informed about any agreements which impact rural life and livelihoods much in advance and their views should be obtained before any decision is taken. This resolution called upon the government to implement rural decentralization and transparency in the right spirit. Finally, the resolution demanded that in these times of climate change the budget allocation for helping farmers to adopt environment friendly and organic methods should be increased in a big way.

Herbal fair, big draw

Biswajit Padhi
Bhubaneswar

RAMESWAR Dhangada Majhi, a tribal from Rayagada district in Orissa, is the cynosure of all eyes. Four days of fame have boosted his confidence. Sitting in his small stall at the Kalinga Herbal Fair in Bhubaneswar he examines the *nadi* (pulse) of his patients with great zeal before prescribing herbal medicines.

"It has been an exhilarating experience," he says happily. "I have been in our family profession nearly 11 years after my father's death. This is the perfect place for me. Our knowledge, perfected over centuries, is being respected."

The five day Kalinga Herbal Fair offered a wide range of products and services this time. For the first time it attracted over 100 vaidyas and traditional healers. Also present were associations of herbal growers, government officials and representatives from the herbal industry.

"We are trying to find space for herbal products in every household and in the heart of each citizen in this country," said Prafulla Kumar Mallick, the young and energetic Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Orissa's Medicinal Plant Board. "We are also working on conservation and propagation."

The fair attracted huge crowds. "My mother has been having chronic joint pain. We had exhausted all allopathic options. I came here on the first day. The oil given to me by the vaidya has produced instant results so I brought my neighbour along today," said Jasaswini Mahapatra, a visitor.

"People are once again placing their faith in herbal products," said Rambakta Mishra, a traditional practitioner who occupied eight stalls with his group. He explained that they were all practitioners of *Parbati Banosodhi*, a line of traditional medicine. Mishra, who was a lecturer in history, is popularly known as doctor sahib in his home town, Bolangir. *Parbati Banosodhi* is now a movement in Bolangir and Sonepur districts of Orissa

due to its widespread use.

"I stumbled upon a set of palm leaf manuscripts while doing my research on the Mahima cult in Birmaharajpur area of Sonepur district," said Mishra. "The manuscripts had detailed remedies for common and chronic ailments which got me interested. I decided to propound this school of thought and further Ayurvedic medicine."

There were vaidyas who were practicing their brand of medicine with the sole objective of preserving the traditional knowledge of their forefathers. "There have been fewer takers to our system with the advent of modern medicine,"

The five day Kalinga Herbal Fair offered a wide range of products and services this time. For the first time it attracted over 100 vaidyas and traditional healers.

lamented Baba Ashok Das, "but we continue to practice it all the same since we have deep interest in it."

The fair was a perfect meeting ground for associations of traditional practitioners and herbal growers to build alliances. "We need to come together to bargain for concessions and better policies," said Geetanjali Mohanty, president of the Orissa Agro Herbal Growers Association. "Orissa needs infrastructure to support trading of medicinal plants. We are hopeful the board will create it through convergence of government programmes in different departments."

Pabitra Pradhan of the Dhanantwari Vaidya Sangha said their demand was for traditional knowledge to be documented and researched.

Much more collaboration was required between primary collectors of medicinal plants and companies, she said.

Knowledge about the uses of herbal plants was freely available at the fair. Ashok Mohanty, a forest officer managing one such stall, explained that people could get instant relief from toothache by applying the flower of the *Akarakara* (*Spilanthes acmella*) to the spot. The leaves of *Patargaja* (*Kalanchoe pinata*) gave relief from flatulence, diarrhoea and other stomach ailments, he said. "The beauty of these plants is that you can keep them in your drawing room," Mohanty told his small audience.

Herbal juices were a big draw. Junaita Hembram, a tribal lady from Bangriposi in Mayurbhanj district of Orissa, said she sold hundreds of bottles of juice everyday. "The evenings have been really taxing," she admitted happily.

There were crowds thronging her stall. "The mint, honey and ginger juice has been the best out of all six," proclaimed Bilasini Dewangan, a customer. Juaniata was selling juices of *amla*, lemon, *bel* and mint. The fair promoted her business. "We have had inquiries from seven interested parties," she said.

Best Engineering, a company from Andhra Pradesh, received several orders for their machines which process herbal plants. Since Orissa does not manufacture such machines, these were much in demand. The wellness centres propagating Ayurvedic massage therapies also wooed many clients. They lowered their rates to attract customers. There were also conferences on the sidelines which brought stakeholders together.

Orissa is a treasure trove of medicinal herbs and traditional knowledge. It is about time the state government recognized this as an opportunity. The herbal industry can provide livelihoods to millions, increase tourism and make Orissa a flourishing green state. Orissa must take a leaf from Kerala.

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Kashmir's top farmers

BILAL BAHADUR



Dr Gazalla Amin receiving the award from Chief Minister Omar Abdullah. She grows medicinal plants

Jehangir Rashid
Srinagar

Dr Gazalla Amin and Abdul Ahad Mir are the first winners of an award for progressive farming in Jammu and Kashmir, constituted by the agriculture department of the state. Chief Minister Omar Abdullah gave away the awards at a glittering function attended by ministers and top ranking officials.

Dr Gazalla Amin studied medicine. But instead of becoming a doctor she decided to become a farmer. She says she was always fascinated by medicinal plants and their uses. It was this passion which drove her to become a farmer.

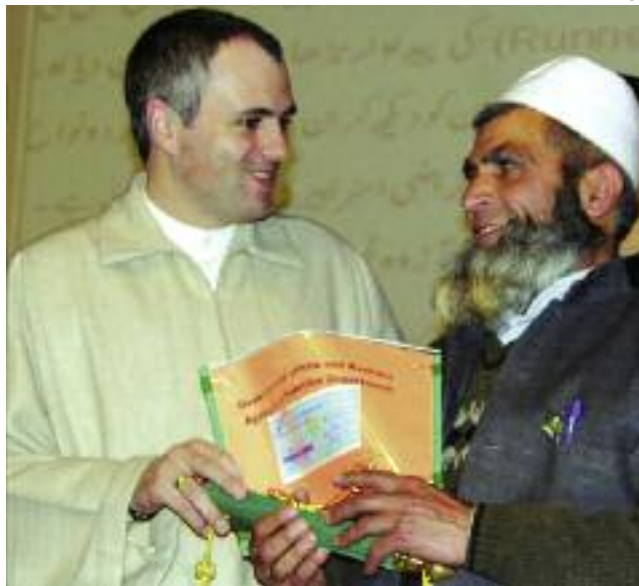
"I am delighted to receive this award. It is an honour. This shows that perseverance, dedication and commitment towards your profession pays. Today is a day of recognition and I am elated," said Dr. Gazalla

Dr Gazalla started cultivation of lavender on one hectare at her home in Asham-Sumbal in Bandipora district. Today, she has extended lavender cultivation to three hectares and she now runs her own aromatic oil distillation plant.

"I started cultivation of aromatic and medicinal plants by collaborating with the Regional Research Laboratory (RRL) under a public-private-partnership agreement. I am producing pure aroma and marketing premium rose water, lavender oil and geranium oil," said Dr. Gazalla.

The young medico has become a household name in medicinal plants and an inspiration for other girls.

Abdul Ahad Mir is popularly known as Kashmir's 'strawberry man.' He was the first to



Abdul Ahad Mir, right, Kashmir's strawberry farmer

Dr Gazalla Amin studied medicine. But instead of becoming a doctor she decided to become a farmer. She says she was always fascinated by medicinal plants and their uses.

begin cultivation of strawberries on his land in Gasoo village in the outskirts of Srinagar city. He began planting the fruit on one *kanal* of land and subsequently extended it to 10 *kanals*. This elderly farmer successfully motivated other farmers in his area to take up strawberry cultivation, helping them with advice. Today, Gasso is known as Kashmir's 'strawberry village.'

"It has been a long journey," he reminisced. "I thank the Almighty that my efforts have born fruit. I would like to cherish this moment forever. I am elated."

Mir is now trying to organize strawberry farmers in his village into a cooperative of growers and suppliers. "I earn ₹60,000 to ₹70,000 per annum per *kanal* from strawberry production. I am happy that more people in my area are willing to take up strawberry farming. God willing we may come up with a cooperative of strawberry growers and suppliers. We will produce the strawberries and then supply them to different areas of the country. I will then believe that I have done some social service," said Mir.

This strawberry farmer has already won laurels for Jammu and Kashmir by winning a national award in 2009 for being one of the most progressive farmers in the country.

The state award has added yet another feather to his cap.

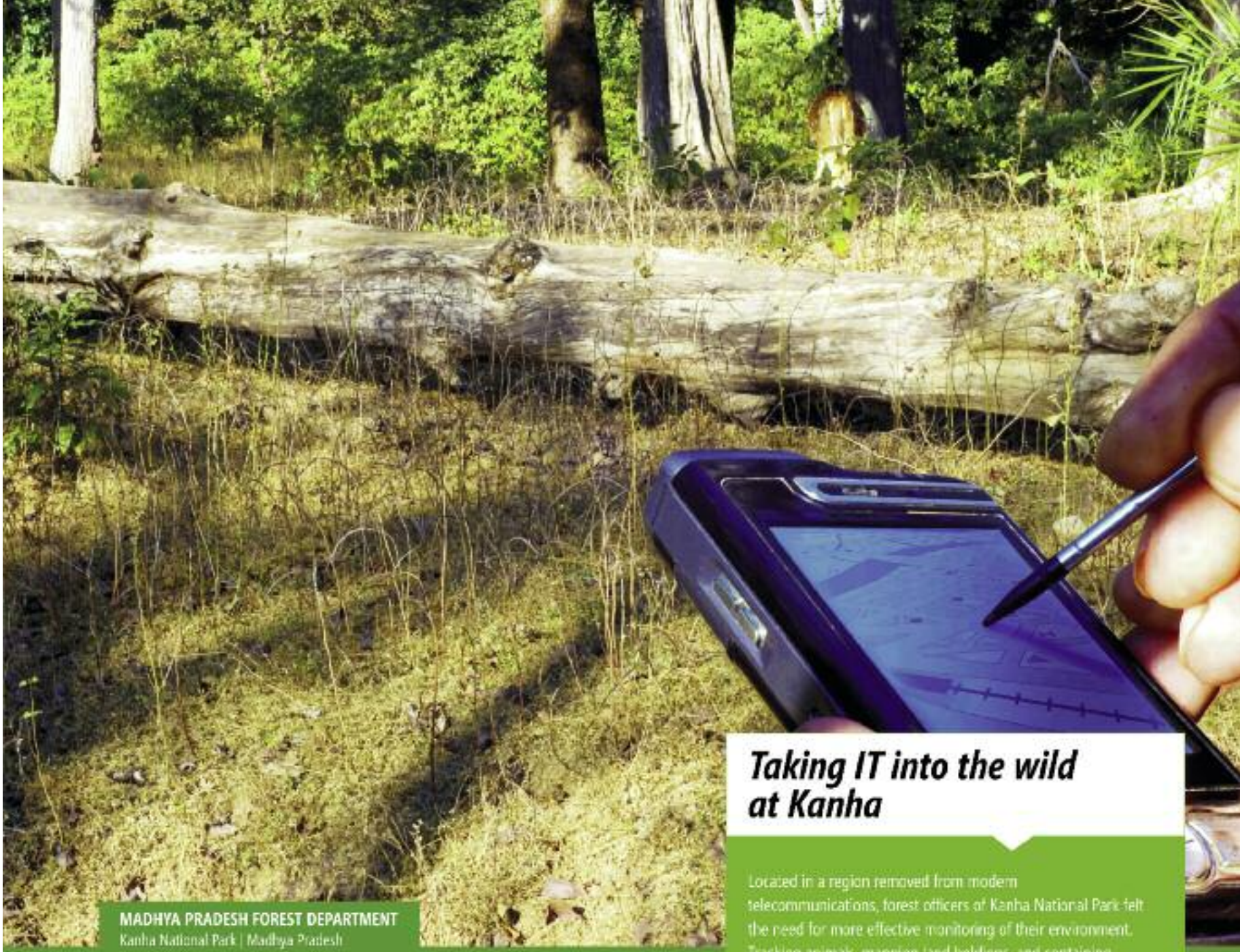
Dr. Gazalla says she too is keen to focus on cooperative farming. She has already organized a cooperative of 30 members. They do different jobs in the fields where medicinal plants are being cultivated.

