

# Civil Society



## EATING RIGHT

A KERALA FESTIVAL SHOWS HOW



### VOICES FROM THE VALLEY

Kashmiris want peace, development and an end to all conflict

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## EATING RIGHT

Annam, a food festival held in Kerala recently, highlighted the importance of natural food and traditional eating habits. A close look at India's growing slow food movement. **20**

Cover photograph: SETHIL KUMARAN

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# Civil Society

READ US. WE READ YOU.

## Food on the table

THE message coming out of the Annam festival held in Kerala and featured as our cover story is an important one. We are what we eat. The growing incidence of diabetes, hypertension and cancer is linked to diet. There is a need to bring back fibre rich meals and encourage biodiversity in our agriculture. It should worry us that even as the developed world is coming full circle and going organic, we in India are opting for corporate control of our farm sector and the shallow uniformity that comes from being entirely market driven. In the process we are abandoning the healthy multiplicity in grains and livestock that traditionally belongs to us.

The question is whether we can eat as our ancestors did especially since we don't live the way they used to? The challenge before the proponents of natural food is to make it practical in modern times. That is a true challenge because it requires a vision that goes beyond concern for ecology and environment. So is some processing okay so that the harried housewife of this day and age can give her family those healthy grains without being trapped in the kitchen all day? It is equally important to showcase nutritious food for the young --- and this will require a degree of messaging that most activists are perhaps incapable of. It is equally important to link farmers to consumers and standardise quality.

So, while the Annam festival is a great idea and serves the purpose of focussing on issues and bringing people together, it will have to go much beyond just this. In years to come, it will have to take the natural food movement forward in ways that make it easy to embrace. It will have to look for sustainability not only in the fields, but also in the market. If there is reason to be hopeful, it is because the time is right. A big responsibility also rests with governments to provide a framework which sponsors diversity, a lower dependence on chemicals and caution in the use of GM strains.

Kerala is of course a good place to begin. It is both steeped in tradition and trapped in the mess of modern lifestyles. The incidence of hypertension and diabetes is several times the national average, we are told. If this can be the case with the level of education that Kerala has, what of the rest of the country?

We would also like to draw attention to the continuing problem with hydropower projects. The country certainly needs more electricity and projects must come up. But just look at the poor levels of accountability. Our story from Uttaranchal is a sad commentary on the state government and the company executing a run of the river project there. The liberalisation we have seen in recent years has been very welcome. Tragically, it hasn't been matched with regulation. When it comes to national duties and social responsibilities, the Indian corporate sector's record is a shoddy one. Till rules are laid down and enforced in practical ways, companies won't follow them. It is dangerous when politicians and business leaders sit on the same side of the table.

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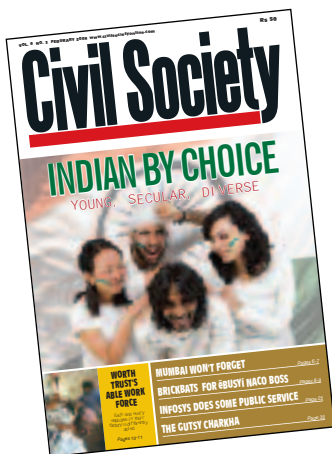
## IN THE LIGHT

by SAMITA RATHOR

SIMPLICITY IS BASED  
UPON LIFE'S COMPLEXITIES!



## LETTERS



### Who is an Indian?

What I love most about being Indian is that we are a mixed bunch of people. Not just ethnically different but different in our language and culture also.

**Rajesh Kumar Verma**

Indians are a misconceived, misunderstood lot. Trouble is we are full of contradictions and so defy description. It's beautiful to be Indian.

**Uma Kant**

This is a country which keeps rein-

venting itself. You have to study the true history of people, life, the cosmos, the metaphysical. Beyond is a world of spirituality where physical bodies do not exist. There is only a tiny flame of undefined colour which is palpable, vibrant and that is our soul. Our collective soul makes India a great spiritual torch which shows light to the world.

**Brijesh Awasthi**

Amit Dasgupta has made a very important point. It is not just who we are but what we want to become, how we constantly try to reshape our identity in a changing world.

**Urmi Juvekar**

I always feel proud of my nationality. But I never had words to describe what it means to be an Indian. Amit Dasgupta has put some words to my feelings. I am proud to be Indian. Every Indian should read this article.

**Vasudha**

Yes, we are all Indians. But the time has come for us to rise above the political divide and say that with pride with our heads held high. Do we need such a harsh awakening to the insecurity that has been exposed? I think we do not. Let us rise together against the political divide. Let us unite again

like we did to achieve our freedom 60 years ago. If we did it against colonial rule, we can do it again. Amit Dasgupta has touched a chord in all true Indians. Good work indeed.

**Subir Ranjan Das**

### Coconut business

When I read Shree Padre's story on coconut milk, I thought of a simple machine developed by the Konkan Krishi Vidyapeeth at Dapoli in Ratnagiri district. I have seen a demonstration myself. If used properly, the machine can enable a farmer to earn Rs 60 from a single coconut since instead of using only copra, there is value addition. Even husk is used gainfully.

**Dilip Chaware**

*President, Corporate Communications  
Navi Mumbai SEZ Private Limited*

### NACO

Your story, 'Brickbats for very busy NACO boss' is important. It shows how our bureaucrats function. They are full of arrogance. The NACO chief has no sensitivity. She should be removed. HIV is a complex problem. If we are to succeed in reining it in, we need to have a vision. If HIV positive women can come all the way to Delhi from all over the country to

work things for themselves the least the NACO chief can do is attend their meeting. It is shocking she could not find the time to do so.

**Krishan Sethi**

Sack the NACO chief. She has no real commitment. How long are we going to keep tolerating arrogant officers like her? The entire health system in the country is either being held hostage by bureaucrats like this person or handed over on a platter to the private health sector where it is driven solely by profit and out of the reach of average Indians. In which country in the world is the public health sector allowed to fester like this?

**Apoorva Sen**

NACO should be moved from the health ministry to an inter ministerial council headed by the Prime Minister with the Health Minister as deputy. NACO should be run in a committed, transparent and participatory manner serving the needs of all Indians and not as the high handed, secretive, stone walling bureaucracy it is now. We need a NACO that is dedicated to ensuring that no more Indians get affected and no more die because they cannot afford anti-retrovirals and other medicines.

