

# Civil Society

## SATARA PUTS ITS WATER SYSTEMS BACK



Dr Avinash Pol and (left) Pravin Bhosle

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## Harvesting Rain for Profit

Name: Shri Muniraj,  
Village: Muthur, Krishnagiri district, Tamil Nadu

Muniraj, a marginal farmer with seven acres of land from Muthur village of Krishnagiri district, had a greenhouse where he practiced floriculture. However, a falling water table meant that irrigation became a problem – especially during summer months even for drip irrigation.

To overcome the problem of insufficient water, Srinivasan Services Trust (SST) encouraged Muniraj to save every drop of rainwater falling on his green house. SST provided technical information and engineering support for creating a pond, next to the greenhouse, large enough to collect six lakh litres of rainwater. To prevent loss by seepage, the pond was lined with a polythene sheet and a shade net was used as cover to help arrest loss by evaporation. The pond gets filled up with 3 days of rain. The water saved in this pond is sufficient for the crop needs for one season.

**IMPACT:** Muniraj is now financially secure and earns more than ₹30,000 per month. He has built a pucca house and also bought a car. He has become an expert on rainwater harvesting and offers advice to several villages in the area.

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## Satara puts its water systems back

A unique community effort in Satara district of Maharashtra has brought back water systems which are now receiving rain. The effort, led by a dentist, Dr Avinash Pol, has lifted Satara's fortunes.

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COVER PHOTOGRAPH: AJIT KRISHNA

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# Civil Society

READ US. WE READ YOU.

## The way with water..

**W**ATER is a community thing — whether you are saving, using, or distributing it. It is tough to see it any other way. Successes with water that we have been reporting on in *Civil Society*, mostly from close to the ground, are essentially collective endeavours. Water issues get resolved when people come together for solutions. It is the kind of work that governments and companies can't do on their own, as the record shows. For sure, there is a need for sophistications that can deliver managerial systems, technologies and infrastructure. But, basically, communities must first figure out how they want to use a scarce resource.

Now community action is easily said but difficult to do. It is undermined by huge social and economic disparities — whether in cities or rural areas. Imagine, for instance, a posh South Delhi neighbourhood scaling down its demand so that water can reach a nearby slum. Or what do you think will be the rights of a Harijan *basti* in a village?

And yet, solutions are found, as our cover story this month on Satara in Maharashtra shows. Leadership and perseverance are required. Dr Avinash Pol, a dentist there, has successfully rallied people around him to build small check dams, tap streams and fashion tanks. By the simple act of catching the rain, storing it and using it well, the people of Satara have changed their lives. Dr Pol is an outlier, but the solution he has helped the people of Satara find is the one we all need.

At the core of Dr Pol's effort is the decentralisation of distribution and demand and ownership of responsibility at local levels. The achievements in Satara have come out of *shramdaan* or voluntary work. Local solutions are really the most effective because they come out of innovation and deal specifically with local problems. It is also interesting that Dr Pol is apolitical. There is really no substitute for pragmatic social activism that addresses a problem without a personal or political agenda and in doing so creates a space large enough for everyone to enter.

On another note we have looked at the finances of municipalities in an interview with Dr Prasanna K. Mohanty, who was not so long ago chief secretary of the unified Andhra Pradesh. Apart from his vast experience as a government officer, Dr Mohanty is one of the few scholars studying the financial problems of municipalities. If Indian cities are to be put into better shape, it is imperative that municipal administrations be given a higher political status and the finances for building infrastructure and providing services. Dr Mohanty has several suggestions, but what is needed is a national discourse and consensus on the role we expect our cities to play.

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## IN THE LIGHT

SAMITA RATHOR



Great work by Dr Yadaiah and excellent reporting by *Civil Society*. Keep it up.

*Dr George Varghese*

### Suranga digger

I liked Shree Padre's story, 'Nothing beats a suranga'. Kunhambu deserves an award for his work. What was especially moving was his willingness to help others without expecting any remuneration. It is also critical for our country to make a database of all traditional water harvesters so that their knowledge can spread to drought-prone areas.

*Rajat Sinha*

### The Vedica MBA

The story, 'Vedica's MBA is smart and female,' was very useful. It's good to know that the archaic MBA course was revised. Today, more than ever, interdisciplinary training is required. People in companies don't understand the environment and society they work in. They only learn to 'manage' the company.

*Avantika Ghosh*

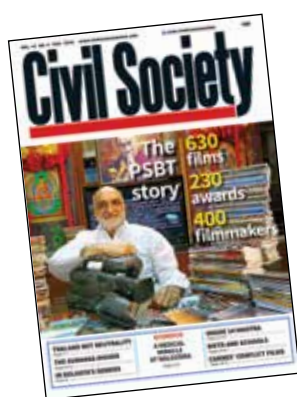
### Dry Bundelkhand

A lot has already been written on the drought-ravaged area of Bundelkhand. It was worth knowing that the government has failed in providing relief but what has the monsoon brought? Have they built ponds, desilted tanks and cleaned up the river? The press should go and see.

*Vishal Monga*

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## LETTERS



### PSBT story

Your cover story on PSBT was beautifully written. Documentaries are yet to be truly acknowledged in India. PSBT has been a stepping stone for many filmmakers who have worked so hard to get their ideas portrayed. Of course, PSBT's backbone is Rajiv Mehrotra. He is doing a wonderful job. I don't see any individual or organisation stepping into PSBT's shoes. Cheers to the PSBT team!

*Ipshita*

For someone who spends a lot of time on the road, I must confess that I can hardly skim through — leave alone read — what many of my talented friends keep producing. But I found time to read about Rajiv, who was in college with me. This is a lovely issue, so full of learning. I see it evolve as the other side of the coin so that governments can't say, "Heads we

win, tails you lose"!

*Aman Nath*

A good piece. This work must continue. We should all help protect the space for alternative filmmakers who have been portraying untold stories and untouched territories for the people.

*Sudhir*

The marginalised documentary is finally finding its rightful space internationally. Filmmakers are taking up uncomfortable subjects and telling those stories with gumption. Stories of conflict, gender, violence, environment, relationships... are all stumbling out globally. PSBT is ahead of the curve in its choice of content and attitude.

*Arpita*

What a moving and wonderful piece on Rajiv Mehrotra and PSBT! May PSBT keep doing great work and bring us all good documentaries.

*Vidya Rao*

### District hospital's feat

Your story, 'How a district hospital saved a baby weighing 650 gm,' was outstanding. It shows what a dedicated team of doctors and nurses in a government-run hospital can achieve. The government must revive its health facilities so that both the middle class and the poor can get access to affordable and high quality healthcare. In fact, some of the best work in India has been done by doctors in government facilities.

*Shania Sinha*

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# 'GIVE CITIES A SHARE OF GST

## Prasanna Mohanty on the crisis facing municipalities

Civil Society News  
Hyderabad

INDIA's long-term economic prosperity will be closely linked to how its cities perform. Can they emerge from decades of neglect to become vibrant hubs of skills, technology and empowerment?

Helping municipalities acquire the authority and expertise they need to deal with backlogs and meet the rapidly increasing demands on them is a complex task. Money is needed in dollops for infrastructure, but more important is a change in perception. Though municipalities are the third tier of government, can mayors and councillors be given a context in which they feel more empowered?

Prasanna K. Mohanty says that a national consensus is needed on the role of municipalities so that they can be better funded and provided with the space to raise resources through innovative taxes and user charges.

Mohanty should know because as a bureaucrat he has been closely involved with urban governance. Now, as a scholar and Chair Professor of Economics at the University of Hyderabad, he is a student of cities and what makes them tick. Dr Mohanty is the author of the recently published book, *Financing Cities in India*. Excerpts from an interview:

**In the drafting of the Goods and Services (GST) law, as we know it today, have the finances of the municipalities been taken into account?**

Municipal finances have not been taken into account because policymakers think that state governments should sort out the issues of municipalities. But the point is that after the 74th Amendment Act recognised municipalities as the third tier, they need financial strengthening to perform. We gave them 18 functions through the 12th Schedule. But their finances are left to the state governments. And, over the years, the sources of revenue for a municipality have shrunk. Octroi was abolished but it was not replaced with an alternative source of revenue for municipalities. Currently, municipalities have got only property tax, except in Mumbai, which has got octroi.

**In this entire debate and discussion over GST, which in itself is a complex mechanism in our country, has any kind of attention been paid to the financial needs of city governments?**

The exercise on GST has not thought about the city. Perhaps it is in the belief that the matter can be referred to the GST Council, which would be empowered to take decisions. However, the high-power expert committee on urban infrastructure



Prasanna K. Mohanty: 'Over the years the sources of revenue for a municipality have shrunk'

**'Anything you do without creating a fiscal space for municipalities I don't think will work.... There should be a national consensus on what municipalities need.'**

has recommended a sharing of GST.

**Sharing of GST in a mandatory way?**

Yes, in a mandatory way. Because anything you do without creating a fiscal space for municipalities I don't think will work. We have given them functions and we know clearly how a municipality is expected to perform. McKinsey estimates are that by 2030 municipalities will require something like ₹9.74 million crore, which includes affordable housing.

Another estimate, by the high-power expert committee, talks about ₹5.92 million crore by 2031. The point is whether we can leave these financial requirements to be taken care of by the states or whether there should be a national debate to evolve a consensus on what municipalities need.

In India municipal revenues are about one

percent of GDP. Even in countries like South Africa, Poland, Brazil, it is above five percent. So we have to strengthen municipal finances, but the question is how?

In the US and a few other countries, municipalities have got access to income tax, excise tax, value added tax, goods and services tax. But in India they have got only property tax.

**The talk on GST is all about economic growth. But cities drive growth. How can they play this role when their finances are in a mess? How do you explain this contradiction?**

I would like to start with the problems of cities. Are cities collecting their revenues? No. Property tax collection is something like 0.18 percent of GDP. In other countries, it is about two percent. If

# TO MAKE THEM VIABLE'

P. ANIL KUMAR



**'Land-based taxes could be reserved for cities. There is scope for value-capture financing.'**

and growing source. And, in the present framework of the Constitution, I don't think there is any other way but to tap GST.

**Is this a problem of vision? Do we lack a national vision for our cities?**

It is not a problem of national vision. It is a problem that has been continuing since Independence. Not many people have looked into this. Research in this area is abysmally poor. We did a study for the Reserve Bank of India in 2007. That is perhaps the most up-to-date study with detailed data. Researchers have not articulated the problem. Strictly speaking, nobody has looked into local finances and in my opinion there has not been a demand at all. Mayors never demand.

**Do you see the Niti Aayog looking into the issue?**

I think they know of the problem. They might be looking into it, but I'm not aware of it.

**You have suggested some reforms. Could you tell us what they are?**

We must be very clear what exactly the municipalities are going to do. We gave them 18 functions through the 12th Schedule of the Constitution. But we never did activity mapping. Let's take water supply. It has got source creation, transmission, distribution.... If you say the municipality will get water from Nagarjuna Sagar or Godavari, it is not enough. We have to be very clear about the functions and activities being discharged by the municipalities. Once that is decided, then finances must be clear. Finances must be commensurate with the functions. There must be accountability and the entire thing must be through a public process.

**How can they be better funded? What are the reforms that you are suggesting?**

Land-based taxes could be reserved for cities. There is scope for value-capture financing. Land values are high in cities. Land values in Mumbai and Delhi are comparable to New York and London. Value in the city is created through planning and infrastructure investment. The Metro has created value. But (currently) people don't pay for value.

**What else?**

An impact fee. Development has local impacts as well as city-wide impacts. Suppose you build a complex with two million square feet of space. It will have an impact on sewage, traffic and so on. The concept of an impact fee is that those who

create adverse impact must mitigate the impact. Therefore we say property and land taxation, development financing through impact fee and value-capture financing must be fundamental principles for local finance.

A betterment levy is needed. For example, when a 151-km Outer Ring Road is built, land values go up. People didn't contribute to this development, but they must at least contribute to the creation of connecting roads, water supply and sewerage.

**Any other point on which you would want reform?**

If you want our cities to become engines of growth, we must make investments in infrastructure. In the pre-Independence era, there was property tax and octroi. Octroi was rightly abolished because it was an obnoxious tax, but it has not been replaced. A substitute in the current framework is nothing but a statutory share or a share of GST.

We followed the British tradition and it was the British who gave us property tax and octroi. They themselves did not follow octroi and though they continued to depend on property taxes, they also gave municipalities huge formula-based grants.

In my opinion the empowering of the municipalities should be through finance. The ideal thing is a municipal finance list in the Constitution. If that can't be done then there should be a statutory share in the GST. This share of GST could be what municipalities would have got had octroi existed. Calculate that and give it to them as a percentage of GST.

**What about user charges?**

Another source of revenue is user charges. We must pay user charges for services like water supply, sewage and solid waste management. And the poor must be subsidised. There is no way the poor can be made to pay for all this.

All long-gestation period projects must be funded through borrowing because they spread over generations. You pay back from user charges, property taxes, land-based taxes, value-added taxes and so on.

**You need a lender who knows to lend in relation to such long-gestation projects.**

We have to start somewhere. Look at municipal bonds in the US.

**But a broke municipality can't raise bonds.**

Municipalities should be strengthened with finances, functionaries and functions. So the bottom line is they must be strengthened and we should start today. Most of the services in the US are provided by local bodies. They are closest to the people.

**Would you say there is a need to understand the unorganised sector better and bring it more into the organised sector and thereby make it a source of source revenue for municipalities?**

The strength of the unorganised sector must be

*Continued on page 8*

municipalities do not collect their own revenues like property tax and then say they want sharing of other taxes, I think that is not justified.

For example, in some cities property tax has not been revised for 20 years. In Hyderabad, when I was commissioner of the municipality, I found out that for 19 years the property tax had not been revised.

But even if municipalities collect property tax, there are limitations. Property tax is something like an asset tax. People can be asset-rich but they may be cash-poor. As a citizen I earn my income and I pay my taxes. I purchase goods and I pay taxes. I don't feel the burden. But with a tax like property tax, where it is levied on an asset, the asset may not be (the source of) income. For example, owners of rent control properties do not get rent (at current rates). So, therefore, there are complications.

If ₹5.31 million crore, or even half that amount, is to be mobilised we have to see what can be realistically mobilised by municipalities and what is the shortfall. The municipalities come under the states, but the states have their own problems. We cannot say only the states should be burdened. At the same time the requirements of cities are growing. They must be connected to a predictable

Continued from page 7

recognised because it is a great provider of employment and services. Till our formal sectors grow the informal sector must be catered to. But I don't agree that the informal sector should be asked to pay a big sum because we should first tap people who benefit from huge land value increments and planning.

**When we talk to street vendors they are all very happy to pay basic municipal taxes. But no one collects it because of corruption and other reasons. Isn't this a missed opportunity?**

The street vendors policy and the street vendors law were both drafted by me when I was in the Government of India.

We talked of vending zones, no-vending zones and restricted-vending zones. If the municipalities are able to create vending zones and provide them with identity cards and licences, they should collect revenues.

**This is a huge opportunity, isn't it?**

Yes, this is a huge opportunity. But there is a much bigger opportunity in capture of land value and using planning as a resource.

