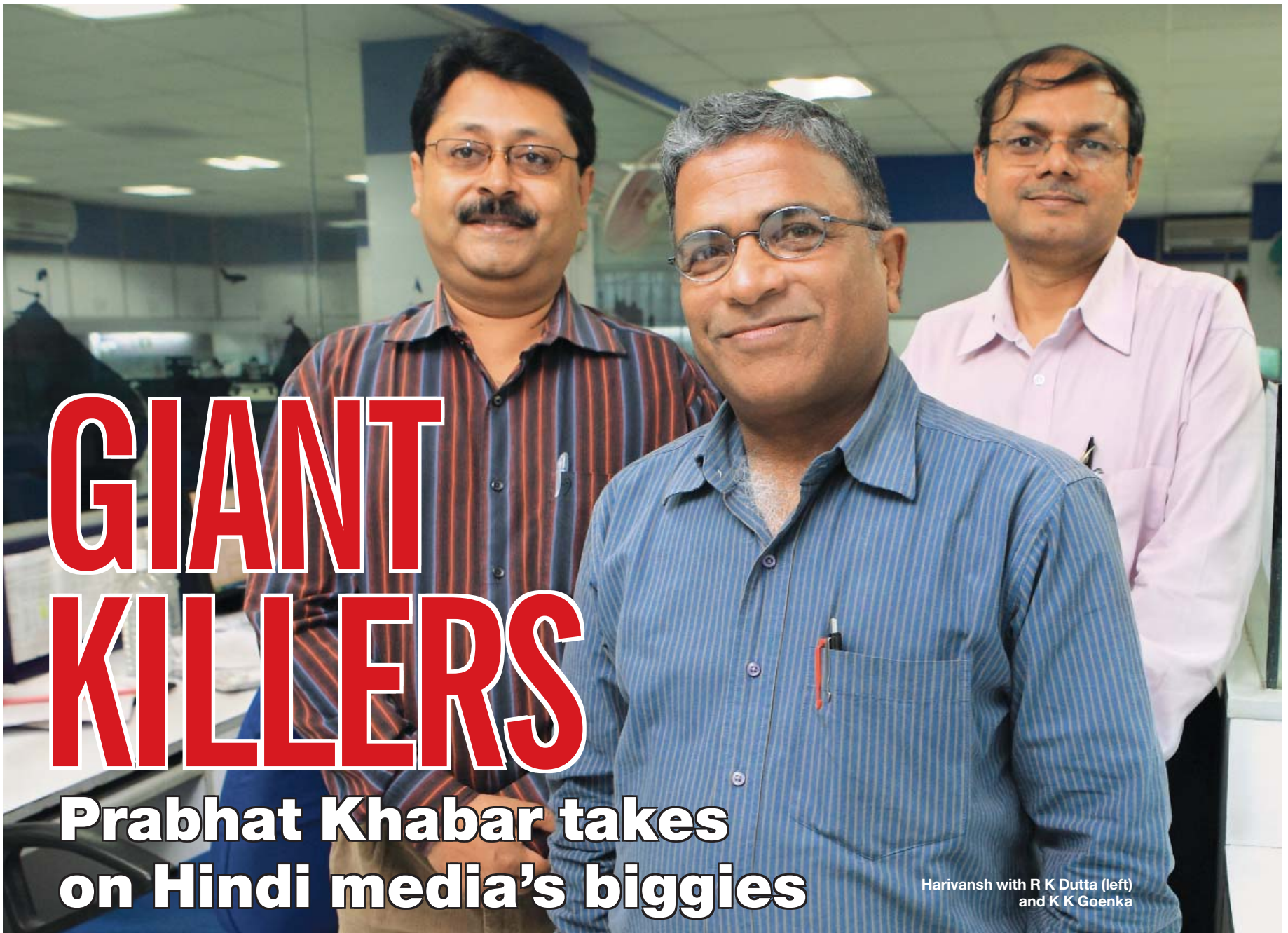


# Civil Society



## GIANT KILLERS

Prabhat Khabar takes on Hindi media's biggies

Harivansh with R K Dutta (left) and K K Goenka



**'THE PERSONAL MONEY MADE IN SKS IS INDEFENSIBLE'**

Vijay Mahajan in a blunt interview on the microfinance sector

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**EIA REVOKED, VILLAGERS RELIEVED**

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**MASOOM IS NIGHT SCHOOL GURU**

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**CSR DIKTAT WON'T WORK**

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**BANT SINGH AT MAX MUELLER**

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People's daily *Prabhat Khabar* has got the better of bigger Hindi dailies by matching their business moves and showing that credibility and content are what matter.

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# Civil Society

READ US. WE READ YOU.

## Why *Prabhat Khabar* is admirable

It has been shown by *Prabhat Khabar* that credible information and personal integrity can be the basis for commercial success in the media. This is an achievement because these are times when editorial content is for sale and managements are happy to allow advertisers to define what journalists do. The malaise is everywhere: open the leading newspapers and magazines, switch on just about any TV channel. When AR Rahman comes on prime time English news and is asked by the anchor about the new car he has bought and he says it is a Toyota we know what is going on. In much the same category are campaigns to save the environment. Or carefully structured shows in which business tycoons and their wives talk about their social concerns and the number of girl children they are educating. At a yet more base level is election coverage which is paid for by politicians.

But *Prabhat Khabar* has been different and in the process built itself into a profitable enterprise in its home territory of Jharkhand and newer markets emerging in the eastern region. For two decades now, *Prabhat Khabar* has taken the difficult road of telling a story as it should be told. It has raised issues of social justice and development. It has taken on governments and exposed corruption. It has walked away from dubious advertising revenue.

What I particularly admire about *Prabhat Khabar* is its effort to be a modern and complete newspaper in a neglected part of this country. The team of Harivansh as Chief Editor and KK Goenka and RK Dutta in the management have treated the citizens of Jharkhand with great respect. The paper has spoken for the weakest people in the region and sought to protect their rights. But it isn't some hysterical pamphlet on poverty. It also has sport, entertainment and business news in the way a good daily should. Overall, it has raised the bar in Jharkhand in ways which national players in TV and print cannot match.

Seven years ago, when we launched *Civil Society* magazine we wanted to create a business model for very small and independent media in India. It was our take then that garage operations in the media can be hugely influential. They can raise the standards of journalism and can improve the quality of information and debate on which a democracy depends.

Ever since we came across each, we at *Civil Society* have been proud to have *Prabhat Khabar* as an editorial ally and Harivansh as a personal friend. He has shown that it is possible to grow new businesses in the media and do so without making compromises.

**Publisher**  
Umesh Anand

**Editor**  
Rita Anand

**Editorial Consultant**  
Saibal Chatterjee

**News Network**  
Shree Padre, Jehangir Rashid, Shreyasi Singh, Syed Basharat, Susheela Nair

**Photographer**  
Lakshman Anand

**Layout & Design**  
Virender Chauhan

**Cartoonist**  
Samita Rathor

**Write to Civil Society at:**  
E-2144 Palam Vihar, Gurgaon, Haryana 122017. Ph: 9811787772  
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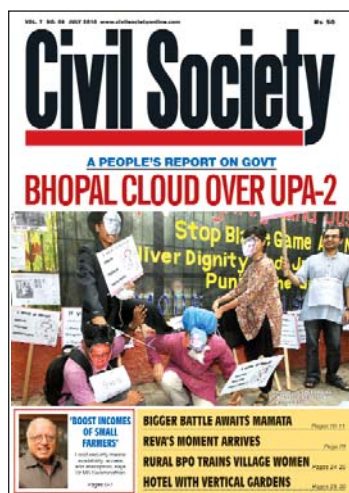
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# POLITICS IS NOT JUST ABOUT POLITICIANS



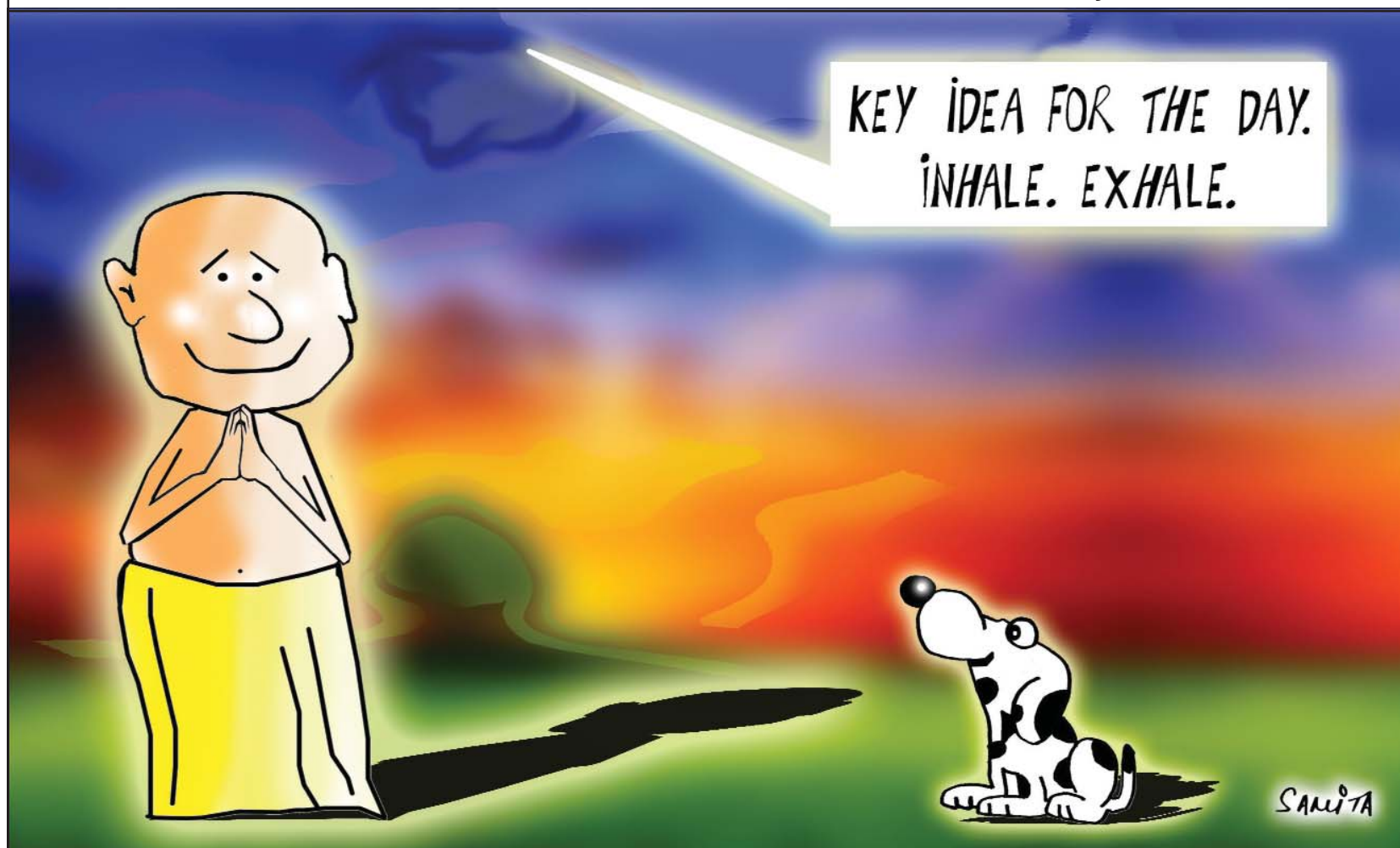
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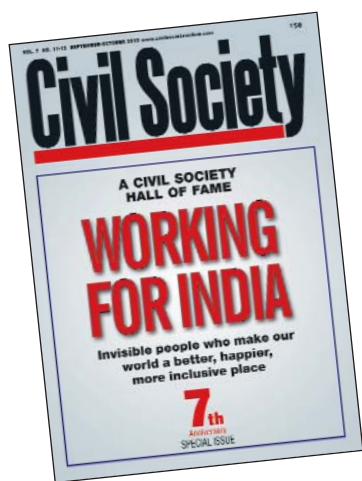
# VOICES

## IN THE LIGHT

by SAMITA RATHOR



## LETTERS



### Annual issue

Congratulations to *Civil Society* for its seventh anniversary. I enjoyed reading the issue especially the stories about how teachers are sprucing up schools and improving education. Very rare to find such wonderful gurus.

**Anila Mishra**

*Civil Society's* stories are original and excellent. It is a well produced magazine with great pictures.

Congratulations and more power to your pen.

**Madhushree Mojumder**

### Uncaring railways

It was interesting to read a feature on the needs of the differently abled in your Annual issue.

In this connection, I request concerned citizens to create awareness among officials of the Indian Railways about two important issues affecting the differently abled.

- We have the facility of doing railway reservation online. On the website under the item 'Quota,' provision has been made for 'Tatkal,' 'General' and 'Ladies.' However no provision has been made for the 'Differently Abled'. Due to this, differently abled persons cannot book their concession tickets through the online reservation facility. They have to go physically to railway reservation counters for getting their concession tickets reserved. This is a pathetic issue. The Indian Railways should look into this lacuna and make provision for the online reservation facility for differently abled persons as is available for general people. For genuineness of concession, TTEs can verify dur-

ing the journey by demanding the necessary identity differently abled persons have with them.

- Even when differently abled people go to the railway reservation counter there are problems. The Union Government has issued National Identity Cards to the differently abled so that they can claim concessions on tickets. However, the railways do not accept this card. They prescribe their own form which needs to be renewed every five years. To get this form, disabled persons have to go through horrible experiences to get it signed by doctors at general hospitals. In fact, the National Identity Card is issued after thorough checking of disabled persons by a team of doctors and only then is it issued. Differently abled persons deserve the above two facilities.

**SR Rajagopal**

### Jackfruit

I was just wondering if anybody had tried making ethanol from jackfruit. If successful then this can industrialise jackfruit cultivation.

**ashish1968@gmail.com**

It is great that people now know the

value of jackfruit and its wood. We would like to grow jackfruit in our area, Udipi district. Please tell us where we can get good quality seeds/grafts.

**ejan45@yahoo.com**

### Traffic woes

I found Ravichandar's piece on technology for traffic police very interesting. These are creative and doable suggestions for any city. We will suggest these to the Chennai traffic police.

**parayath@hotmail.com**

Delhi's traffic police should read this article. We have the maximum road space and the most horrible jams. Traffic here is very sensitive. One little glitch and all roads get stuck. So much money was spent on roads and flyovers but not much I think on traffic management.

**Rajiv Kapoor**

Something should be done for the health of the traffic police. In Mumbai nearly half the traffic police have respiratory disorders. Pollution norms should be strictly implemented.

**Prakash Dhule**

**INTERVIEW** Vijay Mahajan of Basix talks about SKS, the A

# 'In 20 months Gurumani earned what he could have in his entire career'

Civil Society News  
Gurgaon

LAKSHMAN ANAND

THE microfinance sector has been in the news for reasons that don't do its image any good. There is a growing sense that the sector's spirit is being sapped by greed. Promoters of microfinance institutions (MFIs) are seen as amassing personal fortunes and paying managers unrealistically huge sums in compensation.

In sharp focus is the recent IPO of SKS Microfinance which has raised \$ 358 million from the stock markets and was oversubscribed 13 times. The boardroom battles that followed have given the impression that SKS is far removed from the goals of social justice and credit for the poor with which it originally set out as an NGO.

It is the search for commercial viability and capital that puts growing MFIs on a difficult path. The bigger they get, the bigger are their needs. But will making microfinance obscenely profitable actually help in addressing the problem of poverty and the needs of small rural livelihoods? Should SKS' windfall from an IPO be seen as a measure of the enterprise's success or an intimation of the uncertain times that lie ahead for microfinance?

While IPOs are a new phenomenon, the core problems of the sector continue to cry out for solutions. Are interest rates too high and should they be capped? Should MFIs be placed under closer government scrutiny? In the search for size and scale, has there been over-lending? Are some MFIs coming down so heavily on small borrowers that they have been committing suicide in anguish?

Unfortunately, these questions plague the sector just when it could be maturing and playing an important role in financial inclusion. As its image declines, governments feel the need to step in, sometimes with clumsy legislation, as in the case of the ordinance issued in Andhra Pradesh.

To get a clearer picture of what is working and what isn't, *Civil Society* spoke to Vijay Mahajan, 56, founder and Chairman of Basix, a new age company catering to the financial requirements of small rural borrowers since 1997.

Mahajan has degrees from IIT and IIM but has spent only a short while in the corporate sector. He has preferred instead to grapple with problems



Vijay Mahajan

**'In microfinance what happens is that you set out saying you work for the poor and you ask to be allowed to charge 33 per cent interest for the first two years. Then you say Mr Vinod Khosla give me social investment together with all the credibility attached to it and Mr Narayana Murthy please lend your name....'**

of development. He is as respected in financial circles as he is in the social sector. He is one of the founders of the NGO Pradan. As a key voice in microfinance, he has emphasised the need for microfinance to be commercially viable but feels what is happening now is a distortion. Here are extracts from a much longer conversation.

**It seems that microfinance has hit a really rough patch. The reputation of MFIs seems to be in the mud. What do you have to say about this?**

There are three or four reasons. Some of them are intrinsic to the sector and nothing can be done about them till there is a greater understanding of the sector. But some are the creation of the more

## SKS, the Andhra ordinance and the future of microfinance

ambitious players. These could have been avoided and will be mitigated over time.

The single most important reason why the sector gets beaten up is with relation to interest rates. Now if you want to give someone any commodity in small lots, then the transaction cost as a percentage of the price is always high. This is equally true of credit as it is of tea or surf or anything. So, to say that the interest rates charged by MFIs are high is not coming to terms with the math. The sooner one comes to terms with the math, the better. After that the world can decide if the microfinance sector is useful or not.

It is possible as numbers go up to have certain economies of scale. It is also possible to have economies of scope – you could have products in insurance, savings and so on and the costs could be shared. There could be further reduction of transaction costs because of technology.

All this could bring interest rates down, but not drastically. The fall could be from 24 per cent to 18 per cent, but you can't expect it to be six per cent. We have to be prepared for 18. Interest rates in microfinance will always remain high.