**Sameer Thakur**

# KASHMIRIS WANT PEACE, DEVELOPMENT

## Voices from the Valley



**Jehangir Rashid**  
Srinagar

PEOPLE came out and voted in record numbers in the recent Assembly elections in Kashmir, bringing a coalition of the National Conference and the Congress to power. The new Chief Minister, Omar Abdullah's own emphasis throughout the campaign was on the need for development and better governance. What are expectations from him now that he is in office? What was it that people saw in the National Conference's agenda that they made it the single largest party?

We spoke to a cross-section of Kashmiris to understand what they hope for and how they would like their young chief minister to perform. While the flame of azadi continues to burn, the desire for peace and development appears to be stronger. People hope that not only will Omar Abdullah bring about development and good governance but that he will also try to bring permanent peace to the Valley, putting an end to a troubled past. Not only are people asking for hospitals and roads, but for the regional divide between Jammu and Kashmir to be bridged, for the idea of Kashmiriyat to take root once again. They would also like the new government to talk to the Hurriyat. Here are some excerpts from the interviews *Civil Society* did.

### End conflict

**Rauf A Punjabi**, former President, KCCI

Omar should try his level best to resolve the Jammu and Kashmir issue. People want to lead a peaceful life and for that it is important that this issue is resolved at the earliest. Omar should talk to the Hurriyat and other separatists so that some headway is made.

People also want good roads and round the clock power supply. They don't want shortages of essen-

tials especially during winter. If Omar is allowed to work according to his own wishes he will emerge as a good chief minister. He has to face many challenges and he has to keep New Delhi happy every time. The new chief minister should ensure that there are less distribution and transmission losses in the power sector since erratic electricity has always bothered people here.

### Reduce forces

**Naushad Raza**, Director, SOS, Srinagar

Omar should curtail the powers of the security forces and order for the immediate removal of most bunkers. That would provide relief to the common masses as they want minimal interference by the security forces in their day to day life. Then, Srinagar does not give the impression of being the Capital. Roads are in bad condition and power supply is erratic. Road connectivity is important and this needs to be improved. The new government should set up environment friendly factories and provide jobs to unemployed youth.

### Less corruption, more teachers

**Professor Noor Ahmad Baba**, Dean, Social Sciences, Dept of Political Science, University of Kashmir

People voted for development, job creation for unemployed youth and an improvement in the working conditions of institutions. The new state government should play its role in promoting the peace process between India and Pakistan. Mufti Mohammad Sayeed during his tenure as chief minister had said that there is need to carry out dialogue with the separatists and even with militant groups like the Hizbul Mujahideen. The new government should carry forward this message. It is important that talks are held so that peace pre-

vails in the state. Omar should deliver on fulfillment of basic requirements like better roads, improved power supply, improvement of infrastructure and supply of clean drinking water. In addition, the new government should eradicate corruption from society and create jobs for unemployed youth. It should also facilitate trade between the people living on both sides of the Line of Control (LoC). In the education sector, there are colleges without teachers and that needs to be corrected.

### Address regional imbalances

**Nasir Mirza**, Lecturer, Media Education Research Centre (MERC), University of Kashmir

The new chief minister has to play a perfect balancing role in ensuring that there is rational development of both Jammu and Kashmir. The people of both these regions have always complained of regional disparities.

It will be difficult for Omar to take a decision on whether to extend the anti-terror law to Jammu and Kashmir or not. People are keeping a close watch on developments and they want the government to play its role in curtailment of powers given to security forces.

Omar has said that New Delhi should carry on a dialogue with the Hurriyat Conference. On its part, the Hurriyat has been maintaining that it has the peoples' mandate to carry out talks with the Government of India. It is important that more space is given to the Hurriyat.

Corruption has eaten into the vitals of the state and due to this reason Jammu and Kashmir is considered one of the most corrupt states in India. Action needs to be taken against corrupt officials. The work culture needs to be improved. The condition of hospitals as well as other institutions is pathetic and needs to be corrected.

BILAL BAHADUR



## Better hospital facilities

**Dr Fayaz Ahmad**, Registrar, Bone & Joints Hospital, Barzulla

The new government should provide better infrastructure to hospitals. Surgical instruments at hospitals are obsolete and need to be replaced by modern ones. There is a need to change the very system and the time has come for young doctors to be entrusted with more responsibilities. What to talk of advanced surgical equipments, even the blades used in surgery are outdated. Drastic steps need to be taken to improve the overall condition of hospitals.

Young blood should be infused into the administration of health institutions like SK Institute of Medical Sciences (SKIMS), Soura, Government Medical College, Srinagar and others located across the state. Improvement in facilities at health institutions would come as a relief.

## Talk to separatists

**Javed Ahmad Mir**, Senior Leader, Hurriyat Conference, and Chairman, Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front

If the new chief minister plays his part to perfection in resolving the Kashmir issue people will remember him forever. Political uncertainty needs to be resolved and once that is done then only the fulfillment of basic things like roads, power and water hold meaning. Mainstream parties have a role in solving the Kashmir issue. It is time for Omar to convince New Delhi that it is imperative to solve the Kashmir issue otherwise the tension between India and Pakistan will be there for many more years.

Separatists have always been in favour of dialogue. But for that New Delhi has to be sincere. Indo-Pak tension overshadows developmental issues confronting the masses.

## Justice for widows and orphans

**Nighat Shafi**, Chairperson, Help Foundation

For me law and order is a big issue. My primary concern is that the new government should evolve a scheme for proper rehabilitation of widows and orphans. During the 19-year-old conflict many people have disappeared in custody. It is time for the government to provide clues to their relatives about their whereabouts. The health and education sectors are badly hit. The new government should devote attention to setting matters right in these two sectors. Justice delayed is justice denied and this should be the motivating force for the new government.

## Give priority to youth

**Mohammad Iqbal**, sportsman and chairman Jammu & Kashmir State Rugby Football Association (JKSRFA)

Since the new chief minister comes from the younger generation he is expected to solve problems of the youth. Omar, it is expected, will work hard so that his party gets an absolute majority in the next elections. My belief is that he will talk to the separatists. On their side the separatists also seem willing to talk. Since he will be chief minister for a full term it is expected that the people will get relief.