**Are there any other reforms that you would like to talk about?**

Governance is the key. Cities are caught in a vicious circle. Municipalities don't provide good services, people don't pay taxes. If people cannot pay taxes, municipalities cannot give better services. As municipal commissioner in Hyderabad, we brought in reforms without octroi and value-added tax. The property tax growth in one year was 70 percent. The trade licensing growth was 40 percent and the advertising growth was 50 percent. So, what we have to understand is governance is the key. It is necessary that we strengthen our municipalities as institutions of democracy. Look at New York, Tokyo, London. Secondly, professionalisation of administration is very important.

**You are saying municipalities need expertise?**

They require expertise, the right people, motivation and leadership.

**In our country the mayor has yet to become a powerful person. Even if you take a new city like Gurgaon, the municipal corporation has no status.**

India is a union of states and the municipalities are a product under state laws. It is the states that have to come together along with the centre to decide what kind of municipalities we require.

**You were closely involved with the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM). Has it been a success or a failure?**

It is mixed. I was the first mission director and won't say it has failed.

**Where has it succeeded?**

It has created a climate. It brought cities and reforms into the limelight. The point is that the reforms were not pursued. And any funding of municipalities without reforms will not last long. Therefore, we have to strengthen municipalities and pursue well-designed programmes supported by the state governments and the central government. ■

# AAP speeds up its Goa

Gauri Gharpure  
Panjim

THE monsoon downpour didn't stop Arvind Kejriwal, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader and chief minister of Delhi, from making his second visit to Goa in two months. Goa deserves attention because it is not just sun, sand and beach. It is the smallest state in India but one of the richest, with high literacy, a strong Panchayati Raj ethos and political awareness.

The Goa Assembly is a mosaic of 40 seats. The ruling BJP has 21 seats and the Congress nine. The remaining 10 are shared by small but strong local parties. The Maharashtrawadi Gomantak Party has three seats and the Goa Vikas Party two. There are also as many as five independent MLAs. They include ex-Congress strongman Atanasio (Babush) Monserrate, who was recently arrested on a rape charge. The Independent MLAs might turn out to be the game-changers in the upcoming Assembly elections.

AAP Goa hopes to carve a niche for itself within these complex dynamics and is the only party to hit the ground running in anticipation of the 2017 Assembly polls.

During the three days he spent here, Kejriwal packed in meetings in south Goa with the fishing community at Vasco and an interaction with youth in Ponda. In north Goa, he met stakeholders in the tourism sector in Calangute and the Archbishop in Panjim.

"The manifesto is our Bible, Gita and Koran. We are going door-to-door to understand what you want and once we make promises, we won't back out," Kejriwal told people from the tourism sector at the Calangute Association Hall.

It was a particularly rainy day and the Calangute main road was bereft of banners or any publicity material. It was business as usual and tourists strolled around, unaware of the political sizzle. By the time Kejriwal showed up — he was late by an hour — the hall was packed with people, most of them sporting the AAP caps that were distributed to those who registered at the main desk.

The party has employed unusual tactics to create a buzz.

## PROMINENT BANNERS

On 22 May, the first time Kejriwal was in Goa, the party prominently displayed banners across the state. The public meeting, which was streamed live on AAP Goa's Facebook page and its website, had a large turnout. Party workers created a buzz even after the event was over. They sent text messages and status updates on social media: "We believe in cleaning up after our events. Our volunteers are removing all publicity banners. In case you find one in your area, please alert us with a text and we will ensure it is removed."

After the 18 June celebration of Goa Liberation Day, the party again morphed into a "clean-up" gang with workers showing up at Azad Maidan in the city centre, after Chief Minister Laxmikant Parsekar was done with his speech, armed with



Arvind Kejriwal at a meeting in Goa

brooms and garbage collection bags.

Suhani Shah, in her early twenties, currently leads the social media team of AAP Goa and was its former youth wing coordinator. "Our campaigns are simple and transparent. We even live stream our coordinator meetings," she says.

On Holi this year, AAP's Goa Youth Wing organised the second edition of its car wash campaign. Young supporters volunteered to wash cars after the festivities were over for a donation. Drive-in spots were designated in Mapusa, Ponda and Vasco, and AAP earned around ₹20,000. "The campaign demonstrated the dignity of labour and youngsters, some too lazy to clean their own bikes, joined us to clean other people's cars! We are taking small but steady steps," Suhani says.

## ONLINE CAMPAIGN

An online campaign appreciating the efforts of its women party workers began a fortnight before International Women's Day. The party posted two or three profiles of women workers with photos, their contribution and reasons for joining the party. The campaign ended with 120 new registrations at a cultural programme on 8 March.

After Kejriwal's recent meeting in Calangute, the party collected ₹5,000 in cash and got 158 registrations. On 5 July, the AAP Goa social media team collaborated with AAP Qatar to run a Twitter and Facebook campaign called #DonateToSaveGoa and collected ₹1,18,576 by the end of the day.

Walter Lobo, owner of a guesthouse in Calangute, asked Kejriwal how his party plans to serve Goa. "Who will be here, Mr Kejriwal? We don't want any high command," Lobo said, while admitting that he is a disappointed BJP supporter.

That is the question on everyone's mind. While AAP may be creating a buzz, one obvious drawback



# campaign



Suraksha Manch, headed by local RSS chief Subhash Velingkar. The BJP's proximity to the controversial right-wing religious group, the Sanatan Sauntha, whose members have been accused of the murder of rationalist Narendra Dabholkar and a bomb blast in south Goa, is not going down well with sections of the Goan diaspora. The Sanatan Sauntha is headquartered in Goa and has garnered open support from the BJP and its allies in the past. AAP Goa is gunning for the BJP on such issues, including its inability to respond to public demands to ban casinos and bust drug and prostitution rackets in the state.

AAP Goa has also raised the issue of the alleged graft charges against Parsekar's brother-in-law and a banner at the Calangute meeting prominently berated the chief minister for inaction. Parsekar laughed dismissively when asked about the inroads AAP has made in Goa. "What can I say? They believe in sensationalising," he said.

But will they win, as Kejriwal claims? The general opinion is that AAP will cut into the Congress'



votes. Ask industry stakeholders if AAP will win 35-40 seats and they roll their eyes.

At the annual general meeting of the Goa Chamber of Commerce and Industries, Parsekar explained how the government had helped industry. "The problem of getting no-objection certificates from the pollution control board was settled. We have cleared about 98 proposals which are expected to give employment to 50,000 persons in five years," he said. Panjim MLA Siddharth Kuncolienkar blamed "vested interests" for stalling industry's progress and causing unnecessary delay in the construction of a flyover in Mandovi and a solid waste management plant in Panjim.

AAP, on the other hand, with its workers like noted architect Dean D'Cruz alleges that the swift "single-window" clearances are marred by massive kickbacks, complete disregard for environmental laws and unwillingness to understand public opinion. Environment activist Claude Alvares, who supported AAP Goa in the 2014 elections, has challenged the construction of the Mandovi flyover, saying it will cause large-scale damage to mangroves. He has taken the state government to the National Green Tribunal, alleging lack of due diligence and environmental clearances.

D'Cruz is an active participant in AAP's Goa Dialogues, through which workers meet local stakeholders to understand their demands and

propagate the AAP manifesto. D'Cruz is currently collating information for strategy, planning and implementation of AAP Goa's policies.

He says the current government is solely focused on mega projects. Its attention should instead be on education, healthcare, unemployment and agricultural decline.

D'Cruz criticised the setting up of a solid waste treatment plant at a reported cost of about ₹150 crore. "Within 10 days the machine broke down and there was leaching. No proper segregation was done. Slippers and glass pieces were in the garbage and they could not burn it properly. What is the point of spending all this money when there are alternative solutions? Money is also about ecology," he said. "A perception is being created that we are anti-industry. False. We are pro-clean industry."

Kejriwal talked about streamlining processes to help industry. "I got to know that one needs 27 no-objection certificates (NOCs) to host any event in Delhi. We have made the process easier now." He also talked about the delay in construction of the

Mandovi flyover, its escalating costs and the pathetic state of roads in prime tourist zones.

AAP meetings are conspicuously small with minimum publicity. Most announcements are posted on the party's Facebook page, shared by their supporters and texted to those who have registered.

## 'HERE TO LISTEN'

Some party workers claim that they get sudden government notices when they align with AAP. Is the absence of banners at party events a sign of apprehension? "No," says Valmiki Naik, secretary of AAP Goa.

"Our rallies are not conventional rallies. The idea is for Kejriwal to understand what Goa really wants. We are not here to speak. We are here to listen."

"We are new and we know we have got to work hard. We are not afraid of challenges," says Rajashree Nagarsekar, AAP's convener.

During the 2014 parliamentary elections, AAP put up two candidates. Both lost their security deposits. Very few took AAP seriously. Their Facebook page was trolled and they were subjected to a lot of criticism.

In two years, things have changed. AAP now has an identity. Their critics grudgingly concede they are a presence in local politics.

Recently, the disgruntled leader of the Maharashtrawadi Gomantak Party (MGP), Devendra Prabhudesai, joined AAP Goa with 200 supporters. The move is significant because Prabhudesai is a local leader in Parsekar's Mandrem constituency.

AAP's strategy in Goa can be described as underground aggression. Underground because, on the surface, it doesn't make much noise. Aggressive because, week after week, there are updates on social media about party workers reaching out to remote corners of Goa.

"We will continue with small, interactive meetings before we draft our manifesto. You can expect it to be ready by end-September or early October," says Ashutosh. ■

is that in two years the party has yet to come up with one promising leader. There is not a single chief ministerial probable that Goans can assess so far.

Ashutosh, national leader of AAP, is undeterred by such challenges. "The democratic process has its own momentum. Five years ago no one knew Kejriwal. We don't believe in imposing a leader. The churning of the democratic process will bring in a leader. People will decide their chief ministerial candidate and we don't think it is that important anyway. What is important is the idea of change, and the promise that we will bring it," he says. AAP leaders say the party is in talks and will come up with a name soon.

Kejriwal has declared that the party will win 35-40 seats. He was trolled for wearing a *copal*, a traditional headgear made of flowers worn during the San Joao festivities. The fishing community has presented a 40-point manifesto to AAP and meetings with taxi-drivers, shack-owners and hoteliers are expected to yield similar manifestoes.

## ROLE OF THE CHURCH

The leader's calling upon the Archbishop is also significant. Traditionally, the Catholic minority seeks guidance from its parishes. Local priests have been vocal about their political leanings in the past. In the last Assembly elections, the Catholic community was inclined towards Manohar Parrikar. But after his abrupt departure for the Centre, leaving the reins in the hands of Parsekar, many felt disappointed, if not betrayed.

The debate over the medium of instruction in primary schools, with demands to stop grants to English-medium schools in order to push Konkani, has further angered sections of the community.

Parsekar has been sympathetic to the anti-English-medium demands of the Bharatiya Bhasha

# NGOs, govt on warpath again

Civil Society News  
New Delhi

THE relationship between the government and the NGO sector is steadily worsening. Hostility between the two isn't new. A low-intensity battle went on even during the days of the UPA regime between the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) and the NGO sector.

Now, a new notification issued by the government on 20 June has further riled the sector, which was already smarting after the licences of several NGOs were cancelled for not following Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) norms.

The notification places NGOs, charities and trusts receiving annual government grants of ₹1 crore and more, or receiving foreign funds of ₹10 lakh or more, under the ambit of the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013.

It designates those working for NGOs as 'public servants'. Under Section 44 of this law they are required to declare their assets and those of their spouses and dependants to MHA every year.

"The government is no longer neutral when it comes to the right to association or the voluntary sector," says Mathew Cherian, chairman of Voluntary Action Network of India (VANI), a grouping of 700 grassroots NGOs. He is also CEO of Helpage India.

"They first cancelled the licences of 10,700 NGOs for flimsy reasons like somebody submitted a report a day late. No showcause notice was served. Even a common criminal is served a showcause notice."

"The licences of Lawyers Collective and Sabrang Trust were cancelled on thin grounds," says Cherian. "The government continues to de-register NGOs in the FCRA list. They are using the Intelligence Bureau to go after the NGOs."

At a meeting held in Delhi by VANI and FMSF (Financial Management Service Foundation) it was decided to challenge the 20 June notification in court.

The sector is upset that members of their boards who work without taking a fee are included as 'public servants' in the notification and will therefore have to make public their assets. Some are high-net individuals. NGOs feel that their board members will resign and they will lose valuable advice. At the VANI-FMSF meeting it was felt that such disclosure should be made at the organisational level and not at the individual level.

Designations like director, manager and secretary are not clearly defined in the Lokpal Act. These are terms used by companies and not NGOs. "In most NGOs people are designated as project managers, programme managers, finance managers and so on. Some of them work for a very nominal fee or as

volunteers. Should they also be treated as public servants?" asks Noshier Dadrawala, CEO of Centre for Advancement of Philanthropy.

The office-bearers of NGOs can now be prosecuted for corruption under the Prevention of Corruption Act (PCA), 1988. "But corrupt actions as described by this law don't apply to NGOs because they don't wield the kind of power and discretion that officials, elected representatives or employees of public sector undertakings (PSUs) have," says Venkatesh Nayak, advocator of Transparency and Accountability.

"So unless the PCA defines clearly which actions of NGO officers and employees will amount to corruption, prosecuting them for offences other

deadline for submitting this form has been extended time and again.

"If a company has a right to receive FDI, an NGO also has a right to receive money from foreign sources. We want a level playing field. We provide training and skilling to people. We have worked for eradicating leprosy. We are involved in building toilets," says Cherian.

NGO leaders say they don't fear transparency. Already, those receiving foreign funds are filing their returns with the MHA and uploading information about their finances on their websites every quarter.

But these norms are applied only to them, they point out, whereas companies and political parties always manage to slip away.

"The new Finance Bill tried to exempt foreign companies from this onerous Bill and passed the Bill to exempt foreign companies as both the Congress and BJP had received donations from foreign companies and violated the FCRA Act in 2013-14," says Cherian.

The problem is that political parties, by and large, see foreign funding as a destabilising factor and aid as an insult. The thinking within government is that foreign funding is used to stymie development, spread canards about India and support dubious groups.

At the same time many NGOs are doing outstanding work in health, education, the environment, grassroots democracy and so on. But nothing has been done to bridge the trust deficit between the two so accusations continue to fly back and forth.

"They have blocked 17 European NGOs and the Ford Foundation from giving money to India. They have been acting strange with foreign funders also. NGOs used to get ₹13,500 crore as FCRA. This has

come down to ₹7,600 crore. Tell me, can this amount destabilise a government? It is not possible," counters Cherian.

"The government's problem is that NGOs are more popular with the people than political parties. That is why none of the state or regional leaders like NGOs at local level," he says.

Within the NGO sector the thinking is that the government wants to do away with foreign funding entirely so that it can depict the country as a rising power. According to Cherian, the G-7 countries did not support India's bid for a seat in the UN Security Council because it receives aid.