What has happened is several players who have reaped economies of scale have not had a downward sloping price curve. So the gap between cost and the price has kept increasing. We have some players who have an eight per cent profit margin which has to be seen in comparison to two per cent for foreign banks and one per cent for public sector banks. To be eight times more profitable than the Indian public sector in the same economy does not mean you are super efficient. What it does mean is you have been able to pull it off somehow.

People always suspected this. But after the SKS public issue and all the attendant publicity, the common man came to know that MFIs are worth thousands of crores of rupees and a sense of unfairness began building up. Remember, SKS was an NGO till 2005.

Then 10 days ago this incident (the sacking of SKS managing director Suresh Gurumani and his reinstatement on the board under court orders) showed the personal wealth that was being acquired by individuals.

Suresh Gurumani came into this sector 20 months ago and has made more money than he possibly could have in his entire career. Now this is completely indefensible. There has been no great innovation. No new technology has been created. Nor is it like building up a company over decades.

On the contrary, it is merely bridging the gap between supply and demand based on a model adopted from the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh and adapted here.

It was I in 1992 who said that for microfinance to be sustainable it must be profitable and for that it must be commercial and I still stand by it. But that does not mean that we can reward entrepreneurs or employees so disproportionately.

**But how do you determine what is proportionate once you go down this path?**

You know I would draw the line at what are the alternative opportunities for these people. If Mr Gurumani had stayed on in the financial sector he would perhaps have had a lifetime income of ₹ 20 crores. But a lifetime income in less two years, for not even inventing something, for not even being

**'We have some players who have an eight per cent profit margin which has to be seen in comparison to 2 per cent for foreign banks and 1 per cent for public sector banks. To be eight times more profitable than the Indian public sector in the same economy does not mean you are super efficient. What it does mean is you have been able to pull it off somehow.'**

an entrepreneur? For just being in the right place at the right time? It's a fit case for disgorgement. (Disgorgement is the term used when the Securities and Exchanges Commission (SEC) in the US asks for ill-begotten earnings to be paid back.)

**So the SKS IPO was not a good thing?**

I am in favour of an IPO. There is no alternative to an IPO after a certain size. There is nothing wrong with raising money from the capital markets. And when you enter the capital markets it's not possible to predict at what price the market will value the issue. So it's possible you will make super normal profits. But in this case it violates all norms of proportionality.

**Isn't it difficult to determine proportionality? But let's get back to the original question about why microfinance has got such a bad name almost overnight as it were?**

See there are high interest rates, accumulating into high profits, high personal gains for the CEO, high valuations, over-lending to households and once they get trapped in debt then use of coercive methods. It violates the whole....

**Microfinance began as a social initiative....**

Well I didn't begin there. Let's just think of it as pure commercial business. If someone comes into microfinance today for a small ticket loan business is that a valid proposition? I think it is. But that doesn't mean we have to as a sector have individuals getting wealth beyond any proportion and in addition to that malpractices leading allegedly to suicide among borrowers.

**How come these issues have been allowed to reach this point? Is it the absence of regulation?**

The key thing which must not be controlled is the price. If price was controlled it would have made MFIs right from the beginning entirely dependent on subsidies and would have made them unprof-

itable. We said please allow apparently high interest in the early years and competition and good sense of people will take care of it. These were people who came into the sector saying they had found a sustainable way of alleviating poverty and so on. Some of these people have stayed the course and some have not. Those who have not have made extraordinary personal wealth.

**Can you give us some examples of this?**

Oh, SKS is nothing. There is Spandana. Padmaja (Padmaja Reddy founded Spandana in 1997 in Guntur) is likely to become the first Indian dollar billionaire. Spandana is going to list at between ₹ 8,000 to ₹ 6,000 crores. I am told she owns 80 per cent of the company. On one hand it's a great story. A young woman from a small town has built a business so why complain?

But the question is – it wasn't always a business. Till 2005 she was an NGO appealing for soft sources of

money. Once those profits were accumulated, some sleight of hand was done and that NGO became an NBFC with high valuations. Short of an investigation how can you tell what has happened?

Now, if you are running a business and you build it up from scratch with a lot of effort and you get high valuations – that is perfectly acceptable. But in microfinance what happens is that you set out saying you work for the poor and you ask to be allowed to charge 33 per cent interest for the first two years because you don't want to be dependent on subsidies and you ask for interest-free loans. Then you say Mr Vinod Khosla give me social investment together with all the credibility attached to it and Mr Narayana Murthy please lend your name....

Three months before the SKS IPO, Catamaran (Narayana Murthy's firm) made an investment in SKS. That's okay, it's a commercial decision. But then before the IPO Narayana Murthy lent his name to SKS as head of the advisory board. Now what is going on?

**So things have gone very awry?**

See in life people make promises and sometimes fall short. You may feel bad, but say okay it happens. But here the promise is about millions of people. The intellectual challenge that Vikram Akula is offering to Mohammed Yunus is that for microfinance to work it has to serve high levels of profitability. And going by the IPO response he got proven right.

But it is for me an irony that on the day SKS listed, ShoreBank in the US collapsed. As a community development finance institution ShoreBank had done great work over the years. All it was asking for was \$150 million. Vikram asked for \$ 350 million and he was rewarded with \$ 5 billion by the capital markets. It is difficult to understand the market. Where is the comparison between \$ 150 million in the US and \$ 5 billion in India?

*Continued on next page*

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#### **Is regulation the answer? What is wrong with the Andhra ordinance?**

While the sins of the sector are certainly worth bemoaning, the Andhra ordinance is a sledgehammer. The main problem is that it requires every MFI to register in every district and it has not been specified how long it will take to get registered. Given the way the bureaucracy works it could take at least three months. During that period you cannot lend which is okay. But you also can't recover your existing loans. Most MFIs recover weekly. That means in three months 12 instalments are gone and once the women in SHGs are 12 instalments behind they never catch up.

So this will lead to a large number of cases of involuntary defaults. And then there is a clause that says if you use coercive methods you will go to jail for three years. Now, there are five or 10 per cent of borrowers who can use that to intimidate collection staff. With ₹10,000 crores outstanding I estimate ₹3,000 to 4,000 crores will be lost. So we are looking at mass defaults.

#### **The ordinance will destroy microfinance?**

It will wipe out many MFIs. Secondly, 80 per cent of MFIs are financed by banks so it will hit them also. You can forget about financial inclusion. Who is going to come and lend to a sector which has such systemic problems? As it is, RBI requires 15 per cent capital adequacy – which means that if you lend ₹1,000 crores you have to have ₹150 crores in capital. Till now this was coming from various private sources. But why would anyone come into a sector which has political risk, reputation risk and governance issues?

#### **What else in the ordinance bothers you?**

At a conceptual level there is this presumption that only the government is the guardian of the poor. SHGs with the government are recognised and all others are delegitimised. It says if those SHGs are being lent to or any member borrows you have to take a no-objection certificate from the government. I see this as a violation of the rights of citizens.

Andhra Pradesh is a highly monetised economy. It has the highest amount of institutional borrowing per farmer household in the country. It also has the highest amount of moneylender borrowing. In other words, there is high density of banking, SHGs and MFIs. It has reduced the total amount of money moneylenders are lending but not their market share. MFIs have ₹10,000 crores outstanding. Now if you beat up MFIs and make them vanish who will benefit? The moneylender.

Given that moneylenders typically charge 36 per cent, it is a gift of at least ₹2,500 crore to the moneylenders. Why would the government want to do this? Well, Rosaiah (the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister) belongs to the moneylender class. I'm not saying he is doing it for his caste but we are all captive of our networks. There will be a sharing of the booty.

#### **So what is the way out? What about the Union microfinance bill?**

The microfinance bill is flawed. It only addresses NGOs. The problem is that for providers the legal

form of the sector has not been specified. Microfinance is being done by societies, Section 25 companies, cooperatives, trusts, NBFCs, banks. The regulatory framework for each of these forms is a different law.

NBFCs are governed under the RBI Act, banks under the Banking Regulation Act etc. Trusts are virtually ungovernable because they are supposed to enjoy high levels of autonomy. Societies are supposed to be charitable so how they can do this kind of financial activity we don't understand. The microfinance bill will legitimise this chaos.

In addition to different laws you have different regulators. There is RBI to take care of depositors' interests. SEBI looks after shareholders' interests. You have a regulator for insurance and so on.

We have to put an end to these verticals. What is needed is a single comprehensive legislative framework which recognises that the worlds of finance and microfinance are totally different.

The problem is about 'micro'. It is not just in relation to micro-credit. The problem will be the same tomorrow with micro savings or insurance. The moment the ticket size is small, the transaction costs go up and therefore the way you regulate will have to be different.

We need a horizontal. It can be below ₹50,000 or below ₹1 lakh. Anything that happens below that level should be regulated by a single unified financial regulator. Any transaction whether it is insurance, savings, housing etc. In South Africa they have such a regulator. Anybody who wants to operate below the level of 10,000 rands, be it a moneylender or a bank has to register. The lollypop is that usury laws will not apply to them.

It's not the complete answer. But at least it is one of the things. A unified regulator should also cover consumers' interests, consumer education and have the ability to adjudicate on pricing issues. Look at the telecom sector in India. The regulator adjudicates on pricing and the downward sloping curve set in faster than it had envisioned.

#### **Are more MFIs going in for IPOs?**

Spandana and Share and possibly Bandhan will have to go in the next six months. An IPO becomes inevitable once you have reached ₹400 to ₹500 crores of capital size. You can't seek money through debt because you will raise ₹40 to 50 crores, which is the amount you will need every other month. If what you need to raise is ₹200 crores, there is no institution around that will give you that much and so you have to go to the stock market.

#### **How will the Unique Identity Number (UID), Aadhar, impact microfinance?**

It is one of the three pieces of technology which can cut costs. You need a UID but you also need a no-frills bank account. And then you need a large number of transaction outlets, business correspondents' outlets. When all these three come together, then you are in a transaction heaven. These three would enable microfinance transactions to be done using bank accounts. Secondly, it will create history in the bank. A sensible bank will say, 'take the loan from us'. So it will make a lot of people bankable. Thirdly, you can look at all financial products and not just a single product.

# Lafarge EIA rev

## *NEAA agrees mining firm's clearance was flawed*

**Manshi Asher**  
Shimla

**I**N a landmark move the National Environment Appellate Authority (NEAA) on 30th August revoked the environment clearance granted to the French multinational, Lafarge, for its ₹900 crore greenfield cement project in Himachal Pradesh by the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF).

Lafarge is considered the world's largest cement producer. The cancellation of its environment clearance comes close on the heels of the company being embroiled in yet another controversy in Meghalaya over land and forest issues. Twenty-one local tribes and the Shella Action Committee, an NGO, had approached the Supreme Court alleging the French company had obtained environment clearance by falsely declaring forested areas as wasteland. The company was accused of displacing local tribals by using dubious means.

On 9 April, the Supreme Court had ordered Lafarge to meet additional conditions for mining, including a deposit of ₹55 crore towards Net Present Value (NPV) of the forest land to be used for welfare projects for tribals.

Importantly, the judgment in the Himachal case came after a member of the NEAA visited the Lafarge Cement and Limestone Mines' proposed project site on 23 June to assess the feasibility of the environment clearance granted to it on 8 June last year. This was the first visit of its kind by the NEAA to the state of Himachal Pradesh. There is little doubt amongst locals that it played a crucial role in the final decision.

"The dispossession, impoverishment and trauma attached to displacement have neither been captured by the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) nor appreciated by the Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC) or the state government," stated the judgment describing the local economy that threatens to be destroyed by the project. Perhaps the MoEF's Appraisal Committee would have been inclined to a similar opinion had they interacted with the local people and looked at the landscape from the actual mining site.

"After we raised objections about the project with the environment ministry, the EAC made a site visit in May 2009. But local people were not informed. The committee did not meet us or get to the mining site saying it was inaccessible by road," says Pratap Singh Thakur who belongs to Bagshyad, one of the affected villages and a petitioner in the NEAA case.

Ritwick Dutta, counsel for Pratap Singh Thakur,



# EIA revoked, villagers relieved

MANSHI ASHER



Women at Bagshyad public hearing

MANSHI ASHER



JC Kala listening to grievances of community members at Bagshyad

argued that "the very purpose of the MoEF committee's site visit was defeated." Based on this argument, Appellate Authority member JC Kala visited the project site in June to carry out a detailed assessment by interacting with the affected people.

Kala visited Shokrori, located opposite the proposed plant site, Thalli, which is adjacent to the plant site, Bagshyad and Kanda at the mining site and had discussions with the villagers. More than 200 people had gathered at Thalli and another 400 at Bagshyad. They strongly opposed the project.

They pointed out that Lafarge's project would have irreversible and adverse impact on local environment, forest diversity and thereby their livelihoods. However, the EIA submitted by Lafarge glossed over such implications. Supporting its EIA report Lafarge has been arguing that very little agricultural land would be acquired for the project and that there was no livelihood dependence on the steep grassy slopes proposed to be mined. This claim itself indicates that nei-

ther the company nor the EIA consultants had done their homework.

The proposed mining area of 800 hectares located beyond Alsindi, near village Shaungi and above village Talhain, across Pheridhar, Alyas and Bagshyad comprises of grassy slopes and oak forests. At least seven villages depend on these forests and grasslands for fodder, fuel wood and grass. Those with smaller land holdings, like the Dalits, depend on collection of non timber forest produce like wild pomegranate and mushroom from these forests for their main source of cash income.

"They are planning to mine my backyard. Yet they claim I will not be affected because they are not taking my 'private' land," says Pratap Singh.

The other critical inadequacy is the impact of pollution due to limestone mining and the cement plant. Both have been grossly underplayed by the company's EIA report. For instance, village Shokrori with its 350 families is just across the cement plant

site. Agriculture is thriving here. Yet the village has not even been mentioned as affected in the EIA report. All the villages around the cement plant and mining site earn a good income by selling peas, cauliflower, cabbage, cucumber etc. They cater not only to the local market but to markets in Delhi and Mumbai. Horticulture is practiced by almost every household. They have orchards and plantations of apple, pomegranate, walnut, plum, apricots and pears.

Far from mentioning these facts, the EIA report says that 49 per cent of people in the area are jobless, implying that the project will bring employment to locals. This, despite the fact that both the EIA and MoU signed with the state government clearly state that the employment generated in the construction phase will be only 2,000 to 2,500 and it will be for a period of only five years. The permanent jobs generated will be 200 in number mostly for skilled persons!

"People are aware of the experience of local populations affected by the ACC and Jaypee cement plants elsewhere in the state. So we were able to see through all these tall claims," observes Meera, a resident of the area and member of a community organisation, Paryavaran Evam Gram Vikas Samiti.

While local sentiment against the project had been building up since September 2006 when the Himachal Cabinet first approved of it, the movement became more intense after a local Dev Sansad referred to as *Jada* was organised. The local *devta* (diety) Deo Badeyogi through the *Gur* (oracle) declared that the plant should not be allowed to come up in the area. This further strengthened the resolve of the village communities to protest against the project. A joint action committee of representatives of the affected panchayats and nine local community organisations called Jai Shri Deo Badeyogi Sangharsh Evam Paryavaran Sanrakshan Samiti was then formed.

Despite this organised resistance driven by cultural beliefs, there were local political representatives whose support the company managed to garner. In fact, after the NEAA judgement came out, Lafarge hired a private public relations firm to release a press statement on behalf of these supporters in favour of the project.

The district administration too has attracted local wrath. Despite repeated petitioning and appeals by the people, it turned a blind eye to the concerns related to the project and went ahead with the land acquisition process, they say. "Even during the NEAA site visit officials of the administration were discouraging Shri Kala from visiting the actual affected site," says KG Thakur, a member of the Samiti.

The NEAA judgment has proved to be a vindication for the people's point of view. It managed to capture local sentiment and recognize the deep dependence of the affected communities on their natural resources. It was also the outcome of a first hand hearing – a rare occurrence in our systems for redressal.

Manshi Asher is a researcher-activist based in Himachal Pradesh and can be contacted at manshi.asher@gmail.com

# A little bit of FRLHT goes to Jamshedpur

Civil Society News  
Jamshedpur

**T**HE Amruth Ayurveda and Yoga Centre in Jamshedpur has in just one year achieved a reputation for treating lifestyle ailments and chronic diseases. The cure is green, the ambience gentle. There are four wise vaidyas to assess you and put you on the path to good health.

Amruth Ayurveda is a joint venture between the Foundation for the Revitalisation of Local Health Traditions (FRLHT) based in Bangalore and the Arogya Bhawan, promoted by Tata Steel as part of its community initiatives. For many years Arogya Bhawan was a naturopathy centre, but it limped along.

When Tata Steel's executives first read about FRLHT's work, they visited the FRLHT campus in Bangalore to take a look at its state of the art Ayurveda hospital and clinic. They liked what they saw and in October 2009 under a joint venture agreement the management of Arogya Bhawan was taken over by FRLHT's Institute for Ayurveda and Integrative Medicine (IAIM). The new facility was christened the Amruth Ayurveda and Yoga Centre.

FRLHT has been recognized as a centre of excellence by the Union Ministry of Health. It has won several awards for its outstanding work in Ayurveda and research in traditional medicine and plants. This is its first venture outside its Bangalore campus. In October this year, FRLHT inaugurated its second hospital on its own campus in Bangalore.

The partnership has given Arogya Bhawan a new lease of life. With name changed and FRLHT in charge, it is now a well managed modern wellness centre offering the full range of Panchkarma treatment. You can buy standardized Ayurveda medicines. There are yoga classes every morning and gym facilities. A few rooms are available for hospitalization. The clinic's spacious grounds now have a carpet of medicinal plants and shrubs.

The affable Dr KS Nambodri and his wife Gita, also an Ayurveda physician, look after the clinic. Their dedication is clear. They live on campus. The clinic therefore has a homely touch. Dr GG Gangadharan, joint director of FRLHT, visits once a month. There is also Dr Neena Gupta, a vaidya from Lucknow. Sourav Banerjee, a trained hospital administrator, left a job at Max to run this facility.