"I want to go beyond medicinal plants and focus on horticulture crops as well. It is important for people to look beyond government jobs. They should set up their own business

units. Women should take up this challenge and start businesses of their own," she says.

Ahad says he took up strawberry cultivation with great skepticism. "The horticulture department motivated me," he says. "They also provided me technical and financial assistance. Thanks to the Almighty, strawberry cultivation has enhanced my economic status. I have been able to improve my family's income. All this goes to the credit of the horticulture department as they guided me on the right path," said Kashmir's 'strawberry man.'

During the function, 130 progressive farmers were felicitated with district awards and block awards. Seventeen progressive farmers from Leh district, Ladakh, were similarly honoured with awards.



MADHYA PRADESH FOREST DEPARTMENT
Kanha National Park | Madhya Pradesh

Taking IT into the wild at Kanha

Located in a region removed from modern telecommunications, forest officers of Kanha National Park felt the need for more effective monitoring of their environment. Tracking animals, mapping land holdings, and containing forest fires – this unpredictable ecosystem posed a real challenge.

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LOKPAL IN A

IS AN INSTANT SUPERMAN REALLY THE ANSWER TO CORRUPTION?

Civil Society News
New Delhi

A high-voltage campaign to draft in record time a major anti-corruption law for India won concessions from the government in the street, but thereafter its leaders found the going much tougher.

As a committee representing the agitation, known as India Against Corruption, held its first meeting with the government, political interests unleashed a smear campaign against two of its members, thereby seeking to shift attention from the core issue of corruption in high places.

At another level, well-meaning people advised a reality check for the campaign, expressing concern that an important law drafted in haste without sufficient consultation would do little to root out corruption in real terms.

The allegations against Shanti Bhushan and Prashant Bhushan, father and son and both members of the five-member drafting committee, were clearly motivated and timed with the formation of the committee.

Prashant Bhushan has been in the forefront of a movement for judicial accountability. He has also appeared in innumerable cases of public interest. Activists rallied to his defence with Internet petitions. But there was also a view that father and son should step down from the drafting committee till their names were cleared – as would be expected of others in public life.

More worrisome than the personal angle was the demand to draft the Lokpal Bill by June-end and have it passed as law by 15 August. Could a law, which seeks to create a credible ombudsman to reign in corruption, be rushed through in this manner and then be expected to work?

A draft of the Jan Lokpal Bill presented by the campaigners had assumptions with which many authorities seemed to disagree.

It was also surprising that the demand for a Jan Lokpal Bill came to be raised in this shape and form through a public agitation when it was already being discussed in the National Advisory Council (NAC) chaired by Sonia Gandhi and the National Campaign for People's Right to Information (NCPRI).

Prashant Bhushan, Shanti Bhushan and Arvind Kejriwal, a key organiser of the India Against Corruption campaign, were part of this process. But they made no mention of the work already done in the NCPRI and NAC.

Instead, at the Jantar Mantar protests in Delhi, where Anna Hazare, the 73-year-old Gandhian from Maharashtra, went on hunger-strike, the draft Jan Lokpal Bill was used to whip the Congress and the Manmohan Singh Government.

Absent at Jantar Mantar were many of the leading members of the NCPRI like Aruna Roy, Harsh Mander, Shekhar Singh and Nikhil Dey.

The NCPRI made it clear that it would continue with its own work on drafting a Jan Lokpal Bill. The members of the committee appointed by Hazare to deliberate with the government were welcome to participate in the NCPRI's process. But the NCPRI would not define itself in terms of the committee appointed by Anna Hazare.



Anna Hazare in a pensive mood during his fast at Jantar Mantar

A law providing a strong Lokpal is many years overdue. A group of ministers in the Manmohan Singh government framed a wishy-washy draft law that no one was happy with. The NCPRI, working through the NAC, aimed to create an effective counter to the government's inadequate proposals. But time was needed to have buy-ins from competing interests and bring as many groups as possible on board. Only this would make it a 'people's exercise'.

To have a Jan Lokpal Bill at gunpoint as it were seemed counterproductive to many reasonable people. Complex legislation needed thought and debate. It required validation and an eye for detail.

Aruna Roy, a veteran of the RTI campaign, said: "India is a diverse country and we have to think out of all possible boxes, not confining ourselves to a single draft."

Former Chief Justice J.S. Verma wondered whether the draft Jan Lokpal Bill put out by India Against Corruption didn't amount to changing the basic structure of the Constitution.

Kejriwal claimed that enough consultation had taken place. But the flip-flops that the draft went through with multiple versions floating across the Internet seemed to make it apparent that viral social marketing of a complex idea is not a substitute for intense dialogue.

Several key questions needed to be addressed. For instance, should judges of the high courts and Supreme Court come under the Lokpal? Is it right to

A HURRY

LAKSHMAN ANAND

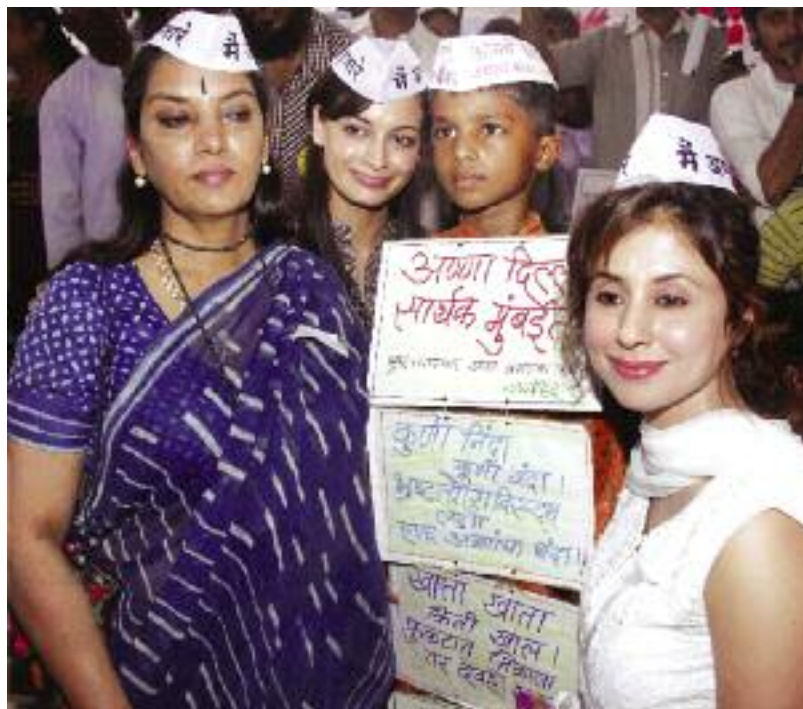
LAKSHMAN ANAND



Schoolchildren also arrived at Jantar Mantar



Anupam Kher and Pritish Nandy at Jantar Mantar



Shabana Azmi, Dia Mirza and Urmilla Matondkar at the Mumbai protest

concentrate in the Lokpal sweeping powers of investigator, prosecutor and judge at the same time? Is it feasible to bring all kinds of grievances under the Lokpal or should he be focused on major corruption and the smaller grievances be dealt with better processes in government?

There were also reservations over a self-appointed committee of five people representing the whole of Indian civil society in negotiations with the government. Could civil society be defined so narrowly?

The committee consisted of Hazare, Kejriwal, Prashant Bhushan and Shanti Bhushan and Justice Santosh Hegde, the serving Lok Ayukta in Karnataka. Should the choice have been so narrow? Should two members have been from one family? The committee had no representation from the opposition, the private sector, the bureaucracy, the serving judiciary and the investigative agencies.

PRE-LEGISLATIVE PROCESS: The past seven years have seen civil society groups build their capacity to shape laws through wide consultation at the pre-legislative stage.

Laws on the right to information, rural employment guarantee, forest peoples' rights and the right to education have all been drafted through low-key consultations with politicians, bureaucrats and others. The experience of activist groups at the grassroots has proved to be invaluable both at the time

of drafting the laws and when implementing them.

The NCPRI has played an important role in building this web of interactions and injecting people's concerns into the legislative process.

It has worked to influence the government through the NAC. It is a difficult and immensely valuable role because of the gaps that develop between the people and those they put in power.

The NCPRI includes seasoned negotiators like Roy, Singh, Dey and Mander in Delhi and many others like them across the country. Kejriwal and Prashant Bhushan have also been part of the NCPRI and made very important contributions.

It was, therefore, doubly puzzling that during the Jantar Mantar protest and while choosing the committee to interface with the government no mention was made of the NCPRI.

The answer could perhaps be found in the divergence of approach. A note issued by the NAC working group on the Lokpal Bill and the NCPRI said:

"The Lokpal Bill is a very important piece of legislation, which will need wider and more geographically spread consultations than has hitherto occurred. It is only the beginning of a discussion and debate on a seminal legis-

lation, which is the basis of people hoping to build a more ethical and accountable country. In a democratic process, discussions do not often progress in a linear trajectory, particularly if it believes in an inclusive process necessary for a mature piece of legislation.

"The only space the NAC actually provides is for discussion and debate when government begins a process of legislation with little or no participation of its people. This space, which also has its own process of functioning and its internal democratic nuances, cannot be seen in simplistic adversarial terms or as this versus that."

The past seven years have seen civil society groups build their capacity to shape laws through wide consultation at the pre-legislative stage.

LAKSHMAN ANAND



'What legitimacy

Arvind Kejriwal has been the moving force behind the India Against Corruption movement and the fast unto death undertaken by Anna Hazare at Jantar Mantar. He spoke to Civil Society on his draft for a Jan Lokpal Bill and some of the concerns expressed over how it has been put together.

Tell us about how the campaign was organised. You have used viral marketing very effectively.

We used email, fixed lines, SMS, Facebook, Twitter – we used just about everything to bring people together on the question of corruption, the Jan Lokpal Bill as the solution and Anna Hazare going on fast. This went on for two to three months.

The use of the Jantar Mantar site and extrapolation of the experience there across the nation was also very effectively done. Could you tell us a little about your strategy?