"NGOs predominantly work with the poor. So, when you cancel the licence of an NGO, those affected are the poor and the marginalised," says Cherian. But so long as the war of words between NGOs and the government is restricted to foreign funding the stalemate will continue. ■



Mathew Cherian

**'The govt is no longer neutral when it comes to the right to association or the voluntary sector.'**

than for abetting corruption would amount to a violation of their fundamental rights," says Nayak.

Also, disclosure of assets has been held up for nearly two years. The asset disclosure form for public servants was notified in July 2014. Then the wife of a public servant challenged Section 44 and approached the Delhi High Court.

Subsequently, the Parliamentary Committee for Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice looked into this issue and recommended that Section 44 of the Lokpal Act be amended so that the assets of spouses and dependants which have nothing to do with the income of the public servant don't have to be disclosed. Information about the assets of public servants should be kept confidential, said this committee.

The court was informed in March about the committee's recommendations and is probably waiting to see what the government does. So the

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# Village adjusts with growing city

**Bharat Dogra**  
Gorakhpur

**G**ORAKHPUR is a major city in Uttar Pradesh and, like most expanding urban areas, it has been intruding into villages on its periphery. Villagers often complain that the city dumps garbage on their land and discharges dirty water into their areas. Dairies based in Gorakhpur abandon their animals who then stray into villages and feed on precious crops.

Can this hostile relationship between the city and the village be turned into a harmonious one? After all, the city does provide employment to villagers and offers marketing opportunities as well. If efforts are made to curb the disruptive impact of urbanisation and promote its more helpful aspects, perhaps a more equitable relationship between the city and its periphery can be established.

This is precisely what a reputed voluntary organisation, the Gorakhpur Environment Action Group (GEAG), has been attempting. As Dr Shiraz Wazih, coordinator of GEAG, says, "Our effort has been to extend support to several farmers in these peripheral villages and help them convert to organic farming. We can help them reduce their cost of cultivation and they can then meet the needs of the city for healthier and fresh food." Such a strategy would help both farmers and consumers.

Besides, by protecting farms and orchards from haphazard development, the city could save itself from the kind of destructive floods that drowned Srinagar and Chennai. The periphery of the city could act as a sink and absorb excess rainwater. For Gorakhpur, a plan like this is crucial since it is located near the Rohini and Rapti rivers that could breach their banks during a heavy monsoon.

"Gorakhpur city has been fast losing its water bodies. In the span of a few decades, the number of water bodies has reduced from 103 to 18. So the

task of saving open spaces in nearby rural areas becomes even more critical," says Dr Wazih.

Arun Singh, a coordinator of GEAG, has been working in the villages surrounding Gorakhpur. He explained how they are improving cultivation methods and helping farmers make their products more attractive for urban consumers.

"Some farmers are selected as model farmers and what they achieve in their fields becomes motivation for other farmers. Some of them are taken for

village who owns just one *bigha* which she cultivates with her husband, Toofani. She has also taken on lease one-and-a-half *bighas* on *hunda* basis, which means she pays a fixed sum to cultivate the land. Phulpati grows a mix of over 30 crops, including turnips, peas, coriander, spinach, tomato, brinjal, cauliflower, soya, chilli and so on.

Since her fields are very small, she uses the space judiciously. On field bunds, she grows root crops like radish and beetroot. Small vacant places are used to grow *lauki* or bottle gourd. In addition, she raises onion seedlings in a nursery. Various creepers are raised intelligently by using spaces carefully for growing *turai*, bitter gourd and other creeper crops.

Chanda has only one-and-a-half *bighas* but she cultivates this small plot so well that it is upheld as a model farm. It is indeed a pleasure to visit her tiny farm with its units of composting, vermi-composting, a cow pack pit, small plots of diverse green vegetables, other crops and fruit trees. She has, at times, grown some sugarcane and flowers along with fruit trees like guava, mango and jackfruit.

Chanda says she has formed a collective with 70 women that helps each one of them market their produce. When nearly 25 of them go together to a nearby market, it is helpful. Chanda may not have studied math but is quick to do her practical math at marketing time. "I've worked out my own system based on *panseri* (five kg rates)," she says.

Apart from individual successes, several community efforts have made considerable progress. In Moripur, plantation efforts have yielded good results. In Mahewa, a community effort to improve sanitation facilities, and collect all wastewater at one point and use it to irrigate kitchen gardens has also been successful.

Hopefully, these efforts will enable farmers to improve their prospects of sustainable development so that they can maintain their fields and open spaces and teach the city to be more eco-friendly. ■



Farmers on the outskirts of Gorakhpur grow crops for the city

special training and exposure visits. They are provided help and encouraged to adopt organic farming in ways that reduce input costs significantly. There is a lot of emphasis on highly evolved mixed cropping systems. We pay special attention to women farmers," he says.

Asha Devi, a farmer in Simradeviprasad village, cultivates about two acres with her husband, Bajrangi. They also own an orchard. She grows about 40 crops a year, particularly vegetables like spinach, methi, soya, radish, carrot, cauliflower, cabbage, chilli, brinjal, *okra*, *turai*, several varieties of cucumber, beans, coriander and fruits like bananas, blackberries, lemons, guavas and mangoes.

Phulpati is a very small cultivator of Khilvaniya

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# BURHAN AND THE KASHMIR FLASHPOINT

Jehangir Rashid  
Srinagar

THE protests and violence that have followed the killing of Burhan Muzaffar Wani, 20, have put the clock back for the Kashmir Valley's search for normalcy. Apart from widespread violence, distrust is back and the state government of Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti will have to do a lot to win back the confidence of the people.

But just who was Burhan and how is it that someone as young as him could set off such turbulence?

Burhan was a Hizbul Mujahideen commander. He was a resident of Tral in South Kashmir and played a role in reviving militancy in recent times.

His popularity had been growing quietly over the five years that he had been a militant. Pictures posted by him on his Facebook page got many likes. In the way that personal stories go viral and attract a following, young Kashmiris had begun to get to know about him and his exploits.

On the evening of 8 July, when news broke that Burhan had been killed in a brief encounter with police and security forces at Bemdoora-Kokernag in Anantnag district, people came out onto the streets all over South Kashmir in solidarity.

In no time, the news reached other parts of Kashmir as well. People gave vent to their anger by demonstrating in various areas.

More than 40 people died as police and security forces fired on protesters in many places. Most of the deaths were reported from the South Kashmir districts of Anantnag, Kulgam, Pulwama and Shopian. Protests rocked other parts of Kashmir as well and even some parts of Jammu division observed a shutdown against the agitators' deaths.

Burhan had become a militant aged 15 in 2010. He had said on record that the basic reason for his joining the militants was that his elder brother had been badly beaten up without reason by security forces.

The brother died in April last year when he went into the forests in the Tral area to meet Burhan and give him food. The security forces had laid a cordon in the forests to capture Burhan.

Burhan's popularity clearly far exceeded the estimation the authorities had of his popularity. The state government failed to gauge the mood of the people. They took things lightly and the situation turned ugly very fast. Personnel of the Jammu & Kashmir Police and the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) failed to control the situation and resorted to direct firing at scores of places. Forty-three persons, including two policemen, have been killed in the protests so far. More than 90 percent of the deaths have taken place in South Kashmir alone.

Thirty-eight deaths have been reported from South Kashmir, two from Central Kashmir and three from North Kashmir. In addition, more than 1,600 civilians were injured during the street protests. Although a majority have been discharged from hospitals, many continue to be in critical condition in various hospitals. Around 1,500 police and CRPF personnel also sustained injuries.

Pellets fired by security forces have caused eye injuries. Around 50 people, mostly youth, have been injured and are unlikely to regain their vision though a team from the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in New Delhi has been attending to them in Srinagar.

The People's Democratic Party (PDP) and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) combine government in the state was missing from the scene and there is a perception among the people that all the decisions with respect to controlling



Burhan Wani's body amid a sea of agonised mourners

the law and order situation are being taken by the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government in New Delhi.

The imposition of curfew drew flak from the people as well. The people feel that the state government is their enemy and wants to crush them economically by imposing curfew for days together.

"The continuous curfew has virtually broken the back of the people. There is tremendous shortage of eatables and baby food in homes and the people at the helm are doing nothing to mitigate the suffering of the masses. Many medicines have gone out of stock in hospitals and chemist shops across the Valley," pointed out Bilal Ahmad, a resident of Pulwama.

The chief minister made one appeal for calm on the state-run radio and television. She has not visited the injured in hospitals. "Mehbooba did not visit the most affected areas of South Kashmir despite the fact that most PDP legislators come from the South Kashmir districts of Anantnag, Pulwama and Shopian. Only last month the chief minister made many rounds of Anantnag district since by-elections for the Anantnag Assembly were to be held. People ensured her victory in the by-elections, but today they feel let down," said Mohammad Lateef, a resident of Anantnag.

The state government imposed restrictions on newspapers, asking them to stop publishing statements of separatist parties. The editors, correspondents and photographers held a protest. The police raided some printing presses in Srinagar and sealed them. Thousands of copies of different dailies were seized by the police before they could reach the newsstands.

Separatist leaders like Syed Ali Shah Geelani, Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, Mohammad Yasin Malik, Shabir Ahmad Shah and Nayeem Ahmad Khan were either arrested or put under house arrest by the state government. These people had called for a strike over the Wani killing and the civilian deaths. ■

PICTURES BY BILAL BAHADUR



Downed shutters in Srinagar



The Mirwaiz climbing out of his house



Eye injuries have been caused by pellets fired by security forces



Deserted Srinagar and (right) a hospital ward



The Accountability Yatra which went across Rajasthan

# Dead come back to life in Rajasthan

Civil Society News  
New Delhi

THE 100-day Accountability Yatra across Rajasthan led by the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) has had an impact. The state government has issued orders to re-verify all one million pensions that had been stopped, including the 688,875 pensions that had been cancelled.

From December 2015 to March this year the *yatra* had travelled to 33 districts in Rajasthan to assess how government schemes were functioning, find out people's grievances and raise awareness of rights.

The *yatris* found that the second highest grievance — 1,626 out of 9,297 — was of people not getting their social security pensions.

In 2012 former Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot of the Congress had awarded pension of ₹500 a month to all men over 58 and women over 55 who were earning less than Rs 48,000 annually in a rural area or ₹60,000 in an urban centre. A pensioner over 75 years of age gets ₹750.

This money was a lifeline for the very poor, particularly the elderly, disabled, widowed and single women. However, suddenly their pensions stopped coming and they were haplessly running to banks, panchayats and e-mitra kiosks to find out why, they told the *yatris*.

The MKSS and the Sookhna Evam Rozgar Abhiyan (SR Abhiyan) decided to investigate. They found out from the Department of Social Justice and Empowerment that, out of a total of 6,845,252 pension accounts, the government had first stopped transferring money to one million accounts and then out of these had cancelled 688,875 accounts as

of 16 June. The reasons cited included death, duplication, incorrect application and so on.

It is difficult to find out if forms were really duplicated or incorrect but one can surely find out if someone is alive or dead. The MKSS and SR Abhiyan did a quick survey in three revenue villages of Bhim block in Rajsamand district. In one village alone, Chak Hirat in Kushalpura panchayat of Bhim *tehsil*, they discovered that nine out of 11 people declared dead were alive and were wondering why

**Altogether, out of 40 people who were deemed dead in Kushalpura, 22 were alive.**

their pension had been stopped. The government had officially declared six of them dead on the same day — 3 March 2016. They were old and needy. Apart from the pension, other government schemes for them were also not being delivered.

Kalu Ram is 45 years old and disabled. He lost his hand when he was 12 while working in a factory in Gujarat. He runs a small tea stall now. Kalu Ram's pension was stopped four months ago. He also wasn't getting his rations ever since the biometric POS (Point of Service) machine had been introduced in his local ration shop.

Meghram, 81, hadn't been getting his pension for six months. He got only one instalment of the Indira Awas Yojana, a rural housing scheme for the very

poor, so his house is in a pathetic state.

Varadi Devi, 79, too wasn't getting her pension. Her Aadhaar card got rejected because of a 'data process error' so she wasn't getting the 35 kg wheat her Antyodaya card entitled her to. She spent ₹500 trying to get her Aadhaar troubles fixed. She doesn't have a bank account since Aadhaar is mandatory for opening a bank account. And she can't get employment under the rural employment scheme since that too needs a bank account.

Dalu Devi, 75, had not been getting pension for six months. She doesn't get rations from the public distribution system either because her name was spelt wrong on her ration card.

Nol Singh, 75, can hardly walk. He lives in a dilapidated house with no door. He has somehow managed to go three times to the *tehsil* to find out why his pension has stopped coming for six months.

Altogether, out of 40 people deemed dead in Kushalpura, 22 were alive.

The MKSS brought eight of these people, whom the government had declared dead, to Delhi in early June to prove to the media and the authorities that they were alive and had been running from pillar to post to find out why their pension had been stopped.

The Rajasthan government acknowledged that it had blundered and restored their pension with arrears. The SR Abhiyan demanded that the Rajasthan government reopen and re-verify all the 688,875 cancelled pension accounts. The government has now issued an order to do so.

But the goof-up over the pension scheme reveals a larger malaise: the government's e-governance and financial inclusion initiatives, heavily reliant on technology, are leaving out the poorest.

"Technology has become a minefield and the internet a nightmare for the poorest people on the edge of survival," says Nikhil Dey of the MKSS.

A number of pension accounts were arbitrarily dropped while seeding Aadhaar numbers to bank accounts.

E-mitras, set up on a public-private partnership model to provide government services, cannot verify people in villages. If an elderly and poor person's pension is arbitrarily cancelled, it's a long and costly process to get it rectified. The pensioner has to apply afresh within 90 days.

"The elderly have a tough time opening bank accounts and using ATM cards. Their pin numbers aren't private but printed on the card itself. They say they can change it but then that's again another process," explains Dey.

Technology can't replace processes. So it's important for the government to verify carefully, door-to-door.

To expect a frail and elderly person to navigate the new-fangled system of various smart cards and devices and systems is unjust.

The SR Abhiyan has demanded an accountability law. It has asked that every department have job cards and a citizens' charter. A Janata Information System is needed so that people know what the government is doing and whether they are being excluded from schemes. Counselling along with feedback from the people would be one way of avoiding problems. There should be compensation for those who are denied their dues. Finally, information and facilitation centres should help people lodge complaints and find answers to their confusions with the system. ■





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# SATARA PUTS ITS WATER SYSTEMS BACK

## Dr Pol's unique community effort harvests and uses rain

**Shree Padre**  
Satara

**I**N 1708, Shahu Maharaj, grandson of Chhatrapati Shivaji, the great Maratha leader, conquered Ajinkyatara, a fort built by Raja Bhoj in the 12th century. Ajinkyatara's strategic location in Satara district of Maharashtra helped the sturdy Marathas keep watch over south Maharashtra. Climb up to the fort and you get a bird's-eye view of Satara town and its surrounding hills.

Centuries later, another battle has started from this historic fort, a war of another kind — the war against drought.

The mantra of water conservation is spreading from here to parched villages in Maharashtra that were reeling under drought for three years.

This silent movement started when Satara's local daily, *Sakal*, issued an appeal to citizens to clean up the premises of the fort through *shramdan* (voluntary labour) on 10 January 2013. A favourite spot for walkers, it was littered with plastic bottles and garbage. A group of people turned up to help.