## Solve unemployment

**Qazi Azhar**, advocate, Jammu & Kashmir High Court

The government should set up more factories and industries so that jobs are created for unemployed youth. Unemployment is a burning issue. Even though we are living in the 21st century, basic issues like absence of clean drinking water, erratic power supply and bad roads confront people. These need to be solved and the new government has a big task ahead.

## Improve our cities

**Mohammad Saleem Beigh**, Chapter Chairman, Indian National Trust for Art, Culture and Heritage (INTACH)

Urban governance has failed not only in Srinagar, but in Jammu as well. Population growth and lack of urban infrastructure are the main reasons. The urban character of cities like Srinagar and Jammu is absent. The government is paying attention to posh areas of both Jammu and Srinagar. Old Srinagar or for that matter Jammu city have lost their character. It is imperative that the character of both these cities is restored.

## Jobs for youth

**Syed Amber Azad**, law student

The new government should solve the problem of unemployment. Since Omar is young he will focus on the youth. The youth have many hopes with the new chief minister. It is hoped that he will deliver. In addition, he should ensure that basic necessities like clean drinking water, regular power supply and better roads are provided to people.

## Revive Kashmiri culture

**Aga Syed Amin**, student

The new government should respect the high

voter turnout and solve basic problems confronting common people. The government should devote attention to improvement in infrastructure in the education sector. For years we have been hearing that the government is serious about the revival of the Kashmiri language, but nothing has been done so far. The new government should pay attention towards this issue. It should also strive for preservation of culture and heritage. My wish is that Kashmir once again becomes a paradise on earth.

## Boost tourism

**Siraj Ahmad**, Senior Vice-President, Kashmir Hotels and Restaurants Association (KHARA)

Honestly speaking tourism has great scope for creating employment opportunities, but that is possible only when the government comes out with a clear policy with a clear mind. My belief is that in Kashmir there is nothing except tourism. It is a fragile industry and it is prone to circumstances prevailing.

KHARA is a non-political body and we are not expected to attach political tones to a particular problem. But at the same time I have to say that tourism depends on peace.

People to people contact between India and Pakistan would lead to better understanding of problems and in this regard Kashmir tourism can play a significant role. Promotion of tourism falls within the agenda of the National Conference and the Congress. It is time for leaders of both these parties to deliver on promises made to the people. We are ready to cooperate with the government provided it comes out with a clear policy and has an open mind for promotion of tourism.

## Keep coalition together

**Shahid Zameer**, advocate, Jammu & Kashmir High Court

The ideology of the new chief minister does not match that of the Congress and I fear that Congress may come out of the government at any point of time. Omar opposed the enhancement in retirement age for government employees, but Congress supported it. There are many other issues where there is no conformity between the policies of the National Conference and the Congress and this may have negative effect on the overall health of the coalition government. The coalition government will keep its promise of providing basic requirements to the people as there will be no lack of funds from New Delhi.

## Build infrastructure

**Nasir Ahmad Khan**, X-ray clinic at Dalgate

For years together we have been seeing people getting killed like anything. This should all end and it is high time leaders of India and Pakistan resolved the Kashmir issue. Development is possible only when there is peace.

The government should upgrade infrastructure and widen the roads. The traffic has increased many times, but the roads are same. The government should pay attention to roads so that there is some relief from traffic congestion.

# Here comes the cycling club!

**Shreyasi Singh**  
New Delhi

It is a welcome addition to Delhi's crowded, overused streets. No, it isn't the latest European car or a Japanese hybrid that's caught our attention. It's the Delhi Cycling Club (DCC) pedalling down busy roads, asserting their right to be seen and heard.

The club, made up of nearly 500 members, many of them successful, well-settled professionals, started in October 2006 with a singular focus - to promote the joys of cycling. It now holds monthly cycling expeditions in the city. DCC has effectively brought together like-minded people who are slowly becoming voices and ambassadors for one of the most sustainable means of transport.

Nalin Sinha, India Country Director of the Institute for Transportation and Development Policy (ITDP), the New York based NGO that promotes sustainable and equitable transportation worldwide, says he is surprised cycling doesn't have the patronage it should in India. "Cycling is the proverbial win-win solution to so many of our problems. It is cost-effective, sustainable, pollution-free, low maintenance and has innumerable personal health benefits. It is one of the best cardiovascular workouts. But, in India, we aspire for roads and cars. We don't realise that big roads and bigger flyovers will not solve the problem. They certainly haven't eased Delhi's traffic. Also, automotive pollution is responsible for more than 60 per cent of our cities' pollution. Shouldn't we then think of more sustainable means of reaching our destination?"

It was ITDP's India Chapter, under Nalin's guidance, that came up with the idea of the Delhi



Members of the Delhi Cycling Club on a rally

Cycling Club. The club had a modest beginning with not more than a dozen members. But, the word soon spread to other cycling enthusiasts, and nearly 150 cyclists came together for DCC's maiden ride on June 2007 from India Gate to Red Fort and back.

"At DCC, we are trying to import into India the culture of cycling. It's converting those who have cars and the choice of individual, motorised transport to start using the cycle more. Also, our group rides make a big statement. Police constables and authorities might not notice the lone cyclist, but when you pass them in large groups, you and the cycle are more visible. Group rides have also helped those who were fond of cycling but were hesitant to come out due to safety issues," says 26-year-old Pushpinder Chowdhury, a DCC member who uses his cycle a few days a week for his home to office commute. That's no mean task considering Pushpinder lives in Ghaziabad and works in Connaught Place.

On an average, Pushpinder's everyday commute is nearly 50 kilometres. But the RITES Original Destination survey shows more than 60 per cent of Delhi's 15 million daily trips are less than six kilometres. The distance milestone is even lower in Mumbai and Bangalore at four kilometres. That's a great opportunity for cyclists and pedestrians. All they need is access to safe infrastructure.

Many times that infrastructure has been provided for, but is ill-used and neglected. "I filed an RTI application to find out how many cycle tracks Delhi has, and who is responsible for them? I was surprised that important, strategic roads like Tilak Marg, Africa Avenue, Aurobindo Marg, Kasturba Gandhi Marg have cycle tracks built into them. But, people just don't know they are there. There is no signage. The tracks have been encroached upon by other users, and many times the tracks are in such poor condition that I prefer not to use them at all,"

explains well-known photographer Dileep Prakash who is also an avid cyclist. In fact, since 2006, Dileep has rarely used his car for commuting in Delhi. He takes his cycle everywhere. He got hooked after a trip to Germany for his photo exhibition where he discovered his museum's curator cycled to work!