Two or three things happened. First, people are fed up with corruption. Second, we wanted a rallying point. Third, we wanted to awaken the nation against corruption. Fourth, the message was widely spread through technology. Fifth, Anna going on fast aroused the emotions of people: here was a 73-year-old man willing to die to put an end to corruption.

There has been some criticism of the choice of five persons for the committee which will discuss the bill with the government. People see the committee's appointment as arbitrary. What do you have to say?

When a committee is constituted to discuss the Jan Lokpal Bill obviously the people behind the drafting of the Bill have to be its members because they are the ones who can explain why this clause, why that provision etc.

We can't have elections for such a committee. There is no end to representation because someone feels a woman should be included and someone else that there should be a Dalit and so on.

The solution therefore was that people who drafted the bill should be in the committee with the idea that they would take all measures to ensure a huge amount of public consultation. The people in the committee have been open to public consultation in the last four months and it is on this basis that the draft has been put together. If you see the first draft and the one that we now have there is a vast difference. There have been as many as 12 versions of the bill, which shows that we have been trying our best to get as much public response as possible.

There was already a process in motion for drafting a Jan Lok Pal Bill under the NCPRI and there was a consultation in the NAC. You yourself, Prashant Bhushan and Shanti Bhushan were a part of this process. So there were a lot of people involved in drafting something called a Jan Lokpal Bill. Why weren't these people included in this committee?

What is the legitimacy that the NAC has? What is the legitimacy that the NCPRI has? Why should only these people discuss the Lokpal Bill? Why shouldn't someone in Mumbai or Bulandshahr discuss the bill? What is the legitimacy of the NAC? It is as arbitrary as anything else.

But just in terms of people drafting the bill... There would be elements in your bill which would have come from those discussions and debates...

THE NCPRI'S ROLE: As joint convener of the NCPRI, Nikhil Dey says that the NCPRI had initiated a process for sending a draft Jan Lokpal Bill to government and formulating views on a bill on whistleblowers that is in Parliament.

About three months ago there was a meeting of the NCPRI to look at the issue of whistleblowers because several people using RTI had been killed. It was then that a group was formed which would look at issues like the Lokpal and protection of whistleblowers. Kejriwal and Prashant Bhushan were in the drafting group. (See full interview on Page 25.)

The Bhushans and Kejriwal were also present at an NCPRI consultation on 3 April and a consultation of the NAC on 4 April.

Asked about this in an interview with *Civil Society* on 14 April, Kejriwal said:

do NCPRI and NAC have?’

LAKSHMAN ANAND



Arvind Kejriwal

Our Jan Lok Pal Bill has come out of discussions with many other groups over the past four months. We have had a series of discussions with lawyers, former bureaucrats, former judges, former CBI officers.

And the NCPRI consultations where people like Shekhar Singh and Aruna Roy...

They were hardly 30 people and a closed group.

But you were a part of that group....

The NCPRI consultation was a closed consultation. It was not thrown open to the public. The consultations that we had earlier were far more inclusive than the NCPRI consultation.

Okay. But till the 3 and 4 of April you were part of that consultation.

Yes.

Are you saying that it was an illegitimate consultation?

No, no. We are going everywhere.... Whoever is calling us for consultation.

But weren't you involved in that consultation as a part of the NCPRI process? Or were you external to the process?

Look I don't want to get into internal or external. Now, too, as members of this committee, we are planning to hold a huge number of consultations across the country. Our purpose is to get as many good suggestions as possible.

Suppose some people were to say that they don't accept the committee, are you open to a proliferation of consultations?

Let there be as many consultations as possible and let them all send their suggestions here.

But suppose they say they don't want to define themselves in terms of the committee because they don't agree with the committee. What happens then?

They would have to agitate against this committee.

The NCPRI has been involved in drafting RTI and other legislation. At what point of time did it lose its legitimacy in your eyes?

"What is the legitimacy that the NAC has? What is the legitimacy that the NCPRI has? Why should only these people discuss the Lokpal Bill? Why shouldn't someone in Mumbai or Bulandshahr discuss the bill? What is the legitimacy of the NAC? It is as arbitrary as anything else." (See full interview above.)

But two days later, on the evening of 16 April, an email received by this magazine from India Against Corruption said: "A number of valuable suggestions had come to us, especially during the NAC sub-committee and the NCPRI meeting on 3 and 4 April, which have now been incorporated in the latest version (2.2). However, we are still in the process of evolution, and the Bill would undergo further changes as and when we receive more suggestions."

Dey says that when Kejriwal presented a draft to the NCPRI on 3 April, "a

The NCPRI is just one among many groups.

And you feel you want to do this not as a part of the NCPRI but as a separate movement.

Why should everything be a part of the NCPRI?

No, I'm just asking...

Why should everything be a part of the NCPRI?

Okay. So, what you are saying is that it need not.

All laws need not be drafted through the NCPRI and the NAC.

There is a view that to draft a law on the back of a surge is not a wise thing. What do you have to say?

I don't agree with that. This is a law which is less technical and more of a political battle. It has been pending in Parliament for the past 42 years. It is not as though the demand for a Lokpal Bill has been raised only by us. The demand for anti-corruption measures has been very strong in this country. The reason that it hasn't happened so far is that there has been a direct conflict of interest between the people who have to draft the anti-corruption law and those who are affected by it. Therefore it has to happen on the back of a surge.

Your draft, as you yourself say, is just four months old.

How much time do you think is needed?

It is difficult to say. The draft needs to be thought through and then there is Parliament.

So, you are saying there shouldn't be a deadline.

No. A time limit is perhaps a good thing. But people are worried that we have swung to the other extreme.

Do you know how long it took to draft the RTI Act? It took just two days.

But a lot of consultation preceded that.

What went into it was the functioning of RTI in the country. (As far as the Jan Lok Pal Bill is concerned) there has been a lot of experience with regard to the functioning of the CVC, the Lok Ayukta, the CBI. Three years ago, on the basis of this experience, we filed an affidavit in the Supreme Court. As far as we are concerned the process has been going on for the past three or four years. It is possible to sit down and plug the loopholes in a very short time.

But what if there is more than one view on how the loopholes should be plugged?

In the NCPRI in two days of discussion we narrowed our differences down to just two issues.

So what you are saying is that the sooner we get down to this and get over with it the better?

And it has to happen on the back of a movement. Otherwise we will get a very weak anti-corruption law.

set of principles was looked at to see how much broad agreement existed." It was found that on a couple of principles there was disagreement.

"There were others on which it was acknowledged that a lot of work needed to be done. It was very much a work in progress," he says.

The two points on which there was disagreement were on transparency and how grievances should be redressed. To burden the Lokpal with all kinds of grievances would bring the system to halt. A bottom-up approach would perhaps be better, it was pointed out.

On transparency it was felt that Section 8 of the RTI Act should remain the basis. But Kejriwal and Shanti Bhushan wanted all information collected by investigative agencies to be put in the public domain even if it had nothing

LAKSHMAN ANAND



'When you make your demands forcefully you can win concessions,' cautions Nikhil Dey. But there is no substitute for consultation – both with the government and people's groups.

to do with the case.

"When you are running a movement and you make your demands forcefully you can win your concessions," cautions Dey. But there is no substitute for consultation – both with the government and people's groups. It is important to get everyone's experience on board and allow all objections to be made at the time of drafting the law. That way everyone knows where they stand.

Kejriwal insists his group has held consultations. He says there has also been much learning from the working of the Chief Vigilance Commissioner (CVC), CBI, judiciary and Lok Ayuktas in the states.

Dey points out that it is not a question of consulting one, 10 or 15 people. "Instead it is to draw upon the experience that exists across the country. The capacity all of us have to enter into open debate needs to be brought on board. One of the demands by the NCPRI has been to have a very robust pre-legislative process."

About the 15 August deadline set by Hazare, Dey argues that there is need for urgency, but "you can't shortchange the consultative process." Passing a law is one thing and implementing it quite another. This has been the experience with RTI and NREGA. "The law was opening doors. But people had to walk the path. This is going to be the case even more so with the Lokpal Bill," he explains.

Harivansh, Chief Editor of *Prabhat Khabar*, based in Ranchi, agrees. He has vast experience in exposing corruption. The stories on Laloo Prasad Yadav and Madhu Koda, among a whole lot of others, were broken in *Prabhat Khabar*. "A law is a serious matter and requires everyone to buy in. Nothing changes overnight," says Harivansh.

"It is utopian to think that you can bring lasting change without going through the State. It is essential to engage with the political class."

FED UP WITH CORRUPTION: For more than two years now, India has experienced a deluge of corruption. First there were the huge sums that flowed into IPL cricket and out of it. Then there came the inflated bills for the Commonwealth Games. Next were the manipulations involving spectrum for 2 G services in mobile telephony. Finally, there was the appointment of a Chief Vigilance Commissioner (CVC) who had charges pending against him.

Such was the grime and filth from this concentrated downpour that when India Against Corruption, based at Kejriwal's Ghaziabad apartment, reached out four months ago, the middle-class was eager to support it.

People had many reasons to be angry. They were tormented by inflation, couldn't get their children into schools, worried by the rising cost of health care, harassed by crumbling civic services in cities, disgusted with traffic jams and much else.

Corruption came on top of all these problems. It didn't help that the government, instead of confronting corruption head-on, chose to act at its own pace. An impression gained ground that a nexus between bureaucrats and politicians had crossed all limits. In India Against Corruption the middle-class found a medium through which they could target politicians and bureaucrats. Rallies in several cities were well-attended.

But what everyone really wanted was a SUPERMAN to set everything right instantly. Eager to fulfil this middle-class yearning, India Against Corruption conjured up one such superman in the shape of an exaggeratedly empowered Lokpal who could bring to book judges, politicians and government officers.

This Lokpal, with extraordinary authority, would not only deal with big ticket corruption, but also ensure that people got their ration cards, passports and driving licences without paying bribes to government officials.

A Lokpal literally means a people's ombudsman. India Against Corruption began cobbling together its own draft of the Jan Lokpal Bill or a people's draft of a law for having a people's ombudsman. Using SMS, email, Twitter and Facebook it gave the impression that a law could be shaped through interactive media and rapid-fire consultations.

A Jan Lokpal Bill draft was shaped by Kejriwal, Hegde, and Prashant Bhushan. It had the support

of Anna Hazare, J.M. Lyngdoh, Kiran Bedi, Shanti Bhushan and others.

When letters to the Prime Minister's Office and to Sonia Gandhi to discuss the draft went unanswered, it was decided that Anna Hazare would go on a hunger-strike to force the government's hand.

Anna is dreaded by politicians for his hunger-strikes and strong-arm measures. A simple, well-meaning man, Anna once worked for the Army. He became famous 25 years ago when he created an ecological model for his village, Ralegan Siddhi, taking it from poverty to economic prosperity. Over the years he has been more famous for fighting corruption in Maharashtra.

Anna went on his fast on 5 April, demanding that the government finalise a draft Lokpal Bill very quickly and pass a law by 15 August.

Concerned about its image and Anna's health, the government blinked and conceded Anna's demands. But in the chaos that has followed it remains to be seen whether middle-class India is any closer to having its superman.