But on the second day just three regular visitors to the fort arrived for *shramdan*. They were Dr Avinash Pol, a dentist, Mahendra Jadhav, a building contractor, and Bhagwan Mahipal, a dealer in pump sets. Undeterred by the lukewarm response, they resolved to spruce up the fort's vast grounds themselves.

Every morning, from 6.30 am to 8.30 am, they would work. After a week, a curious onlooker, Dr Sharad Jagtap, joined them. One by one, more hands came forward. Soon, the fort was clean.

Dr Pol then suggested that they begin soil and water conservation work in the fort's 100 acres overrun by wild flora. It would help the crippling water shortage their town was facing. The volunteers readily agreed.

For four years, rain or shine, 40 people from Satara in uniform do *shramdan* here every morning. Among them are doctors, software engineers, bankers, businessmen, retired persons and even a policeman.

More than 65 acres are now dotted with continuous covered trenches (CCTs), loose shoulder *bunds* (LSBs) and small check dams. About 7,000

trees have been planted and nurtured.

"We joined hands because we realised this kind of community work is for our future," explains Shailesh Chavan, an engineer, who is a drone photography expert.

Satara has been rewarded with water. "The water level in bore wells had gone down to 200 feet in the foothills before we started work. Recently, we heard people say they were getting water from newly dug wells at a depth of 40-50 feet in the same area," says Jadhav.

Volunteers took the message, 'Self-help keeps away drought', to parched villages in the district. Led by Dr Pol, who is now called *panyacha* doctor (water doctor), the core team travelled to these villages, drew up plans, linked them to government officials and arranged funds.

"Water harvesting and conservation is happening through daily *shramdan* in Rehmathopur, Jalagaon, Velu, Bichukale and many other villages," says Dr Pol.

Spreading this movement still further is the Pani Foundation, established a year ago by Hindi film actor Aamir Khan and his wife, Kiran Rao. The foundation has started a unique contest with Dr Pol's help, called the Satyamev Jayate Water Cup. Villages in drought-prone districts compete to win the prized cup.

The Naam Foundation, founded by Hindi film actor Nana Patekar and Marathi theatre actor Makarand Nanaspure, is also working with Dr Pol to scale up water conservation so that sparse rain doesn't wreck the lives of people ever again.

### PEOPLE SPREAD THE WORD

"There is a serious scarcity of water in Maharashtra," explains Dr Pol. "Our irrigation coverage is just 16 percent. Most villagers are migrating to cities. Once we create a model in one area, it spreads. Nearby villages learn from it. I don't need to campaign. I tell people to spread the word. If watershed work is implemented scientifically, 300 to 400 mm of rain is enough."

Dr Pol and his volunteers are now working in around 50 villages of Satara district. Whenever a village appeals for help, Dr Pol arrives on the spot. One of his most dramatic stories of a turnaround in



Dr Avinash Pol (centre) with residents of Velu village which is now



A check dam next to a percolation pond in Jakhangaon village

water availability is about Velu village in Koregaon *taluka* of Satara district.

One day, Sharad Bhosle, a building contractor living in Satara, approached Dr Pol and explained the plight of this water-deprived village. The very next week, Dr Pol, along with the Deputy Collector, went to Velu and did a thorough on-site inspection.

"If all of you do *shramdan*, you can put an end to your water woes," Dr Pol said and explained the kind of water and soil conservation work that the



zigzagged with water systems



village needed to do. Work started with two volunteers from the village. Then a few more joined in. Dr Pol linked the village to government officials and a few donors.

If you walk up a surrounding hill and look at Velu today you will see a landscape zigzagged by a myriad CCTs, LSBs, *nala bunds* and so on — all to ensure every drop of rain is captured.

In the first fortnight of June, it rained in Velu. Just four cm. Yet the village exploded with excitement. A

conservation structures made by the villagers, his well has water.

The villagers had also noticed that an old tank on a hill would fill to the brim with rainwater and the excess would spill into a river. There were four more tanks at a lower elevation, but the water wouldn't always reach there. Can't that water be directed to our village, they enquired. Dr Pol realised they were right.

That observation might create history. For the



The revived KT Bandhara dam in Jakhangaon

drizzle had turned their wells and ponds wet with water. When you are ready to put rainwater to good use, just four cm can be a lot.

For the first time in three years, Velu sent back its tankers. Farmers began buying drip irrigation pipes and seeds of potato and ginger. Pravin Bhosle, a farmer with 20 acres, booked a truckload of potato seeds. For six years he hasn't been able to cultivate his land because of scanty rain, he says.

"Even if we get just 200 to 300 mm rainfall like we did for the past three years, we should get a good crop," he says. The normal rainfall here is 500-600 mm.

Nanavare, another farmer, has five acres. He plans to grow lots of ginger in between his sapota trees. Satara's ginger is famous in India and many farmers here grow this crop with drip irrigation.

Nanavare has spent ₹6.65 lakh to build a large tank lined with plastic. He has also erected *nala bunds* and loose boulder *bunds*. At the lowest end of his land, there is an open well. There was a time it would turn dry very fast. Now, thanks to soil and water

first time a project interlinking percolation ponds is being implemented in Maharashtra. More than five villages will benefit and around 10,000 acres can be brought under cultivation thanks to enhanced irrigation.

The plan is this: The topmost tank will be connected to four percolation ponds below it through a two-foot-diameter pipeline of about two kilometres.

A feasibility plan was drawn up by Dr Pol's team and sent to engineers working for the government for an opinion. It was a viable plan, they said. For funding he approached Anu Aga, their MP. A video through a drone was made and sent to her. Aga was impressed and released ₹96.58 lakh for the project.

People from an adjacent village objected and began to play politics. A political leader complained to the collector. But Dr Pol stood firm. "Look, this is a government project. It will be made. If you don't cooperate, unnecessarily your village will be blacklisted. Officials will think you are a quarrelsome village." They finally agreed. They too will benefit. The project is expected to be completed by the end of this year itself.

"I was sarpanch of Velu three years ago," says Pravin Bhosle, "I never dreamed that I would play such an important role in this great transformation. If Dr Pol had not come to our village, we would have remained in the same sorry state. Doctor *saab*, for us, is like God."

"Out of all the villages I have worked with so far, Velu stands first in involvement and speed. What you see here is the outcome of the past nine months of work. Many more works are yet to be done. But what has been done so far will ensure their water security. Velu will never again face drought," says Dr Pol confidently.

## JAKHANGAON INVENTS A DAM

For the past 10 years Jakhangaon, with a population of 3,000 and 1,500 hectares of land, had been suffering water scarcity. When Dr Pol was invited here about four years ago the village's water supply was providing each family just 20-50 litres every day. In 2001 tankers had to be rolled in. But they would bring water once in eight or nine days. At least one or two people from each family had migrated to Mumbai in search of work.

There was no way anyone could earn money. The

village used to have 1,530 animals and they used to be taken wherever there was water. Soon, no water could be found anywhere. Four years ago, the number of livestock dwindled to 30. A mere 25 hectares could be cultivated. Most families found themselves surviving on money sent from Mumbai by their men.

A rivulet, Jamb oda, 4.5 km long, runs through the village. It had many vented dams popularly known as KT Bandhara (Kolhapur Type Bandhara). Wooden planks and compacted soil were used to close the vents at the end of the monsoon. The entire rivulet was heavily silted and no *bandhara* was working.

The doctor worked out a blueprint. The first priority was to desilt the Jamb oda. But this took a long time since the stream was loaded with silt. Dr Pol suggested that the vents — some were leaking — be closed with concrete. A cut-off trench was built in front of the leaking dam and lined with plastic behind. Black cotton soil was filled into the trench. These steps revived the old *bandhara* and the method has now spread to other villages.

Villagers have constructed 14 new check dams, basically modified gabion structures, for just ₹3 lakh. These would have cost the irrigation department at least ₹15 lakh each. The modified gabion structures they have built are now locally famous as the Jakhangaon model. Across still smaller streams, low-cost check dams designed by Padmakar Bhide of Pune have been made. All in all, Jakhangaon has constructed 38 check dams, big and small.

As a result, the water table has risen. There is no drinking water shortage. CCTs have been dug in about 133 acres. Work is ongoing.

Cultivation has resumed. Farmers have formed groups and started growing chillies using plastic mulching and drip. They get an average of ₹60 per kg for chillies. Milk production has increased to 1,000 litres per day. It is pooled and sent to three collection centres.

“In such a small village, our people are spending a lot of money every day to recharge their mobiles,” says Santhosh Mahadik, a local villager.

“We didn’t have mobile phones a few years ago,” says Jitendra Shinde, the sarpanch. “Now, apart from BSNL, two private phone companies have erected towers in our village.”

## SPRING IS REVIVED

It isn’t as if there is no water in every village. Sometimes people don’t know how to tap it sustainably. Take the example of Alwadi in Satara district. Last year the villagers invited Dr Pol for a visit. It is a remote village of 808 hectares surrounded by steep hills. Around 600 people of 95 families live around here. Though just 35 km from Satara, Alwadi doesn’t have any facilities. A bus service started here only three years ago.

All the villagers are small landholders with around two to five acres. They were cultivating rice as their first crop. Actually, there is no dearth of water. A spring flowed down from a hilltop near their village and then dived into an earthen channel which drank up all the water. So the villagers couldn’t cultivate a second crop.

The water table is also high. But people are poor and don’t have the money to dig a well. Income from just one crop wasn’t enough to make both ends meet. So they migrated in droves. Half of

## Villagers have constructed 14 new check dams for just ₹3 lakh. These would have cost the irrigation department at least ₹15 lakh each.

Alwadi’s population lives in Mumbai.

Dr Pol climbed the steep hill and saw the spring. Within minutes, an idea flashed in his mind. The water from the spring could be brought to the villagers through a pipeline.

But there was a hitch. The spring was in a dense forest. Unperturbed, he returned with the *tehsildar* and district forest officer. They took a look. The forest officer agreed to give permission. The next task was to put a pipeline in place. The doctor sent Bhagwan, a water activist and pipeline specialist, to work it out. He then connected the leaders of the village with a donor.

“People were waiting for a solution for 60 years. The forest officer gave us permission saying they do have provision for providing water for drinking. For the pipeline I put Bhagwan in touch with the irrigation engineer. A friend agreed to provide the pipes after I appealed to him. We took the collector to the village. He said through ATMA (Agricultural Technology Management Agency) we could provide villagers with drip irrigation and strawberry plants. So they began strawberry cultivation,” says Dr Pol.

Funds from the rural employment guarantee scheme were used to dig trenches for laying a pipeline. It took the villagers a month. Since the spring is on a hill, the water flows down due to gravity. Most of Alwadi now has adequate irrigation. Water is distributed in rotation for farming. Strawberry cultivation was tried out last year. Villagers didn’t make much money out of strawberries last year because prices fell but they gained knowhow and now have the confidence to give it another try.

A section of the village doesn’t get water but another stream on a hill has been identified. Says Vasanth Surve, “If we bring that water through a pipe it would water the remaining fields in our village.”

## LAKES ARE THE ANSWER

In Jalna, as a result of drought 1,500 bore wells had dried up. People got water once in four or five days. Jalna is dotted with steel industries and the town’s monthly water bill was as much as ₹20-50 lakh.

Local organisations invited Dr Pol to find a solution to their misery. Dr Pol surveyed the area. He saw that Jalna had four heavily silted lakes.

Ghanewadi lake, over 600 acres, had been built by the Nizam. A Ghanewadi Samrakhshan Manch had started desilting it but work was moving at a snail’s pace.

The Jaykwadi dam is located about 50 km from



Women farmers in Jakhangaon now grow chillies



Residents of Alwadi village gather near a pipe that taps water from

Jalna in Aurangabad village. The government had spent ₹250 crore connecting Jalna to the dam via a pipeline. The dam had very little water. The Jalna municipality had to spend ₹1 lakh per day on electricity just to pump some water from the dam. The municipality hadn’t paid the electricity bill for three years so its electricity supply had been disconnected.

Dr Pol suggested that the Ghanewadi lake, which is just four km from Jalna, be revived. Water could flow via gravity to the town. The Ghanewadi Samrakhshana Manch needed to be strengthened. Dr Pol delivered a stirring speech appealing for help. A friend from Mumbai immediately donated ₹25 lakh. Around ₹1 crore was collected virtually on the spot. The next day, work began in earnest. The government pitched in. The people got involved.

The Siddhivinayak Temple Trust expressed a desire to help the drought-affected villagers. Dr Pol invited them to Jalna. Come and see, he said. They came and were impressed enough to sanction ₹25



a stream on a hill

Pol sparked the idea of water harvesting and conservation and spread it to parched villages, the Pani Foundation is helping to scale up the work and popularise it by creating competition.

Actor Aamir Khan and wife Kiran Rao set up the Pani Foundation a year ago. Satyajit Bhatkal, director of Satyamev Jayate, is its CEO. This foundation works solely on water projects. It trains people in watershed management and underlines the importance of *shramdan*.

## THE WATER CUP

The Pani Foundation has launched a unique contest called the Satyamev Jayate Water Cup. Three drought-prone *taluks* have been selected: Koregaon from Satara district, Ambajogai from Beed district and Warud from Amravati district. The villages that want to take part have to apply and 116 villages have done so. The local panchayat selects three men and two women from each village who are then trained by the foundation at three centres, which are becoming famous here for the superb training they provide in water conservation. The foundation pays for transport, accommodation and training.

After the recruits were trained, the contest started on 20 April for 45 days. A questionnaire of 100 marks has been drawn up. A group, which included Dr Pol, worked out the guidelines and criteria for marks. Thirty-five marks are for *shramdan*, 25 for

**Dr Pol respects the opinion of villagers and makes them responsible for implementation. 'Our investment should not be in projects. It should be in human beings.'**

machinery work, 10 for water budgeting, 10 for people's participation, 10 for motivating people, five for open well and borewell recharge and five for an innovative idea.

The first prize is of ₹50 lakh, the second of ₹30 lakh and the third of ₹20 lakh. About 8,000 to 10,000 people participated in *shramdan* for one and a half months, which may well be a world record. The results will be announced on 15 August, Independence Day.

Dr Pol is also working with the Naam Foundation, founded by actors Nana Patekar and Makarand Nanaspure. Inspired by Patekar, Nanaspure has been working in Maharashtra's rural areas where farmers have been committing suicide. The Naam Foundation provides financial help to families of farmers who have taken their own lives and helps educate their children. It also works on water conservation.

Both the Pani Foundation and the Naam Foundation are hugely impressed by Dr Pol's work

and have made him a trustee.

## DOCTOR ON CALL

It was while studying dental science at Bharati Vidyapeeth in Pune that Dr Pol began wondering why the long queues for medical treatment consisted mostly of villagers. He realised it was because of poverty caused by poor conditions of farming, lack of water and education.

As soon as he set up his dental practice in 1997 at Satara, he began his first project on sanitation at a village called Beblewadi. Villagers began contacting him and the discussions invariably veered to the scarcity of water.