ITDP's Nalin Sinha says that's a common sight in Europe. "In Switzerland, 70 per cent of people use cycles for short trips despite having sometimes two or three cars. But, in India, a big mindset challenge to cycling is the perception that it is meant for the poor. There is zero aspiration in taking up the cycle. It's just not considered a sign of development. Yes, road safety is a legitimate issue and we need to solve that by including cycles in our public policy. Hardly four per cent of Delhi's commuters now use the cycle. That's a dramatic shift from the 60s or 70s when the number was around 70 per cent."

Nalin says there are several easy, short term initiatives the government can launch to help revive cycling. It can designate an area, say the India Gate circle in Delhi, as a no car zone once a week or even once a month. Also, the government can incentivise public and non motorised transport for its own employees by handing out allowances and other benefits. These simple measures will achieve small transformations at little cost. But, yes, they need some political will.

Till that happens though, DCC is enjoying its uphill ride. It's also been imaginative in bringing people to its fold by weaving the cycling narrative with heritage and tourism. With the help of INTACH Delhi, DCC has organised three Heritage Cycling Rides, and is now in talks with the tourism ministry to include such rides as a must-do on travel itineraries. The club has an active online group to help members stay connected, and has expanded to Mumbai, Bangalore and Noida.

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# Many die in Delhi building spree

*But just one case of compensation*

Civil Society News  
New Delhi

DELHI'S Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit has won a third term in office. The Commonwealth Games of 2010 figure high on her list of priorities. So, construction is taking place full swing. Stadiums, flyovers and roads are being made. There is also the Metro snaking its way all over the city. Everywhere you can hear the irritating whine and clash of machines while construction workers slog away, day and night.

Sometimes there are newspaper reports of accidents on site. Workers get injured or even die. How safe are their working conditions? Are they ever compensated?

SA Azad, an activist, decided to find out on behalf of the Nirman Mazdoor Shakti Sangathan, which is affiliated to the National Trade Union Initiative (NTUI).

Azad looked for answers to three questions: In Delhi, between 2002 and 2008, how many construction workers were injured on site, how many had died and where was the compensation money paid from?

He investigated and dug out information, first going to government departments involved in construction like the Public Works Department (PWD), the Delhi Jal Board, the DDA, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), the Labour department and so on.

He was in for a surprise. The departments replied that hardly any workers had been injured. MCD owned up to two accident cases, PWD said only one accident had happened. Labour department provided information on the number of construction workers –17,320 in nine districts of Delhi.

Azad found these happy figures rather suspicious. He decided to look elsewhere. He went to the DCP, (Deputy Commissioner of Police), offices of the Delhi Police,

in each district. To his amazement, he found that the Delhi Police had diligently and dutifully noted down each and every accident on construction sites that had taken place between 2002 and 2006.

Now the true picture began to emerge. Azad has figures for five areas. DCP, Outer Delhi, (Pushpanjali), reported 26 deaths of construction workers, 48 accidents and 96 serious injuries. North-West district (Ashok Vihar) reported 30 deaths, 39 serious injuries and 52 accidents. West



District (Rajouri Gardens) reported 71 deaths, 115 injuries and 123 accidents. Central District (Daryaganj) had noted 40 serious injuries and 36 accidents. And North-East district reported 21 deaths, 64 serious injuries and 41 accidents.

Azad dug deeper. He put in an RTI application with the Delhi Metro Railway Corporation (DMRC) which is digging and digging and making big pillars on which to run its trains. DMRC replied that there had been 52 minor accidents and 69 fatal injuries/deaths according to its records. Compensation had also been paid, at least on paper. Azad inquired what action did DMRC take against the construction companies when an accident took place? Were these accidents reported to the police?

"The DMRC says it is providing protective clothing. But if the manner of construction is shoddy, if the machines their contractors use are ancient, then of what use is such protective clothing?" asks Azad.

The irony is that the Delhi government with honourable intentions set up a Delhi Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Board to implement the Building and Other Construction Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1996. This law is meant to ensure safety for construction workers

and basic facilities for them, including a crèche for their children at every construction site.

This welfare board has about 11 members. Amongst them are activists. Bureaucrats are also represented. It should have political representation, but it does not.

The board has met almost 15 times since 2002. In six years it has hardly done any work. Even the administrative machinery to implement the law has not been put in place. Money is not an issue. The welfare board has a generous budget of Rs 167 crores.

Any construction project costing more than Rs 10 lakh and engaging more than 10 construction workers has to contribute one per cent of the total cost to this welfare board. Government departments doing construction have paid up.

The welfare board spent Rs 5,46,000 hiring the Delhi School of Social Work to conduct a survey on construction workers in Delhi. "Under the law, the board should have appointed dedicated inspectors to do this work, but they have not done so," says Azad. Appointments for committees under the law, including a safety committee, have not been made. So far the board has hired 10 data entry operators.

They spent Rs 35,88,970 for 'advertisement to create awareness'. For insurance, under the Jan Shree Bima Yojna, Rs 13,49,900 was spent. Creches were to be created at construction sites but this has not been done in any significant number.

How many workers did this board give compensation to for death or injuries? Just one worker received Rs 15,000. "This board set up for workers with a generous budget has to date paid compensation to only one worker," points out Azad.

**The welfare board has about 11 members. Amongst them are activists. It has hardly done any work. Even the administrative machinery has not been put in place.**

# Gorkhaland leaders forget Gandhi

**Vivek S. Ghatani**  
Darjeeling

THE demand for Gorkhaland is turning violent due to infighting among political parties heading the agitation for a separate state carved out of West Bengal.

Blood flowed, people lost their houses and the police, including the administration, were reduced to mere spectators. To some extent it was believed violence was inevitable because one of the leaders of the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM), the frontline political party leading the agitation, was brutally murdered with a local weapon. The leader was so badly defaced that it was hard to identify him.

But the Morcha's act of revenge was even more

Hearing that the five accused – Nirmal Diyali, Krishna Bahadur Diyali, Bikash Diyali, Bimal Diyali and Rajen Cinturi – were being produced in court, they pounced on them at the Kurseong court, beat them up with whatever they had, snatching whatever they could from the police.