Dr Nambodri explains that Amruth Ayurveda focuses on the preventive, promotive and curative aspects of health. Lifestyle illnesses like blood pressure and diabetes are treated as well as chronic diseases.

The clinic works in synergy with the Tata Main



Hadjar, the plant used by tribals for fractures



Dr KS Nambodri at the Ayurveda pharmacy

Hospital. It has an out-patient facility in the hospital. Patients suffering from illnesses like arthritis, paralysis etc are referred to Amruth Ayurveda. "Basically we are using an integrative medical approach," says Dr Nambodri. "Every system has its merits. In Ayurveda we can treat chronic, lifestyle and age-related illnesses. But emergencies, accident cases and so on, can best be tackled by the hospital."

Dr Nambodri is a patient doctor listening in great detail to his patients. A proper prescription is written out. The clinic's pharmacy is well stocked. Apart from standardised Ayurveda medicines, you can buy OTC formulations. There are Ayurveda medicines in capsule form and packed in light plas-



Dr Gita Nambodri in one of the treatment rooms

tic containers so that they are easy to carry.

The clinic has three treatment rooms which offer special Panchkarma treatment like Abhyangam, Dhara, Pizhichil, Shirovasti, Udvartanam and Navarakizhi. To relax the patient, light music is played during treatments.

Jharkhand is a major source of medicinal plants in India because of its dense forests. Out of 26 major medicinal plants and herbs, 22 varieties are available in Jharkhand. FRLHT tries to promote tribal medicine and is engaged in documenting and validating it.

"We at FRLHT document and record case histories scientifically. Ayurveda physicians claim to cure cancer. We need to build scientific evidence



and present it as case history so that it can stand scrutiny before the allopathic system of medicine," says Dr Namboodri.

One Ayurvedic medicine FRLHT has promoted is *Punarjeevan* which dispels fatigue. It is a discovery of the Kani tribals in Travancore, Kerala. TBGRI tested and marketed it. A percentage of the sales goes back to the Kanis.

"Over here the tribals use a plant called *hadjor* to heal fractures. They wrap it around their injured arm and they do get well," says Dr Namboodri as he walks us through the clinic's medicinal garden, a veritable forest of *tulsi*, ginger, turmeric, aloe vera, *gugulu*, *elaichi*, *shatavari*. He shows us the *hadjor* plant which local tribals use.

When Amruth Ayurveda held a two day Green Health Camp for the tribal community from 13 to 14 July to promote home herbal gardens, tribal people did come but they were not ready to share knowledge about the plants they were using as medicine. Under FRLHT's home herbal garden scheme, 20 plants have been identified for common illnesses and are given as a package. Once the people understood FRLHT's objective they began pulling out bits and pieces of plants from their pockets and bags, eager to explain the medicinal qualities of each plant.

Yoga sessions begin from 5:30 am and carry on till 7:30 am. Dr Namboodri says the *asanas* tackle joint problems and stress, a major reason for illness. There is also *satsang* on Sundays. The gym is well equipped and is popular with the young.

The clinic did not have problems marketing its services. Tata employees were informed through the company's intranet. Jamshedpur citizens knew about the erstwhile Arogya Bhawan and now word has easily spread about its new avatar. The number of patients have increased and the clinic is reaching a break even point. "Financial stability is very important," says the globetrotting Dr Namboodri who has travelled to 17 countries to promote Ayurveda and talks to his patients on Skype.

*Hazards Centre's report shows...*

## Everyone is hit by bill for C'wealth Games

Civil Society News  
New Delhi

NOW that the Commonwealth Games are over, perhaps it is time to consider who will really foot the bill for the extravaganza? Hazards Centre, a group which works for the urban poor has done some calculations. In August, during the run-up to the games, Hazards Centre released a report, 'Heritage Games, Cleaning up the Debris', which estimated the economic and social cost of the games.

After the games, Hazards Centre held a press conference to say once again that a staggering Rs 102,000 crores had been spent and that paying it back will impact the common people of Delhi who will have to contend with rising costs of real estate, rent, energy and transportation.

Hazards Centre agrees national pride has been salvaged, but only due to the hard work of thousands of workers and athletes. Thanks to them India came second.

Even as the games were being held, people had begun paying the costs in many invisible ways. "We had shown how students, commuters, labourers, and vendors had already begun to pay the costs. The poor were evicted, displaced and divested of social and economic security," says the group.

Hazards Centre describes the games as an exercise meant for a few but the investment for which has come from the vast majority of people.

"The athletes won 101 medals. Thirty-eight gold medals were shared by 41 sportspersons. Of these 10 are from the armed forces, five in public services and 13 from families who are affluent. Nine come from deprived backgrounds and have had to struggle immensely. What has been the investment of the nation and the sports associations and government in these athletes?" asks Hazards Centre.

The stadia have been built with public money. But plans are afoot to hand these over to companies on a 10-year lease. To bid for the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium and Indira Gandhi Sports Complex, the net worth of the companies will have to be ₹ 1,000 crores. For the National Stadium, Swimming Pool Complex, and Shooting Range, the net worth would be ₹ 500

crores. The company which wins will be allowed branding rights over the stadia, permission to sublet built-up space, use the venue for concerts and running academies etc. Will this promote sports in the country?

University hostels were taken over and renovated for the Games. Nearly 2000 students were evicted. But hardly any tourists occupied those rooms. Now principals of these colleges are concerned about the high maintenance costs of the renovated hostels. They have said that unless the University Grants Commission provides funds for this purpose, they will have to charge students an extra ₹ 2,000 per month.

Workers who toiled day and night to get the games infrastructure ready on time have obviously not benefited from the outpouring of national pride. The Labour Department of Delhi made little or no effort to register all workers at games venues or to ensure that they were paid minimum

wages and provided with basic social security.

Around 300,000 street vendors and hawkers were prevented from plying their trade. Cycle-rickshaw pullers and loaders were removed. Domestic maids, construction workers, daily wagers, hawkers who did not have the requisite "identity cards" demanded by the police had to leave the city or remain indoors in fear. Even out of 94 masseurs brought from Kerala for the games, 37 were left jobless because of lack of accreditation.

An all-round increase in prices is also apparent. Recently, circle rates for Delhi have been hiked by 100 per cent. But in neighbouring Gurgaon it has gone up by only 5 to 20 per cent. In the last 15 months there has been a complementary increase in property tax in Delhi by 30 to 40 per cent. There is also an average increase by 3 to 4 per cent in office rentals.

Associated with the boom in construction has been the rise in steel prices by between ₹ 1,000 to 1,500 per tonne, and cement prices, which had already risen by ₹ 20 per 50 kg a bag, are slated to rise by another ₹ 15 to 20. Much of this rise will feed into government and private revenues. But it is the common man who will pay.

So citizens of other cities, beware. Once the party is over, the bill will give you a hangover.

**Hazards Centre agrees national pride has been salvaged, but only due to the hard work of workers and athletes.**

# Mumbai's night schools find a guru

*Mobile science lab, short syllabus and job training are offered*

**Gautam Singh**  
Mumbai

It is late evening and a Marathi class is underway at the Adarsh Nagar Night School in Worli. I watch Jiten Parab, 16, engrossed in reading from his textbook. Just an hour ago, he was intently checking out the innards of an old Maruti car.

Jiten, son of a farmer from a village in Malwan district, says he's been fascinated by machines ever since he began living in Mumbai, seven years ago. So he works at a motor workshop from 9 am to 6 pm, Monday to Saturday and half of Sunday trying to figure out what makes machines tick. He then attends school after work, six nights a week and does his homework before he sleeps.

That's a lot of hard work but with simplicity and honesty he says: "I want to do a course at an Industrial Training Institute (ITI) so that I can get a good job."

It is this passionate aspiration of students for a better life that inspired Nikita Ketkar to resign her government job and set up Masoom (Innocence) in January 2008. Her outfit now runs an intervention programme for night schools.

"It is sheer self-motivation, a desire to do something with their lives that brings these youngsters here. But they receive a very poor quality of education. Notebooks, textbooks, access to scientific laboratories and in some cases, even chalk, are not provided. I felt they deserved better," says Nikita.

Mumbai has around 150 night schools for students from Class 8 to Class 10. They cater to more than 15,000 students. The oldest night school was set up almost 100 years ago. Funded by charitable trusts, some of these night schools receive aid from the government in the form of teachers' salaries. The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) rents out classrooms in their schools to the night schools. But it doesn't allow them use of facilities like science laboratories or computers. The trusts pay the rent and running expenditure, but it is only "five or ten percent of the trusts that take an active interest," says Nikita.

In 2006, Nikita and her team of volunteers



Nikita Ketkar



Masoom team helping out at a night school

researched the problems night schools faced and what could be done. Their findings revealed that around 60 per cent of night school students worked during the day, doing small jobs in canteens, offices and shops. Some helped with the family business or at home. The children, tired from work, found it difficult to concentrate. They were also hungry.

Most teachers work part-time in night schools, teaching in schools during the day. They cannot give their best. Perhaps the biggest handicap is the duration of the classes. Night schools are open for just three hours. Day schools work five to six hours. Yet night schools are expected to complete

the entire year's syllabus. School results were naturally poor. The average pass percentage of Class 10 students was only around 20 to 30 per cent.

In 2008, after Masoom was founded, it adopted two schools for an intervention programme. Masoom decided to improve infrastructure, enhance the quality of education and lobby with the government, trustees and other stakeholders.

During one of her first visits to a night school, Nikita found students had negligible exposure to understanding science by doing practicals. Students were permitted entry to the science lab once, usually just before the board exam.

Masoom created mobile science lab kits which

PICTURES BY GAUTAM SINGH

# And a guru in Masoom

are taken to night schools on scheduled days so that students can participate in practicals. Similarly, access to a library, computers, free notebooks and textbooks have been provided by Masoom.

Ashok Jadhav, principal of the R M Bhat night school, feels that much more can be done for students but there is a lack of funds. "Some children need financial help. We teachers sometimes pay for their board examination fees. We wish we could expose them to computers. But we don't have a teacher," he says.

Masoom provides a meal to students in night schools it works with. Jadhav's school isn't part of Masoom's intervention programme, so his students don't get nutrition. He strongly feels it's important to provide children with an evening meal.

"The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan should be extended to secondary education," says Nikita. "If day schools are being provided midday meals, then night schools should also be given evening meals. The night school's student is at a disadvantage compared to the student who can afford to attend day school. The night school student is at times the sole breadwinner of his family and has to work."

It is also a huge challenge for teachers and students to cover the entire syllabus in a short time. To tackle this problem Masoom put together a 'research and development team' with academic experts. The team brainstormed with the night school teachers and managed to bring out a condensed version of the syllabus which they are now following for Class 10.

"Masoom is also working with the Night Schools Headmasters Association, an umbrella organization which sets the preliminary papers, and they have agreed to focus their question papers on the minimum essential syllabus that we have worked on," Nikita explains.

But there's more that Masoom is trying to do for night students. It offers them extra-curricular



**Jiten Parab**

activities, life skills training, psycho-social counseling and vocational guidance.

"We have seven or eight students who are enrolled in vocational courses. That is motivation for the present batch to attend school regularly. We have counselors who help students with learning disabilities or those who are slow learners during our one to one sessions with them," Nikita says.

Prashant Kokate, 24, a former volunteer, now heads the Career Cell. "We find out where the student's interest lies through questionnaires. But it doesn't stop there. We do one to one counseling and see where their interest really lies. Some of

them could just be writing what their parents want them to do. Some might be good at drawing. We make them aware of the possibilities."

Masoom sponsors meritorious students above 18 years for courses in soft-skills development, English conversation and grooming, says Prashant.

Amol Pashelkar, 21, is one such student. Weak in math and science, Amol didn't really believe he would be able to pass Class 10. But the persistent efforts of a volunteer teacher helped him overcome his fears and four years after his first attempt he scored 74 per cent, a record of sorts for a night school student. "I feel proud to have won the scholarship and more self-confident now," he says. Amol has enrolled himself for further studies at a night college which he attends after his day job at the Bombay Stock Exchange.

Masoom's intervention strategy is being implemented in 10 night schools. The NGO is constantly monitoring its impact. Ganesh Naik, 29, a former volunteer is now the Education Coordinator. He collects data from schools on attendance levels, response to English conversation classes, extra classes and teachers' training.

"There is awareness amongst night schools about Masoom's initiatives," he says proudly. "Attendance has improved and the pass percentage for Class 10 has gone up by 10 to 15 per cent." Attendance is still a major issue. Perhaps this is because students feel their part time teachers are disinterested. "The teachers need to be motivated too," says Naik.

The night schools are an orphaned lot. They were set up even before the BMC schools and no specific department takes responsibility for them. "The education department is sympathetic, but they say they don't have the budgetary allocation. And night schools don't even exist in the reports of the Planning Commission!" says Nikita.

Finally, I ask her, why did she name her NGO, Masoom? But this is best answered by Vaishali Aiwale, 19, a student and a homemaker. Married for less than a year, she sits comfortably behind a desk, immaculately dressed in a golden sari, in a classroom full of trendily-clothed teenagers. "I have a great desire to learn. I'm not concerned about getting any job. I just want to keep on learning," she says simply and with innocence.



## Inclusive cities for women

**Shreyasi Singh**  
New Delhi

JAGORI, a feminist documentation, training and resource centre, and Women in Cities International, Canada, are co-organising the Third International Conference on Women's Safety in New Delhi from November 22 to 24. The theme is 'Building Inclusive Cities.' The conference which has the support of international agencies such as UN-Habitat, the Huairou Commission and UNIFEM, brings together urban planners, architects, city governments and several others to discuss and debate women's safety.

The conference is an opportunity to build on the global movement for safer and more gender-inclusive cities and communities.

Two international conferences in Montreal in 2002 and Bogota in 2004 have already taken place on a similar theme. Both of these resulted in the creation of a Declaration on Women's Safety.

Lack of safety in public spaces is a serious obstacle to women playing an active, participative role in an urban setting. Physical factors like badly planned, unsafe roads and transportation systems impact gender equality because they curtail mobility and access.

The conference seeks solutions to making cities safe and inclusive and free of violence against women and children. It also hopes to sensitise municipalities, housing departments and civil society on the need for inclusive cities. The conference will assess and disseminate lessons learned and spread good practices on inclusion and safety of women and children.

A highlight of this three-day event to be held at the India Habitat Centre is 'Transportation – Women and Mobility in the City', a photo exhibition which seeks to understand women's experiences of navigating a city. Curated by Delhi based photographer Gauri Gill, the exhibition will include a range of voices, working class women living on the periphery of the city as well as middle class women commuting to work in the heart of the city. The exhibit will also feature vulnerable sections such as girls, elderly women, disabled women, indigenous women, lesbian and transsexual women, and those from ethnic and cultural minorities. Professional photographers, artistes, students, activists and enthusiasts have been encouraged to send in entries.

A Heritage Walk has also been organised to give participants a chance to explore the city in depth with an eye on women's experiences and spaces in the city.

Since it was founded in 1984, Jagori has worked to address violence against women through direct interventions, campaigns along with institutional and legal changes.

Contact: [conference@jagori.org](mailto:conference@jagori.org), [juhi02@gmail.com](mailto:juhi02@gmail.com)

## No takers as yet for borewell



The borewell rescue team at work

**Shree Padre**  
Kasargod

A child going to school fell into an abandoned borewell in the Madras Port area in 2000. His school bag, flung nearby, alerted passersby. A huge crowd gathered. Local television crews started reporting the incident live. But nobody knew how to rescue the child. The little one eventually died.

More than a dozen such tragedies happen in India every year. There is concern among people so TV channels give these incidents a lot of coverage. But public memory is short. After a while all is forgotten and the administration too drifts into slumber.

Tamil Nadu now has a team of trained youngsters well equipped to handle such a crisis. Whenever they hear of a child trapped in a borewell their leader gets into emergency mode. His team is raring to go.

"Shall we rush to the spot, sir," ask team members eagerly. But their leader advises caution. "No. There is a legal dimension to the issue. We cannot intervene unless the administration invites us to."

Dr V Anand, 49, an ENT surgeon, is the brain behind this rescue mission. He runs two hospi-

tals in Pollachi and Coimbatore.

Anand has trained eight engineering students and equipped them with mobile phones and a jeep to get to the spot. But, incredibly, the team hasn't been called even once because of government apathy.

"We have technology to look right into a patient's body. An infrared camera can show us the scene even in pitch darkness. We can use such facilities during critical times," he says.

Dr Anand put his technology and team of rescuers together after the tragedy in the Madras Port area.

He had first written a letter to the Police Chief with his suggestions. After a nice long gap of one year, he received a reply nominating him as a member of the Greater Madras Disaster Management team.

"I'm part of a 10-member team. Till date I haven't seen the other members! So much for the speed with which our government works," he says.

The doctor was convinced that government departments would continue to dither. He resolved to do something on his own.

First, he found out if any suitable rescue equipment was available in the US and Canada. His

# for borewell rescue



queries drew a blank. Nobody had methods to achieve a narrow borewell rescue.

Dr Anand's family runs the MC Veluswamy Memorial ENT Trust, named after his deceased doctor father. He decided to undertake research and development under this trust. Pollachi has a Mahalingam Engineering College founded by the illustrious industrialist of this region. The college agreed to Dr Anand's request for cooperation.

The engineering college deputed some of its students. Dr Anand became their guide. After some years of designing, planning, fabrication and many improvisations, they invented a model.

Generally, in product development, students do the paper work – specifying the components, design etc. Fabrication is done by technicians lower down in the hierarchy. Muniswamy, one such technician, made an outstanding contribution. The team used discarded gears and other abandoned parts to develop the equipment. New



Dr V Anand

spare parts would have pushed up costs. The total cost came to only ₹ 2 lakhs.

## TEAM IN ACTION

If a child falls into a borewell, the team is trained to rush to the spot. Once they arrive, they split into three groups. The first group will monitor the temperature and humidity inside the borewell. The second will pay attention to imaging to get an idea of the entangled child's posture. The third makes plans to lift out the child.