No school or college teaches rainwater harvesting or watershed development. "These things probably can't be taught in school. I too did not know. But I learnt. I spoke to *gram sevaks* and to people working in agriculture. I went to see water works. I turned to Google. In the past three years, since the beginning of the drought, my work has widened and become better known."

He first travels to the village with water problems and does an exhaustive survey. His past work in sanitation, education and water comes in handy. "I do the survey the way I diagnose a patient. Once I examine his teeth, I decide whether a filling will do or a root canal or a bridge. I identify the specific problems of the village and possible solutions too."

Dr Pol makes use of government schemes, contacting officials and bringing them to see the village. He also uses his volunteers judiciously.

He respects the opinion of villagers, takes them into confidence and makes them responsible for implementation. "Our investment should not be in projects. It should be in human beings," he says. "I haven't gone to Alwadi for months. They built a road with rural employment guarantee scheme money on their own. I helped them connect with the department. Soon the road will be tarred."

Dealing with government requires paperwork and endless delay. Yet work gets done at amazing speed. Dr Pol has even taken farmers to Sikkim and China on a study tour, using government schemes.

"There are many government officers who want to work sincerely for the country. But they are not linked to the right people in villages. I do this," he says. Dr Pol has a busy schedule but he keeps aside three to four hours every day to listen to the problems of villagers. People from different villages ring him up. To give time to everyone he uses WhatsApp and his Android phone.

"I tell them it's difficult for me to visit everyone. But if you want to hear my views, call me after 8 pm. They assemble a gram sabha and give me a call. They put their phone on speaker mode and near a microphone. I have taken part in hundreds of gram sabhas on phone," he says.

Dr Pol doesn't tell donors to pay directly to villagers either. Donors are requested to deposit the money with suppliers. Payments are made through the bank.

A notable impact of water returning to villages is that people who had migrated to Mumbai are coming back to farm once again.

What is the biggest lesson Dr Pol has learnt in these years? "Keep your head cool, your words sweet and your mouth shut. Then you will succeed," says Dr Pol. ■

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crore for Jalna to have a new water system. Several check dams have been constructed. This is another example of how Dr Pol "connects right people for good work".

## BICHUKALE'S SHRAMDAN

Sambhaji Pawar, a *kirana* shop owner from Bichukale, lives in Satara. He is a member of the Ajinkyatara *shramdan* group. He took the message of water conservation to his dry village, Bichukale, 25 km from Satara. Since 2010, his village had been dependent on tankers.

The villagers approached Dr Pol. He visited the village and suggested water conservation measures. "Initially there was a very lukewarm response to the appeal for *shramdan*. We were just two members but we carried on working. Eventually, people joined us," recalls Sambhaji. Now Bichukale with its 302 families organises *shramdan* every Friday. The water table has risen and conservation work is in progress. If the *shramdan* at Ajinkyatara and the work of Dr

# BUSINESS

ENTERPRISE | CSR | ICT | GREEN TECH

AJIT KRISHNA

## ‘For Lok Capital investing is first about getting the people right’

### Vishal Mehta on investing for profit and social impact

Civil Society News  
New Delhi

**I**N times when private equity investments haven't been faring too well, Lok Capital is out there raising money for its third fund, having made some good decisions and performed nicely in the past 10 years with its first two funds.

Set up to invest in companies that don't just make money but are also drivers of inclusion and socially oriented in their goals, Lok Capital chose microfinance in the first round and did well. The exception was Basix, which unfortunately got caught in the Andhra quicksand.

Lok Capital is now looking at micro, small and medium enterprises where the demand is consistently big, as was the case with MFIs a decade ago. The fund is also looking at healthcare, agriculture and affordable housing.

Civil Society spoke to Vishal Mehta, one of the co-founders along with Rajiv Lall and Donald Peck, on what Lok Capital's investments are looking like:

**You invested early on in microfinance companies. What has been the experience?**

Actually, just yesterday (10 July) we completed our final exit on the fund. It was a \$22 million fund. We made 10 investments and we had our 10th exit yesterday. It was a 10-year fund so technically it expires in December 2016. We have made two times cash on cash in rupee terms, which is basically 15 percent net return year on year. So it was about (makes quick calculation) ₹100 crore and we made it ₹200 crore. It is a small size but it's very good returns for that vintage.

**Do all these returns go to the people who put in the money or...?**

The way we are structured is quite unique. You want good business leaders, people who are doing it for more than money. Profit maximisation is not the only goal and that's what we felt we should be in our structure.

So there is the sponsor, or general partner in the lingo of a fund, which is the Lok Foundation. It is a non-profit. The Lok Foundation is the 100 percent owner of Lok Advisory Services, the company which manages the fund.

The profits are calculated after giving the investors the principal and 'hurdle' back. The 'hurdle' is the minimum return the investors want before they are willing to share the profit with the JV. The 'hurdle' in the first fund was five percent. Of the profits, 80 percent has gone to the investors. Of the remaining 20 percent, 10 has gone to the foundation and 10 to the company, of which the foundation is the 100 percent owner.

**What did you look for when you first identified Ujjivan?**

I learnt very quickly because I had good mentors like Rajiv Lall and Donald Peck.



Vishal Mehta: 'You want good business leaders. Profit maximisation is not the only goal'

Donald had been investing in India. He is a co-founder, engaged from day one.

Microfinance is not rocket science. You have to do it right, and do it efficiently, and you will make money. The demand is fairly large and people do have the intention to pay you back because they value the service. Yes, we clearly got our people right and one validation of that is very recently the RBI giving five of its 10 small finance bank licences to microfinance institutions in which we invested. That is a very good hit rate. Ujjivan, Janalakshmi, Utkar, Suryadey and Equitas.

Janalakshmi we had exited long time back. But Janalakshmi was our first investment and I remember doing that deal. Rajiv and I had gone to finalise it with Ramesh [Ramanathan]. Rajiv was so clear. He said, I am doing this first deal for Lok, the last thing I want to get wrong is people. I have huge respect for what Ramesh has done. We paid pretty good valuation for that deal. We wanted to make sure that in people terms we got it right, even if we didn't make much money.

Look at the pressure. You set out to create impact. But if you start funding some of the guys you should not be funding, you might create negative impact. It's not like I made a bet and lost money. So for us what matters is who are these people, what are their motivations, are they doing it for the same reasons as we at Lok Capital are? These are very subjective calls. There is no formula. You get better as a team in selecting the right people.

**But you exited nicely from all your investments, barring perhaps one.**

There was one write-off. In Basix, which was promoted by Vijay Mahajan and a

stellar company. It is completely unfortunate that it got caught in the Andhra crisis.

### **But it wasn't bad as an original call.**

No, it wasn't. Vijay Mahajan is the father of microfinance in India. I mean, we were very happy to do that deal. It is just extremely sad how it happened and what the eventual outcome was.

### **Now, you make money and that's good. What about the impact part of it? How have you assessed that?**

On impact I would say we started with a very loose definition. We knew our intent. There were two or three things we looked at. Microfinance, to be honest, was very easy. You are serving a segment completely underserved by banks. You've done this consistently, these people keep coming back to you and you earn much higher rates of interest because they value the product. As long as you do it responsibly, there is huge impact.

We haven't as a fund figured out a way to do deeper impact analysis of how lives of people have changed. That's a very difficult and expensive impact assessment.

But we looked at microfinance in terms of affordable, consistent financial services done in a responsible way. That's how we looked at the impact. It is much more complex in health and education and agriculture to innovate and to give more and better products.

I mean, we started funding microfinance at an average interest rate of 40 percent. It has come down to 25 percent now. There are many more products available.

### **Do you think you had a role to play in that by being an investor in microfinance companies and allowing them to gain new efficiencies?**

I would think so, especially when you understand that the RBI goes through a very deep and thorough analysis of who should be given a banking licence. The kind of diligence they have done on people and systems!

### **How deep is your association with companies you invest in?**

Out of the 10-member team I run right now there are only two people who are pure investment background folks. Eight of us have done operational things in life, which is very unusual for our fund. I think that stems from our model of getting engaged.

The reality is that not every promoter is looking for your engagement. It is a very, very intense relationship game. People have to see value in you and so you have to invest in that relationship to build trust over time. Our engagement has largely been in the areas of human resource — building teams. The fact is I was getting much better CVs than these companies were getting on their own. But we also run a fellowship programme where we deploy smart people for one year in these companies and we share the cost of that jointly.

The other main area has been technology — how you think about systems. Governance is a misused term but in this case I will use it. Post the Andhra crisis, then the Malegam Committee and now licences... governance is very important. How are you looking at the boards and the auditors of these companies? How are you preparing them to become institutions rather than just small individual-run companies? Initially, it did not show us a lot of outcome. Now that some of these companies have been selected we believe we were investing in the right governance structures as well. We have always had somebody — this is largely about expansion — who could help the companies plan the next stage, move to new geographies. How do you go to MP from UP, how do you go to Rajasthan...

### **Would you like to give an example, like Ujjivan?**

I have many examples. We were not one of the early investors in Ujjivan. We came in the second or third round of funding. In Ujjivan I would say our work has been in three areas. One, when the Malegam Committee's regulations became applicable, which basically meant there is a pricing cap now, the only way companies will remain sustainable is by bringing down their operating costs. We worked with the company to figure out very detailed branch-level economics. I mean it literally — do not keep five stationery items in a branch.

We have worked recently with them very closely on this banking transformation, which is in process. They had confidence and trust in us. But, more specifically, Ujjivan has probably employed more Lok fellows than any other company. I think we have had three or four Lok fellows there.

You give funding, perspective and then you get into ground-level issues which they may not have the wherewithal to address.

At Lok Foundation we ran a big literacy campaign for Ujjivan customers where we made two short films on how customers should be wary of ghost lending — you borrow for someone else and then it gets you into a debt trap. The campaign was translated into 15 regional languages. With Ujjivan we had a pretty strong track record. So you are right — perspective, governance and then minute aspects of the operation.

### **Your second fund, where has that gone?**

About 82 percent has gone into financial services, it's a \$65 million fund. And the remaining 18 percent has gone into health, agriculture and education. When we were raising the second fund we said we want to diversify, we wanted to from day one but at that time we didn't want to spread ourselves too thin. Our investors wanted us to focus because we had a lot of things to prove. They wanted to keep it simple.

Within financial services we had already said this will be MSME finance, affordable housing finance apart from microfinance. We had not anticipated small finance banks because we weren't sure those regulations would come or not. So that was the diversification fund.

**'Look at the pressure. You set out to create impact. But if you start funding some of the guys you should not be funding, you might create negative impact. It's not like I made a bet and lost money.'**

### **When you look at MSME finance does that get touched by education and health or are those two separate?**

I think they are still separate.

### **So then in MSME what are you looking at really?**

Basically, we are looking at non-banking finance companies. For almost the same fundamental reasons why banks were not able to reach microfinance customers, banks are also not able to reach small businesses. I am talking about loans from ₹50,000 to ₹7-8 lakh.

### **What kind of businesses are these?**

Small hotels in small towns, power looms, dairy farmers who want to buy five new animals — all of that.

### **What is the kind of healthcare company you would invest in?**

We set three priorities: affordability, access and quality. We are trying to do this with the right people and we have done two deals so far. There is one eye care company called Drishti that we seeded. It is run by an IT entrepreneur who clearly had his heart in the right place. By the way, Nandan Nilekani just invested in that company last week. We are trying to prove there is a model in eye care in small towns in Karnataka; you don't have to go to Bengaluru, you can stay in Devanahalli and we will give you good quality and a wide range of affordability from ₹1,500 to ₹15,000.

### **This is optometry plus ophthalmology?**

That's right. Eighty percent of this is cataract. It covers 98 percent of what can go wrong with an eye. We want to start addressing some of the more specific things in the next phase. We already have three hospitals and three spokes or smaller hospitals.

The other deal is in what I call remedial care but the concept is that after an accident or stroke the hospital is done with you but you are not functioning. This company in Madurai does an average of 30 days' remedial care where you and an attendant from the family comes — it's largely about diet, physical therapy, but trying to get you back on your feet in an affordable way. The idea is to expand this. This company is about two or three years old and promoted by Arvind from the Arvind eye care family. ■

# Bottling goodness

**Gauri Gharpure**  
Panjim

IMAGINE leaving a corporate job in Mumbai to go to Goa for its coconuts. That is what Nilisha Ferrao, the proprietor of Narla coconut oil, did. Launched in 2015, Narla relies on best quality coconuts and stringently supervised processes to produce clear, cold-pressed, unrefined coconut oil.

Ferrao is an MBA from Symbiosis in Pune. She was working at Godrej Securities as a senior marketing manager when she left to start her enterprise.

The move to Goa and venturing into a business that involved coconuts seemed a natural choice. Growing up, she used coconut oil extensively and when she gave bottles of Goan coconut oil to friends, they were thrilled with it.

Ferrao realised there was demand out there for good quality coconut oil. Best of all, Goa had a profusion of coconut trees. “The coconut tree is the heart of Goa. So many coconuts go waste because farmers don’t know what to do with them. It wasn’t just good business. I also wanted to help farmers optimise the use of their produce,” she explains.

In recent years cold-pressed, unrefined coconut oil has become a rage in the West. It is seen as a ‘super oil’ and ‘super food’. The oil is prescribed for wrinkles, face cleansing and moisturising, for healthy teeth and gums and as a massage oil. Other common uses are for cooking, treating skin rashes and alleviating

eczema. Rich in lauric acid and medium chain triglycerides, coconut oil is recognised for its antifungal and antioxidant properties.

Priced at ₹590 for half a litre, Narla coconut oil is expensive when compared to most major brands. In Goa, villagers sell coconut oil filled in old whisky and brandy bottles in local markets and along the road from the airport to Panjim for one-fifth the rate. So, what makes Narla special?



Nilisha Ferrao with Narla, her brand of coconut oil

Coconuts are de-husked, broken up and dried naturally. “Most oil brands subject the fruit to artificial heat for drying. That is the main difference. Cold-pressed means we just use sunlight to dry the fruit,” Ferrao says. Drying coconuts naturally is a long and painstaking process.

Any fruit that has caught fungus is discarded. Once the coconuts are dried, they go through another round of sorting and selection before being taken to a local mechanised stone mill for oil extraction. “The mill has to be clean. We usually go as early as 6 am to be the first in line and get the oil extracted through clean machines,” says Ferrao.

The oil is then filtered through a muslin cloth and sent for packaging. No preservatives and additives are used. Narla is packed in glass bottles to ensure purity and a long shelf life. “Besides, glass is eco-friendly. That is important to me,” Ferrao adds.

It takes a month for a coconut to transit from tree to bottle. Production varies depending on the quality of sourced coconuts and sunlight. In a good season, around 500 kg of coconuts are processed.

“For every two kilos of dried coconut meat, we get less than 500 ml of oil,” says Ferrao.

Ferrao gets repeat orders. Most people use Narla for their skin. It is especially good for babies. “Narla has become a hit with young mothers because it cures diaper rashes like no other expensive cream can,” she says. Even her sister ignored her advice to use coconut oil for her baby’s rash. She kept trying out one expensive cream after another. But the baby’s rash was stubborn.