After the incident, a blame game started. The GJM sees the hand of the state government in both incidents. "The murder of Subodh Pradhan is a conspiracy of the state government," said Binay Tamang, spokesperson for the Morcha's Central Committee.

"The state government has already sent agents to the hills to create divisions amongst our own people. Had our leader not been murdered by those people who were once GNLFF members, the public would not have pounced

on the accused in court the next day."

Many here believe the incident that occurred at the Kurseong court due to the failure of the administration. It occurred in front of the Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate, Sub-divisional Magistrate and the Sub-divisional Police officer.

Why didn't the administration at least order a lathi-charge, people are asking. Since there were no such orders, 30 odd policemen stood around while the accused were beaten black and blue in front of the

court. The mob, which mostly comprised of Morcha supporters, (though Morcha leaders blame the public) simply dispersed.

"Had there been any firing or lathi-charge, violence would have escalated," was what Dipyendu Das, the Sub-Divisional Magistrate, told journalists straight after the incident.

Other political parties believe that democracy in the hills has faded away. The Akhil Bharatiya Gorkha league (ABGL), the oldest political party here was barred from organising a public meeting in Darjeeling recently. "In a democracy everyone has the right to speak. We had permission to hold a public meeting from the administration but the Morcha occupied the area where we were to speak from. Do you call this democracy? What happened at the Kurseong court was a total failure of the administration," said Madan Tamang, the ABGL president.

The Communist Party of Revolutionary Marxist, (CPRM) another political party striving to achieve Gorkhaland is also of the same opinion. Recently, it held a three day *dharna* at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi along with the Bharatiya Gorkha Parisangh, an apolitical organisation of Gorkha literary figures.

# Kol tribals



Koli tribals of Chitrakut on a water recharge project

**Bharat Dogra**  
Chitrakut (UP)

For as long as they can recall, Kol tribals in the Chitrakut district of Uttar Pradesh, depended on the forest for food and livelihood. The jungle was an old and trusted friend yielding nutritious mahua, anvla and chiraunji. Tribals could earn money by selling such forest produce and by plucking tendu leaves.

But since the last five years, this tried and tested support system is crumbling. The tribals do not know why. Yet, they speak in unambiguous terms about the losses suffered by them.

"We have been eating mahua in different ways during different seasons," explains Phulmatiya, a Kol woman. "It is extremely good for our health. Till a few years ago, we were able to collect enough mahua for our needs all the year through. We could also sell mahua and earn some cash. But, during the last season when we went to collect mahua, we hardly got anything."

Phulmatiya comes from Mangawaan village of Manikpur block in Chitrakut. Other villagers, too, were keen to stop and talk despite the winter chill.

"Earlier, collection of tendu leaves was a significant source of livelihood for us," says Prema, another Kol woman. "But now such few leaves are collected that our earnings have declined considerably. Some of the leaves we pluck are so small that even after we've worked hard to collect them, they are rejected. Buyers say that such small leaves cannot be used to roll bidis."

Kunni, an articulate middle aged Kol woman said, "Previously, we did not worry so much about hunger. Even if it was a rainy day and we couldn't



The burnt guest house

pathetic. When the GJM revived the Gorkhaland agitation in 2007 it had said that it would fight with Gandhian methods, in a peaceful, democratic manner. Now their words sound hollow.

The Morcha supporters torched around 20 houses at Rohini, some 50 km from Darjeeling, ransacked about 25 houses, burnt a tanker carrying petrol and torched a two-year-old guest house owned by the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill council (DGHC). All in retaliation for the murder of their leader, Subodh Pradhan, on the premises of the guest house by a handful of people in the wee hours of 1 January.

The reason behind the murder is not really known as yet but the police said that Subodh Pradhan had reportedly occupied the guest house by breaking its locks. Locals of Rohini told him that it was illegal to stay there without permission. A war of words followed and that resulted in his murder.

Five people from Rohini surrendered in front of the police but that was not enough for the Morcha. The day after, when the five accused were being taken to a court in Kurseong, Morcha supporters were in a rally to protest their leader's murder.

# detect climate change

BHARAT DOGRA



go for work, we could always go to the forest to collect roots and tubers like Birain and Angitha. Once I boiled or cooked these, there was enough food and no one would remain hungry. But these have become so rare now."

Kodan Kol remembers his favourite Parora, a vegetable available in the forest and relished by all. "Now its availability is just 10 per cent of what we obtained a few years ago," he says.

Most villagers here are small farmers who have been adversely affected by erratic rainfall in recent years. According to government data, rainfall in Chitrakut district was deficient by 14 per cent in 2004-05, 8 per cent in 2005-06, 22 per cent in 2006-07 and as much as 60 per cent in 2007-08.

But people say such statistics do not convey the right picture of their problems. It is not just the amount of rainfall, but the timing of the rain that matters. If rainfall fails when crops need it the most then it doesn't matter if it rains excessively some other time.

When rainfall and overall weather patterns became more erratic, more unpredictable and don't fall in line with established cropping patterns, then farmers and their crops suffer much more than by shortages in annual average rainfall. This is what has been happening in recent years in these villages.

"Due to hotter conditions the wheat crop matures earlier than usual and grain formation is adversely affected," says Raja Bua, a senior activist of the Akhil Bhartiya Samaj Seva Sansthan (ABSSS), who has worked in Chitrakut for several years. "It is these kind of changes which indicate a more durable alteration in weather patterns, distinct from the temporary change caused by a bad year, or a year of lower rainfall."

Discussing the decline of the palash tree, known for its beautiful flowers, a tribal says, "So rarely the tree flowers now."

Weeds like lantana and parthenium are spreading fast while there is an increasing scarcity of fodder. Cows yield much less milk and for a shorter duration. At this moment, a tribal woman blurts out, "It is not only cows, women also have less milk." Several villagers start laughing, but further questions reveal a much more serious fact. Earlier, it was customary to breastfeed babies for nearly two years. Now babies are breastfed for less than one year.

As we moved on to speak with the people of Tikariya, Dhonda and Amchur Neruva villages, we found further confirmation that the changes taking place in recent years, particularly during the last six years, go beyond the occasional drought - induced changes which are temporary and reversible.