Dr Anand says monitoring temperature and humidity is very important. "Because of the shock of falling in, the child turns panicky. Consequently, body temperature rises, resulting in excessive sweating. High humidity inside the borewell doesn't allow the sweat to evaporate. Excessive sweating results in loss of water and salts from the body. This, if allowed to continue for 12 hours, might cause death."

Dr Anand doesn't think that passing oxygen into the hole is that important. "Just sending cool air inside consistently is sufficient. A common blower is handy for this."



A dummy being used

The next step is to insert the infrared camera inside the hole. For doing this, a special platform has to be mounted at the mouth of the borewell. The platform has a hole in the middle to carry out operations. It prevents operators from stamping around the mouth of the borewell for that might toss soil on to the baby. "For the same reason we don't allow more than two people to climb on to the platform," says the doctor.

Before inserting pipes into the borewell to extricate the child, graspers and fingers are fitted to it. Two types of fingers are designed. One is to catch hold of the shoulders and the other to be attached to ankles or wrists. "A study of anatomy made us aware of which part of the human body can bear body weight," says Dr Anand.

Though most children fall inside the borewell feet down and head up, the opposite posture can't be ruled out. Recently, in Rajasthan, a boy fell in head first. "It happens when a running child gets entangled. If the hole is covered with a gunny bag, it might cover the child's face and cause suffoca-

tion. This is a dangerous situation," says Dr Anand.

A good quality PVC pipe of 1.5 inch diameter is used to lift the child up. These 15 feet pieces can be fitted to one another. A hexagonal connecting rod is introduced into the hole of these pipes.

The fingers are important parts that hold the child's limbs and are finally instrumental in lifting. Their movements are maneuvered from the platform by operating the hexagonal rods.

The fingers are made of a special steel alloy. For safe grasping, they are covered with foam. With the help of the camera, fingers are carefully fixed into the body parts of the victim. Once this tricky task is completed, the final part of the operation which is lifting, takes just 10 minutes, say team members.

The team's pipes and rods can reach a depth of 60 feet. "However, we can get better results from a depth of 15 to 20 feet," explains Dr Anand. "In most Deccan plateau areas, the rock layer starts at this level. It is at this point where the soil layer ends and the rock begins, that the bore hole has its narrowest point."

## WAITING FOR ACTION

The team has been ready since four years. Its members, who were at that time students, have graduated. So far they have done about a dozen rescue missions using a dummy.

Dr Anand is prepared to offer free services in a 200 km radius. Till date, they have not been given a chance. For distant places, Anand says if the kit is available, local people can use it too, with proper instructions.

Digging a parallel pit is now projected as a scientific method of rescue. Dr Anand differs. "It isn't result oriented at all. The digging shakes the soil and aggravates the situation. Only in one case in Rajasthan was this method successful but that was because there was an existing well nearby."

"In Tamil Nadu awareness is growing. We haven't heard of an accident in the recent past. After a tragedy at Kannur, Kerala also woke up. But the situation in Rajasthan, Punjab, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh has not improved," says Dr Anand.

The kit requires a jeep but Dr Anand is working to redesign the tools so that it can be put inside the dicky of a car or transported by air if the need arises. A new team is also being groomed since the older one has gone in search of jobs.

The Tamil Nadu and Kerala governments have sent their teams to Dr Anand in Pollachi to get trained. Tamil Nadu sent 30 very young fire service workers. Kerala has sent four or five middle-aged people from their groundwater department. No follow-up seems to have been done.

The problem of children falling into borewells is an easily avoidable one. Closing the bore hole once it is abandoned is the easiest solution. "Let each one of us take care to do this. Covering the borewells has to be given top priority", says Dr Anand. "But if a child falls in, we should have a foolproof system of saving him or her."

He says he has documentary proof that four children who were trapped died just before their rescue. "Can't we stop such tragedies," he asks.

His company, Nitya Medical Products (0422-2232828) can produce such kits. The district administrations in 'borewell accident prone' districts should keep such kits and train their fire forces for such an eventuality.

Contact: Dr Anand at 098436 62666 E-mail: anand@entanand.com

# Flower power in Kashmir

**Jehangir Rashid**  
Srinagar

**I**N Kashmir a government job is considered to be heavenly. So it takes courage to quit and move on. That's what Nusrat Jahan Ara did and she has now emerged as one of Kashmir's most successful entrepreneurs, a role model for the youth to aspire to.

With 10 years of experience in the flower business, Nusrat is the proud state franchisee of Petals n Ferns, a leading national chain of fresh flower stores. She is the pioneer of the cut flower industry in Kashmir. Nusrat has excelled in a business which was once considered to be non-productive by most people.

Nusrat is from Dadoora village in south Kashmir's Pulwama district. She resigned from her job as community organizer in the Jammu Development Authority since she had set her sights on being an entrepreneur.

"I was not satisfied with my job. I wanted to do something big," she explains. "So I decided to quit and start my own business. I wanted to start a novel business. The cut-flower business attracted me. I feel proud of my decision. Today, I have many more goals to achieve," says Nusrat.

She began her business in 2000 with literally no financial support. "I joined a new sector. My family supported me through thick and thin. Without their encouragement I may not have succeeded in getting to where I am now," says the entrepreneur. She said parents should help their children chose their careers and support them in their decisions. They should not impose their ambitions on their children.

A graduate in computer applications, Nusrat has set an example to other youth in the state. Her success is more significant since she comes from a village which has witnessed death and destruction during the past two decades of militancy in Kashmir. She has confronted challenges and forged ahead.

"Initially there were some hiccups. There were people who used to say I had made a wrong decision by quitting my government job. But my parents remained steadfast. They encouraged me like anything. Today they feel proud of my success," says Nusrat.

Her business has an annual turnover of ₹ 2 crores. She began her cut flower enterprise by holding an exhibition in the rented hall of a local hotel. "In 2000 I organized a flower exhibition. It was just an experiment and I managed to get a few orders. Since the trend of purchasing fresh flowers did not exist in the Valley, the response was not overwhelming," says Nusrat.

The initial hiccups did not deter her though financial constraints did restrict her growth. However, she braved it out and managed to import flowers on a credit basis. "I didn't have enough money to expand my business but I got material from flower dealers in Delhi on credit. So I first sold the products and then paid back the

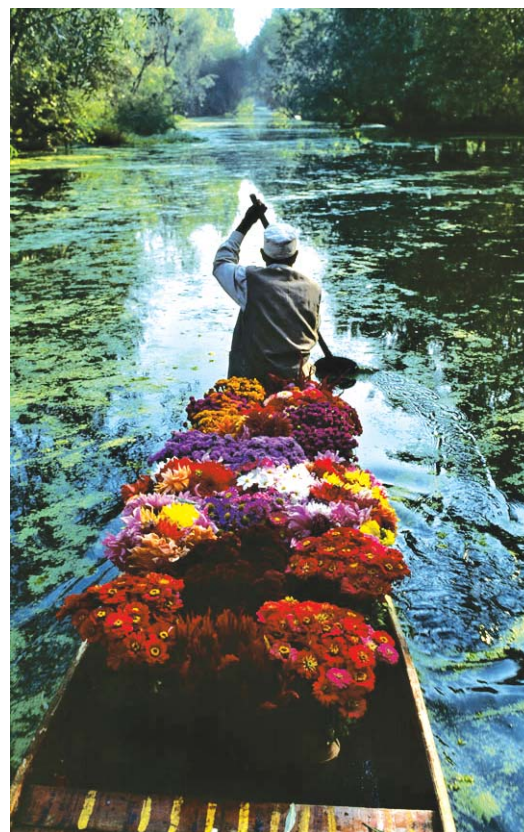


Nusrat Jahan Ara (right) receiving the Tata-TiE Stree Shakti award

dealer," she explains.

Nusrat started cultivating flowers in the backyard of her house as an experiment to enhance her profits. "I got my first big assignment from Jammu and Kashmir Bank. They offered me an annual flower arrangement contract for their functions. This was my first real business opportunity and I earned good profits out of it," recalls Nusrat.

She had to struggle hard to meet supply



demands since the production of fresh flowers is rather meager in Kashmir. She imported flowers from other parts of country to meet her needs.

By 2004, Nusrat has started earning good profits and it was during this year that she became the state franchisee of Petals n Ferns. In order to expand her business she decided to set up her own flower farm.

"I started flower plantation on 25 kanals of land in Beerwah area of Budgam district. The farm yielded good produce and helped in reducing imports. So I made better profits," she says. The idea of local flower cultivation helped her showcase Kashmiri flower varieties to markets in other states.

Nusrat is now the proud owner of three flower farms and a retail outlet which provides employment to 15 people.

Last year on 12 December she was awarded the TATA TiE Stree Shakti award by the Tata group and the TiE Mumbai chapter. The award is given to outstanding women entrepreneurs across MSME (Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises). These awards are specifically for innovative Indian women in business. Nusrat received the award under the small enterprise category.

"It was really great to receive the award. It encourages entrepreneurship and I am glad to have received it," says Nusrat.

Her future plans include modernizing her flower farms and competing at national and international flower shows. Her objective is to place Kashmir on the global flower production map.

"I am working on this plan and hopefully I will succeed. I want to make Kashmir the valley of flowers," says this astute businesswoman who has risen from the grassroots.



# MICROSOFT AD

# RANCHI'S MEDIA WAR

*Prabhat Khabar  
proves content,  
credibility are good  
business*

Civil Society News  
Ranchi

A new confidence suffuses the offices of *Prabhat Khabar* in Ranchi. Circulation has crossed half a million daily. Advertisement revenues have surged. Its eighth edition, in colour, has rolled out. The newspaper has never known such success though it has been number one in Jharkhand for quite a while.

What makes these gains even sweeter is that barely two years ago *Prabhat Khabar* feared being crushed by big Hindi newspapers out to capture the Jharkhand market. At stake currently is an estimated ₹ 100 crore in advertising rising 20 per cent each year.

Now, not only has competition been stopped in its tracks, but *Prabhat Khabar* has also made serious forays into the larger surrounding market of Bihar and strengthened its presence in West Bengal.

A homegrown team of journalists and managers have shown uncommon savvy. They have been nurturing *Prabhat Khabar* since 1989 and have strong local reputations. But getting the better of three powerful national dailies – *Hindustan*, *Dainik Jagran* and most recently *Dainik Bhaskar* – puts them in a super league.

The interest in Jharkhand is defined by Ranchi. It has gone from being a small town to the bustling capital city of the new mineral-rich state of Jharkhand which was carved out of Bihar nine years ago.

Shopping malls, global brands, young people in jeans thronging coffee shops, the opening of educational institutions are intimations of a valuable market in the making.

This is especially so when Jharkhand is coupled with Bihar which has been



Chief Editor Harivansh at *Prabhat Khabar's* modernised press

experiencing a newfound prosperity under Chief Minister Nitish Kumar.

But there is more to Jharkhand than Ranchi. The state has lots of catching up to do.

In its rural areas and forests, people are extremely poor. There is no administration, no justice system to speak of. Jharkhand is one of the states in India hit by rampant Naxalism.

The middle class in Ranchi enjoy their prosperity, but they also crave for better infrastructure, less corruption and greater accountability in the political class.

*Prabhat Khabar's* success has been in being able to bridge these two worlds which have similar core needs, but different aspirations and priorities.

The three national Hindi dailies – *Dainik Jagran*, *Dainik Bhaskar* and *Hindustan* – are feared because they have giant footprints and are run by aggressive managers and owners. They are networked with governments and politicians and pump vast sums into marketing. No effort is spared to push up numbers and bring in advertising.

*Prabhat Khabar* is just the opposite. It has a regional identity and has grown with its own resources: which means that finance has come in a trickle. Its owners are the Jhawars of Kolkata, who have till recently treated the newspaper with the same affection bestowed on an attractive bauble stored in the family locker: something nice to own.

*Prabhat Khabar* is editorially led with Chief Editor Harivansh enjoying more

# COVER

PICTURES BY LAKSHMAN ANAND



**In times when the media is expected to provide celebratory editorial environments and keep advertisers happy, *Prabhat Khabar* has reported on hunger. It has gone in search of stories of poverty and deprivation. It has shown how governance has collapsed.**

freedom than others in his position do. The paper highlights problems of development and vigorously exposes corruption. It is positioned as a people's daily and routinely needles governments. From Lalu Prasad Yadav's fodder scam to Madhu Koda's mining scandals, *Prabhat Khabar* has a long list of bold stories to its name. It has been a thorn in the thick hide of every chief minister.

In times when the media is expected to provide celebratory editorial environments and keep advertisers happy, *Prabhat Khabar* has reported on hunger. It has gone in search of stories of poverty and deprivation. It has made it its busi-

ness to show how governance has collapsed.

Each year to mark the paper's anniversary, *Prabhat Khabar* does a special issue on corruption. It lists projects big and small and says how much has been paid in illegal commissions.

It is this model which was being put to test when the bigger, more commercially oriented Hindi dailies decided to enter the Jharkhand market. The fact that *Prabhat Khabar* has come out on top seems like proof that papers like it can succeed and that people want papers that speak for them.

"Content is king," says KK Goenka, managing director of Neutral Publishing Ltd, which formally owns the *Prabhat Khabar* title. "It is because of Harivansh's leadership and the credibility of our editorial operations that we have been able to fend off competition."

Harivansh points out that the fight is for more than market share. It is, for him at least, over defining the role of the media and linking integrity and relevance to commercial viability.

"A democracy needs media it can trust. A democracy needs information for governance to work for all," says Harivansh.

**NO INSTANT FORMULA:** But there is no instant formula for achieving credibility. It can only be built from one day to the next. *Prabhat Khabar* has had to hold its ground in difficult situations when powerful politicians and financial interests have tried to browbeat the paper over stories they did not like. It has

# COVER

refused to carry paid stories and more than once taken painful decisions to walk away from advertising. As anyone can well imagine, none of this has been easy.

Prabhat Khabar's slogan is "Akhbar nahin, andolan hai," which translates as, "Not merely a newspaper, but a movement".

It has run a campaign called "Prabhat Khabar aapke dwar" or "Prabhat Khabar at your door" with which it has gone from urban neighbourhoods to villages to listen to people's problems and highlight them, thereby making the paper an instrument for development.

Before Jharkhand was carved out of Bihar nine years ago, Prabhat Khabar championed the cause of a smaller separate state, which would be better governed. The paper propagated the rights of tribal communities over their mineral wealth.

The result is that entering the Jharkhand market and dislodging Prabhat Khabar is a complex commercial proposition. It can't be done by burning money alone.

"The national dailies when they come here attempt a personality change. They try doing grassroots stories and even some exposes. This is acknowledgement of the model that Prabhat Khabar stands for," says Harivansh, who is a soft-natured, generous person and doesn't enjoy bad-mouthing rivals.

They have also lured away Prabhat Khabar staff with much better salaries. But an identity can't be grafted. It has to come from inspiration and chemistry and a lot of madness.

**GROWING AND LEARNING:** When Harivansh joined Prabhat Khabar to be its editor in 1989, it was just eight pages printed in black and white on an outdated press. He on the other hand gave up a job in mainstream media to build a modern paper in Ranchi, then a backward urban centre symbolised by its corruption, poverty and abysmal living standards.

What exists today as a valuable media brand in a rising market is the result of more than 20 years of hard work. In this journey he was joined right from the beginning by Goenka, who is now MD, and RK Dutta, who is executive director.

Harivansh is 55. Goenka is 47 and Dutta 46. In terms of age it is an interesting bandwidth.

Replicating Prabhat Khabar is doubly difficult because as an editorial offering



Teeming Ranchi with rival hoardings of Prabhat Khabar and Dainik Bhaskar

and as a business it has managed to evolve while holding on to its core values.

Harivansh, Goenka and Dutta have each grown as individuals and professionals. With each challenge they have acquired new sophistications needed to protect their turf. The scale at which they think has changed. But almost miraculously, their mission has remained intact. In media, with its many distractions, it is easy to tire and drift. Yet they have hung together as a team, leaving enough space for each other.

In the coming couple of years, Prabhat Khabar expects to invest ₹ 50 crores in its growth. For many media companies that is not a very large sum. But at Prabhat Khabar it represents a big leap. Just five years ago there was no money for new offices or recruitments.

Prabhat Khabar has a current turnover of around Rs 80 crores of which more than ₹ 40 crores come from advertising revenue. It is compelled to go out in search of new talent both in editorial and management. Already there are about 1,000 people on the rolls whose salaries add up to ₹ 18 crores or so a year.

This is a difficult curve to be on. It means Prabhat Khabar has to keep spending to grow faster and maintain its leadership position. Indications are that it can do it.

**THE STOP-BHASKAR STRATEGY:** When it became known a year ago that Dainik Bhaskar was launching a Ranchi edition, the Prabhat Khabar team perceived a challenge like they had never known before.



**Prabhat Khabar reaches out with social messages, asking people to vote and fight corruption.**

# COVER



Hindustan's hoarding of freebies

Replicating *Prabhat Khabar* is doubly difficult because as an editorial offering and as a business it has managed to evolve while holding on to its core values.

*Dainik Bhaskar* has its origins in Madhya Pradesh. But it has spread itself across the country by lowering cover prices, mopping up circulation by selling subscriptions with free gifts and offering sweetheart deals to distributors and hawkers. With numbers to show, it collects local advertising at discounts and offers national ad campaigns the advantage of multiple editions.

Another important *Dainik Bhaskar* stratagem is to recruit editorial and management talent en masse with alluring hikes in salary so as to cripple the competition.

In Jharkhand however *Dainik Bhaskar* seems to have found it difficult to steamroll *Prabhat Khabar* on whose demise its success will depend. It has had to contend not only with a unique editorial product, but also a business strategy whose timing it hadn't wagered for.

The *Prabhat Khabar* team studied the experience in other markets where *Bhaskar* had made an entry and decided to make a few crucial moves:

It decided to be the first-mover in a price cut. In June this year, just two months before *Dainik Bhaskar* was to launch, *Prabhat Khabar* lowered its cover price from ₹ 4 to ₹ 2

It invested in marketing schemes such as scratch-and-win offers. So, not only was the paper cheaper, but there were freebies.

A new and sophisticated printing machine was installed.