JANTAR MANTAR: Anna's presence at Jantar Mantar was rapidly used to become a rallying point. There were campaign trappings such as white caps with 'I am Anna Hazare' written on them. There were also carefully chosen slogans, banners and flags.

Sri Sri Ravi Shankar and Baba Ramdev have been part of the India Against Corruption movement. They ensured that their supporters turned out in substantial numbers. The BJP's front organisations among students and workers also marked their presence. Ex-servicemen provided solid support.

With a core crowd guaranteed and television channels eager to get middle-class eyeballs, it became easy to stir up what seemed on TV and Internet like an uprising but was in reality people randomly expressing themselves against corruption.

Anna rapidly became an icon swathed in glowing accounts of his social activism. Everyone wanted a piece of the action and film stars turned up in droves.

Finally, Anna dropped his bombshell about Narendra Modi being a good chief minister. He was roundly attacked for this by the National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM) and intellectuals and activists in a statement issued by Teesta Setalvad.

There could be two views on rural development in Gujarat under Modi, but what worried many was how Anna hadn't noticed that the Lokpal's post had been vacant in Gujarat since 2005.

As the scaffolding was dismantled at Jantar Mantar and Anna's committee contended with issues of credibility, no one was any clearer what the Lokpal Bill would finally contain.

‘ DEADLINE FOR LOKPAL CANNOT BE AT THE COST OF CONSULTATION ’

Nikhil Dey is the low-profile joint convener of the National Campaign for the People's Right to Information (NCPRI). As a member of the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS), he has worked extensively at the grassroots for the implementation of the RTI Act and the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA). Excerpts from an extensive interview:

The NCPRI had a process in place for drafting a Jan Lok Pal Bill. This was a part of a larger process under the NAC. Consultations were held in which Arvind Kejriwal, Prashant Bhushan and Shanti Bhushan were involved. At which point did that process stop and this new draft of the Jan Lokpal Bill emerge?

About three months ago there was a meeting of the NCPRI at which we were looking with a fair amount of concern at the whistleblowers issue because several people had been killed while using RTI.

At that time a group was formed that would formulate a more comprehensive draft bill which would look at issues like the Lokpal and protection of whistleblowers. Arvind Kejriwal and Prashant Bhushan were in the drafting group along with others and I was also supposed to look in and see what was happening.

Arvind, independently, and may be also as a part of that process, went around to many other groups and that draft kept getting changed. Finally, I am not in a position to say whether it could have been called an NCPRI draft.

So, then, the draft that we are now seeing...

We have not during the current agitation put out a draft saying that this is the draft that we want adopted.

Arvind's draft was discussed at the NCPRI meeting on 3 April. Actually, a set of principles was looked at to see how much broad agreement existed. A couple of them were identified as being principles on which there was disagreement. There were others on which it was acknowledged that a lot of work needed to be done. It was very much work in progress.

There was also an NAC consultation?

It was the next day. The issues which came out at the NCPRI meeting were presented. Arvind, Prashant and Shanti Bhushan were present. They were present at both the NCPRI meeting and the NAC consultation. The two areas of disagreement which emerged at the NCPRI meeting remained.

What were those two areas?

The first was the inclusion of grievance redressal within the ambit of the Lokpal Bill. One view felt it was very necessary because it is difficult to separate grievances from corruption.

The other view was that if you take ordinary grievances which have no connection with corruption then you will overburden the system with the result that you will neither be able to get grievances redressed nor fight corruption. I believe that you have to deal with grievances bottom up. What we have is very much a top-down approach. It starts with the Lokpal and Lok Ayutka at the top and there is the hope that under their supervision the overall vigilance structure will be tighter.

On grievances, to my mind, you have to start with that individual who doesn't get a job card or ration card or wages under NREGA. How do their grievances travel up, let alone be heard and addressed?

Are you saying that the Lokpal should be for larger corruption and for every-day problems better processes are needed in government?

And those need to be strengthened but through a separate legislative design and structure or a separate administrative design and structure,

whatever it might be.

What was the second point of disagreement?

The second point was on transparency. There was a general agreement that the RTI Act would provide the minimum basis for transparency. Now Arvind and Shanti Bhushan believed that Section 8 of the RTI Act is too liberal and allows too much to be withheld. Therefore, they felt that at the point when the chargesheet is filed by the investigating agency everything except two areas – national security and the protection of whistleblowers – should be put up on the website. Many people believe that investigating agencies have extraordinary powers to go into people's lives, tap telephones and so on. They get hold of a lot of material which may have nothing to do with the corruption case.

The idea of RTI is for people to get information on government. Here the government is getting information about people and making it public.

You have been involved with framing at least two pieces of national legislation. What does such consultation involve?

The Right to Information Act was extremely fortunate to have gone through years of work

before anyone in government thought that this is something which must be legislated on. It became legislation in 10 states before it became national legislation. In each state it got tested and debated and each state had different experiences. The richness of that debate existed.

The first Freedom of Information Bill passed by the BJP-led NDA government at the Centre was condemned all around because everyone knew which were the specific provisions which were a problem. That is why when the draft legislation went to the NAC there was consensus on it.

And in the case of the NREGA also there had been a lot of consultation. So it was clear what people wanted, what they didn't want and finally what came in the NREGA was 100 days of employment though the campaign position was 365 days. The campaign demand was 'per individual', but in the law it was 'per household'. But everyone knew. It was very clear.

So the process is critical to the workability of the law.

Absolutely. When we say that we need civil society participation, the idea is not to talk to one, two, 10 or 15. Instead it is to draw upon the experience that exists across the country. The capacity all of us have to enter into open debate needs to be brought on board. One of the demands by the NCPRI has been to have a very robust pre-legislative process.

A committee of five people representing all of civil society and all of India. Do you have a view on this?

For us the priority has been two-fold: One is how broadly can we mandate the consultative process? It doesn't mean just asking, but also finding ways to take those views on board. Secondly, where there are essential principles of the law, to try and negotiate those with the government. When you are running a movement and you make your demands forcefully you can win your concessions, but finally a law has to be implemented.

So your focus is not the committee but the process.

Yes and we would now urge the committee to ensure that the consultative process is as wide as possible.

But you have a deadline of 15 August?

There is a need to act urgently. But you can't shortchange the consultative process.



Nikhil Dey

LAKSHMAN ANAND



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.

She looked around, until she found a Zed Home.



130 luxury green villas spread over 20 acres. From 2727-4000 sq. ft. On Doddaballapur Road. Forty minutes from MG Road, Bangalore. 20 minutes from the international airport.



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- 24/7 water supply without BWSSB connections.
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6 awards, from 5 nations, in 3 years so far.

Insights

- Opinion
- Analysis
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- Ideas
- Angst

Retail corruption has a cure

V. RAVICHANDAR

CORRUPTION rules our lives these days. One cannot miss the stench in the air arising from scam territory be it the CWG, 2G, Mumbai's Adarsh building, Karnataka's land and mining deals or the Cash for Votes scandal. You don't get a respite from the spate of stories in the newspapers, magazines, TV and online media. And of late there have been veiled references to a need for our version of Tahrir Square by arousing urban citizens through online petitions, missed call recordings and even organising a second Dandi March that has its origins in NRIs in the US.

For all our huffing and puffing about corruption and scams, it shows no signs of going away. This, if anything, is going to increase going forward given the expected near double digit growth rate in our GDP. It will entice more of our politico-bureaucratic class to find new ways to get away sans detection. This columnist's case is that while wholesale corruption (mega scams at a centralised level) is inevitable (even developed countries have corruption in the form of the pernicious lobbying system) it is retail level corruption that the *aam aadmi* faces at every government-citizen interface on a regular basis that can and needs to be eradicated. One does not endorse whole level corruption but unless we find innovative, legal ways to reform election financing and put more folks away as 'state guests' this trend unfortunately is here to stay.

But we can do something about addressing retail level corruption. I have some personal experience in the area of property tax reform that has made a difference at ground level. The year was 2000 when the Bangalore Agenda Task Force (BATF) was formed. As a member I was tasked with finding ways to improve the City Corporation's revenues. Being a novice on city matters and a market researcher by training, one went into all proposed solutions by experts to fix this issue – the Self Assessment Scheme (SAS) stood out as a potential way forward for property tax reform.

At that time, property tax was fixed arbitrarily by the revenue inspectors based on opaque guidelines related to use of material, perceived cost of construction, locality, etc. This led to 'rent seeking' behaviour by the property tax inspectors whereby



LAKSHMAN ANAND

The India Against Corruption movement in Delhi

they computed pretty high tax rates payable by the owner and offered to reduce the amount payable to the Corporation if they were suitably compensated by the owners (normally 30 to 40 per cent of 'savings' over a five-year period). Needless to add, these one-to-one understandings were common and Corporation revenue consequently suffered.

Around 2000, there was a Supreme Court judgement in a Patna case that recognised self-assessment schemes on Area Rental values. Using that opening we designed a citizen friendly scheme that had a few key characteristics – for starters, we would trust the citizen to state the truth instead of depending on the tax inspector to protect the Corporation's interests. And to ensure the citizen stayed honest, a five per cent random scrutiny of returns with associated penalties was provisioned. Secondly, for citizens to easily file their returns we planned a simple self assessment form whereby the rates per square feet and applicable depreciation was available for citizens to compute based on their locality, type of property, built-up area and year of construction. Further, anticipating a legal

challenge we made SAS an optional scheme – a citizen could file their own returns or do business with the inspector as usual.

To cut a long story short, the self assessed property tax scheme succeeded beyond our wildest dreams. Tax revenues in 2000-01 jumped about 40 per cent and over a decade, property tax revenues have gone up over ten times (over ₹1000 crores currently) which is way beyond any increase explainable by growth in building activity. The moral – have a simplified scheme and trust the citizen to maximize returns to the government. Given that the tax inspectors were removed from the equation, the scheme essentially aggregated the money that leaked from the system to come into the Corporation's coffers. Our back of the envelope calculations estimated that in 2000, at least ₹25 crores (would be over ₹100 crores per year currently) of bribe amounts were sucked away from the corruption economy.

The tale gets interesting and shows that eternal vigilance is needed to protect the hard fought gains

Continued on page 29

What Bihar's women want

RAJIV KUMAR

BIHAR seems to be shaking off its yoke of extreme backwardness and poor development indicators which have defined the state, indeed the region, for decades. The second term of the JD(U) government under Nitish Kumar has been widely perceived as a vote for development as opposed to caste. Bihar's chief minister has taken laudable steps like building infrastructure, especially roads, expanding the education system and addressing the special needs of the 'Mahadalits.' He has cracked down on anti-social criminal elements and created an environment to 'make every Bihari proud.'

Behind the euphoria over Nitish Kumar's visionary leadership is the quiet support of a group which has been recognised but perhaps its criticality has been missed. This is the participation and support of women in the electoral process. The turnout of women was in one word, stupendous. They broke all social barriers and norms to participate. We witnessed scenes of women voters queuing up in the six-phase Assembly elections in Bihar.

Interestingly, in a state where the gender ratio is skewed in favour of men, it is the women who outnumbered men in the election process, with 54.85 per cent of women voting in comparison to the male vote of just 50.70 per cent. This was the first time the women of Bihar played such a crucial role in forming a government in the state.