Kusuma Kol says for two years the crop loss on her fields was so complete that she did not even try to harvest it. Sagraty Kol says mahua and tendu leaf collections are just 25 per cent compared to a few years back while a weed called Gundhaila is spreading widely.

Dharma Narain Dwiwedi is a leading farmer of Amchur Neruva village, owning about 65 bighas (25 acres). Till a decade ago, his fields provided adequate food all the year through for his nine-member family, apart from significant cash earnings. Today, his farm yield doesn't provide food for even six months, he says.

Ramdukh Kol says he has 13 bighas from which he used to get 15 sacks of paddy in good times. One sack contained about 80 kgs. But in recent years, the land has just lain uncultivated. He didn't risk

farming on his fields because of the uncertainties.

Ramdukh recalls that over a decade ago ABSSS made an effort to get tribals a better return for the mahua they collected. Some tribal families of Amchur Neruva village collected 20 sacks of mahua. Now we can barely collect a little mahua to eat once in a while, he says.

Gokul, a honey collector, says that honey collections have gone down very heavily. Other gatherers of forest-produce lament the heavy reduction in the collection of chiraunji seeds and anvla fruits, both high nutrition products that also yielded a good income when they were available in plenty.

To check this decline in livelihood and nutrition from farming and forests, the ABSSS has initiated significant watershed development projects. The watershed plan in Mangawaan panchayat extends over 1500 hectares and is supported by Sir Dorabji Tata Trust. Two initiatives in Itwaan Paatin and Markundi-Amchur Neruva villages, extending to 3500 hectares, are supported by NABARD.

These initiatives involve treatment of the hills and valleys to ensure that rainfall is saved in fields, pastures and tree lands so that crop yields and produce of indigenous trees like mahua, anwala and other fruits can increase. In the Mangawaan watershed project the objective is specific-to increase the tree cover ten times. An earlier, smaller effort in Tikariya, supported under the drought-prone area programme, has resulted in increased crop yields for some of the poorest farmers. The water-table has risen and so have the number of trees. Such efforts are accompanied by social mobilisation to increase the capacity of communities to work together for the overall welfare of their villages.

Villagers with much improved water and moisture conservation have more trees and better pastures. Such an environment is conducive for improving livelihoods and nutrition. Bhagwat Prasad, Director of ABSSS, says, "We've learnt valuable lessons from our earlier experiences in Tikariya. This area called Patha has an old history of water scarcity. We'll try to convince people to accord first priority to drinking water needs of people, then to the drinking water needs of farm animals, and only then use water for irrigation. We'll be emphasising environment friendly farming. The aim is sustainable development of the village community with special emphasis on the poorest."

Recalling the old days Gaya Prasad Gopal, founder-director of ABSSS, says, "From the outset we emphasised the land rights of Kol tribals, and this base will give us to strength to ensure that these initiatives provide the most help to weaker sections, particularly Kol tribals."

At a time when climate change and adverse weather conditions are causing far reaching changes leading to adverse impacts on livelihoods, nutrition and health, it is a relief to know that at least some efforts are being made and some signs of hopes are emerging.

*This report was written under the CSE Media Fellowship on Climate Change*

# Hydro project reduces Chaïen to

**Rakesh Agrawal**  
Chaïen (Uttarakhand)

**N**OT very long ago, Chaïen village enjoyed an idyllic existence. Located 12 km from Joshimath in the Chamoli district of Uttarakhand, Chaïen had fruity orchards, farms and healthy cows. People were content. They didn't need to look for greener pastures.

But now Chaïen village is virtually extinct. Villagers live in temporary tin sheds five to seven km away and in the Railway Reservation Centre (RRC) at Joshimath. A few have no choice but to stay in their ramshackle homes. Chaïen's orchards and pastures lie in ruins. Cows have been abandoned in the forests. Farms are uncultivated.

The search for hydel power has been made a national priority. But just how projects are unsettling communities and destroying livelihoods without providing viable substitutes is being overlooked. Chaïen is an example.

"I was the most prosperous person in the village. Now I'm living like a refugee," says Bhupal Singh Panwar, the former pradhan of Chaïen, bitterly.

The village has been reduced to rubble by the 400 MW Vishnuprayag Hydroelectricity Project (VNP), a run of the river project across the Alaknanda. It was built by the Jai Prakash Construction Company and commissioned in October 2006.

Bhupal Singh Panwar was the first to raise his voice against the hydro-project. He organised the villagers and they went on a fast unto death. Now, the hapless Panwar with four of his relatives lives in the Railway Reservation Centre.

Everybody is wondering how to eke out a living as their lands, orchards and animal rearing activities have been sacrificed at the altar of development. Villagers used to earn money by selling fruits, vegetables and milk to tourists on their way to Badrinath. But the Vishnuprayag hydro-project has destroyed all the orchards in Chaïen along with its two hamlets, Thebadi and Bagicha.

The Jai Prakash Construction Company constructed a tunnel 12.5 km in length from the Alaknanda river near Lambagar to Chaïen village, the area of the project site. The tunnel was dug through the core of Chaïen village. Three gates were dug separately at different places to throw construction debris. Massive explosions were made to dig these tunnels that further weakened the village's geological structure. Such explosions can cause

landslides and land attrition. As it is Joshimath and its surroundings areas are known to be prone to earthquakes.

In 1998 when the Jai Prakash Construction Company began building people complained but their complaints were not addressed.

"The company destroyed 14 hectares of our pastures and another 14 hectares of our forest. Homes and cow shades developed cracks because of enormous explosions," says Panwar. He shows a letter that the villagers wrote to the company, the district magistrate and the district forest officer (DFO) on 22 August 2002 warning that the village is being reduced to rubble, but nobody did anything.

The road to the village was destroyed as huge stones were recklessly flung. Drains got filled with debris. Suddenly, a drain on the northwest side of the village began to overflow with water. "It was a

clear indication that the tunnel was leaking and its water could create havoc in the village already weakened by explosions," says Panwar.

His fears came true. "Before we could figure out what was happening, houses in Thebadi and Bagicha hamlets, cow sheds, trees laden with fruit, land, all begun collapsing into the ground," recalls a weeping Maheshwari Devi, 36, who had to leave her three-roomed pucca home and live like a refugee in tin sheds built by the Jai Prakash Construction Company.