Editorial was ramped up. *Prabhat Khabar* became 24 pages, all in colour.

The result was that its circulation in Jharkhand shot up from 248,000 to

350,000 copies a day. The Bihar edition went from 74,000 to 100,000 and in West Bengal where there was no price cut the circulation remained at 60,000.

Added up, this has put *Prabhat Khabar's* cumulative circulation at 510,000.

By the time *Bhaskar* arrived in Jharkhand, *Prabhat Khabar* had already expanded the market with the price cut and acquired the additional numbers for itself.

People could now get their favourite and trusted paper, all in colour at half the price.

In other markets where *Bhaskar* has succeeded, the leaders didn't move as swiftly as *Prabhat Khabar*. They waited for *Bhaskar* to settle down and then it became extremely expensive to respond.

Here in Jharkhand, *Bhaskar* had to do the catching up with troublesome

results. At ₹ 2 with loads of freebies, *Bhaskar's* subscriptions have been selling in large numbers, but there are concerns over their validity. A true picture will only emerge after a year when the subscriptions have to be renewed.

The *Prabhat Khabar* team can't suppress their excitement at having pulled this off. As they cut the paper's cover price, *Hindustan* and *Dainik Jagran* followed – making *Bhaskar's* entry even more difficult.

A lower cover price with rising circulation and growing investments in people and quality could be a recipe for disaster unless it is matched by advertising revenues.

*Prabhat Khabar's* leadership reports that the paper's advertising revenues



Dainik Jagran occupies prime space at the airport

# COVER



Anuj Sinha, editor of the Jharkhand editions of *Prabhat Khabar*

**Ranchi's roads and civic amenities may be poor, but it bustles with activity. It has hopes and aspirations that have taken shape as the Indian economy has opened up.**

have already begun to surge, especially because of the push that it is undertaking in Bihar. So, expectations are that the money it is investing, mostly with loans from banks, will come back in good time.

Jharkhand has always seen six to seven per cent growth. Bihar under Chief Minister Nitish Kumar has claimed more than 10 per cent growth.

*Prabhat Khabar* is confident of holding on to its position in Jharkhand. But its real trump card is Bihar where it hopes to ride the wave of better governance and prosperity with a professionally produced paper.

A spanking new office is set to open in Patna. "We believe that Bihar is ready for a Hindi paper which addresses issues that relate to better governance and stability," explains Harivansh. "In Bihar our emphasis is on revival of the economy and the success stories of people who are returning to the state to strengthen this process."



Departmental stores and malls have come up in Ranchi

**EVOLVING CONTENT:** *Prabhat Khabar's* editorial contents have been continuously evolving. While it remains a paper known for its hard-hitting stories and its unwillingness to compromise, there is also coverage of cinema, music, health, fashion, women's issues, sports and business.



'Bindas' Bhupesh in action at the Dhoom Radio studio



A crowded coffee shop

# COVER



Young girls on a Ranchi street

Laxman's courageous knock against the Australians becomes lead as does India's haul of medals at the Commonwealth Games.

Harivansh has got respected names from all over the country to contribute to his comment pages. He has also attracted local intellectuals and people in government who wish to speak out.

The result is that *Prabhat Khabar* is a well-rounded paper put together with sensitivity and a feel for what is relevant and contemporary.

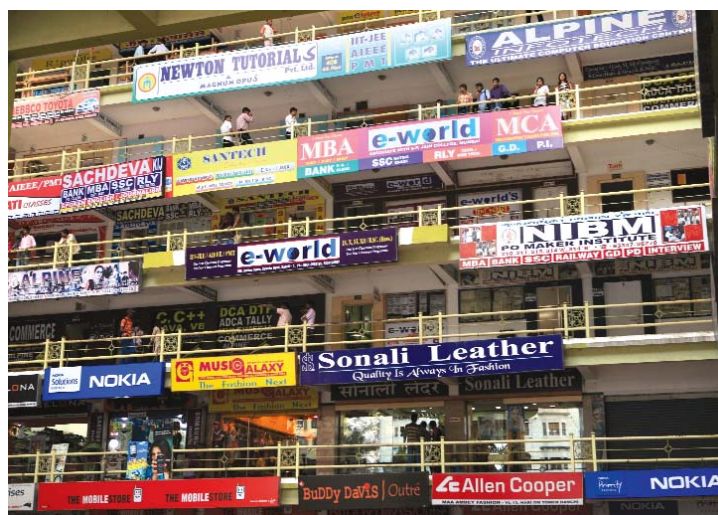
Harivansh has also learned to delegate responsibility. His resident editors for his eight editions are all young men in their early thirties.

Anuj Sinha, who supervises all the Jharkhand editions, is older at 42, but spirited and full of positive energy. He has been with the paper for longer than Harivansh has and was given the job of setting up the hugely successful Jamshedpur edition before he returned to Ranchi to occupy the cabin next to Harivansh's.

Most senior appointments have been from among existing staff because it is important that *Prabhat Khabar* be led by individuals who understand the paper's culture and priorities.

However, for an executive editor based in Delhi Harivansh has had to look outside. It was decided to hire NP Singh, who began as a consultant with the paper and has done stints at Aaj Tak, NDTV and Sahara.

Harivansh insists that he has decentralised large chunks of editorial authority. The day's stories and the way they are to be positioned are decided by the young resident editors and their respective teams.



International and Indian brands are advertised loudly

**THE NEW RANCHI:** Ranchi is no longer the remote city that Harivansh moved to 20 years ago. Its roads and civic amenities may be poor, but it bustles with activity.

It has hopes and aspirations that have taken shape as the Indian economy has experienced reforms and opened up. International brands are advertised loudly. There are departmental stores and shopping malls.

A Coffee Café Day is packed with young people. Girls and boys hold hands, hang out together and don't mind being photographed. Not insignificantly, this is also the city where the Indian cricket captain, Mahinder Singh Dhoni, comes from. Without doubt he has changed the way

young men and women of the city perceive themselves.

At the studios of Radio Dhoom, an FM channel owned by *Prabhat Khabar*, Bhupesh Sharma is the radio jockey on air. He used to be in Delhi, has worked in NOIDA and spent time trying to get into the Hindi film industry in Mumbai.

'Bindas' Bhupesh, as he calls himself, loves his job as a radio jockey and copywriter for Radio Dhoom. He has a collection of bracelets and lives in his jeans. When he is not working he spends his time romancing his girlfriend.

"These days even a 74-year-old man wants to think that he is young," declares Bhupesh between numbers. "It is a different world."

For *Prabhat Khabar*, the challenge is to stay in tune with two worlds. One in which governance sucks and extremely poor people eke out a living amidst injustices. And another in which ambitions and hopes have begun to soar.

It is a challenge only very good journalists can measure up to.

# ‘Ultimately, content is king’

*KK Goenka, managing director, and RK Dutta, executive director, have handled the business affairs of Prabhat Khabar for the past 21 years. Low-key and grounded in reality, they take the decisions that have seen the paper grow and remain viable. In the past eight years they have played key roles in getting the better of competition. Civil Society spoke to them at the Prabhat Khabar office in Ranchi.*

**Prabhat Khabar has been successful in retaining its market. What do you think have been the reasons for its success?**

I think there are three or four basic reasons. First, there is the editorial content and the pro-people approach of the paper. I think that is one of the main reasons. Second, there is good team work. The top three people have been associated with the organization for the past 21 years. That is unique for any organization. I think the newspaper understands the pulse and needs of the local market. Team work is very important. Our people are emotional and the sense of belonging to the organization is very high. We have developed a different culture here, a family culture. The emotional quotient in *Prabhat Khabar* is very high.

**So you think there is a greater understanding in management of the kind of role editorial needs to play?**

The balancing of editorial and management is just perfect. We understand our respective strengths and weaknesses. If we feel that there is a clash between the interests of readers and advertising revenue, we forego revenue. Paid news was a big issue during the last elections. All the big newspapers minted money. But *Prabhat Khabar* did not. We took a different stand. We chose editorial over revenue. Our credibility is most important.

**When the big newspaper brands decided to enter the Ranchi market, how did you define your strategy?**

In any tussle over market share in the media, one strong brand will prevail. If you have a good product and an effective marketing strategy in place there is no reason to fail. We know the local market better than any national player. Their focus is not Jharkhand or Bihar. They have a national perspective. But our focus is Jharkhand and Bihar so we will always be in a better position. They won't be able to dent our markets here. We can conquer them.

**What were the key strategies you employed which were new to your organization?**

Well, earlier we were very conservative. Price reduction was never considered. But this time we reduced our price from Rs 4 to Rs 2. We had the first-mover advantage. We also went all colour. We got the benefits of this early strategy.

**What was the impact?**

We increased our numbers manifold. Circulation grew.

**What is your circulation figure now in Jharkhand?**

It is around 350,000. *Hindustan's* is around 280,000 and *Dainik Jagran*, below 150,000. *Bhaskar* claims more than 100,000 copies.

**So what has happened? Has the market grown? Are people buying more than one paper?**

I think the market has grown. Cover price played a major role. Purchasing power here is not very high. People are basically poor. At Rs 4 many people



KK Goenka



RK Dutta

were not able to afford a newspaper. So there is duplication of readers as well as new readers. The market must have grown by almost 250,000 copies after the price reduction. That is my assessment because we have grown by almost 125,000 copies.

**What is the lesson in this for other smaller regional newspapers?**

See if you stick to the basics – give a good product, be pro people and sincere to your readers and you are backed by good marketing, then you can not only maintain your market share but you can grow.

**What if you had not reduced your cover price?**

We would have had a problem. If we had reduced our cover price after *Bhaskar* entered the market it would have given us a negative image. People would have said *Bhaskar* forced you to reduce your price. But we did this two months before they entered the market. See, people feel that *Prabhat Khabar* is their own paper. There is a sense of belonging. We are sons of the soil.

The other papers are seen as 'outsiders'. *Hindustan* is perceived as a newspaper of Bihar. A lot of people have migrated from Bihar to Jharkhand so they are *Hindustan's* prime target. *Dainik Jagran* is not able to position itself. Even *Dainik Bhaskar* is selling mainly because of their attractive schemes. You are paid to read their newspaper. The numbers are there but it remains to be seen what will happen after a year.

Ultimately content is king. It is all about your product. We are matching them on price and other factors. Whoever has better content is the winner. We have the advantage of loyal readers. If we don't commit mistakes, I don't see any reason for readers to leave *Prabhat Khabar*.

**Is there any rise in ad revenue?**

It is growing and will increase further. *Bhaskar* is aggressive and tries many strategies. We will learn from them also. We have to adapt those strategies very fast.

**What is the advertising pie? How do you see it growing?**

The local ad market should be around ₹100 crores for print media. *Prabhat Khabar* gets around 45 to 50 per cent of that. Every year it grows around 25 per cent. Till last year we were doing reasonably well, growing by 30 per cent. We hope to meet our targets because we have no other option. Our dependency on ad revenue has gone up.

**How much have you had to invest in taking on the competition?**

Our basic investment is in new infrastructure, upgrading our printing facilities. We are spending a lot in Bihar, on new offices. Definitely there will be losses because we will have to pump money into our new editions.

**And cutting your cover price, investing in marketing?**

Yes, of course. Cutting the price cost us around ₹30 crore. We are spending on branding activity. You must have seen our hoardings. We can't avoid such expenses. We have to be in the race.

**You said you have started thinking like a big paper.**

Well we are in transition. We are coming out from that typical Indian middle class mentality. We are already ninth among the Hindi dailies in the country. And if we grow by 100,000 we will be seventh. Our target is to be sixth or seventh in the next two years. Our total readership is more than five million and growing.



# Business

- Enterprise
- Inclusion
- CSR
- ICT
- Go Green

## Just 50 firms in India use GRI

Civil Society News  
New Delhi

THE Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) seeks to make companies more conscious of their social and environmental responsibilities. It believes that such awareness is good for business and builds value. Ernst Ligteringen, chief executive of GRI, was in Delhi recently to deliver the annual lecture of the Business and Community Foundation (BCF), a non-profit which helps companies take up social causes. *Civil Society* caught up with Ligteringen to find out how GRI has been progressing in India and the rest of the world over the past 10 years since it was started.

**The Global Reporting Initiative has been reaching out to Indian companies. What has been the response?**

The GRI's fundamental mission is to make the practice of sustainability reporting or environment, social and governance reporting (ESG) a robust and widespread practice. Since its inception in 1997 the GRI has engaged with India from the very beginning. The number of Indian companies is increasing but so is the interest of stakeholders of companies in India. The discussion is becoming more intensive and this comes at a time when mainstreaming of reporting of ESG results is being questioned. Therefore we are interested in having a closer dialogue with companies, civil society and different stakeholders especially the government in India about how GRI can be advanced further. So that is why GRI has established a focal point in India.

**How many companies have this form of reporting?**

Well it sounds a bit strange for an organization engaged in transparency and accountability but the truth is we don't know.

**How is that?**

Because it is largely voluntary and not everybody who uses the GRI guidelines will tell us. We know from evidence that companies have not informed us. What I can tell you as a matter of fact is that there are at least 2,000 companies we know who use it. But we also know that the actual



Ernst Ligteringen

**In 2000 research by KPMG estimated that about 3,000 companies were using GRI globally. If you look at Fortune's list of 250 of the largest companies in the world about 70 per cent of them are now disclosing their environment, social and governance data.**

community of users is much larger. A person from one large insurance company told us, look there isn't a big company anymore which will produce board results without looking at the GRI standards. These standards have become the de facto standards. And whether they mention it in the report or not, that is the practice.

**What is the picture that emerges? What type of companies use the GRI guidelines? What are the size and sectors they belong to?**

In 2000 research by KPMG estimated that about 3,000 something companies worldwide were using GRI. If you look at Fortune's list of 250 of the largest companies in the world about 70 per cent of them are now disclosing their environment, social and governance data.

In India, as far as we know, the number is just around 50 companies and mostly the bigger companies. But it is the trend worldwide. Small and medium companies pick up GRI for diverse reasons. Sometimes they are in the supply chain of

LAKSHMAN ANAND

# BUSINESS

larger companies. Sometimes they want this distinguishing feature or they want to demonstrate this to their clients just as large companies do.

**Is there a danger of it being reduced to some sort of a public relations tool, a sort of badge round the CEO's neck? So pollution keeps growing, there is no inclusion of the poor and there is no explanation for this.**

GRI still has a long way to go. It started just over a decade ago. And it needs to grow in two ways: in terms of numbers and quality. For many companies, GRI is still new and a first step and as you indicate, it is sometimes just started by a few isolated people in the company but it should advance over time to really become part of the DNA. Companies have to take this seriously. They will also find very quickly that finance strategy and sustainability are inseparable. So therefore it becomes a business issue. Its not just something good you do on the side as an after thought. CSR is not about philanthropy.

**A lot of businesses emerging across countries in South Asia are the result of crony capitalism. In such an atmosphere where policy decisions are not driven by democratic openness how does GRI work?** What GRI does is to work with different stakeholders in the DNA. The way we operate is to figure out what are the meaningful measures by which a company can be transparent or any organization can be transparent about the impact it is having on the environment, society and economy. This is fundamental to our understanding of where our economy is going. We are in the middle of a massive transition to a new sustainable economy. We are leaving an era of take, make and waste.

**You are talking about the developed world.**

No, I am talking about globally.

**But there seems to be a lack of fit in that. Let's take what Coca-Cola does in a developed economy and what it does in India and then it gets on to the environment committee of the CII ...its shocking. There are any number of companies passing on dirty technology to emerging economies. Now you have a global reporting initiative. Well, it seems to be full of contradictions.**

The GRI is the standard test. It also makes it possible to get very diverse parties round the table. That's the role we play. So companies and society can debate. Now the instrument exists so why are you not using it? The issue you just indicated needs to be resolved between the parties. What we are advocating is that transparency is good for companies, for society and the market.

It isn't the case that civil society is always on the side of the angels. There are also cases when civil society comes with arguments, where they simply do not have the full understanding of the

complexity that businesses have got to deal with.

GRI makes more information available so that we can have an informed debate. That is what we need because we have so many choices to be made over the coming decade, choices that are too fundamental to leave only to business or government or civil society. These are choices we should make together and we need to make them in an informed way. That is the fundamental mission we are working on.

**Sure, but the point GRI will find hard to tackle is given the way corporations from the developed world behave in the developing world it is a problem to get rid of the culture of take, make and waste.**

It is a problem also in the developed world. Corporations are not a homogenous bunch. You have companies in the developing world who I would say are among the best innovators. I can name you two, three Brazilian companies where I take my hat off. They are at the forefront of innovation in their business models.

**But you can't say the same thing for a lot of global corporate behavior and therein lies the problem.**

Is the glass half full or half empty? We are on a path. Bloomberg systematically goes through all the sustainability reports, plucking out the data and disseminating it through its screens. These are the financial markets taking an interest. The moment companies begin to realize this, the whole issue becomes different. This is no longer something for do-gooders, something nice you do on the side, for awards. How companies position themselves in a market in ten years time will be fundamentally different to as we know it today.

**What does the inclusion of 50 Indian companies look like to you? Does it**

**tell you any story?**

There is certainly growth but India is not in the forefront.

**Are most successful examples driven from the top, from the CEO, the director?**

If you are trying to integrate the GRI into the business, and it is left only to the communications department, it does not work. It works best when the top is committed. But there are different ways of arriving there. Often the first to take this on is the CEO but not always. There are champions in the organizations but they do need ways to con-

**'If you are trying to integrate the GRI into the business and it is left only to the communications department, it does not work. It works best when the top is committed.'**

vince others. And they come up. They look at other companies and how they have done it. Look that one got an award, that one got lot of praise. When the journey starts they start seeing data and they discover new dimensions.

**What interest has the government of India shown in GRI?**

It's early days. A couple of years ago no government was talking to us and the thinking was that this type of reporting was

more akin to CSR and should be voluntary. More and more, especially after the financial crisis, there is an understanding that markets are not perfect and there is a role for government for initiating the future economy. More governments are in talks with GRI over how they can shape policy to take this through. Now we do think there is a role for government. We don't think everything should be regulated. We do think it is important to mainstream this kind of disclosure and that governments indicate the minimum they expect or require.