“You know how it is. You don’t listen to family advice. Finally, her friend called from Delhi and told her to use coconut oil and she used Narla. Believe me, the rash was gone the next day,” Ferrao beams.

Health-conscious people on protein-based diets are also opting for Narla. It is a myth that coconut oil increases cholesterol. In fact, lauric acid helps prevent high cholesterol and high blood pressure.

Ferrao sells Narla at local fairs and bazaars in Goa and Bengaluru. Her product is also for sale on craftsvilla.com. She modestly downplays the success that Narla has achieved in such a short while and insists that she is still learning the ropes. She wants to start extracting virgin coconut oil from tender coconut meat instead of naturally dried coconuts and is researching processes and strategies.

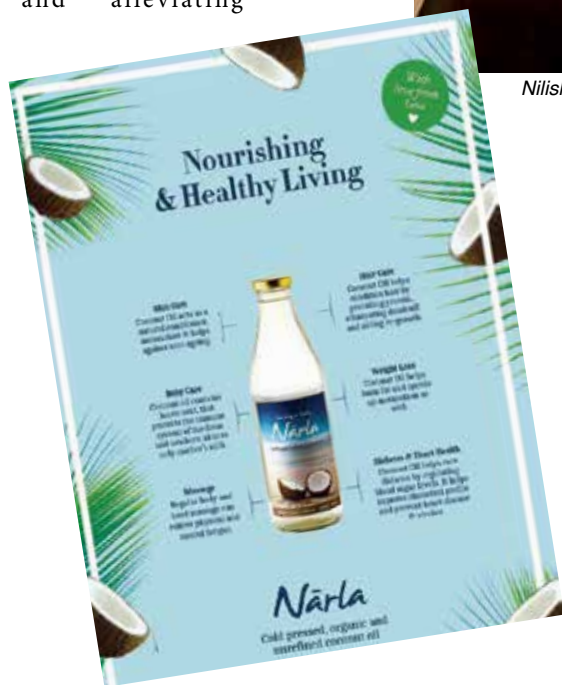
Meanwhile, to upscale her micro business she has enrolled at the Centre for Incubation and Business Acceleration (CIBA) in Goa. She is also trying to find out how to get funding from government schemes for small-scale enterprises.

Ferrao knows there is huge potential to diversify. But for now she wants to focus on optimising processes and bringing down production costs so that she can pass on the benefits to her customers. “Coconut oil is so good, it must be used widely. I don’t want Narla to be an elite product,” she says. ■

Ferrao taps time-tested natural methods and carries out stringent quality control to make Narla pure and wholesome. Her mother helps with her knowledge.

She says local oil mills use leftover coconuts and don’t really check for fungus or dryness. Often, water is added if the fruit dries up too much to extract more oil. The outcome is fuzzy liquid that becomes rancid quite fast. “That won’t ever happen with Narla. It is crystal clear, like water,” she says. Customers also compliment her for Narla’s natural fragrance.

Ferrao describes the process she uses. First, large fleshy coconuts — the ones used for cooking — are collected, sorted and selected. Ferrao currently sources coconuts from a small village in Canacana, at the southernmost tip of Goa, and provides employment to around 20 local families.





# INSIGHTS

OPINION | ANALYSIS | RESEARCH | IDEAS

## Education needs action



DILEEP RANJEKAR

### BACK TO SCHOOL

IT was 2008 and the commissioner discussed with us the idea of designing workbooks for all government schools in the state to supplement the textbooks which in his opinion had some gaps. We thought the idea was great since it provided us an opportunity to not only develop some quality workbooks but also interact with the three lakh-plus teachers on how to use those workbooks. We developed the workbooks in collaboration with two other organisations and, just when they were ready to be printed, the commissioner was transferred out. The new commissioner expressed inability to print the workbooks since there was no budget. We were disappointed.

In the meantime, another state learnt about the workbooks we had developed and members of the State Council for Education Research and Training (SCERT) visited us, requesting us to share the new workbooks. We explained that we would be very happy to share the workbooks but had a few conditions/requests for the state. They must create a team of high-quality academics to design workshops to develop teachers to use the workbooks to change their perspective and teaching-learning methods.

Unfortunately, the state took the workbooks and simply printed them to distribute them to all the elementary schools in the state — without developing the teachers for using them effectively. This is the way most actions get driven in the states — jobs such as printing, purchases of equipment and so on are promptly carried out but the issues related to practices, perspective and culture are not addressed. Nor is any effort made to orient teachers to meaningfully use the material developed.

Around six years ago I was invited by a donor

organisation to join a panel of three members to evaluate the work of a very large not-for-profit organisation. Since I respected both the donor and the non-profit, I agreed to join. The evaluation included meeting and interviewing several stakeholders associated with the organisation's work. The members of the non-profit prided themselves on having been associated with curriculum reforms and new curriculum development in two states in India. In order to test their conviction, we asked them why they felt their work of curriculum development was so important when the earlier curriculum had never reached the teachers and educators. We also asked them whether they found any connect between the curriculum and classroom processes. After much discussion,

obtained. A high-powered committee was appointed to listen to people and develop a draft policy. The committee has already made its recommendations public. Critiques are awaited from all stakeholders. Several sub-committees of the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) have been simultaneously established to discuss identified areas that range from how to improve the overall quality of public schools to issues related to gender, mid-day meal programmes and so on.

The question that comes to the minds of several people closely connected with education in this country is: What would all this lead to? Is the New Education Policy going to be a panacea for several issues baffling us?

The National Policy for Education, 1986 (modified in 1992) has existed for the past 30 years and included some comprehensive recommendations to implement quality education in India. A closer analysis would reveal that several important policy recommendations have not been implemented by successive governments. The National Curriculum Framework was last reviewed in 2005 and presented some radically different ideas of subject, perspective and pedagogy. However, it was not implemented through necessary modifications in the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) curriculum and in-service teacher development efforts.

To strengthen the rights of children and parents, the Right to Education Act was approved by Parliament in 2009 but most schools have not implemented the majority of its provisions even after seven years. The National Policy for Education had dealt with important issues

such as goals and objectives of education, connect of education to achieving societal goals, creation of an Indian Education Services, top-quality institutions such as the University Grants Commission (UGC), the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), the National University of Educational Planning and Administration (NUEPA), the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), and the District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs); management of

*Continued on page 26*



*People, political will and money are needed to implement our many policies on education*

**Jobs such as printing, purchases of equipment are promptly carried out but practices, perspective and culture are not addressed.**

there was unanimous agreement that even if they revised the curriculum it would be of no significance if they did not reach it to teachers and to the classroom. That involves special effort. A component that was almost always missing in their work and that of the state was implementation of the curriculum.

The past six months have witnessed a heightened debate on the New Education Policy for India. Recommendations from several states, bodies, associations, academics and NGOs have been

Continued from page 25

education, continuous review of institutions' performance and closing/restructuring them, as necessary; examinations to drive the quality of education; merit-based teacher selection and development and so on. Both the quantitative and qualitative implementation of these critical issues has not happened.

Concurrent to formulation of policies, investments should have been made in universities and schools in education that developed competent professionals who could ensure quality implementation of policies. As a result of failure to do so, we have a serious shortage of high-quality educationists and academic resources who understand education in depth. Several panels during the past 10 years have recommended developing a pool of at least 500 people in every state who could significantly contribute to the education quality in the schools. The recommendations have remained on paper.

Practically every recommendation of policy involves significant people resources, political will to implement the policies and, most important, budgets. All discussions of implementation stop at lack of availability of sustained funds in the states as well as at the centre. It is not a question of one-time funding. Money is needed to create several enabling conditions to implement the spirit of each component of policy.

Education is supposed to develop young minds for the future and, therefore, has to be essentially futuristic. A careful analysis of the future that we envisage is necessary to articulate new policy.

Yes, several contexts of the 1986 National Policy for Education have changed and a review of the policy is needed for today and for the future. However, simultaneously, we have to commit necessary resources, human and financial — if needed, almost four-fold.

Illustratively, more than 10,000 high-quality academic resources are required to be recruited in close to 700 DIETs. It would easily need an additional budget of more than ₹800 crore each year. And this is just one item. If the government has to implement its own commitment to provide cooked meals of certain nutritional value to every child, you need a budget of at least ₹25 per meal. This may need trebling the existing budget.

While education should continue to be a concurrent subject, budgets must be made available for each state — irrespective of affordability and income. If we are establishing 30 central universities to develop education professionals, they must be funded in such a manner that they can drive high quality in every aspect of their functioning. The idea of funding them just for five years and expecting them to be self-sustaining later is unworkable. Most developed nations have premier education institutions that run on philanthropy or government support. There is no other way to run institutions — if you want to provide autonomy to such institutions and not exploit the students.

Assuming we are able to finally release an extremely relevant New Education Policy, the danger of the policy remaining on paper (like the earlier one) is very real if we don't enable its genuine implementation with necessary people and budgets. ■

*Dileep Ranjekar is CEO of the Azim Premji Foundation.*

## Finally the truth is out about Blair



SHYAM BHATIA

SIR John Chilcot's report on Britain's war in Iraq reveals a style of decision-making in London that has more in common with authoritarian Asian regimes, including Indira Gandhi's Emergency years, than what is expected from the Mother of Democracies.

Chilcot's comments about Britain's military participation to topple Saddam Hussein is also a searing indictment of a widely criticised conflict that continues to affect the wider international community. Many experts fervently believe that this 2003 war, and the circumstances leading up to it, paved the way for the rise of extremist groups like Al Qaeda and ISIS — offshoots of the Taliban — that operate in Asia, including South Asia, and other parts of the world.

Britain was the junior partner in the war spearheaded by the US that further capitalised on support provided by NATO and Washington's other allies. But London's backing in particular was key in helping to legitimise the invasion and later helping to police parts of the country after Saddam Hussein was toppled and executed.

A retired civil servant, Sir John Chilcot took seven years to prepare the report which is critical of British Prime Minister Tony Blair's unqualified support for over-zealous US President George W. Bush when he promised him long before the invasion, "I will be with you, whatever."

Chilcot agrees that Saddam Hussein was a brutal dictator who tortured and killed many of his own people, but nevertheless concludes that "the UK chose to join the invasion of Iraq long before the peaceful option for disarmament was exhausted. Military option at the time was not a last resort."

His report is also critical of how Blair and his team did not prepare for the aftermath of the war, including the deaths of "at least 150,000 Iraqis". Chilcot comments, "The people of Iraq have suffered greatly." Britain also suffered avoidable military post-war casualties because of bad post-war planning.

Commenting on the war and what it means for the families of 179 soldiers who died, former British Prime Minister David Cameron said, "sending our brave troops onto the battlefield without the right equipment was unacceptable".

A spokesman for some of the families of the

British military casualties has separately said they died "unnecessarily and without just cause and purpose".

One of Chilcot's most damaging conclusions is that there was no justification for Blair's assertion in 2002 — one year before the invasion of Iraq — that Saddam continued to develop weapons of mass destruction, including chemical, biological and nuclear, that could be launched with only 45 minutes warning against British bases in the Mediterranean. Despite what the Iraqi authorities said at the time, Blair's intelligence advisers claimed Iraq "continued to produce chemical and biological agents" and there had been "recent production".

It was this key claim that Blair used to win support from fellow British parliamentarians who had lingering doubts about the wisdom of invading Iraq. They included the current Labour leader, Jeremy Corbyn, who opposed the war back in 2003 and who has now apologised on behalf of his Labour Party for "the disastrous decision to go to war."

Chilcot says, "The Joint Intelligence Committee should have made clear to Mr Blair that the assessed intelligence had not established 'beyond doubt' that Iraq had continued to produce chemical and biological weapons and that efforts to develop nuclear weapons continued."

For his part Blair has now accepted that intelligence assessments were wrong and post-war planning was poor. He has also apologised to the military families of those killed in 2003, adding he accepts they will "neither forget or forgive him".

"I feel deeply and sincerely in a way that no words can properly convey the grief and sorrow of those who lost ones they loved in Iraq — whether our armed forces, the armed forces of other nations or Iraqis," he said in response to the Chilcot findings.

"The intelligence assessments made at the time of going to war turned out to be wrong, the aftermath turned out to be more hostile, protracted and bloody than ever we imagined.... and a nation whose people we wanted to set free from the evil of Saddam became instead victims of sectarian terrorism. For all of this, I express more sorrow, regret and apology than you may ever know or can believe."

But, crucially, he has refused to apologise for going to war, saying the world was far better without Saddam, adding he would never agree "that those who died made their sacrifice in vain". Even before the report was formally published Blair told an American television network, "I find it hard to apologise for removing Saddam. I think, even from today.... it is better that he's not there than that he is there."



A protest in London against Tony Blair's handling of Iraq after the John Chilcot report came out

## One of Chilcot's conclusions is that there was no justification for Blair's assertion that Saddam Hussein continued to develop weapons of mass destruction.

Former British Liberal Democrat leader Sir Menzies Campbell said, "No matter what Tony Blair says or any criticisms there will be of him in the Chilcot Inquiry report, people have long since made up their minds. His partial acknowledgement that the military action against Saddam Hussein has made some contribution to instability in the Middle East will do nothing to change public opinion that his was a major error of judgement. The inevitable truth is that Iraq is his legacy and it will be his epitaph."

Other critics say Blair's reluctance to make an unqualified apology is typical of his authoritative style of governance at the time that invokes comparisons with the high-handed policies of Asian leaders like Sheikh Hasina in Bangladesh and Indira Gandhi during the Emergency.

Unlike the worst years of Mrs Gandhi's Emergency rule, Blair did not and could not respond to his political critics by sending them to

jail. But those who dared to challenge him, whether politicians, journalists or others, were kept at a distance or shunned. Journalists who tried to look into his or his family's personal life were warned of the consequences they would face if they continued.

The overall result was what critics called a 'sofa' style of governance where only a handful of the 'great' leaders' personal advisers were allowed to participate or advise on key policy issues. Full-throated cabinet meetings and seeking consensus on key policy issues were not a hallmark of the Blair style of governance. Blair let it be known that he knew best and did not welcome those who questioned his judgement.

Unlike Mrs Gandhi and her immediate family, or at least as far as has been publicly revealed, Blair has also been much more clever about building up a personal fortune. Questions continue to be asked about how much personal cash Rajiv Gandhi may

have accumulated through the Bofors deal, but nothing substantive has been proven. In Blair's case reliable estimates put his personal fortune at between £40 and £60 million, all accumulated after he left office in 2007 and all assumed to be the results of contacts he made while Prime Minister.

Where Blair was less astute than Mrs Gandhi was his willingness to be associated with questionable political scenes that could limit the rights of ordinary British citizens. So there was a massive outcry when he tried to push through a scheme for introducing compulsory identity cards that would allow everyone to be followed and tracked by the authorities 24 hours a day. This scheme was dropped when Labour was eventually pushed out of power.