She is not alone. One by one in a few days 25 houses and 954 nali (about 19 ha) of farmland was destroyed completely. The administration and media was activated only after people began to protest vehemently.

Officials started reaching the village. The tehsildar, the deputy-district magistrate and the then district magistrate of Chamoli, DS Gabariyal, inspected Chaïen village on 26 October, 2007. The district magistrate wrote to the Jai Prakash Construction Company saying that the destruction of the village has been caused by explosions made by them. He also said the water of the Alaknanda appeared to be emerging from the drain. This is possible only because of leakage from the penstock pipe.

The district magistrate sent a report of his survey to the state government saying that 25 houses have been damaged completely, 20 partially and that 954.30 nali (about 19 ha) of farmland has also been damaged. After evaluating all this, resettlement of the village was termed essential. The total expenditure for relocation including all facilities was estimated at Rs. 1 crore, while total losses were estimat-



Janaki Devi's broken home at Chaïen



Bhupal Singh Panwar's home collapsed too

# rubble

ed at around Rs 10 crores.

The Jai Prakash Construction Company responded by arranging 17 tin sheds as temporary residences at Marwari, some 10 km from Chaien for affected households. In the RRC, Joshimath, temporary residence was similarly arranged.

But the district administration continued to respond to this crisis in favour of the villagers. It emphasised that all affected households of Chaien village must be resettled humanely in a phased manner – 25 households in the first phase, 20 in the second and the remaining 91 households in the third phase.

The district magistrate sent a proposal of immediate resettlement to the Chief Secretary on 4 February 2008. Around Rs 84 lakhs was demanded for the resettlement of 25 households in the first phase.

While the district administration kept on working to heal the wounds of the affected people, the state government did just the opposite.

A high level government committee met on 6 February, 2008, in the presence of Divakar Bhatt, then Minister for Disaster Management, to discuss conditions of damages and resettlement.

The government said it couldn't pay more than Rs 25,000 per affected household from the Central Disaster Fund. The Jai Prakash Construction Company agreed to provide Rs 84.05 lakh in the name of 'corporate social responsibility' and handed over a demand draft of Rs 80 lakh to the district magistrate of Chamoli on 16 February, 2008.

But none of this money has been distributed to the affected people for rebuilding their homes because the selected land site at Chunar hasn't been transferred. The Irrigation Department is supposed to transfer the land to the Revenue Department but it has not done so. It is noteworthy that despite repeated requests by the district magistrate, the land transfer process is stuck somewhere in the government.

It is clear that the village collapsed because of excessive explosions and land shattering. So, it is the Vishnuprayag hydro electric project which is responsible for the destruction of Chaien village and the Jai Prakash Construction Company should bear the responsibility for the damages it has caused. Yet, in the meeting held in February 2008, chaired by Divakar Bhatt, the Jai Prakash Construction Company was let off for a mere Rs 80 lakhs!

At that meeting the state government said it would provide 250 sq yards and Rs 25,000 to all 25 'affected' households. Another Rs 3.35 lakhs from the money the Jai Prakash Company had handed over would be given to each affected household. In this way the state government washed its hands off the matter.

The question which people are asking is: why were the demands of the district magistrate pushed aside? He had asked for resettlement of 25 households in the first phase, 20 in the second and the remaining 91 households in the third phase. Yet only 25 households whose homes were severely damaged were considered for resettlement and compensation. Twenty homes which developed severe cracks have not been considered at all. Also, providing one home per household ignores the huge loss the village has suffered in terms of its farmlands, orchards, pastures and water sources.

The people of Chaen village have been ruthlessly evicted from their village. The Chief Minister, BC Khanduri, is now in charge of disaster management. Chamoli also has a new District Magistrate, AK Dhaundhiyal. They must work to fully compensate and rehabilitate the people of Chaen village who have been so cruelly evicted.

## Mamring survives on cycle dynamos

**Vivek S.Ghatani**  
Darjeeling

UPPER Mamring is a small village 22 km from Kurseong in the Darjeeling hills. For many years, villagers waited in vain for electricity appealing periodically to the West Bengal government. Poles and promises were made. A hydel project was started rousing much hope but it collapsed.

In desperation the villagers took things into their own hands. Upper Mamring's 170 houses now rely on cycle dynamos to generate a little electricity. They can light two bulbs of 20 watts each, watch TV and charge their cell phones.

"We started to light bulbs in this fashion around 1989. We did not know how to generate electricity with a cycle dynamo. But we came across a person named Suraj Mukhia who used to work in a cinchona factory. He told us about the cycle dynamo and how we should use it," said Hemant Gurung, a local resident.

To generate electricity from a cycle dynamo a water source is required.

"The water source should be at a distance of at least 100 meters from the cycle dynamo. If the distance is less than this, the water will not flow with force and it will become hard to generate electricity," explained Bijay Gurung, a farmer.

The generated electricity is the direct current which allows a house to light two bulbs at night. The residents said if an inverter were used, they would be able to light five bulbs but they don't have money to buy expensive inverters.

Upper Mamring is a poor village. Its economy depends entirely on agriculture. Most people farm vegetables like carrot, radish, ginger and beans. The vegetables are sold in Siliguri, a trade hub for North Bengal.

The produce fetches villagers between Rs 80, 000 to Rs1.5 lakhs annually. But the money earned is paltry. In the hill districts of Darjeeling, prices for day to day necessities are expensive compared to the plains of Bengal. The villagers said they find it difficult to pay for the upkeep of the cycle dynamo.

The local administration and the state government have only made hollow promises. "In 1972 the then Chief Minister of West Bengal, Siddhartha Shankar Ray, visited this place. He was delighted to see the beauty of this area during his two day stay. He was equally amused to see that no electricity had reached this place. Ray assured us that he would light up our village. Shortly after poles were erected but after that nothing happened," recalled MK Sampang, a village elder.

A big disappointment for the village was the collapse of the Darey Khola mini hydel project set up by West Bengal's Renewable Energy Development Agency (WBREDA). Under the project a 2.25 KV station was set up using water from the nearby Darey Khola stream. The project was supposed to supply electricity to Upper Mamring from 6 pm to 10 pm. But the project flopped because the water source at Darey Khola dried up.