So what are the women saying? What are their aspirations? What is this collective consciousness at work which has been instrumental in returning the Nitish Kumar government to power? What would be a fascinating study for the psephologist and those interested in the politics of development are the factors that made this happen.

This is the time when the state government is unfolding its agenda of 'consolidation' of the development processes it initiated in the first term. This is also an opportune time to address the issues which made these women come out in large numbers to vote. The desire is not only for more development but also for more nuanced and responsive development which women as a participatory force could help define.

Yes, the women voted to endorse the positive developments that have taken place in the state but it goes beyond that. Now they are seeking a better deal in every sphere of activity be it political, social or economic. A new order is called for which will not only put Bihar securely on the map of development but also ensure a more enabling environment for women to participate in the development trajectory.

The scenario, despite the outpouring of support by women, continues to be challenging. Age-old social practices and patriarchal patterns still prevail which keep women sidelined many notches below their male counterparts in all areas of life, be it access to education, health or participation in governance.

In Bihar, 52.2 per cent of girls under the age of



Girls and cycles. But Bihar needs to do much more for girls

18 years are married off which is the highest in India. Early marriage is the bane of society with girls still being seen as a burden on their parents to be cast off at the earliest. This prevents girls from growing into mature adults who could carry out not only family responsibilities with aplomb but contribute to society more fully.

Consider this. The fertility rate of 4.2 per cent in Bihar is high. It directly impacts population figures and is higher than the national rate. Child marriage can be seen as a major reason for this, a practice spawned by retrograde social norms. For a state on the move under a dynamic leadership, an increasing population and limited resources is not a perfect formula for growth. Nor is it befitting to have girl children married and producing children rather than being in school and getting an education.

According to preliminary data released by Census 2011, the literacy rate in India is 74.4 per cent and Bihar stands at the bottom at 63.82 per cent.

Yet even within this dismal scenario, a resurgent Bihar is taking the road to women's literacy. It may be somewhere at the bottom as far as overall literacy rates are concerned, but the state has posted the second highest decadal growth in female literacy rates in the country.

The number of literate women in India more than doubled from 10,465,201 in 2001 to 21,678,279 in 2011. This is the time then for policy makers to take a good hard look at what they have inherited not only in terms of a thumping mandate but the challenges and to be more precise, the answers they need to come up with to meet the aspirations of a burgeoning population of neo literate women.

Another challenge is the lack of healthcare facilities. Remote areas of Bihar are still deprived of basic

healthcare facilities. The number of Primary Health Centres (PHC) is 1641 as against the required number of 2489, a shortfall of 848. In Sub-Centres the shortfall is a stupendous 6101. The women in such areas can be equated with having facilities akin to the most backward parts of Africa.

So the state government is not in a comfortable situation. Rather it will now need to ignore all the euphoria and work hard. A society cannot move ahead unless all its people across caste, gender and regional lines are partners in progress.

Bihar has to battle high mortality rates of mothers and infants and the spectre of malnutrition. With 58 per cent of children in Bihar malnourished, this is a huge challenge to overcome. All these require hard-nosed policies and programmes and allocation of resources.

There is no denying the fact that the Nitish Kumar government has enabled women to participate in governance more significantly than in the past. This has led to their empowerment. Reservation at panchayat level has had an impact on their increased role. Of the 260,000 representatives in panchayats, a whopping 120,000 are women.

The Mukhyamantri Akshar Aanchal Yojna, aiming at making four million women literate in a year and providing bicycles to girls are populist moves which have led to this sense of empowerment. In a way Nitish Kumar has loosened the constricting patterns that kept the state backward. In the process, he has unleashed a wave of energy, participation and aspirations of a better quality of life for those who have been historically marginalised.

Now he and the government he leads will have to learn to ride this tiger.

Charkha Features

China on tribal wishlist

ALOKA KUJUR

THERE is a serious *Hindi-Chini bhai-bhai* bonhomie happening in Jharkhand, a region which falls under the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution due to its large tribal community. Politics makes strange bedfellows but trade and commercial interests are great levelers of intellectual, ideological, regional and cultural differences. Often friendship between countries is based on treaties and agreements signed between governments and heads of state. Sometimes comradeship is borne in response to a demand for goods from the other side of the border, a need which finds its way through other channels.

Rather than sermonize, condemn or condone such transactions it may be useful to examine the underlying factors which make the goods of one country find a bustling market in another. This trend becomes even more interesting when it reflects the needs and aspirations of rural communities cut off from the world of consumer goods. This is exactly what is happening in Jharkhand where the Adivasis or tribal communities are joyfully buying up goods which traditionally they had no use for, or perhaps had no access to. Suddenly the sale of mobile phones, batteries, torches, radio, TV, LCD, DVD, camera and electronic toys has picked up and is doing brisk business.

Of course Jharkhand is not the sole state to be bitten by the Chinese bug. Chinese products first made an impact here in India when customers mostly from the middle class woke up to the plethora of 'Made in China' goods – watches, garments, crockery etc – flooding the market. They were cheap, useful and readily available fulfilling a variety of household needs. These were lapped up by a burgeoning middle-class, largely urban. Driven by a need to acquire all the items of a good life has been an aspiration for this class particularly the lower middle-class. The catch was that their income was not in proportion to their aspirations. This gap was amply and indeed cleverly filled by

Chinese products – a perfect fit.

What is more difficult to understand is how this fit works in the tribal areas of Jharkhand. The Adivasis are known to be 'forest dwellers' living off forest produce like lac, tendu leaves, tamarind combined with some agriculture for their needs. Their way of life and socio-cultural patterns are entwined with the forest, worshipping nature and in a deeper sense protecting natural resources.

Yet it is curiously amongst this community, which has carried these traditions from time immemorial, that Chinese goods have created a niche. It is perplexing, this coming together of opposite poles of lifestyle, one based on an intuitive and symbiotic bond with nature and the other on acquisition of a large number of cheap utility items; 'utility' as defined by a popular consumerist culture. It would seem to be a clash of culture. But it is not so in Jharkhand with both co-existing and even dovetailing into a composite whole.

Suddenly the dark huts of the forest, abode to thousands of Adivasis, are starting to shine with the white light of Chinese torches. Mobile phones about a decade ago were out of reach for these people. Yet obviously the yearning was there especially amongst those who migrated in search of livelihoods and were unable to buy a mobile phone to be in touch with their families. This gap was filled after 2000 by cheap Chinese electronic goods including mobiles and spread like bush-fire to the local population. That was not all. Agricultural workers or those working for industry were attracted to the new gadgets which opened up a new world for them. It was inconceivable for an Adivasi to buy a branded colour TV or any electronic item produced in India by an established local company. It was simply beyond their means.

Yet these items represented a world of aspirations, entirely different from what tribal culture and tradition bestowed on them. The lure of material goods, of a lifestyle that boasted of these and

brought modern facilities into their lives was something they consciously reached out to. It was not inherited with the socio-cultural patterns sanctified by their symbiotic link with the forest. This latent, unexpressed need has now found an outlet. 'Gizmos' and 'Adivasis' represent two ends of a pole, yet Chinese products have brought them together! This too is an aspect of Adivasi aspirations and not necessarily what the intelligentsia and 'culture-vultures' of our age have categorised them into.

Indeed such aspirations can be an eye-opener for policy makers and activists alike. That an Adivasi can also make a conscious choice and wish to own consumer goods reflects changing socio-economic priorities. It may sound simplistic and perhaps too premature to arrive at any conclusion but such ambitions should not be ignored. There is a view that it is imperative for the world at large to 'preserve' the old way of life of the tribals in its pristine glory. The popularity of Chinese products smashes a hole in that theory.

Safdar, an organization working in Jharkhand, conducted a study into usage of battery run TVs, mobiles, emergency lights, torch chargers and pens. Their findings confirmed that all these had become necessities in the lives of the rural population. There is also another aspect of this proliferation of goods and that is the livelihood opportunities it creates for those who stock and sell these products. In sum, everybody is happy.

There has been much talk about the lack of development in tribal areas and the government's plans to allocate resources for such regions which since India's independence have remained on the fringes. Perhaps this is one way that the tribal communities living here have spoken, in an unpretentious way about their aspirations and priorities in their journey towards mainstream development. It would be wise to factor in this aspect while planning for the development of tribal areas and integrating Adivasis with the rest of society.

Charkha Features

Continued from page 27

in the civic space. Around 2003 under the guise that the Capital Value System (CVS) was an economically better basis to compute tax returns (which it is), the system sought to strike back by quietly changing the rules whereby the power again shifted back to the tax inspector. Under SAS, once a citizen paid up he/she was considered to have complied with property tax provisions under the eyes of the law unless their case was taken up for random scrutiny. In the new scheme enacted by the legislature under administrative prodding, they opined that the Corporation had one year to scrutinise the returns, inspect the property if necessary and only after an order is issued is the person considered compliant with tax requirements.

Ironically, the political class of corporators came to our rescue. By then they realised that citizens loved the SAS provisions and any attempt to tinker

with it would seal their political fate in future elections. They pushed back the introduction of the discretionary law and to this date Bangalore continues to enjoy the elements of the SAS model (extended on a year to year basis) even though the law states otherwise! This went to show that once citizens have tasted a superior system (bye bye tax inspector in this case), they are loathe to go back to older systems.

Around 2001, some of us felt emboldened to try another reform of the katha system in the Corporation. This is another area where bribes are sought to obtain kathas, which are mandatory as per the Corporation, but do not confer any title as per the Courts. It is another pernicious system to extort money from hapless owners who buy and sell property. We came up with a scheme but could not pull off the reform since some sagacious senior officials pointed out to us that we ought not to

rock the boat and "some food must be left on the table"!

Guess this is a reform that will happen when we have another set of enlightened leaders willing to do the right thing by citizens.

So what is the learning from this exercise? One, it is possible to eliminate local level bribes if the leadership designs systems that trust citizens and reduce discretionary powers in the hands of officers. But for this to happen, the practice of taking 'placement' money for government jobs needs to go. This can happen if the electorate rewards the politicians who work towards making the common citizen-government interface hassle and bribe free be it land tax, registrations, FIRs, infrastructure connections and the like. We need to focus on addressing local level corruption that impacts us all.

V. Ravichandar, Chairman, Feedback Consulting, believes that retail level corruption can be addressed if we engage.

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- JRD Tata



Leadership with Trust

The elusive green tribunal

KANCHI KOHLI

HAPPY anniversary to the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF)! April 2011 saw the completion of the first year of the ministry's promise to ensure green justice for one and all.

Last year, the MoEF promised effective and expeditious disposal of cases relating to environmental protection, conservation of forests and other natural resources and access to specific biological material. We were looking forward to the setting up of the National Green Tribunal (NGT) with circuit benches across the country, headquartered in New Delhi and empowered to settle disputes under seven environmental statutes. Enforcement of legal rights related to environment and giving relief and compensation for damages to persons and property and related matters were part of its mandate.

Ironically, this one-year milestone prompts us to not just question the ministry's intention but to point out that the NGT exists only on paper! Even as environment clearances continue to be granted to the tune of 100 a month, pollution related liability and monitoring mechanisms remain as weak as ever and forest land diversion carries on efficiently, this forum for justice and those seeking to use it effectively continue to wait in the corridors of neglect. And we thought we were going to match countries like Australia and New Zealand in green justice delivery mechanisms.