There were also protests when Blair seemed to back a scheme of compulsory repatriation of terror suspects to US and CIA black holes where they could remain without trial for years on end. All this is about Blair's legacy about which questions are once again being asked following Chilcot. It must be reassuring for Asians in general and Indians in particular to realise that they are not the only ones who need to remain vigilant to preserve their hard won freedoms. The Magna Carta and the Indian experience of fighting for freedom have much in common to celebrate. ■

# Tracking sand mining



KANCHI KOHLI

## FINE PRINT

THE illegal removal of sand from riverbeds and beachfronts has triggered debate on the many legal challenges of regulating a sector driven by cartels and mafias. On the one hand, there are reports of district administration officials taking action on illegal sand mining and facing threats or having been issued transfer notices. On the other hand, there have also emerged critical judicial directions that have pushed the need to ensure that sand mining is regulated for environmental impact.

Sand mining is practised the world over for riverbed management and is also used by local people for small-scale construction. However, for the past few decades, the removal of sand has increased manifold. The 2016 sand mining guidelines of the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change directly correlates the increased demand for sand with the requirement for cement by the construction sector. This should not come as a surprise given the tumultuous rise of the real estate sector in India over the past two decades.

Responding to the directions of the Supreme Court and the National Green Tribunal (NGT), the environment ministry finalised a regulatory framework for minor minerals that includes minerals like limestone and silica extracted from sand. This regulation also includes all mining activity even under five hectares which was otherwise out of the purview of the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) notification, 2006, prior to the Supreme Court's orders in 2012.

In December 2015, I discussed in this column the advantages and perils of what is being proposed. Since then, the law has been in place for about seven months, since 15 January 2016. We discuss what it really means:

## NEW LAWS

The amendment to the EIA notification now divides the approval process for sand mining and mining of other minor minerals into individual and cluster categories. It further divides each of these categories into the approvals that will be required from the environment ministry in Delhi, the State Environment Impact Assessment Authority

(SEIAA) or a newly constituted body at the district level called the District Level Environment Impact Assessment Authority (DEIAA).

The DEIAA is to be headed by the district magistrate. It needs to base its decision on an expert body called the District Environment Appraisal Committee (DEAC), to be chaired by an executive engineer of the irrigation department in the district.

So, for anyone interested in understanding how the environment approvals for sand mining and other minor minerals are now governed, here is the explanation.

All individual leases up to five hectares are considered to fall in the B2 category under the EIA notification. This means that these activities do not require an EIA report or a public hearing. But they do need to seek permission from the DEIAA in



Sand mining has come under regulation

collaboration with the DEAC. If the individual lease is above five hectares but up to 25 hectares, it still remains B2; only, the approval would need to be sought at the state level from the SEIAA.

However, there are individual leases which will require an EIA as well as a public hearing. These include mining of sand and other minor minerals in areas between 25 and 50 hectares which will need clearing by the SEIAA as Category B1 and all those above 50 hectares which will need clearing from the environment ministry in Delhi as Category B2.

The procedure has a minor difference when it comes to mining of sand or other minor minerals, if done through a cluster approach. While all other routes remain the same, the change is in case of leases, which are between five and 25 hectares that have no individual leases up to five hectares within them. This means, to be eligible for B2 status with no EIA and public hearing, the entire 25 hectares needs to be of one project proponent. It cannot be by a group that has come together as a cluster only for environment approval.

In either case, the permission has to be taken "before commencing any construction activity, or preparation of land, or mining at the site by the project proponent".

## SITE INSPECTION

What is interesting is that the new amendment now clearly spells out that the authorised members of the expert committees appraising applications for any environmental clearance at the national, state or district levels "may inspect any site connected with the project or activity in respect of which the prior environmental clearance is sought for the purpose of screening or scoping or appraisal with prior notice of at least seven days to the project proponent who shall provide necessary facilities for the inspection".

While this does not make the site inspection mandatory, the very inclusion in the notification could drive home the point that a site inspection is good practice before a decision on whether a project is environmentally viable or not can be taken. It also helps authenticate the information provided in an impact assessment report and other documents related to project approvals.

## EXEMPTIONS

The new regulatory framework also lists exemptions from environmental approval in 11 instances. For example, extraction of ordinary clay or sand manually by potters or earthen tile-makers is exempt. Removal of sand after flooding for agriculture purposes is also exempt.

The tricky inclusion is the customary extraction of sand and ordinary earth by gram panchayats for community work or personal use. There are reported instances across India where there has been collusion between the panchayats and the sand cartels. Even though the DEIAAs and SEIAAs have a role in monitoring compliance with this regulation, it would be extremely difficult to ensure which extraction is for community work and what is being siphoned off. This could become an enforcement challenge in the future.

A full list of the other exemptions can be found in the notification.

The true efficacy of this regulatory framework is still to be fully understood. The starting point is for people to know that it actually exists and that district collectors will be preparing a District Survey Report, which will be put out for public comments. The DEIAAs are at their formative stage, with the numbers not yet disclosed. Even as we track the impact environmental regulation of sand mining and minor minerals will have, the fact is that we now have regulation to reckon with. ■

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# LIVING

BOOKS | ECO-TOURISM | FILM | THEATRE | AYURVEDA



The tent cinemas used to travel to remote villages in Maharashtra

## Rural talkies are fading away

### An evocative film on tent cinemas

Saibal Chatterjee  
New Delhi

**A**N Indian entry — *The Cinema Travellers*, a feature-length documentary about rural Maharashtra's dying touring talkies — bagged an award at the 69th Cannes Film Festival in May. The beautifully crafted and deeply engaging film also deservedly garnered rave reviews all around.

Yet, in the mainstream media back home, the award went largely unreported. The indifference may have been difficult to fathom, but it wasn't surprising. For one, *The Cinema Travellers*, made by filmmaker-researcher Shirley Abraham and photographer Amit Madheshiya, is a non-fiction film that does not offer any inducement other than its ingrained passion for cinema. Moreover, it celebrates a seven-decade-old tradition that isn't exactly a top-of-the-mind phenomenon in urban India.

But that is precisely why *The Cinema Travellers* is an important film. It captures for posterity the dynamics of an alternative mode of exhibition that is now on its last legs. All through the 96-minute film, Madheshiya's camera lingers on vintage projectors and peeps into their entrails just as an archaeologist might peer at relics of the past thrown up by an excavation mission.

In one sequence, a man selling newly-minted digital equipment takes a tent cinema operator to an ancient monument and shows him wall engravings made centuries ago. Another man who figures prominently in the narrative even mentions Harappa and Mohenjodaro while talking of old cinema projectors that are now increasingly being sold as scrap.

Just as crucially, the film brings alive the sheer sense of wonder that the tent cinemas still evoke in the backwoods of Maharashtra, while diligently, if not necessarily despairingly, mapping the magnitude of their struggle for survival in the age of satellite television and digital filmmaking/projection.

The touring cinemas, which employ high-maintenance, decaying projectors, are set up at crowded post-harvest season religious fairs, where everything from star-studded Bollywood blockbusters and Marathi crowd-pullers to mythological epics to C-grade flicks laced with naughty extrapolations are avidly devoured by villagers, with the men and women segregated into separate ground-seating blocks.

"In rural areas, for the less privileged who do not have easy access to multiplexes, cinema still has a quality of magic," says Madheshiya. "The way they feel when they watch a film, in many ways, still parallels the way people would have felt when they



Shirley Abraham and Amit Madheshiya

first saw what the pioneering Lumiere brothers produced."

*The Cinema Travellers* is a series of illuminating vignettes woven together to yield a fascinating tale of an alternative film exhibition system battling the effects of rapid changes wrought by advancing technology and emerging fads.

The film zooms into the stories of three men who

*Continued on page 30*



A still from *The Cinema Travellers*

are at the forefront of this difficult fight — a doughty touring theatre operator, Mohammad, an old-style showman, Bapu, who is still manfully carrying “the burden of big pictures”, and a 70-year-old projector mechanic with a mind that ticks faster than 24 frames a second.

The two cinema operators that *The Cinema Travellers* focuses on are poles apart, temperamentally and in their approach to the business, but their battle is the same: they are up against circumstances that are beyond their control. Redundancy stares them in the face. But they carry on regardless.

Mohammad and his Sumedh Touring Talkies crew lug a massive tarpaulin tent and a huge vintage projector (covered with a fraying polythene sheet) on an open-top truck from village to village. Bapu of Akshay Touring Talkies uses his decrepit lorry as a platform for a mobile projection booth. His truck is falling apart. The door-lock of the driver's cabin is held in place with the help of old film clips — a vibrant, eloquent visual metaphor for the state of Bapu's calling.

On a daily basis, the two men have to navigate numerous problems posed by inclement weather, unruly crowds, delivery delays, shaky projectors and scratchy strips of films. But they cannot bail out for this is the only thing they have ever known as a means of livelihood. The returns are paltry and hope is slowly slipping away from them.

No less fascinating is the work of Prakash, who has been mending film projectors for 45 years. He operates out of a rundown workshop filled with rotting, outmoded machines that stand no chance of ever being revived. That pretty much sums up his story although the still-enthusiastic Prakash, who tells the camera that his name means light, has devised an “oil-bath projector” and hopes to soon find a buyer for his invention.

*The Cinema Travellers*, which was five years in the making and was, among others, supported by a short-term six-week fellowship at the Cluster of Excellence, Heidelberg, and a grant from Sundance Institute, bagged the Cannes Film Festival's Loeil d'Or (The Golden Eye) Special Mention in May.

All the documentary films in the festival's official selection were up for the award, introduced in 2015. The 2016 Loeil d'Or was awarded to Brazilian

filmmaker Eryk Rocha's *Cinema Novo*.

Explaining the rationale behind picking the two titles, jury head Gianfranco Rosi, Berlin Golden Bear-winning documentarian, lauded their “strong elements of narration, of transformation, of subtraction” and said that “they both belong to the language of cinema”.

After receiving the award, Madheshiya said: “Premiering our film in Cannes was huge. Winning an award here means a lot to us.”

Introducing *The Cinema Travellers* at the film's premiere in the Cannes Classics section, Abraham had said: “It showcases the keepers and custodians of an old tradition.” The film was received enthusiastically.

*The Screen* review was glowing. “Whatever masterpieces, if any, bow at this year's Cannes Film Festival, it is likely none will communicate the excitement engendered by movies more headily than *The Cinema Travellers*.”

The leading US showbiz publication said: “This fast-moving, lyrical documentary tells of the waning days of the tent cinemas that tour around remote villages of western India's Maharashtra region. It is also an elegiac paean to the showmen who tote their rusted equipment to fairgrounds following the harvest season, and also to the twinkly-eyed septuagenarian projector technician-inventor Prakash, and to the rapt faces of spectators.”

Another American trade paper, *Variety*, describing the documentary as intimate and poignant, said: “*The Cinema Travellers* proves a heartfelt tribute to India's cinematic-caravan traditions and the disappearing art, skill and spiritual thrill of 35mm projection — what with its complicated lenses, cigarette-burned strips, and often-scratchy imagery. More generally still, it's a portrait of the way in which a cherished, antiquated yesterday is buried by a new, hopefully brighter tomorrow — and how not everyone is ultimately equipped to successfully face its coming dawn.”

By putting human faces on the story and fleshing it out in the form of the tangible struggles and aspirations of individuals, Abraham and Madheshiya have created a lively, heartfelt cinematic portrait that will most definitely outlive its time — unlike, unfortunately, the once-thriving tent cinemas of semi-rural Maharashtra. ■

# Kruger's animal kingdom

Susheela Nair  
Pretoria

WE nibbled sandwiches at the al fresco dining area in Sabi Earth Lodge. Ahead, we could see a herd of elephants quenching their thirst at a waterhole in the vast expanse of the veld.

It was an awesome moment and a splendid prelude to our wildlife safari in Sabi Sand Private Game Reserve, an unfenced 60,000-hectare private reserve that is ecologically integrated with the adjacent (and similarly unfenced) Kruger National Park in South Africa. With no fences, the animals are free to get up close and personal. Together, the two areas make up some of South Africa's most incredible, pristine land.

Sculpted into a slope of the earth, the resort is unobtrusive. A hidden corridor takes you down to an entrance which opens to an endless veld. The resort captures the spirit of nature and luxury in one unique experience. The boma, its walls sculpted from tree roots and piled up piece by piece, captures the drama of the African night and evokes the power of the wilderness.

The breathtaking décor features an art gallery, meditation garden and an underground wine cellar with a collection of over 6,000 bottles of rare wines. With 13 ultra-luxurious suites, each with its own private plunge pool, en suite glass-fronted bathroom, individually designed furniture, and outstanding cuisine, Sabi Earth Lodge is one of the National Geographic Unique Lodges of the World, which demonstrates its commitment to sustainability, authenticity and excellence.

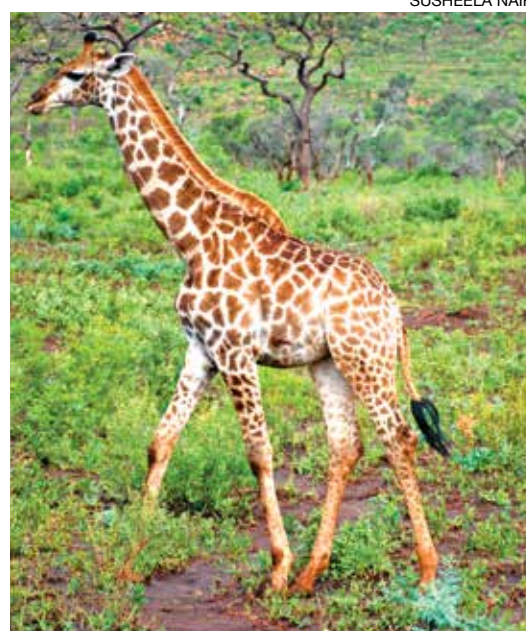
We were treated to a series of dramatic sightings at Sabi Sabi, indisputably one of Africa's best safari destinations and the oldest private game reserve in South Africa, formally inaugurated in 1948. The origins of Sabi Sabi Private Game Reserve in Mpumalanga Province of South Africa date back to the 1920s, when a number of people held hunting concessions therein.

The private game reserve is home to the Big Five — the leopard, lion, buffalo, elephant and rhino. As soon as we embarked on our wildlife safari, we sighted hippos wallowing and sparring in a waterhole, hulking giraffes, countless grassland zebras, leaping impalas, an array of playful antelopes like the nyala, and a lone, lost ostrich. As we sat enthralled in an open game-viewing vehicle, we saw a leopard napping in the shade of the long grass, oblivious to our presence.