**Are you saying disclosure should be mandatory?**

I am saying governments needs to indicate. There are also mandatory ways you can do this. There is a minimum that should be required. There is also a lot of best practice to be developed. Some companies will take the lead and also reap the benefits of it.

We don't think being very prescriptive works. We think its best if governments find a way to implement the principle. The Danish government is an interesting example. They pass a bit of regulation which says for large companies we expect you to disclose your material ESG results or explain if you don't. It's very simple. They are not yet going exactly into what is the material, no specific definitions because as soon as you go there you get companies trying to find loopholes or you get lots of companies saying, leave that to us.

The GRI is working in a voluntary sphere. But we are working out through dialogue what is the best measure. Now the Danes did not write in the regulation you have to use GRI. What they said is you have to do this and you could use the GRI guidelines because they are the most widely used for this kind of reporting. It's a light touch, but governments need to indicate.

The Security and Exchange Commission (SEC) of the United States, I believe in December last year, put out an explanatory note saying companies have an obligation to disclose material decisions and results. The SEC clarified that the impact on climate should be considered material which is affecting the company's business. It also suggested that GRI guidelines can be used.

You will see more of this kind of action. In South Africa the Kingsley corporate governance has just been adopted. Companies listed on the Johannesburg securities exchange have to link GRI to their financial reports.

# Online bazaar for artisans

**Shreyasi Singh**  
Noida (UP)

**M**UCH like the unique handicrafts he sells, Sudip Dutta is fashioning his own life with rare strokes. Just last year he was living out an Indian expatriate engineer's dream, handling IT sales at a technology firm in the Silicon Valley for the US and Asia Pacific region. Now he spends nearly seven days a month visiting small villages in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, discovering talented artisans to put in place a supply chain for Aporv, the website he co-founded to facilitate linkages between Indian artisans and the global community.

Launched in June 2010, Aporv, which means 'unique' in Sanskrit, wants to go beyond providing artisans a decent market to sell their products. Dutta, who moved to Bengaluru last year after five years in the US, says the richness of their venture lies in the stories woven around each handicraft on sale. The storytelling, he says, helps renew interest in neglected crafts, and creates a socially conscious customer base that will help preserve our craft traditions.

Aporv already retails a range of crafts – leather paintings, Madhubani art, black pottery, wood parquetry – from across India. Its product range includes home accessories, decorative items and jewellery. Dutta points to the immense opportunities available. "Some research reports say that handicrafts are a \$28 billion industry globally. The handmade products market is a \$ 200 billion market worldwide. China has 30 per cent of this market, India just 2 per cent," says he.

"Indian creativity is not appreciated enough abroad. We have a lot to offer and we need to showcase that. After agriculture, handicraft is a huge employer in India. The potential to align all of this is tremendous," he adds excitedly.

Unfortunately, most artisans have little idea of the markets available to them and even less of the prices they can command. Educating artisans, Dutta says, is a key mission although he is quick to add Aporv is firmly a "for-profit" enterprise.

"We never bargain with our artisans. We give



**Sudip Dutta**

them the price that they ask for," says 33-year old Dutta. And, before you can ask if those rates are really the fair trade price Aporv guarantees, he rushes to explain. "On their price, we factor in our logistics, marketing and other costs to arrive at the sales price. A percentage of the difference between our sales price and the price they sold to us goes back to them. This enables them to understand the true 'value' of their product."

Eventually, Aporv wants its artisans to log in to the website directly and put up products for sale. "It's important that the sale prices are not a secret to our crafts people. It helps build trust," says Dutta, who says he was always creatively inclined as a child but engineering won over in the choice of a lucrative career. An engineer from BITS Pilani, he worked with Infosys and Larsen & Toubro before going to the US. He co-founded Aporv with his partner, Subhra Banerjee. They are supported by two key team members, Shashikant Khandelwal, a BITS Pilani-Stanford alumni who created the IT infrastructure, and Deepak Kumar, an IIML-Wharton graduate who helps strategise on the business outlook. They continue to live in the US and work for Aporv part time.

Dutta quit his job to move back. His passion is catalysing results. In the five months Aporv has been in business, it has gotten over 45,000 page

views. It already has 75 registered customers. He admits they are looking at breaching break even on their "some tens of lakhs" of investment, mainly self-funded, within the next 12 months, ahead of schedule.

They have also signed up Infosys as a customer and are working to expand the corporate customer base. The response has been encouraging, Dutta says. "Companies like us because we help them meet their CSR objectives. And, our products, all handmade, are genuinely green."

Aporv also offers its customers the bells and whistles of a modern, retail experience – a seven day, no questions asked return policy, gift packing and home delivery facilities across India as well as detailed product specifications complete with multiple picture views to help make an informed choice. Plans are afoot to start shipping internationally by November 2010.

But, challenges abound. Dutta confesses corporate bulk orders will not be a cakewalk. "Because we are fair trade, our products are priced higher. The corporate range begins from ₹ 200 to ₹ 250. We need to educate our customers on why they pay higher, why they do more than just buy a product. And how they might be playing a role in preserving a 16th century art form."

Finding interesting products has been easy, says Dutta. Each village has a different craft with unique differences. But convincing artisans to partner with them was more difficult than they had initially thought. Artisans are hesitant to talk for themselves because they fear bypassing the middleman or the broker. Despite this, Aporv has grown its community of artisans to nearly 500 across Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Mizoram, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and other states. They also work with self-help groups and NGOs to broaden their supply chain.

"Artisans don't need sympathy or pity. We need to give them work, appreciate their skill. They are capable and willing. If we don't give them work, we are killing our art," says Dutta. Fortunately, though, Aporv has spotted the riches that can flow from keeping Indian crafts alive. It's a fortune likely to throw up more than just great profits.

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# Insights

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## CSR diktat won't work

V RAVICHANDAR

**W**E, the government and the private sector, had a compact. The role of business was to focus on jobs, generating income and paying taxes. The government was to take care of security, maintaining law and order, provisioning social infrastructure, etc. Over the years, this compact has been broken.

The government has found it exceedingly difficult to keep its promises. The Public Private Partnership (PPP) mantra has been one way to co-

opt the private sector into the arena of government responsibility. A more recent manifestation of this trend is the proposed move to make it mandatory for firms with over ₹ 5 crores profit per year to spend 2 per cent of their average net profit on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities. There are other criteria too that are applicable for the mandatory CSR by firms but one gets the government intent – bail us out. And for good measure, if any firm does not have ade-

quate profits or is not in a position to spend the prescribed amount on CSR activities, its directors are required to state the reasons in the annual report. A mandated CSR regime is about to dawn on us.

Mandatory CSR for business is not a great idea. It is likely to result in firms fudging the activities (to ensure compliance) and having their own creative interpretation as to what constitutes CSR. Further shareholders are likely to get short shrift

LAKSHMAN ANAND



# INSIGHTS

since the primary purpose of business is to maximize shareholder wealth ethically and legally. Yes, they are to do it with appropriate social consciousness but many firms have their own way of addressing this through their current CSR activities done in a voluntary manner. By mandating it, the government is using its significant cleft to get firms to fill up the pothole created by *sarkari* failure on the social front. This is not a good sign since once introduced what is to stop future governments from effectively outsourcing their responsibility to the private sector by mandating higher percentages?

This author strongly feels it is necessary for corporate India to engage in addressing social challenges across India. The problems are too vast and complex to be left just to the government and it is in our collective interest to find ways to partner governments in addressing them. However, the way to get this done is to align business interests with the task at hand.

I am part of finding such an alignment in the area of urban governance and feel there is an alternate way to get business to cooperate. Here is my work in progress tale and learning thus far about getting business buy-in for the social participation idea.

CII under its India@75 programme mentored by the late Prof CK Prahlad identified addressing the urbanisation challenge as a key challenge and an opportunity to get our growth trajectory on track. As Chief Evangelizer of the idea of a City Connect platform being catalyzed by CII across cities of India, I am working with industry leaders, NGOs and government representatives to build a coalition of the willing in the urban space. To date we have reached out to over 10 cities and the goal is to cover at least 20 cities before March 2011.

The idea of City Connect is built on a few basic

beliefs. Across our cities, the list of woes is similar (traffic, transport, garbage, water, corruption, mosquitoes, etc.), though the relative hierarchy of woes may differ by city. The long list of woes is common and so is the solution set. However, the initiative to fix our cities needs to be local with business, civil society groups and associations coming forward on a common inclusive platform to work with government on the local challenges

**By mandating CSR the government is using its significant cleft to get firms to fill up the pothole created by sarkari failure on the social front. This is not a good sign since once introduced what is to stop future governments from outsourcing their responsibility to the private sector by mandating higher percentages?**

instead of resorting to a blame game. Why local? You cannot, for example, expect Trivandrum folks to take initiatives to fix Kochi. Kochi folks need to come forward to fix their city. More importantly, business, as the elite, has a responsibility to take the lead in putting together and funding the initiatives under the platform.

There are three themes embedded in the idea of a City Connect platform – business to take the lead, platform inclusiveness and collaborative effort. For starters, you might well ask why business should bother. Here is why. It is a no brainer that if a city fails, business certainly suffers – so it is in the interests of business to ensure a city works for all its citizens. Traditionally, business has been making 'trade union' like demands to government to fix the place. This is a wasted route since the capacity of the government to fix the city is seriously in doubt. Business is slowly realizing that an investment in urban governance is as important as its focus on raw material, talent, capital equipment, process, etc. A better functioning city will improve top and bottom lines for the firm.

If business does agree to get involved, the

temptation is to take up projects that benefit them directly like roads to their factories or their neighbourhoods. This too is myopic. More benefits will accrue to the city (and business) if the platform has an inclusive focus. Here is how I make my case. Let us take the case of an extremely productive and vital employee, Sheila, for our hypothetical firm. Working mother of two school going children Sheila's home operation is significantly dependent on

her day maid who comes in at 7 am every day. Now wind back to her maid's woes. Water is supplied to her slum only from 2 am to 2.30 am and she has to be in a long queue to get her water. She is dependent on the bus and pedestrian walkways to get to Sheila's place.

So what chance of her making it at 7 am if her eco system fails her? And what of the cascading effect on the firm's business top and bottom line for the day if a few harried Sheilas have to rework their plans including delaying or skipping work. Clearly, business interests lie in an inclusive outlook and collaborating with the government agencies in fixing the city's problems.

The jury is out on an idea like City Connect. We have two operational in Bangalore and Chennai since nearly four years with a nascent third one in Kochi. Efforts are underway in Pune, Vadodara, Ahmedabad, Gurgaon, Chandigarh, Muzaffarpur, Balasore and other places. It takes over a year to build a core group in a city that embraces such an idea and another two or three years for it to gain some traction and acceptability. It is my conviction that an idea that is rooted in aligning business interests to common social goals has a better chance of long term success over mandating it as CSR through laws. The future will bear us out on whether it can work.

*V Ravichandar, Chairman, Feedback Consulting, believes in the long haul and in the philosophy of 'nothing ventured, nothing gained.'*

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# Voice of small farmers

BHARAT DOGRA

IN recent years some influential farmers' organisations in India have faced flak for not paying enough attention to the problems of small farmers and women farmers. The need for inclusive and broad-based farmers' organisations which will give priority to small and marginal farmers has often been articulated.

The Small and Marginal Farmers' Front (Laghu Seemant Krishak Morcha) in Uttar Pradesh tries to fill this gap. A special feature of this peoples' group is that it cooperates closely with several voluntary organisations who are working for weaker sections and for environment protection.

The Bundelkhand region has suffered adverse weather conditions like serious drought and devastating hailstorms in recent years. People had to endure acute distress. In late 2007 the Morcha mobilised villagers to hold a huge protest in Mahoba to get the administration to provide adequate relief. Nearly 5000 peasants reached Mahoba on 29 October, 2007, and demanded better drought-relief work, fodder for their starving cattle and other animals, adequate compensation for damage caused by hailstorms, relief from debt etc.

This demonstration attracted sympathetic supporters from Mahoba town. Many farmers deliberately kept themselves uncovered waist upwards to symbolise their poverty and economic distress. They shouted slogans like - *Anndaata Bhukha Hai, Chaar Saal Say Sukha Hai* (The farmer who feeds others is hungry since there has been a drought for four years). Bullocks carried placards around their necks stating: 'I need fodder. I need water'.

This protest had the desired impact on the administration. More money was sanctioned for drought-relief and related work. More fodder was made available.

However the relief was not adequate and the Morcha continued to raise related issues like the need for adequate compensation for crop loss. Insurance charges are deducted from the farmers' credit arrangements with the government and banks. Very small payments were received for compensation and relief, yet peasants were asked to open bank accounts with an initial deposit of Rs. 500. This burden for obtaining a small payment was resented.

In February 2008 the Morcha organised another demonstration this time with around a dozen bullock carts. Activists had warned the administration that if they did not save their starving animals they will simply send them to a senior official's office. The administration locked up the gates of the collectorate. Peasants demanded that the police open the gates to let the animals in. They said if cars can

enter so can the farmer's bullock cart. They said if such trends continue soon officials will allow only people wearing western dress to enter. The officials had to open the gate but due to other barriers the bullocks could not go beyond a few steps.

Whenever we spoke to farmers who are members of the Morcha or connected with it, we found a high level of awareness of organic farming and environ-



Innovative women farmers of Laghu Seemant Krishak Morcha

ment-friendly farming practices. In these villages at least some activity relating to composting, vermiculture, preparation of bio-pesticides etc was in evidence.

Some Morcha activists like Harish Chandra Tiwari have emerged as model farmers. He is the main coordinator of the group's activities in Damora village. His farm is a model of water conservation and integration of horticulture and tree-farming. He has grown nearly 1000 mango, jamun, ber, neem, tendu and dudhi trees.

Some women activists of the Morcha are also very innovative farmers. Parvati lives in Chandrapur village. She also works in Chando village. She has learnt organic pest-protection methods and she used these to save her brinjal crop. Pankunwar of Damora village has increased her crop yields dramatically through organic methods. Neem leaves are boiled and used as a pest repellent by the women.

The Laghu Seemaant Krishak Morcha has worked closely with Samarpan, a voluntary organization headed by Radhekrishna. Jalaun district has been notorious as a dacoit prone area with a strong feudal background. It is thus quite remarkable that Samarpan and the Morcha could work here on land rights, women's equality and other sensitive issues in a peaceful way. This reveals that they have certain strengths: they understand how the village community works and how broader understanding on sensitive issues can be established within the community.

Radhekrishna says that when they first began work, women were asked to name three farmers in

their village during training workshops. But they almost never mentioned themselves. Even male members would mention bigger, influential farmers. Women now have a strong sense of identity not just as small farmers but also as change makers.

The water rights of small and marginal farmers are in jeopardy here and the Morcha has been working on this issue. Villagers voluntarily contributed to extend the Jaitpur minor canal for several kilometers so that hundreds of additional farmers could benefit from this irrigation. The resistance of big landowners who used to corner the lion's share of the water was overcome with the mobilization of people and strategic planning by which some influential landowners were won over.

Now a new threat has appeared. Some powerful landowners have diverted the water of this minor canal at source using JCB machines. This has denied water to thousands of families. The Morcha is taking up this issue. It needs to be tackled by senior officials. Another problem is that a newly constructed culvert near Mau collapsed during the first rains and this issue too is being tackled by the Morcha.

In areas where Samarpan and the Morcha have been active for several years, organic and sustainable farming practices have spread widely. "Women organic farmers have taught us some important lessons. Initially, we were cautious about advocating organic farming practices because we apprehended that there may be some loss of yield. But organic farmers informed us that they are reducing expenses and increasing yield," says Radhekrishna.

In Daangkhajuri village, 35 diverse crops including grains, vegetables, legumes, fruits etc. are being grown using mixed cropping patterns and appropriate rotation. As a result fields are almost always green and preparations for the next crop begin even as one crop is still maturing. So through the year farmers keep getting one crop or another which provides them a little cash and meets their nutrition needs. The village makes excellent use of scarce water resources to irrigate as much land as possible. It has been able to reduce water wastage from artesian wells using makeshift devices. They are waiting for some help from the government or the voluntary sector to carry this work further.

According to rough estimates ₹2,50,000 will be adequate to protect and use 24 artesian wells in and around this village.

These villages have a fairly elaborate system of saving for difficult days in the form of self-help groups, grain banks, seed banks, disaster fund etc. What is most praiseworthy is that villagers who are themselves poor save and contribute generously when other villages are in hardship.

# Did Jindals get it right?

KANCHI KOHLI

I met Dr Harihar Patel in the winter of 2009. It seemed like a routine day for him as he attended to patients in his home at Gare village in Gharghoda tehsil, Raigarh district, Chhattisgarh. But as I began speaking to him, I realised that Dr Patel had more to offer than medicine. Succinct and articulate, Dr Patel is leading a movement against coal mining by the Jindal Steel & Power Ltd (JSPL) company around his home. People have come together and formed the Adivasi Majdoor Kisan Ekta Sangthan to resist the mining company.

Why are they protesting? And why am I writing about this movement only now? The reason is simple. Due to the determined struggle of the Adivasi Majdoor Kisan Ekta Sangthan and support groups like the Jan Chetana in Raigarh, the company has not been able to operationalise work on the mines till date despite valid environmental clearance. Further, the story of the environmental clearance deserves attention as it challenges the critical pillars of governance as envisaged in the Constitution of India.

The JSPL had planned to set up a 4 MTPA mine and a 4 MTPA pithead coal washery in the villages of Lamdarha, Saraitola, Gare, Khamaria and Karwahi in the Gharghoda tehsil of Raigarh district. The Union Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) granted an environment clearance on 18 May, 2009, as mandated under the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification, 2006. If one relies on official records of how this project was assessed by the MoEF's Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC), one would find no problems at all with it. All objections were considered, duly recorded, and only then was the clearance granted. The minutes of the meeting of the EAC held on July 2008, state that the ministry accorded a Terms of Reference (ToR) to carry out an EIA on 28 March, 2007. Based on this the company applied for an environment clearance. The first mandatory public hearing was held on 5 January, 2008.