The events that mark the NGT's anniversary are necessary to determine the denial of justice which can be categorised as deliberate. Even as the NGT Bill was introduced in Parliament there was much debate on its design and scope to be a justice delivery mechanism. Other than the specifics, one of the most fundamental questions that surrounded the NGT was whether it would act as an extra lease of life to the few projects and activities on access to biological material.

The NGT allows for appeals not only from those aggrieved by the grant of a clearance or approval, but also from those who, due to substantive or procedural scrutiny, have been denied a clearance by the regulatory authority. This was drastically different from other existing quasi-judicial bodies where the definition of the 'aggrieved' person was regarded to be one who is being impacted by a faulty decision or act of non-compliance.

On 19th October 2010, almost six months after getting parliamentary consent, the MoEF issued a press release officially notifying the NGT with the appointment of Lokeshwar Singh Panta as the Chairperson of the body. He had taken charge of the NGT in New Delhi just a day earlier. The "officialisation" of the NGT on 18th October 2010, had an immediate impact. With the Chairperson's appointment, the 13-year-old National Environment Appellate Authority (NEAA) ceased to exist due to a clause inbuilt into



We were looking forward to the setting up of the National Green Tribunal with circuit benches across the country and headquartered in New Delhi.

the NGT legislation and reiterated by the Minister of Environment, Jairam Ramesh, in an 19th October press release.

The NEAA till its collapse was the only forum available to those aggrieved by the grant of environmental clearances issued under the Environment Impact Assessment Notification, 2006, to challenge the same. Even with its one member and complex set of problems, it was a forum that had continued to function.

Of course what this meant was that all cases pending before the NEAA remained hanging in midair, awaiting their new deliverers of justice. No new cases on fresh approvals or seeking liability could be filed. Even if they were filed they would remain unheard. Where approvals were in place, project authorities were free to go ahead with business as usual, even if the project was under challenge.

It is a year now and the Rules of the tribunal are yet to be finalised, the expert members still have to be appointed and the promised regional benches are yet to be located. This tentative state of

affairs has been articulated by the ministry in response to a question in the Rajya Sabha on 1st March, this year. The response says, "The Tribunal shall consist of a full time Chairperson and not less than 10, but subject to a maximum of 20 full time Judicial Members and similar number of Expert Members. Hon'ble Shri Justice LS Panta, retired Supreme Court Judge, has been appointed as Chairperson of the Tribunal on 18.10.2010. The Tribunal shall have five places of sitting. The Principal place of sitting of the Tribunal shall be at New Delhi and Bhopal, Kolkata, Pune and Chennai shall be the other four places of sitting. The process of selection and appointment of Judicial and Expert Members of the National Green Tribunal has been initiated."

In the numerous press statements and parliamentary responses on the NGT, the MoEF has consistently missed providing a time frame when the NGT will be up and running. Should one attribute a conspiracy theory to this or regard this as a deliberate delay in justice? Or is it that the ministry feels that people's lives, livelihoods and ecological spaces which are to be lost and threatened with the consistent chugging of approvals can wait indefinitely. Perhaps the people living with pollution, health impacts and loss of the right to a clean existence are to just continue doing so even as the authorities take it slow and easy.

What is being sought is certainly not an NGT miracle where all faulty decisions will be revoked, due compensation given or a clean-up of polluted areas done effectively. The issue of immediate importance is holding this illusive dream and the dream makers both answerable and accountable.

Anyway, happy anniversary, MoEF.

The author is member of Kalpavriksh Environmental Action Group

Living

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

The broken window

Buddhadev Dasgupta's poetic film on the good deed

Saibal Chatterjee
New Delhi

BUDDHADEB Dasgupta's cinema springs as much from the fertile imagination of a poet as it does from the multi-hued palette of an impressionistic painter. Drawing inspiration from both high art and folk forms, he has never followed established cinematic conventions. His films – certainly the ones made since 2002's *Mondo Meyer Upakhyan* (A Tale of a Naughty Girl) – are deeply tactile and yet dream-like, a quality that elevates them to a zone of experience rarely encountered in Indian cinema.

In *Janala* (Window), his 15th feature film, the 67-year-old Bengali filmmaker walks down the same path with firm intent and gives the audience yet another glimpse of what a movie camera can achieve when it is set free. Rooted firmly in the soil, *Janala* is redolent with the sights and sounds of Purulia district, where the filmmaker spent his boyhood years.

This film is like a free-floating nimbus cloud, soaring above the mundane and altering its form repeatedly as it makes its way through the fractured inner worlds of tangible yet enigmatic characters who nurture impossible dreams in the face of harsh reality.

Janala extends the run that the multiple National Award-winning filmmaker began about a decade ago with *Mondo Meyer Upakhyan*, based on three of his own poems and a Prafulla Roy short story, and continued through *Swapner Din* (Chased by Dreams, 2004), *Kaalpurush* (Memories in the Mist, 2005) and *Ami Yasin aar Aamaar Modhubala* (The Voyeurs, 2007). Though *Janala* has been bankrolled by one of Bollywood's leading production houses, Reliance Big Pictures, it retains the tone and texture of a Dasgupta film.

Dasgupta belongs to an endangered filmmaking



Buddhadeb Dasgupta

species in an era in which even obviously gifted directors (and not just those active in Mumbai) hanker after mass approbation and think nothing of diluting their creative purity in the process. "As a creative artist, one does change one's style in keeping with the times, but it is imperative to stay true to your vision," says the Kolkata-based Dasgupta. "Unfortunately, most films these days have begun looking like each other. In this scenario of drab sameness, it is difficult to tell who has made which film."

In contrast, Dasgupta's artistic imprimatur is loud and clear on every frame that he composes. "That is how it should be," he argues. "Every true artist possesses his own signature style. He leaves behind images and ideas that can stand the test of time."

The early Dasgupta films – *Dooratwa* (Distance, 1978), *Neem Annapurna* (Bitter Morsel, 1979),

Grihajuddha (Crossroads, 1982), *Andhi Gali* (Blind Alley, 1984) and *Phera* (The Return, 1986) – were cast in a realist mould influenced by Ray but addressed concerns uniquely his own.

Leading up to the crystallisation of his current cinematic idiom were equally celebrated films – *Bagh Bahadur* (The Tiger Man, 1989), *Tahader Katha* (Their Story, 1992), *Charachar* (The Shelter of the Wings, 1993), *Lal Darja* (The Red Doors, 1996) and *Uttara* (The Wrestlers, 2000). The style evolved steadily, but the consistency of his vision never wavered.

Dasgupta cites the work of Satyajit Ray, Ritwik Ghatak and G. Aravindan to support the argument that every great filmmaker has a way of crafting images and articulating ideas. "No one can ever confuse a Ray film with a Ghatak one. Each is distinctive," he says.

The tragedy of Indian cinema, Dasgupta adds, is



A frame from *Janala*



Still from *Janala*

that meaningful images are being increasingly relegated to the sidelines while imitative and dumb-down ways of looking at the world have been openly embraced. "That is the way advertisers and the big market players want it," he adds.

Dasgupta, who came into filmmaking in the 1970s after working for several years as a professor of economics, has always been a poet. He has numerous anthologies of verse to his credit. While his poetry is actually "anti-poetic" in as much as they flout many basic rules of versification, his films are loaded with conceits and images that are typically drawn from a world where the human mind is as free as a bird.

Take a scene from *Janala* as a case in point. The film's adolescent protagonist, Bimal, stands at the window of a classroom looking out on the village landscape and at the sky as a geography teacher drones on drearily about a point on the world

map. In his mind's eye, the boy visualises a sea approaching the school walls, and soon the water flows into the classroom and wets Bimal's sandals.

Cut to the present. Bimal, now aged 30, is seen standing before the same window, but now the fenestration is crumbling and the school is in a shambles. The protagonist has, on an impulse, returned to his school in a semi-rural part of Bengal and is struck by both nostalgia and remorse. He decides to donate a new window to his alma mater although he works in an old age home and has limited means.

The little money that Bimal has is not his – it belongs to his pregnant would-be wife who works in a call centre back in the city and is saving up for their wedding and the unborn baby. But he is willing to sacrifice his immediate plans of marrying the girl he loves to pursue his dream of gifting his

rundown school a new window.

A small, well-meaning act of benevolence pushes Bimal into a spiral of events that are completely beyond his control. He seeks a loan from a money-lender: the promised loan doesn't materialise to the chagrin of his live-in partner who can see their dreams of wedded bliss evaporating. He gets a furniture maker to make a window for him but the man overcharges him. And when the window is ready, the school headmaster refuses to accept it because Bimal hadn't sought his permission. The school authorities tell him that a monetary donation would have been more useful than an inanimate gift.

His dream shattered, Bimal befriends a truck driver who offers to help him find a taker for the unwanted window. They set off on a journey in search of a happy ending. But in the real world of Dasgupta's *Janala*, the doors that lead to true happiness are often firmly shut.

Janala is a Buddhadeb Dasgupta film, and numerous windows open up as its 'narrative' ambles languidly through the rural landscape picking up surreal situations and cranky misfits that add to the allure of his stunningly beautiful way of capturing the joys and sorrows, the fears and fantasies, the hopes and disappointments of common people who constitute the real India.

There is a thief who robs people and places at random. The man has little use for the objects that he filches – a school bell, a suitcase crammed with toys, a rickety

van, a bicycle, a wrist-watch, and even the ornate window with the metallic grill embellished with two birds in flight. The thief gives away many of these things to the needy and sometimes pawns them at the weekly market.

And then there are two circus performers from Kerala – a man and his three-month pregnant wife – who are on the run from their brutal employer who forces them to do their acrobatic acts despite the woman's delicate state. Bimal and his truck driver-friend decide to help the duo escape to safety even as the window that has turned into a burden on them is stolen by the thief and eventually ends up against a tree, abandoned for good.

The wood, unable to find its rightful place in a society where human niceties don't matter anymore, returns to the very woods that it came from in the first place.

Bimal returns to his school in a semi-rural part of Bengal and is struck by both nostalgia and remorse. He decides to donate a new window to his alma mater.

Varanasi's organic restaurant

Anjali Pathak
Varanasi

SIPPING hot ginger-lemon organic tea I chatted with Vishal Sehgal, the dynamic young owner of Brownie organic restaurant in Varanasi. I was struck by his courage in launching this enterprise. Inaugurated on 9 November, 2008, Brownie's success reveals that people do flock to restaurants which serve organic, healthy food.

Located in the green environs of the Varanasi cantonment area and housed in an old British period bungalow, Brownie's fame has spread far and wide in organic circles merely by word of mouth.

But I must sample the food first. My lunch *thali* arrives and as I tuck into brown rice, vegetables, raita, dal and paneer my jaded tastebuds suddenly revive. This is simply the best paneer I have had in my entire life, so velvety that it melts in my



A typical *thali* meal at Brownie

mouth. The rice has character and bite. Yes, the food tastes genuinely organic and fresh.

I ask Vishal why he decided to invest in an organic restaurant. He speaks of his father who died of pancreatic cancer. This personal tragedy spurred him to do something to promote better health and food habits among people. Sure enough, Brownie was born with an initial investment of ₹16 lakhs.