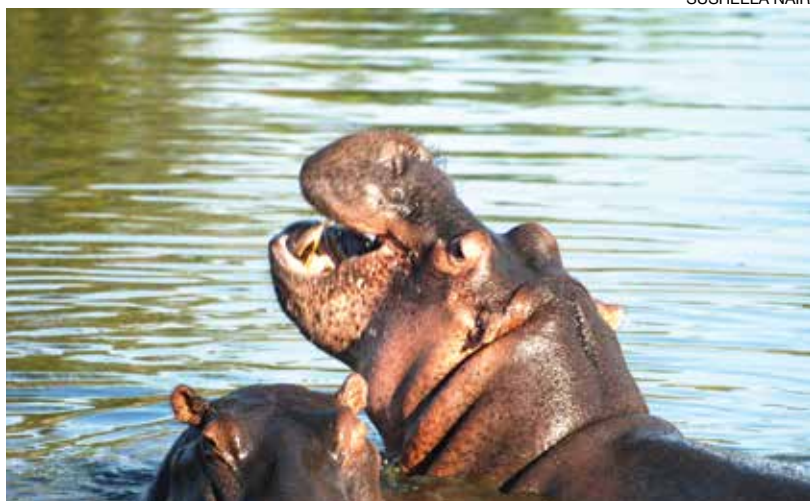
The Sabi Earth Lodge

SUSHEELA NAIR



A giraffe struts around

SUSHEELA NAIR



Hippos wallowing in water



Elephants at the Sabi Game Reserve

SUSHEELA NAIR

The reserve is a classic example of the role the private sector can play in conservation and community development in Africa by linking tourism, conservation and community. Sustainable ecotourism in Sabi Sabi supports conservation that in turn helps community involvement. This is a fragile balance. All three of these components are integral to the successful running of the operation. Though there are disturbing tales of escalating slaughter of thousands of rhinos, and the very real possibility of their extinction, the heartening news is that Sabi's rhinos fare better. Not one has been poached over the past 12 months.

In response to the surge in poaching, private lodges and landowners inside and bordering Kruger National Park have invested significant funds — often directly derived from tourist dollars — to protect the wildlife that draws visitors to their properties in the first place. The camps' guests contribute directly to the protection of the park and the maintenance of round-the-clock anti-poaching units. The income they provide funds school outreach programmes that aim to educate local communities about the significant contribution these animals can make to the local economy, if kept alive.

Apart from being one of the largest individual employers in the area, Sabi Sabi supports local communities through a wide range of projects like

## The private game reserve is home to the Big Five — the leopard, lion, buffalo, elephant and rhino.

sponsoring a crèche to youth development through sports and environmental education. Guests also have the opportunity to visit the communities and learn more about their culture through the Community Tour.

Another recent initiative is the Conservation Contribution executed and managed by the Sabi Sand Wildtuin Nature Conservation Trust which will go towards anti-poaching, general conservation and community measures within the reserve. The contribution is allocated towards security manpower, upgraded fences, updated gate controls, technology and surveillance, investigation and prosecution capabilities, development projects with the neighbouring communities, conservation initiatives for all

indigenous flora and fauna found on the reserve, including the re-introduction of species which have previously been indigenous to the region.

Bush clearing, erosion control, controlled fires and a strict safari policy all form part of the award-winning conservation programme. Waste segregation on site, removal by a local waste company, use of gas, borewell water supply, regular alien vegetation removal to encourage indigenous vegetation throughout are other measures adopted by the reserve. Sabi Sabi has initiated a rhino education drive within the local community. A team of conservationists visits local schools armed with informative posters — a fun presentation with a hard-hitting message about the plight of rhinos.

The reserve uses the three-pillar approach (community, conservation and tourism) seriously. "If we didn't have tourism in Sabi Sands, rhinos would have vanished already," explained our guide. Sabi Sabi hasn't had a single poaching kill on its property since the lodge beefed up its anti-poaching programme. With help from anti-poaching canine units, aggressive involvement of private companies, continued investment in conservation efforts by companies that profit from wildlife tourism, and public education campaigns aimed at reducing demand for rhino horns, these endangered animals can be spared extinction. ■

# A better life at Swift Wash

Gauri Gharpure  
Panjim

**B**EAUTIFUL Women — Journeys from despair to dignity,' is a first-person narrative of 10 women who left a life of sexual exploitation to work in Swift Wash, a laundry in Sancoale Industrial Estate in south Goa, founded by Anyay Rahit Zindagi (ARZ), an NGO that works with victims of sexual abuse and trafficking.

The media was keen to talk to the women but ARZ has resolutely maintained a screen of privacy for the past decade in deference to the wishes of the women. They were clear that they did not want to interact with the media.

Still, there were growing requests to 'know more' about the women and their rehabilitation journey. So ARZ commissioned Salil Chaturvedi and Abhinandita Mathur to write a book on what the women had to say.

Mathur, who has prior experience researching gender and sexual exploitation issues for various NGOs, was chosen to draw up questions and interview the women. Later, Chaturvedi worked on the interview transcripts, and changed the question and answer format to 10 fluid first-person narratives.

"It was humbling how much they opened up," says Mathur. "I saw people beyond their circumstances."

One woman, in her forties now, recalled in graphic detail how she was gang-raped. A customer paid for her and took her to a jungle where a dozen others joined him. Another was HIV-positive and struggling to quit alcoholism. "Some of them got as little as ₹50 for one customer," says Mathur.

"All my money would be spent on mutton and alcohol," says a woman of her earlier life as a commercial sex worker in Baina red light area of south Goa. As a laundry worker, she earns less than half what she did selling her body. Yet she is proud. "Izzat sab kuch hai", she says as she compares her diminished income with the growth in quality of life, self-respect and independence.

The journey of the women began in 2003 when the Goa government launched a crackdown against illegal shanties in Baina to clear the area of the sex trade. Many families were displaced. The move was strongly contested by human rights groups and

gender activists who said the eviction was unfair in the absence of a solid rehabilitation plan for the displaced. ARZ had for long been working on awareness and intervention programmes with victims of sexual violence in Baina. They began looking for a livelihood option for the women who wanted to change their lives.

"We decided on a laundry. We figured, since Goa is a tourist destination, there would never be a shortage of clothes to be cleaned," says Juliana Lohar, project coordinator of ARZ. Swift Wash was started in 2006. Since then it has given a chance to around 600 women to move away from commercial sex work. In two daily shifts that employ 30 women, the laundry cleans about 700 kg of clothes a day during the peak tourist season. Swift Wash's clients include the International Centre, Goa, The Taj Group, The Queeny, The HQ, Goa Shipyard Limited and the Salgaonkar Medical Research Institute.

It was not an easy shift, however. Most of the women weren't used to a routine and found it hard to show up early. Some would grumble. "Ghar pe bhi kapde dhote hain, yahan bhi woh hi! (We wash clothes at home and now here too)". Lohar, who is also general manager of Swift Wash, explains how it took intervention at many levels to help the women transit to a life of dignity.

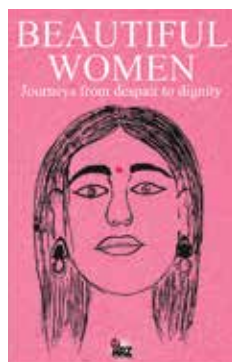
Most of the women suffered from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and showed signs of anxiety and depression. They were dependent on alcohol. ARZ would assess each woman and chalk out intervention plans that included de-addiction programmes, counselling and medical intervention for depression and related issues if required. The NGO also watched out for other stakeholders who could obstruct the rehabilitation process. If they found that the children, boyfriend or husband were unhappy with the woman giving up commercial sex work and were trying to demoralise her, they would counsel them too.

Why would the children or the husband be unhappy? "Because they get used to easy money, feeding off her sex work. The women earn less here and we make direct bank payments. The women get complete control of their money and this makes the other stakeholders uneasy," explains Lohar.

The women used to earn double or treble the amount they earn today. But they didn't know where their income vanished. Today, most have rid themselves of various addictions, gotten out of exploitative relationships and manage their earnings wisely. They even manage to save, something they didn't do earlier. Some have rid themselves of debt, others have invested in gold jewellery or married off their daughters comfortably.

Mathur feels the impact of the Swift Wash project would be much more if the book were to be translated into Kannada, Hindi or Marathi to reach women who are still being exploited in commercial sex work and inspire them to find alternative livelihoods. ■

The book can be ordered at [arzindia@gmail.com](mailto:arzindia@gmail.com)  
Beautiful Women is also available at  
People Tree, Assagaon



Beautiful Women  
by Salil Chaturvedi  
and Abhinandita Mathur, ARZ, ₹200

# 'Migration



Cities like Delhi attract migrants from all over India

Civil Society News  
New Delhi

**M**IGRATION is leading to mingling of identities across India. People migrate mostly for survival, jobs, education and marriage. Nowhere is this more visible than in our cities. A walk down the road, a ride on a bus and you see faces from all over. But migration also takes place in small towns and rural areas where it may not be so readily noticed and documented.

*Internal Migration in Contemporary India* seeks to explain the dynamics of migration. Edited by Deepak K. Mishra, professor at the Centre for the Study of Regional Development, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, the book consists of a series of research papers by academics.

What makes the book interesting is that it captures the experiences of different migrating groups. It includes a study of Muslim women migrants living in Jamia Nagar in Delhi, Northeast migrants in the capital and Ladakhi youth who come to the city to study. There are chapters on Bihari migrants, migration and Punjab, and a study of migration patterns in nine villages of Andhra Pradesh. Also included is an important paper on seasonal migrants — the most vulnerable.

Cities are the magnets to which people are drawn. The shift is for opportunities, but with them come the challenges of discrimination and poor access. The city can be a harsh place to be and poorer migrants are worse off than the others. This is also true outside cities when the migration is from one region to another.

In an email interview, Prof. Mishra answers some



# not fully understood as yet'

AJIT KRISHNA



**Did the researchers face difficulties? Were all the migrant communities forthcoming about their experiences?**

Migration has received a lot of attention in mainstream literature across different disciplines. What we know for certain is that there are a lot of variations in the experiences of different categories of migrants. There are aspects of migration that remain, that have not yet been understood adequately.

Also, significant structural changes in the economy have altered the nature and outcome of the migration process in different parts of the country. Many of the researchers relied on primary field research to examine the issues at hand. And field research is often time-consuming and difficult, but once a certain level of trust is established between the researcher and the informants, it is easier to understand each other. As is evident in the chapters included in the volume; despite following diverse research methods, the authors have been able to connect to the experiences of the migrants, with their hopes and despairs.

**Are there some commonalities shared by migrants who move to urban areas though they are divided by class and region?**

Within the categories of economic migrants, there is perhaps a basic desire for a better and more secure livelihood that underlies all their efforts to survive and prosper in a new environment. However, the similarities end there. Depending upon their class, caste, ethnicity, region and gender, different migrant groups have vastly different experiences.

**Would you say that rural-to-urban migration is on the whole empowering and critical for urbanisation?**

Migration is often viewed as a positive development in a developing economy. Migration not only brings remittances that are critical for survival and prosperity from the origin areas, but it also brings in new ideas, technology and new aspirations.

However, such a general portrayal should not blind us to the fact that a large section of migrants works under precarious and exploitative conditions, and many of them are part of a cycle of debt-bondage from which they struggle to free themselves. The continuation of 'older' forms of bondage and absence of freedom in the age of globalisation is among the glaring paradoxes of contemporary times.

With the neoliberal restructuring of urban spaces, a simultaneous process of exclusion and disenfranchisement is also under way — whereby huge and glittering urban infrastructure is created

**'Experiences of migrants differ based on caste, gender, region class, ethnicity.'**



Deepak K. Mishra

using the cheap labour of the migrants, but they are not recognised as full and legitimate urban citizens. Thus, while urbanisation does empower some sections of migrants, it is also a process of exclusion, discrimination and ghettoisation for others.

**Is there a need to reorient government schemes for seasonal migrants who are the poorest and have the most difficulty accessing government schemes? What are the schemes you would say are critical for them?**

Most of the contributors to the volume have reflected upon the policy changes that are required to make migration more inclusive and non-discriminatory. There is also a specific chapter evaluating policy responses to the problems faced by migrants in general and seasonal migrants in particular.

Without trying to summarise all these arguments, let me just point out that the rights of migrant workers need to be anchored in the framework of workers' rights, which, unfortunately, have been under increasing attack in recent times. The rights of migrants as citizens, similarly, need to be seen in the context of a basic, universal, non-negotiable and non-discriminatory set of rights that are not contingent upon the domicile status of the citizens.

For seasonal migrants, there is a need to define a bundle of entitlements — access to the Public Distribution System (PDS), primary education and healthcare, for example — that are mobile and enforceable across the states.

Apart from these, interventions that support the livelihoods of seasonal migrants, both in their areas of origin and destination, free them from bondage, physical confinement and torture, provide them with opportunities to upgrade their skills, to have access to information and institutions, policies that safeguard against exclusion and discrimination on the one hand and expand opportunities on the other will go a long way in addressing their specific vulnerabilities.

Some sectors such as construction and domestic service that employ a large number of migrants need sector-specific interventions. Inter-state coordination will be a key component in such contexts.

Designing and implementing such policies, given the federal structure, and multiplicity of stakeholders is a formidable challenge, but not altogether impossible. It is not the logistics, but the political commitment that is a more critical barrier in achieving such an objective. ■

questions on the relevant and significant book he has edited.

**Your book has a range of people's experiences of migration. How were migrant communities chosen? How long has the book been in the making?**

This book is the outcome of a collective engagement with migration as a social phenomenon in contemporary India. Each of our contributors had been involved in studying migration from their perspectives, some of them for a very long period. But this exercise emerged through a collective endeavour initiated by the Rajiv Gandhi Institute for Contemporary Studies (RGICS), which brought together some established and upcoming scholars for a preparatory workshop in which the issues were discussed in great detail and we finally decided to focus on migration from the perspective of the marginalised sections of society.

Fortunately, thanks to the tireless efforts of the authors, we were able to cover a wide canvas although, given the diversity and complexity of internal migration, we had to focus selectively on only a few of the cases. Regarding the disciplinary and methodological standpoints, these studies point to a diversity of approaches to study migration in India.

It took us more than three years of sustained efforts to bring all these works to their final shape. All the papers were presented, discussed and further modified in another two-day workshop organised by the RGICS.



*Internal Migration in Contemporary India*  
Edited by Deepak K. Mishra, SAGE, ₹995

## SHRAM is organic

IN June 2008, Piyusha Abbhi, a young MBA, helped a group of women in Batamandi village of Himachal Pradesh to start a small venture called SHRAM (Self Help-Recycling, Altering and Manufacturing Group).

The idea was to recycle local industrial waste and generate an income so that the women became financially independent. The group uses recycled material and natural fibres like palm leaf and grass to make eco-friendly products.

There are fragrant soaps made of rose, *haldi* with goat milk, lemon grass with wheatgerm, honey, lavender and lots more.

SHRAM specialises in bags. They make sling bags, duffel bags and waterproof satchels. Coasters, designer envelopes from handmade paper, crochet and embroidered products, cotton table linen and accessories from jute using methods like tie and dye are also produced.

SHRAM's women are inventive too. They use waste plastic bottles to make furniture. Customised products as per the requirements of customers can also be made.

SHRAM has now diversified into food processing. The women are making pickles, candies, chutneys and other products from organic fruits and vegetables. Roasted snacks from organic brown rice and wheat is another of their products. A special snack being produced is *khakhra*, a Gujarati staple, in different flavours with organic ingredients. Gluten-free muesli is one of their fast-selling items.

The group currently consists of nine women from Batamandi village.

Their small venture has changed their lives. The women can now afford to give themselves and their children a better life.

Each and every product is made with great care. The products are appreciated for their rich colours, exclusive patterns, designs and quality. SHRAM does not get any financial support from the government or NGOs. The sale proceeds of the products made by SHRAM go directly to the group. They procure raw materials for their products from their own funds.

Buy a product from SHRAM and help this enterprising women's venture grow. ■



**Contact:**

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