The minutes record that the EAC received several representations from people's organisations like the Zila Bachao Sangarsh Morcha, the Jan Chetana and from Dr Harihar Patel of the Adivasi Majdoor Kisan Ekta Sangatan. Critical in this list are representations from gram panchayats of the area and one from Medha Patkar, the leading people's rights activist.

The EAC noted that, "there had been disturbance in the conduct of the public hearing and the hearing could not be held in a proper manner." Due to this disturbance, the hearing was put on hold. There was no formal announcement made by the Chairman of the Public Hearing Panel on whether the hearing was cancelled/adjourned/postponed. After a few people had dispersed, the public hearing was resumed and the Additional District Magistrate concluded it stating that no further comments/inputs

were available from the people. Acknowledging this they asked for the public hearing to be reconvened as per requirements of the law.

But the public hearing was not reconvened, for reasons the authorities can justify best. The JSPL mine proposal was considered again in the meeting of the EAC on 20 and 21 October, 2008, where some more questions were placed before



Dr Harihar Patel injured at a protest

**Due to the determined struggle of the Adivasi Majdoor Kisan Ekta Sangthan and support groups like Jan Chetana in Raigarh, the company has not been able to operationalise work on the mines till date despite valid environmental clearance.**

the project authorities. The EAC looked at the Gare mine application again on 28 and 29 January, 2009, and found some shortcomings which included the non existence of a pre-project survey of the socio-economic status of local communities living in the project area. The EAC put it down as one of the requirements to be fulfilled as per the UNDP Human Development Report. What is interesting is that the EAC ordered for financial and livelihood incentives as part of the project's Corporate Social Responsibility. Note the shift from the impacts on livelihoods to how the project can enhance livelihoods.

Somewhere down the road all the objections raised by local people and organisations went down into a black hole.

The minutes of the January meeting also record a very significant twist to this story, one that should have had a crucial bearing on

whether or not mining activity should be allowed in the said area. The official recordings refer to a letter by the Jan Chetana which pointed out that the No Objection Certificates (NOCs) of the gram panchayats which JSPL had submitted to the EAC were forged.

Members of the Jan Chetana had through Right to Information (RTI) applications discovered the existence of the NOCs. According to Ramesh Agrawal of the Jan Chetana, "when we confirmed this with the panchayats, they said that no such NOCs were issued by them."

This is a strong allegation and it is 'officially' denied. The minutes of the EAC meetings record that it had been informed by the company that a verification from the sarpanch of Gare village had been sought confirming that they had given a no objection certificate earlier. For the other villages similarly such confirmations were presented by JSPL in EAC's meeting held on 24 and 25 March 2009, following which the project was granted clearance.

Dr Harihar Patel and Ramesh Agrawal continue to raise this issue. According to them: "The NOCs of 2006 as submitted by the company to EAC were forged based on which the clearance should never have been considered." They also ask: "Why is it that the EAC did not make an on site inspection when such a critical allegation was raised? When so many opportunities were given to the project proponent, why did the EAC not consider calling upon the complainant to present their case in person, even once? Why such blatant bias towards the company?"

The two also vehemently state that there is no record in the official registers of the panchayats of such meetings in which the said resolutions were supposed to have been passed. The complaints before the District Collector, Governor and the local police have not got the activists any response. Perhaps it is the court of law that they will seek next.

Who is one to believe? Do we believe Dr Harihar Patel and Ramesh Agrawal, small activists and residents of the area against whom police cases have been lodged recently by those who consider them hindrances? Or the authorities who never really chose to verify the ground reality? Dr Patel and the Jan Chetana have approached the National Environment Appellate Authority (NEAA) in New Delhi challenging the clearance granted by MoEF for Gare IV/6 Coal Mines and Washery. When the NEAA stayed the clearance in its order on 26 May, this year, it was challenged before the Chhattisgarh High Court, where the decision remains pending.

I walk along the banks of the Kelo River looking at its murky waters. That day Dr Patel had shared his anguish. The story, my sister, he said, is far from over.

*Kanchi Kohli is a member of Kalpavriksh Environmental Action Group and is based in Delhi*

# Living

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## Bant Singh at Max Mueller

*Electronic music, film bring rural hero to Delhi*

Abhinandita Mathur  
New Delhi

THE effect was electric: pulsating music, powerful lyrics and a message of resistance. Rustic Punjabi songs of revolution merged with dancehall and hip hop to create an irresistible blend on a balmy evening at the Max Mueller-Goethe Institute in Delhi.

The iconic hero of Punjab, Bant Singh, folk singer and activist with the Kisan Mukti Morcha sang passionately with Taru Dalmia, a young musician of dancehall and hip hop.

An unlikely audience of Dalit activists and faces from Delhi's nightlife scene listened, bridging the gap between classes and masses. The event marked the launch of *Word Sound and Power: the Bant Singh Project*, a collaboration between young musicians and the revolutionary singer Bant Singh. It created new music, new sounds and a film, thereby carrying Bant Singh's message to a youthful, urban audience.

It all started when Samrat B, musician and DJ, frustrated with the music scene in Delhi began thinking of how he could change the vacuous music young people jived with. Samrat came across an article on Bant Singh and the story stayed with him. Two years later, when Max Mueller mooted the idea of a project that would combine a new media arts project with a socially relevant one, Samrat thought of Bant Singh.

Dalit farmer, activist and singer from Jabbar village in Mansa district of Punjab, Bant Singh is an extraordinary person. He worked on farms and nurtured his love for radical poetry and music. In 2000, his young daughter was raped by upper caste men from the village. Bant Singh took the courageous step of taking the men to court. Such a step was unprecedented in a village where

Dalits were historically oppressed.

Bant Singh secured a conviction in the local court in 2004. The three accused upper caste men were sentenced to life in jail. But it was a victory the local landlords saw as a challenge to their authority. They would not let him get away with it. In 2006, even as the judgment was being



Bant Singh in his village home

appealed, the culprits viciously attacked Bant Singh in the evening while he was returning from work. Bleeding and in severe pain, Bant Singh was kept waiting at the local hospital for 36 hours. Eventually, his hands and one of his legs had to be amputated for gangrene had set in.

What followed is rare. Eighteen days after his arms and legs were amputated, Bant described his condition: "I was lying in bed singing aloud with doctors surrounding me listening in awe and wondering how I found the strength to sing. But I never felt that way, because I still had my voice."

When Samrat shared this "awe inspiring" story of Bant Singh with his friend Taru Dalmia, aka Delhi Sultanate, he was equally moved. Dalmia is a dancehall and hip hop singer and performance

poet based in New Delhi. He is a founding member and emcee of BASS Foundation, New Delhi's first dubstep and drum and bass sound system. A student of history, he researches issues on the relationship between forms of culture, power, social control and violence.

"Well it had been my idea for a long time to kind of make Indian dancehall music. And I was on the lookout for artists who had revolutionary or subversive content. Samrat brought this up and things fell into place with this project," he says. Globally, dancehall and hip hop have always been the voice of the oppressed.

But what made the two of them go beyond their regular music practice? "As musicians the scene is limited to gigs and parties. It can be frustrating," explains Samrat. "The medium of electronic music has been used by artists in other countries to make their presence felt unlike here. We wish to change that. The urban-rural divide is one of our key concerns. There are two ways to approach it – one is political propaganda and the other through the medium of art. Music is what we know best."

Taru explains, "Our primary work is to entertain the audience, as musicians. But the music should be more inclusive and the audience not devoid of relevant content." Explaining why they wanted to collaborate with Bant Singh Taru points out, "It was his persona and music that drew us to him. Also, Punjabi poetry and music would work well with our music."

Samrat then roped in photographer Lakshman Anand and Chris McGuinness. Lakshman Anand filmed the project as it unfolded and Taru and Samrat visited Bant in his village. Chris, who is from New York, did the recordings.

The four of them set out to meet Bant Singh in his village. "We were nervous," recalls Samrat.

But Bant Singh, waiting for the youngsters, put





Bant Singh and family with Chris McGuinness (right) and Taru Dalmia behind him

them at ease at once.

"Lakshman called me," said Bant Singh with a smile. "I remember he had come with Raghu Rai to shoot the story for *Tehelka*. I love being filmed and photographed so I asked him to come anytime. I am always happy to interact with people."

"He and his family welcomed us and our ideas with open arms," says Samrat. The team spent the next three days at Bant Singh's home playing with his children, spending nights under the stars on the terrace and making music together at their mobile studio set up under a tree.

Bant Singh's earthy Punjabi though hard to understand did not come in the way, explains Lakshman. "When I was filming, even though I could not speak Punjabi, I could at least present a question and follow what Bant said. We had already made a connection on other grounds and language then seemed a small problem. On our return Simar Puneet who helped us translate and subtitle the film made a crucial contribution."

The team returned to Delhi with over 100 hours of footage, 20 recordings of Bant Singh's songs and many new realizations. "So far we had only read about Bant's struggles and activism," says Samrat. "Only when we spent time with him did we learn about his music. For instance, he sings compositions by legendary revolutionary poets of Punjab like Sant Ram Udasi and he has been doing this since his younger days." Samrat

**The team spent the next three days at Bant Singh's home playing with his children, spending nights under the stars and making music together.**

then collected images of Sant Ram Udasi and other influences on Bant Singh to include them in the film.

"When we sat on the edit table it felt like starting from scratch," says Lakshman. "Taru and I even returned to the village to shoot more but perhaps there is no end to it when it comes to a person like Bant Singh."

Editor Sourav Bramachari joined the team to extract a short film out of the many GB of footage and did a great job giving the film a tight narrative and sharp cuts. The film is well shot and works as a great tool in understanding this process-based project. It showcases the details of the collaboration, the background story of Bant Singh's life, and his inspirations. The film uses four song

tracks produced during the project, mixed by Chris McGuinness and Samrat, using Bant Singh's songs and Taru's poetry.

The project was finally presented at the Goethe Institute. There was music and a panel discussion with Bant Singh, Sudhanva Deshpande, actor/director with Jana Natya Manch and a lecturer at Jamia Milia Islamia and Amita Baviskar, professor of sociology at the Institute of Economic Growth, New Delhi. The film was also screened.

The project, says Samrat, has been well received. "People who came to see the presentation were not the already aware activist types. The idea was to convert the audience and I think we achieved that. But the greatest feedback we received is from a group in Punjab called Inqalabi Naujawan Sabha, which wants a longer version of the film in Punjabi to show around in villages." Members of the Sabha told Samrat, "If you do this in cities, we in the villages gain the confidence to do our work".

With this experiment, the team is inspired to not only take the project further but also do much more. "There are many plans," each one of them said. Samrat, Saurav, Lakshman and Taru have formed New Delhi Films. With their heart in the right place and the varied talent they bring to the table, the collective is certainly something to watch out for.

Watch the film at [www.wordsoundandpower.org](http://www.wordsoundandpower.org)  
Or on Youtube: <http://www.youtube.com/user/lakshmananand>

# Sita in black and white

**Shreyasi Singh**  
New Delhi

**T**RIPURARI Sharma has devoted the last 30 years to shattering stereotypes. "Advocating something loudly does not bring about change. It happens step by step," says Tripurari, 54, an Assistant Professor at the National School of Drama (NSD), New Delhi. Since 1979, when she graduated from NSD with a specialisation in direction, Tripurari has effectively used theatre as a voice for women.

Her recent play, *Shifa* (Healing), is about an adolescent girl who is born HIV positive. The narrative delves into how the young girl deals with self doubt and discrimination. "Essentially, it's about encountering the question: how do you face life when time is short," explains Tripurari in her tiny, musty office at NSD. "All of us take time and life for granted. But when my audience is presented with that question via the play, so many things are bound to change within them."

Tripurari's insights into her audience have been shaped by long experience. She has conducted numerous theatre workshops with college students and women's groups to develop scripts which delve into social issues.

She came into prominence with *Aks Paheli* (Riddle of Images), a production in the 1980s that she organised as part of a sub-group of women activists and journalists called, "Society for Portrayal of Women in the Media". With Sita as the focus, the play examined how society stereotypes women, and how those stereotypes internalise into set notions perpetuated by society.

"Sita is one of the most loved characters in our country," says Tripurari. "There are references to



Tripurari Sharma

her all across. Most peg her as the good, obliging wife, a yes woman."

Tripurari doesn't agree with that portrayal. It has been retro-fitted, she points out. "There is enough even in Valmiki's *Ramayan* to suggest Sita was more empowered than many would like her to be. It's not that she meekly followed Ram into the forest. She insisted on going with him despite the disapproval of her parents and even Ram's unwillingness. Later, she made the decision to

bring up her children in the forest. She was capable of saying no."

Sita continues to fascinate Tripurari. Recently she finished scripting a new play on her titled, *Purna Nava* (Ever New) that she hopes to put on stage next year. Again, she wants to convey a counterpoint by showing how Sita constantly reinvented herself, took on new avatars. She would love to do similar studies of Amba and Bhanumati, Duryodhan's wife. "Indian mythology has inherent multiple interpretations," says Tripurari.

Her repertoire is similarly rich and varied with plays like *Bahu*, *Birsa Munda*, *Beech Shehar*, *Banjh Ghati* and *Reshmi Rumaal* among others. Many of these she directed for her own theatre company, Alarippu, before joining NSD full time in 1995 to teach acting.

Co-director of the popular television serial *Shakti* based on women's issues, Tripurari has written dialogues for critically acclaimed movies like *Mirch Masala* and *Hazaar Chaurasia ki Maa* as well. She also researched and scripted *Sanshodhan*, directed by Govind Nihalani, which chronicled the initial groups of women elected to village panchayats.

A recipient of the Sanskriti and Nastya Sangh awards, Tripurari was among the 1,000 women recommended for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2005 to highlight individual effort around the world to bring equality and justice for women.

Her own productions run into dozens. "If I look at the women's movement in India, we have nothing to be proud of as such. But, yes things have moved. When I see younger women claim the public space today, there is great confidence, a sense of entitlement," she remarks.

## Winners of India NGO awards

**Civil Society News**  
New Delhi

**T**HE India NGO Awards for this year, which were given away by The Resource Alliance in association with The Rockefeller Foundation, went to four NGOs.

Development of Humane Action (DHAN) Foundation was honoured under the large category. The NGO is well known for its sustainable innovations that have helped vulnerable people become self-reliant. DHAN has ICT programmes that help villages acquire resources and expertise. DHAN also has a robust women's self-help group programme.

India Foundation for the Arts (IFA) and Calcutta Rescue won the award under the medium category. IFA is the only organization in India which exclusively supports arts and culture. IFA funds arts innovations and capacity building to address issues of livelihoods and sustainability.

Calcutta Rescue provides free medical care, education and work opportunities to more than



Mukul Wasnik presenting the award to IFA

100,000 needy people in Kolkata, Malda, Tamulda, Canning, and the 24 Parganas.

Salaam Baalak Trust was honoured under the small category. The trust is governed by an all-female board and works for street children provid-

ing them shelter, medical care, vocational and skills training.

The India NGO Awards honour good standards and practices in resource mobilization, accountability and transparency among NGOs.

Mukul Wasnik, Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment, Ashvin Dayal, Managing Director, Rockefeller Foundation-Asia and Neelam Makhijani, Chief Executive Officer, The Resource Alliance, were present to honour the awardees.

"If people working in the social sector enter politics, they will be able to transform the lives of a large number of people," said Mukul Wasnik. "There are NGOs who are working silently in this country and it is very important that an award like this gives them the recognition they truly deserve. Civil society is contributing in a huge way by bringing about an attitudinal change in society. Problems like female foeticide, illiteracy and unemployment could be addressed more effectively if these NGOs start working closely with the government."



Music by the nomadic orchestra was an instant hit

## Nomads sing for Delhi

**Kavita Charanji**  
New Delhi

**S**URAJ Bhopa is a nomadic folk healer and musician from village Nanglimega in Alwar district, Rajasthan. He plays the *ravan hatha*, an ancient Indian musical instrument, and sings ballads to earn a living. "It's a very hard life and I am broke. We move around so much that the children cannot go to school most of the time," he says sadly.

The Nomadic Fair and Festival held in Delhi gave Suraj Bhopa and fellow nomads a chance to flaunt their talent to an urban audience which has little understanding of their unusual way of life and culture.

Six nomadic communities came together to play music. "This was unusual because these six communities don't normally sit together and play their instruments in concert," says Vinay Rai who, along with his wife Meenakshi, organised the festival. Their non-profit, Chinh, supports nomadic communities. The event was organised with the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR).

On display were nomadic art and handicrafts. There were participatory workshops for visitors on nomadic instruments, screening of award winning archival documentation of these communities along with nomadic musical concerts in the evening.

Musical soirees by the internationally acclaimed Nomadic Orchestra of the World (NOW) were a major attraction. The participating musicians have performed with Roma gypsies in Rome and won the 'Sounds of Border Award' for the best live performance of 2009. The unique *jugalbandi* of *ravanhatha*, *been*, *bapang*, *dhol* and *ektara* made it easy to understand why.

"Some communities need an extra dose of sup-

port," says Meenakshi. She cites the example of Suraj Bhopa who like many of his community is in dire need of a platform. "While others have multiple talents, the Bhopas are entirely dependent on singing with the *ravan hatha* to make a living. In the past they flourished since they enjoyed the patronage of local rajahs. Today Bhopas like Suraj can earn only when there are special programmes. As it is their children have stopped learning the *ravan hatha*. In fact Suraj had almost given up the instrument when we brought him back from the brink."

Fed up of leading a wandering life with no identity, many nomadic communities are settling down and taking to agriculture, abandoning their ancestral professions, like the banjaras or wandering traders.

Mamraj and Meera Banjara who settled in village Bamanvas in Jaipur district, Rajasthan say they are now better off. Fifteen years ago their children would sleep hungry. At that time Mamraj used to trade in sheep and Fuller's Earth. His only asset was a little donkey on which he ferried his goods.

Encouraged by students and anthropologists who visited Bamanvas, he began to grow vegetables on a barren patch around his hamlet after fertilising it with sheep manure. Soon he had a network of people who would buy his vegetables. Today Mamraj is the proud owner of a truck on which he takes his vegetables to the *mandi*.