Vishal's initial apprehensions about being able to source organic supplies were soon quelled by a seemingly effortless connect to various organic growers within and outside Uttar Pradesh. Organic cheese was sourced from Auroville and Kodai, organic meat from Kullu in Himachal, organic cereals, pulses and spices from Ahana farm near Mirzapur and organic vegetables from local growers.

Some salamis and meats are imported directly from Italy. Organic honey is sourced from local wild bee hives by smoking out the bees first and then extracting honey from hives. Organic milk and paneer is being supplied by local dairies. Their owners have been instructed to provide only natural feed to their cows and refrain from using oxytocin. Bakery foods are being supplied by the Brown Bread Bakery near the ghats in the old city.

About seven to eight small farmers within a radius of 15 km from Varanasi are supplying Brownie with organic vegetables. Surprisingly, these growers are selling such vegetables to Brownie at the same rate as the chemical produce available in the market. The produce is not certified or branded but it is organic. This means that Brownie can afford to keep prices low and there-

by attract a bigger clientele. My organic thali cost me ₹175.

Vishal tells me that 1,178 customers have rated Brownie as the best restaurant they have eaten at in India! "Your dishes taste so fresh and pure what is the secret behind this?" is a constant refrain of Brownie's clients. "We are organic," Vishal responds laughingly as he chats up clients in the evenings.

Brownie's menu has been steadily evolving. It now serves Japanese, Spanish, Italian, Thai, Chinese, Indian and Continental fare. No artificial colours, flavours or additives are added. The bread, cakes and pastries are made of whole wheat flour. Spices are freshly ground for that appetizing taste.

I pointed at Coke and Pepsi bottles behind the serving counter and look quizzically at Vishal. "We are stocking these as a stop gap arrangement till our own line of soft drinks and mocktails

takes off. Indian cooling drinks are being developed with *gulab jal*, rose, *kesar*, *phalsa* and *jamun*," says Vishal.

Formerly in the automobile spare parts manufacturing business, Vishal often requests his patrons for recipes from their countries and most of them oblige happily. Some recipes were retrieved from the Internet.

Vishal admits that most professional chefs and managers cannot appreciate the organic philosophy behind Brownie. They are so accustomed to using chemical additives, artificial flavours and colours that it is hard for them to let organic ingredients take centrestage in the cuisine. Nevertheless, with an in-house training programme in place and with three Nepali chefs, two waiters, a new manager and marketing person, things look promising for Brownie.

During the peak season Brownie gets up to 150 customers every evening. Networking with tourist guides and travel agents in Varanasi has paid off as most international customers are brought in by them. A good customer turnout means a turnover of ₹5 lakhs per month but footfalls vary with the season. The success of Brownie has led Vishal to consider opening another restaurant in the Assi Ghat area overlooking the Ganga.

Musicians play live Hindustani classical music every evening from a little gallery overlooking the dining area. Frescoes of Tara and the Black Princess adorn the mud plastered walls of the restaurant. The ambience is soothing.

Address: Brownie restaurant, Bungalow No 53-1, Old Sita Travel Building, Next to Doordarshan Kendra, Varanasi Cantonment.
Mobile: 09839222565, 09838888859
Phone: (0542)2251150 www.brownierestaurant.com



Chitvan's rooms are spacious and look into the forest

Kanha's soul at Chitvan

Amita Joseph
Kanha (Madhya Pradesh)

STARTED by four entrepreneurs, Sharad Vats, Shailender Tiwari, Q. Talat and Ashwani Agrawal, Chitvan Jungle Lodge in the Kanha National Park, Madhya Pradesh, is one of the most discreet getaways you can visit with a light ecological footprint.

The lodge blends seamlessly into the surrounding landscape with its wooded hills and expansive grasslands interspersed with Sal trees, whistling thorns and scrub. Spread over 14 acres, these forests were earlier teeming with cheetahs. They are now home for the



tiger, the Sambhar deer and the sloth bear amongst other animals. The dense Kanha jungle also has a large population of spotted deer which is why the forest is called chitri-van (chitri means spotted). The lodge is therefore called Chitvan – forest of the spotted deer.

The closest railhead for Kanha, however, is Gondia in Maharashtra, 135 km away or Jabalpur, Raipur or Nagpur which are more distant. Apart from familiarizing you with the rich flora and fauna of Kanha, tiger sightings and safaris, Chitvan provides the visitor with an opportunity to experience the soul of rural, tribal and agricultural India. Focusing on sustainable eco-

tourism with production of organic produce on site, Chitvan boasts of creating new benchmarks in hospitality and wildlife tourism.

The lodge has a big Saja tree in the midst of its courtyard and three spacious suites, tall and grand, each 750 sq. ft. The suites have a spacious sitting area with attached terraces overlooking the captivating Maikal hills. Also, the suites are built on the principles of Vaastu and located right next to the organic farms in Chitvan.

From the windows of the suites the dense Sal forests of Kanha are visible. There are bay windows both in the ground floor suites and on the first floor suites. The rooms have carved Indian furniture, handloom fabrics and charpoys. Most of the handloom fabric used has been sourced from MESH, a group that works at building liveli-



Chitvan's organic farms

hoods for people with disabilities.

As night falls, fireflies flit around in the dark. A large family of friendly insects inhabit the lodge including frogs, garden monitors and butterflies. The organic farm produces rice, wheat and vegetables round the year. The wheat is ground at Chitvan which also has its own cows.

The Agni (Fire) Restaurant has a unique multi-cuisine restaurant with a swimming pool on one side and the organic farms on the other. A deck on the mezzanine floor provides you with a 270 degree view. You can see the local village and the Kanha forest. It is an ideal place to write a book or to take a few days off from a busy routine.

There are a dozen venues for meals with organic produce. But you won't find a menu card here. Most evenings Aslam., the young chef, prepares a

dish in the dining hall with a recipe he shares with guests. The kitchen is visible from the dining space. It is clean and hygienic. A common tip box occupies a prominent space in the reception area. Looking around it is difficult to imagine this was barren land just five years ago. It is now full of trees, insects and birds.

Chitvan initiated its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programme with school education in the local village by motivating children to go to school and encouraging parents to reduce dropouts.

The lodge interacts regularly with local school teachers, announcing rewards for children who get good results and extra cash incentives for bright students. It distributes books, texts and stationary to children who cannot afford to buy these.

Its conservation work extends to creating awareness amongst villagers and children about the tiger and wildlife conservation efforts. To save forests there is a need to grow forests. So 1,000 trees are planted annually by involving local communities and children. Villagers and schoolchildren are taken to visit the park. Safaris and bi-monthly visits to the lodge are organised. Chitvan rewrites the environment mantra of 'reduce, reuse and recycle' with its own quaint philosophy of 4 R's – recreation, regeneration, reformation and restoration. A medicinal plants garden has been created as well.

Rainwater harvesting is done by building of bunds. Chitvan is water sufficient and draws minimal water, ensuring that depletion of the water table does not happen. The lodge tried solar lighting but it is solar cooking that finally succeeded.

One of the remarkable facets of Chitvan Jungle Lodge is its promotion of local employment and training. Out of its 36 member team, 35 of them are from the nearby villages. Regular training is being imparted on required skills for the hospitality industry. During the monsoon months when the park is closed, Chitvan organises English speaking classes for schoolchildren, jeep drivers and forest guides. This enables them to interact better with domestic and international tourists.

Many of the team members 'walk to work' from their villages. There is a canteen that takes care of their nutritional requirements. And the menu is planned as carefully as for the guests by Ashwani Aggrawal, the general manager of the lodge. He is on his feet from dawn to dusk, taking care of guests, visiting village homes and building bonds.

Chitvan Jungle Lodge proves that practicing CSR is not the sole prerogative of large corporate houses. It is possible to follow responsible business practices no matter what the enterprise is or its size. All you need is the will, the ability to connect with the community and be responsive to the local environment in which you function as a responsible entity.

Contact Sharad Vats for reservations at 9811200094 or Ashwani Aggrawal at 09981041044. E-mail: info@chitvan.com
Address: Village Samnapur, Post Mukki, Kanha National Park, Tehsil Baihar, District Balagahat, Madhya Pradesh - 481111
Delhi office: 106-107, A3, Sector 11, Rohini, New Delhi - 110085

The priceless Pashmina

Kavita Charanji
New Delhi

ABDUL Rashid Bhat carefully takes out a bundle of Pashmina shawls from a suitcase. He places them delicately on the shop's counter.

"We don't just sell a shawl. We sell a design and the history of the shawl," says Bhat, who is assistant general manager of Poshish, a retail outlet of the Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) State Handloom Development Corporation Ltd, located in Lajpat Nagar, Delhi.

The shawls are exquisitely hand embroidered with delicate motifs in myriad shades. They are a reproduction of a Kani (twill-tapestry) technique from the Dogra period in the 19th century and the late Mughal period. The original shawl designs are tucked away in the private collection of a New York based collector, Frank Ames. There's also a 'shoulder mantle' in Kani technique whose design goes back to 1770, the Afghan period. A replica of this shawl is on display at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Another Pashmina shawl with a red base has shades of blue, yellow and orange hand embroidered on it. This shawl is a replica of a 'shoulder mantle' from the Afghan period. The original can be admired at the Bharat Kala Bhavan, Benaras.

There is much more to these Pashmina shawls than meets the eye. The designs have been painstakingly collected from museums, private collections, rare books, publications and journals and then revived.

Designs have also been taken from shawls dating back to the 16th and 18th century when Kashmiri craft was at its zenith due to the patronage it enjoyed from the Mughal, Afghan, Sikh and Dogra dynasties.



Classic shawl designs from historical records

"We call them Royal Pashmina shawls. Not only do they have the image of being beautiful, they are hand spun, hand woven and hand embroidered. The finishing is done by hand too," says Rashid with pride.

Kashmiri shawls, explains Bhat, are produced from two techniques: the loom woven Kani shawls and the needle embroidered Sozini or amlikar shawls. Depending on the intricacy of the design, he points out, the Pashmina shawls at Poshish are bought for anything between ₹ 30,000 to ₹ 1.5 lakh.

Shawl making, says Bhat, is a cottage industry. The J&K State Handloom Development Corporation works with 75 identified artisans apart from numerous others who are less skilled. It takes an artisan between four to 11 months to complete a shawl.

Unfortunately, Kashmiri artisans in the Valley have been hard hit for a variety of reasons. At one time, the world renowned Pashmina shawls were the rage in Europe which imported them on a huge scale. Today demand has dwindled due to the global financial crisis. Political unrest in Kashmir has also played havoc with the livelihood of Pashmina weavers who were already hit

PHOTOGRAPHS BY NARAYAN KAUNDIYAL



by the ban on shahtoosh. Rashid bemoans the fact that cheap imitations of Pashmina shawls have flooded the market. "These days the word 'Pashmina' is used very loosely. Any scarf made from natural or synthetic fibre is sold off as Pashmina."

To top it all product development stagnates in Kashmir, even as other Pashmina producing nations such as China, Pakistan and Nepal gain an edge since they are more in tune with current Western trends.