Mamraj's success story has triggered a chain reaction across the community. It has made growing vegetables a livelihood option. The Banwariya community has begun to copy Mamraj by cultivating land around their hamlet to grow vegetables and grain. Dhauri Banwariya is all set to send her first consignment of food grains to Delhi from her village Mundawra near the Sariska tiger sanctuary

Though Suraj and Mamraj are at the opposite ends of the economic spectrum, the common factor is that they are both nomads. Suraj is a Bhopa (bard) and Mamraj, a banjara. They intermingled with their fellow comrades the Kalbeliyas (snake charmers), Banwariyas (hunters), Gadia Lohars (iron-smiths) and Jogis (baul singers from Haryana) at the Nomadic Fair and Festival.

"Such events energise the gypsy communities. They have begun to realise the value of their local wisdom, traditional knowledge and mystic strength," says Meenakshi.

Kesarnath Kalbelia, a folk doctor from Dadar village in Alwar district claims he cured a Sicilian woman of a back problem. "After two days of treatment, which involved manipulating her limbs and a certain set of exercises, she was back on her feet," he says proudly.

He finds it hard to earn a decent living. "I only manage to survive because I play the *been*, practice traditional medicine and know about plants and herbs with medicinal

properties," he says.

Kesarnath takes visitors around the installations he put up at the exhibition.

The pride of place was given to a creeper from which he crafted his musical instruments, the *been* and *bapang*. He showed visitors samples of various plants and herbs that can tackle scorpion and snake bites.

Nomads continue to remain one of India's poorest communities, eking out a living at the bottom of the pyramid. Chinh hopes to ameliorate their lot over a period of time. "We have identified some of their cultural strengths and expertise. We hope to promote those with the help of existing government schemes," says Vinay.

He cites the example of the *ponchu*, a nomadic ornament, which is helping to empower nomadic women. The product has been showcased at Dilli Haat, he says, and the Handicraft and Handloom Export Promotion (HHEC) procured *ponchus* for the Commonwealth Games.

The ornament is slowly inching its way to the export market. There are grouses though. Mamraj's wife, Meera, skilled in making traditional *ponchus* says work is erratic and at Rs 20 a piece, she returns paltry. However, she is more fortunate than other *ponchu* makers since Mamraj takes care of household expenses.

Nomadic instruments, like those made by Kesarnath, were displayed during the concerts. Slowly a niche market for handmade musical percussions is coming up.

*Goodri* patchwork (crafted by Gadia Lohars from Uttar Pradesh) is another area which has market potential. Chinh is also working in Madhya Pradesh with the Baiga and Gond communities who are hunters by occupation.

## RANDOM SHELF HELP

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

## Dementia tsunami to hit India



## THE DEMENTIA INDIA REPORT 2010

*Prevalence, impact, costs and services for dementia**A report prepared for the Alzheimer's and Related Disorders Society of India*Gautam Singh  
Mumbai

THE first India Dementia Report which was released on 21 September, World Alzheimer's Day, portrays a stark picture of neglect. Illnesses which are likely to strike India's growing ageing population continue to be overlooked. The report on dementia has been researched and collated by the Alzheimer's and Related Disorders Society of India (ARDSI), a national voluntary organization dedicated to the care, support and research of dementia.

Currently, there are an estimated 3.7 million Indian people aged over 60 with dementia. More women than men have the illness: 2.1 million women and 1.5 million men.

At 10.5 per cent, Kerala will have the highest population of the aged followed by Himachal Pradesh (9 per cent), Punjab (9 per cent), Maharashtra (8.7 per cent), Tamil Nadu (8.8 per cent), Orissa (8.3 per cent), Goa (8.3 per cent), and Puducherry (8.3 per cent).

Dementia is not part of aging and is caused by a variety of diseases. Currently, there are no treatments available that cure or alter the progression of dementia. Prescribed drugs, though cheaper than in the West, would still be unaffordable for the poor.

The number of people with dementia is expected to increase to 7.61 million by 2030 and 14.32 million by 2050. India will have overtaken the US by 2016 which currently has 4.3 million people with dementia, alarming enough for them to say their state of preparedness is like, 'being in a rowing boat facing a dementia tsunami.'

But here the approach, if there is one, is quite laidback. Consider this: for a population of more than 100 million elderly, only three of the nation's 206 medical schools have a department of geriatrics. There are only six residential care facilities

exclusively for people with dementia. Just 10 care centres offer professional care. Five centres provide domiciliary care. It's no wonder that the "service gap for dementia, defined as the difference between the numbers of people with dementia and the numbers which receive at least evidence based care, is estimated to be much over 90 per cent," remarks the report.

It should also be no surprise that overall there is low level of awareness about dementia. Media coverage remains poor. This can have serious consequences. Families don't see dementia as a health problem, the diagnosis is delayed, the victim misunderstood and perhaps, ill-treated. Social stigma remains strong and patients are sometimes denied admission to hospital facilities. The list is long.

In fact, there is no special emphasis on dementia diagnosis and management in the training of healthcare professionals. "Every training programme for any healthcare practitioner needs to incorporate some level of competence in geriatrics," points out the report. Even though studies, such as the World Alzheimer's Report 2009, show dementia to be the leading independent cause of disability and dependency in India, this apathy in the health sector is shocking.



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Dementia affects not only the victim but the entire family. Care in India is "almost totally home based." The report noted that caregivers were mostly women. In urban areas 69 per cent of caregivers were women and in rural areas, 80.2 per cent. Spouses too provided care – in urban areas 26.7 per cent and in rural India, 23.3 per cent. Forty per cent of children were caregivers in urban areas and in rural areas, 70 per cent.

The stress of caregiving is often overlooked and "six pilot study sites in India reported high levels of psychological morbidity among caregivers which ranged from 40 per cent to 72 per cent. Caregiving services "are in the infant stage in this country and the gap between the need for care services and the actual available services is very huge," says the report.

Further there remains a critical shortage of specialized health care professionals in geriatrics. Care programmes and delivery services aimed at meeting the needs of older persons, like the National Policy for Older Persons, the National Council for Older Persons and more recently the National Initiative for Caring for Elderly (NICE), "have not produced the expected results," says the reports.

The report concludes with recommendations to make dementia a national priority.

It emphasizes the need for a National Dementia Strategy.

In comparison to other diseases, dementia gets very little attention. Consider this: the number of cancer patients in India according to the latest ICMR figures, is 2.5 million. But analysis of research efforts from India for the last 10 years revealed 1,426 publications were related to cancer, 604 to heart disease, 917 to mental disorders, 94 to stroke and 119 related to arthritis. Only 76 research papers were related to dementia.

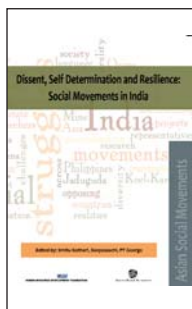
There is also an inverse correlation between these chronic diseases associated with disability and research efforts. "The more

disabling the disease, the less it has been researched," observes the report.

Experts in psychiatry and epidemiology contributed to the report. They include Shaji KS, Jotheeswaran AT, Girish N, Srikala Bharath, Amit Dias, Meera Pattabiraman and Mathew Varghese. The researchers received scientific and editorial support from Prof Martin Prince and Dr Cleusa Ferri of the Institute of Psychiatry, London, and Alzheimer's Disease International's 10/66 Dementia Research Group.

*There's a lot more in the report and you can download it at <http://www.ardsi.org/assets/dementia.pdf>.*

# Smitu's vision on paper



## DISSENT, SELF-DETERMINATION AND RESILIENCE: SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA

Smitu Kothari, Savyasaachi and PT George

Intercultural Resources and Human Resources Development Foundation  
On request

Amit Sengupta  
New Delhi

LAST year, on 23 March, activist and intellectual Smitu Kothari, 59, died of a sudden heart attack in Delhi, leaving his family, friends and admirers stupefied and shocked. But they were able to overcome the abjectly tragic moment of his sudden departure by creating a long evening of multiple narratives: poetry, memories, songs, speeches, anecdotes, including some intimate and obsessive idiosyncrasies of Smitu shared in a public space by his brothers, equally eminent scholars and activists, Milon and Ashish Kothari. If I remember correctly, they spoke of Smitu's passion to dismantle clocks, radios, sundry techie apparatus, only to re-fix them again.

In later years, he was doing much of that, but the terrain had shifted to the multiple resistance zones against the mindless use of technology, political and money power to ravage ancient and indigenous ecologies and communities in India and elsewhere. This was Smitu's new obsession, in word, text, music, feeling, image and thought, to dismantle this brutish and short mindset of total domination of the contemporary political economy of development. And to re-fix it with a new paradigm of hope.

Development is not one-dimensional, said Smitu, it can't be driven from above by the vested interests of profit lobbies over the ravaged bodies of forests, rivers, mountains and living communities with oral traditions, great social histories, and unfinished memories of bloody and non-violent resistances. No, this paradigm shift should mark the realm of both, the model of small is beautiful versus gigantism and mass displacement, as much as a creative, beautiful, humane alternative of sustainable, organic, communitarian and egalitarian model of development.

Indeed, Smitu, as an intellectual-activist, like his father, eminent social scientist Rajni Kothari, grappled with this new idea of globalised modernity, and the conflicts with tradition. He also

searched for historical alternatives, non-dogmatic, creative layers of dissent, as much as the possibilities of hope and an egalitarian society. In that sense, for Smitu, a slogan in the Narmada Ghati by the resilient and stoic women of the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) would really have no contradiction with the amazing Dervish renderings of Sufi legend Amir Khusro, or the latest conceptual shifts in grassroots politics or in the academia.

Last year, after Smitu died, Rahul Ram, lead singer and guitarist of the path-breaking band Indian Ocean, arrived on the make-shift stage to sing a song. We all know the song, on Rewa, the other famous name of Narmada, the incredible river, more beautiful and sacred to the people in this valley than even the Ganga, hiding within its simmering waters, damned and condemned, the epical stories of 25 years of people's resistance led by the NBA. So Rahul came and shouted across the hall, "Medha, will you sing with me?"

Now, we all know how Medha Patkar's voice is forever choked because of incessant slogan shout-

ent, non-absolutes. He would want language, idea, experience and research to move beyond the stated and the surface, and explore the non-monolithic realms of knowledge in synthesis with living realities of life and communities. "Let's not forget that," he said. Indeed, it was like saying that, remember, being non-dogmatic is not easy, it needs rigour and intensity, and an innate sense of originality and brilliance which is hidden in the leaves of the forests, and the eyes of tribals, and the social histories of rebellions across the terrain of old and new India. It is also hidden in the doctrine that true knowledge is liberation.

Indeed, said veteran forest rights activist Ashok Choudhary, "We have made mistakes. But the pressure below, from the people, is so intense, so strong and relentless, that there is no option but to fight and redefine our tactics and strategies."

The book, with an aesthetic cover, is like a journal of contemporary Indian struggles, non-violent, across the tribal and hinterland landscape of both mining and non-mining conflict zones. It is an apt

tribute to Smitu's quest for documentation of hitherto non-linear formations of thought, language and movements, from a people's perspective, but without the absolute bondage of either stiff, clichéd academia, or the pious, high moral ground of self-righteous activism.

This writer too has written an essay in the book – *Prophets Unarmed: Social Movements in Orissa*. The essay documents the new, contemporary, refreshingly original and diverse non-violent struggles across the most unexpected, underestimated and quiet landscape in India – the tribal and non-tribal zones of Orissa, with their recent history of ecological struggle to protect biodiversity, traditional medicine, flora and fauna, nature and wildlife – from Chilika to Gandharmardhana. The current militant, non-Maoist struggles move from Niyamgiri across Kashipur to Jagatsinghpur (against Posco) and Kalinganagar – just on the threshold of the tense Maoist territories of Malkangiri and the borders with Andhra, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh. The non-violent movements share a chord of unity, in content and character, but they are original and different.

Similar struggles across India, from Chhattisgarh, the Northeast to Jharkhand, has been meticulously documented – living testimonies of grassroots resistance – often ignored by the media and academia. The Intercultural Resources calendar on these movements across India is also a landmark publication. "Perhaps, we should also document the Maoist struggles," said Himanshu Thakkar, water expert. Because the line between social and political is thin.

Similar struggles across India, from Chhattisgarh, the Northeast to Jharkhand, has been meticulously documented – living testimonies of grassroots resistance – often ignored by the media and academia. The Intercultural Resources calendar on these movements across India is also a landmark publication. "Perhaps, we should also document the Maoist struggles," said Himanshu Thakkar, water expert. Because the line between social and political is thin.

Contact: Human Resources Development Foundation: 011-41321438  
Intercultural Resources: 011-26560133



LAKSHMAN ANAND

ing and on the spot speeches, mostly without a mike or loudspeaker, often fighting the noisy din of the infinite cars and buses on the streets. But fortunately, her throat chords were fine and healthy that day, and she had inside her consciousness too many memories of the early struggle of the NBA, when Smitu, along with others, worked like relentless scaffolding. So she and Rahul sang and the Narmada became both the river and the ocean, Indian and international at the same time, one of the greatest struggles of our time which has influenced the world, from the Amazon to the Three Gorges Dam of China.

So this year, in a quiet gathering at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, the song came back in the form of a book: *Dissent, Self-Determination and Resilience: Social Movements in India*. Edited by Smitu Kothari, Savyasaachi and PT George. Published by the Intercultural Resources, founded by Smitu and friends.

Activist MJ Vijayan said that Smitu emphasised on the non-narrative, non-linear, the non-appar-

# For a strong spine

SAMITA RATHOR

ONE of the most important directives in Patanjali's *Yogasutra* is the principle of ahimsa or non-violence. Ahimsa is applicable to the body, the mind, the soul and that includes the spine, which also happens to be a pillar of strength for the human body. The spine needs to be treated non-violently. The entire practice and philosophy of yoga focuses on maintaining an erect spine.

It is not only in the Indian tradition that the spine is considered important. There are examples of the critical role ascribed to the spine throughout the world. Hippocrates, the Father of Medicine (460-370 BC), described manipulative procedures in his monumental work, the *Corpus Hippocrateum*. He wrote, "Get knowledge of the spine, for this is the site for many diseases."

Socrates (469-399 BC) said, "If you would seek health, look first to the spine."

A weak spine can lead to a lot of complications as it is the basic supporting structure of the human body. It plays the role of a shock absorber. It is very essential to maintain a healthy spine.

A messed up and weak spine could be due to over exposure to the computer, an accident, carrying heavy objects, flawed diet/lifestyle, ageing, wrong posture and movements. The health of the spine plays a very important role in being holistically fit.

A pain in the neck and lower back is usually caused by stress or damaged muscles disturbing the spinal vertebrae and other related bones and

## SOUL VALUE

tissues from their normal positions. Many a time mental stress can also be responsible for this.

To manage a healthy spine, awareness is required. Some simple do's and don'ts can make a world of difference to a weak spine.

### Nourishing the spine

Nourish the spine with care and gentleness, like a mother would nourish her newborn. A baby bit by bit learns to sit/stand, move and finally masters the art of more complicated movements. This is exactly how we should slowly adapt our spine to our movements.

The first step is to learn how to sit and stand, secondly, how to be in motion and thirdly, how to exercise in a harmonious manner as per your body's capacity and capability and in order to decrease muscle stress.

Sitting with your feet flat on the floor helps. The spine should be erect while seated. Make a conscious effort to sit as straight as you can and then relax. This is the anatomy of a good sitting posture.

Stretching can be done a few times a day for 40 to 60 seconds or more. The most effective time for stretching is when your muscles are warm from exercise. Stretching is extremely powerful in reducing stress and tension and in preventing lower back and neck pain.

When lifting or bending always keep your back

straight and bend at the knees. Remember, never bend at the waist without bending your knees. Even while lifting something heavy, do not bend at the waist, bend your knees so that they take the weight, not the spine.

Do not be glued to the computer screen for more than 15 minutes at a stretch. Look away and move around for a while. While working on the computer keep the back as straight as possible.

Cardiovascular exercises are useful for the spine and the entire body as they enhance circulation.

Drink lots of water. Eat foods high in anti-oxidants including raw fruits and vegetables. If you have acute neck pain, an ice pack can give relief.

Certain yoga asanas can strengthen the spinal muscles. But if you have a back pain do not do asanas without guidance from a proper teacher.

By just maintaining the placement and function of your spine you can prevent back and neck pain and improve the quality of your life.

Do not ignore your spine and leave any kind of back pain unattended. Everything is psychosomatic, so an unhealthy spine may interfere with your inner well being and spiritual evolution. Treat the spine with respect by taking good care of it. Nurture it with abundant positive energy and good thoughts.

Not surprisingly Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, "The best lightning rod for your protection is your own spine."

samitarathor@gmail.com

## PRODUCTS

# FROM A HILL TOP

The Shram Self-Help Group (SHG) consists of women from Batamandi village in Himachal Pradesh. They have been making products from industrial waste, recycled material and natural fibres like palm leaves and grass.

The SHG specialises in producing bags, coasters, waterproof satchels, raincoats, crochet and embroidered products. Shram can also manufacture customized products if you place an order.

The group has now diversified into food processing. They are making pickles, candies, sauces, chutneys and other products from Indian gooseberry, mangoes, strawberries and other organic fruits and vegetables. Roasted snacks from organic brown rice and organic wheat are also being produced and packed for markets.

Shram or Self Help-Recycling, Altering and Manufacturing Group was started by Piyusha Abbhi, a young MBA, on 1 June 2008. She mobilized women from Batamandi to bring out their latent talent and skills. The women, who were financially dependent on male members of their family, now earn their own money.

Each and every product is made with great care.

The products are liked by everyone for their rich colors, designs and quality. Shram SHG does not get any financial support from the government or NGOs. It helps itself.

Contribute to a noble cause and buy a product made by Shram.

For trade enquiries contact us at:  
SHRAM SHG Village Batamandi, Paonta Sahib Himachal Pradesh.  
Email: piyusha4@gmail.com Mob: 09318911011



# 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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