To revive the moribund craft and give it a contemporary twist, the J&K State Handloom Development Corporation launched an ambitious Pashmina Research & Development project. Indica, a Delhi-based outfit, was hired to introduce a faster weave with updated techniques and recreate historic designs. The painstaking research has paid off. Six hundred of the most exquisite specimens of shawls found in international museums, private collections, rare books and catalogues have been documented.

In the second phase of the project, under the supervision of Stress Lab, a team of graduates from the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) recreated 80 designs from the 600 designs which could be revived by artisans.

Now, says Rashid, another 30 designs will be recreated from the same 600 documented designs. Meanwhile, Poshish in Delhi is readying for an exhibition of shawls in November-December.

Contact: Poshish, J-34 B Central Market, Lajpat Nagar, Delhi

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READ US. WE READ YOU.

An ode to non-violence

Kavita Charanji
New Delhi

THE Dalai Lama has a favourite anecdote which he loves to recount. The spiritual leader of the Tibetans was the chief guest at the inauguration of a Buddhist temple in Bihar. In a speech at the function, Chief Minister Nitish Kumar declared that with Lord Buddha's blessings the state would develop at a faster pace. To which the Dalai Lama retorted that if Buddha's blessings could indeed develop Bihar, the state should have developed much earlier. Explaining the moral of the story, the Dalai Lama said that development and material peace are the outcome of "karma or action," and not merely Buddha's blessings.

The Nobel Laureate's dig at Nitish Kumar was greeted with much laughter as he delivered the keynote address at a panel discussion on, "Non-Violence and Spiritual Values in a Secular India," held to commemorate the birth centenary of late R Venkatarman, former President of India. Organised jointly by the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library and Venkatarman's family, represented by his daughter Lakshmi Venkatarman Venkatesan, the event brought together panellists Swami Dayananda Saraswati, founder of Arsha Vidya Gurukulam in Anaikatti, Coimbatore, Salman Khurshid, Union Minister for Water Resources and Minority Affairs and former Lok Sabha Speaker, P A Sangma. The session was moderated by Buddhist scholar, practitioner and ordained teacher, Dharacharya Shantum Seth.

Pointing out that non-violence and secularism have been deeply imbedded in the Indian psyche for thousands of years, the Dalai Lama stated that non-violence was deliberate restraint from violence, "an act of compassion, a genuine sense of concern for another person's well being." Secularism, he said, was an integral part of India with Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, Islam, Judaism and later Sikhism making place for each other at different points of time. "I regard India as a guru and we are *chelas* (disciples)," he said.

Dayananda Saraswati explained that human beings differed from animals because they had the "faculty of choice, a matrix of values. A human being not only wants to survive but he knows that others have similar instincts." That, in his view, was true *ahimsa*. "It is very important that we recognise that *ahimsa* is not man made, it is inborn and we have to value it. All other values are derivatives," he said. "Robbing, stealing and scandals like 2G hurt humanity. We are all acquainted with *ahimsa* but we have not assimilated its true meaning. Greater education



The Dalai Lama speaking at the function

is therefore a necessity."

Non-violence for Salman Khurshid was more a "creative and active sentiment rather than merely non-interference and aloofness." Violence of thought and attitude and jealousy, manifested in greater violence, he added. Though secularism has been part of our ethos for thousands of years, it often came under a cloud and our religious leaders had to intervene to ensure that matters did not reach a head, said Khurshid.

The Dalai Lama said non-violence and secularism have been deeply embedded in the Indian psyche for thousands of years.

Sangma embarked on his address on a humorous note by saying that politicians had forfeited the moral right to speak about spiritual values and maybe he should step off the stage. The former Lok Sabha speaker said that India as a spiritual nation stands in stark contrast to countries like Egypt, Libya, Bahrain and the Middle East which are in the grip of war. Nevertheless, Indians are quirky. "Despite 2G, CWG and the Swiss Bank controversy, Indians are still enjoying cricket," he said in a lighter vein. However, there was a limit to tolerance and it was time for both the public and politicians to wake up to reality.

The younger generation also lent their voices

for peace. In honour of her grandfather, R Venkatarman, the redoubtable 16-year-old soprano singer, Tara Venkatesan, helped stage a multi-faith concert in partnership with the Mozart Children's Choir of India, supported by the Austrian Cultural Forum. The singers rendered selections from a variety of faiths, including music composed and directed by Gerald Wirth, artistic director of the well known 500-year-old Vienna Boys Choir. The repertoire consisted of moving Hindu and Buddhist chants, Sufi quawali and a Christian hymn, which incorporated a solo by Tara herself.

"My grandfather was secular and accepting of all religions and faiths though he was very religious at the same time. I grew up in this environment and that was further engrained by going to an international school. I thought I would do something to honour him with this concert. Music is a universal language as well as a unifying force," explained Tara, a 10th grader at the American International School in Delhi who has performed in Europe, Asia and the USA as well as for dignitaries such as Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh, the President of Austria, the Mayor of Salzburg and the Dalai Lama.

Indophile Gerald Wirth composed and arranged most of the music. Wirth has the distinction of collaborating with Indian maestro Pandit Ravi Shankar to launch the Global Peace Choir, consisting of children from India and Austria. Over the last few years the choir has evolved into the Mozart Children's Choir of India.

"Though Indian culture is very close to me, the biggest challenge was to arrange the music in a way that it did not take away from the original, get the essence of the music and still arrange it for a choir," said Wirth.

Look within for peace

SAMITA RATHOR

A spiritual quest begins when we start self-reflection. Life's journey travels to different destinations like joy, sorrow, hardship, inheriting knowledge and going beyond the sensory world that we mistake for real.

But the journey towards the self moves us within rather than without. Within lies peace. True awareness is our real nature where there is absolute silence, peace and serenity. True awareness means to transcend the body and the mind. This process brings us close to the true nature of our real self.

SILENCE: Now think about this. Peace cannot be acquired. It is our natural state. When our body and mind are exhausted and tired where do we take refuge? In sleep. Sleep is when we are closest to our true nature and sleep can be experienced only in silence. So the true nature of the self can be experienced in silence when all faculties are suspended.

Silence is only one but sound has variety. Silence never changes and is constant just like peace. Silence cannot be heard but only experienced. We can hear sound through our sensory organs. So what sense organs do we use to experience silence? Every being carries a natural instinct to experience silence in order to feel a sense of peace and calm. When creation began there were a variety of sounds. Sound can never replace silence. Silence is not part of creation but the

SOUL VALUE

nature of the source. In absolute silence lies our true nature.

SELF: In today's world we think our true nature is synonymous with our physical and mental attributes. How tall or heavy we are, the colour of our eyes, hair, skin, or how intelligent a person is. These attributes keep changing and are impermanent. Anything permanent cannot be real. True awareness is universal and ever changing. If awareness was an attribute it would change. When everything in life reaches a point of equanimity where one does not get affected by opposites then true awareness of the real self is experienced.

According to the Rig Veda, the person who treads on the path of truth and refrains from deception, treachery, pretension and remains untouched by falsehood is never devoid of eternal joy. One should never fear sorrow because it is the stepping stone to happiness.

Doing things contrary to truth will only take us away from our true nature. When we conform to truth we have no scope for sin. When we follow real truth and do not sin we experience peace which is our true nature.

TRUTH: According to our ancient Hindu scriptures *sat chit anand* is our true nature. *Sat* is pure truth, *chit* is pure consciousness and *anand* is

infinite bliss. This encompasses the essence of awareness and real truth beautifully.

Awareness is our true nature. Devotion and love are its ingredients. We all carry this intrinsic ability to be in life joyfully and lovingly, in sync with our true nature.

The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali say that the path to a state of union with oneself mentally, physically and spiritually is by "*tapas swadhyaya iswarapranidhanani kriya yogaha*."

The closest English translation of *tapas* means to burn/purify, in other words, austerity. *Swadhyaya* means constant study of the self. *Iswarapranidhana* is a very profound concept but the underlying connotation is to surrender to a higher force. So by practicing austerity we put in the right effort to burn our impurities and purify ourselves, seek an understanding of ourselves and surrender to a higher force.

We are gifted with the divine power of memory, which helps us register, retain and reflect. Registering is the first step to understanding. Understanding is the recall of reflection. Constant reflection has the capability to remove the cloudy pockets in the mind. If there are too many clouds in the sky there is darkness and it is difficult for light to penetrate. Once the clouds move away, light passes through, and we see clear blue skies. In the same way, the mind reflects pure light and clarity emerges as the clouds dissolve.

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LAKSHMAN ANAND

PRODUCTS

MAT MANIA

DRESS up your home with woven grass mats in a range of unusual colours and designs. Green Earth has reinvented the Bengal mat, making it chic and fashionable. You can buy mats for your dining table, larger ones for your floors, windows or as screens and runners.

Green Earth has three varieties of mats: thick, medium and fine. The thick Do Hara mats are also great for a session of yoga. The fine mats are called Masland after Bengal's famous Muslin and true to their nomenclature, are as smooth as silk.

Green Earth was started by Bashobi Tewari, a graduate from the National Institute of Design (NID), Ahmedabad. Bashobi wanted to help the crafts people of Midnapore find a market for their products. She has introduced quality and aesthetics. The mats are now exported.

Marketing and business development is done in Delhi, says Mayank Mansingh Kaul, a textile designer from NID who helps in marketing the mats. "While researching textile policy in the Planning Commission we realized there was a lot of export demand but hardly any innovation in our products. We needed to innovate and feed into fashion and crafts groups. Every two and a half months new designs are invented. So the summer collection of mats is designed and ready."

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Changing Lives



Watershed Development

“Insufficient rainfall and water scarcity was a constant problem in Sollepuram village located in the Sarangapalli Panchayat, Hosur, Tamil Nadu. Srinivasan Services Trust, in collaboration with NABARD and the local panchayat, started a watershed development program to help increase ground water levels here. Three check dams and one percolation pond were constructed to conserve rainwater. These completely filled up this year giving dramatic results. The ground water levels in bore wells rose by 20 to 30 feet.” It is now possible for me to irrigate 4 acres farm with water from bore well. The SST agronomist advised us to grow crops that require minimum water, resulting in increased crop yields.

*Sri Rajappa, Secretary,
Sarangapalli Watershed Project,
Hosur, Tamil Nadu.*

Achieved as on March 2010

Number of Water users and Watershed association formed	144
Area covered under watershed development (Ha)	12466
Area covered under Dry land horticulture (Ha)	5564
Number of Rain water harvesting structures constructed	241
Water table increase in meters	9 - 16
Number of farmers benefited by changing cropping pattern and got increased yield.	4578
Landless families provided with Income generation activities.	1605

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Smart Steel

All of us are experiencing the drastic changes in our climate and environment.

As an indispensable part of a developing world, Tata Steel has decided to rise to the challenge of reducing its carbon footprints while increasingly developing new steels with new technologies for a demanding world. This has resulted in important commitments and actions.

- Reduction in the weight of steel used in automobiles has reduced atmospheric pollution
- Special Steel developed to substitute leaded steel in fuel tanks
- Increased use of steel structurals in multistoried buildings
- Use of steel pipes in construction has reduced bamboo and wood felling

TATA STEEL

Green Steel

Clean Steel

Safe Steel

Smart Steel

Responsible Steel

New Steel