"As far as we know that project required a lot of water flow. But during October and November there is no water in the Darey Khola," Sampang said.

The villagers had paid Rs1000 to WBREDA as first connection charges. A beneficiary committee was formed to look after the project. The committee hired three people. But it could not pay any salary to the staff. Worse, during the dry season people were plunged into darkness once again.

"We talked to officials of WBREDA but they could not help us. Finally, last year we handed over the keys of the failed hydel project to them. Instead, we are using the cycle dynamo mechanism," said Sampang.

The people are not happy with the paltry amount of electricity they get.

"During day time we use the electricity to charge our cell phones as that is important for us. At night, the bulbs are not much better than lamps," shrugged Ajay Rai, a contractor.

A good supply of electricity would help children the most. They would be able to study after dark and even learn computers. "Education for the children is of utmost necessity," explained Raj. "Our children do not have access to knowledge of the outside world. Mere book knowledge is not sufficient," said Rai.

Although the income of villagers is low, they are keen their children learn how to use computers. "How can they learn computers when there is no electricity? They must learn, but how? A child cannot go everyday to Kurseong trudging 22 km because there is no transport available in our village," said Rai with a sad voice.

But the villagers have not lost hope. They believe that one day their village will get the light it rightly deserves. "The Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council's rural electricity department has assured us light and we villagers are waiting for it," said the villagers.

For village leaders, the demand for Gorkhaland is very important. "Electricity is not reaching villages like ours. This is an example of the shoddy development that has taken place in 20 years of the DGHC. The solution for all this is an independent state. Once we achieve Gorkhaland, everything will be fine," a local political leader said.

## Civil Society wins award

**W**E are happy to inform our readers that we received the Karmaveer Puraskar 2008 under the print media category. The Karmaveer Puraskar is for social justice and citizens' action. The award is given by I-CONGO or the Indian Confederation of NGOs.

Awardees are chosen from all walks of life. Nominees are screened by a committee of experts.

The Karmaveer Puraskar are given out every year on 26 November, at a Right Every Wrong Conclave, held by I-CONGO. Activists, academics, leaders and artists discuss social issues at the conclave. This year, the theme was Citizen Action for Electoral Reforms.

I-CONGO is planning to launch a signature campaign this year to get the government to declare 26 November as National Social Justice and Citizen Action Day.

"In a country of almost 1.2 billion Indians, we have many awards for movie stars and other achievers launched by tobacco, FMCG, media and beverage brands as marketing campaigns but we are yet to recognise the real-life unsung heroes who believe that it is better to light a candle than curse the darkness by leading a change," said Jeroninio Almeida, founder and chief volunteer, ICONGO.

# India, Pak peace campaign



Sandeep Pandey (second from left) addressing a press conference in Lucknow

**Anjali Singh**  
Lucknow

**W**ITH war clouds appearing and disappearing on the horizon, citizens of India and Pakistan have launched a signature campaign for peace from 9 January to 8 February. The focus of the campaign is to lobby against war posturing and terrorism and to promote cooperation and peace between both countries.

The campaign will start simultaneously in 22 cities of India and 15 cities in Pakistan.

In India, the cities are: Ahmedabad, Amritsar, Chandigarh, Bangalore, Bhopal, Bhubaneswar, Chennai, Dehradun, New Delhi, Guwahati, Hyderabad, Jaipur, Jammu, Kolkata, Lucknow, Mumbai, Patna, Panjim, Raipur, Ranchi and Shimla. In Pakistan, the campaign goes to Baluchistan, Islamabad, Karachi, Khairpur, Khuzdar, Larhana, Lahore, Multan, Peshawar, Quetta, Sadikabad, Shikarpur and Sukkur.

"In Pakistan there are parallel forces operating when it comes to governing the country," said social activist, Sandeep Pandey. "These are, to be precise, the civilian gov-

ernment, the army, the ISI and the terrorist outfits. In such a scenario our effort should be to strengthen the process of democracy in Pakistan and give the civilian government all our support to act against the army, the ISI and the terrorists. We are doing the opposite by talking of war. This signature campaign will aim at increasing people's power. It will put pressure on the government to strengthen solidarity and peace by initiating action against those who pose a threat to it."

Agrees Irfan Ahmed, Vice President, Indo-Pak People's Forum for Peace and Democracy and People's Union For Civil Liberties: "All efforts of

initiating the peace process between Pakistan and India came to a standstill post 26/11. Years of effort, of organising marches and peace walks to Pakistan are now negated. So this signature campaign is the way to initiate contact again." He said he was very happy to see that mostly young people signed the campaign sheet both in paper and on the website. "This is a positive outcome which clearly suggests the next generation wants peace not war," he added.

Citizens of both countries are demanding through this campaign that governments of India and Pakistan practice zero tolerance for religious extremism and terrorism. The campaign also demands that both governments follow in spirit the conventions and resolutions of the UN and SAARC against terrorism.

"The signatures will be compiled by voluntary organisations like Pakistan Institute for Labour Education and Research (PILER) and Confederation of Voluntary Organisations, Hyderabad, in India. It will then be sent to the Prime Ministers and Presidents of India and Pakistan as the voice of the people from both countries," said Sandeep Pandey.

## Samita's World

by Samita Rathor





# Goonj spreads warmth in Bihar



Truckloads of relief material being sent by Goonj



A woman stitches a blanket

**Shreyasi Singh**  
New Delhi

**M**ORE than five months after large tracts of Bihar were submerged by the worst floods in living memory, life for many of the 3.5 million affected people keeps getting tougher. December and January were especially difficult as those rendered homeless fought the winter bite with little to protect themselves with.

Government agencies, international relief organisations, leading Indian NGOs, activist groups and political outfits played an instrumental role in relief operations in the immediate aftermath of the tragedy. But, months later, less than a handful of these agencies have managed to stand their ground even as many say the battle is far from over in Bihar.

Goonj, a New Delhi based NGO, understands this only too well. Goonj is a crucial cog in relief efforts in Bihar, and its Rahat floods campaign has marched on resolutely beyond the river's initial days of fury.

Goonj now has a team of 15 full time people stationed across the five worst affected areas in Bihar— Saharsa, Supaul, Madhepura, Purnia and Khagaria. It has reached more than 8,000 to 8,500 villages, 150 of them extremely remote, with relief material— food, clothes, tents, utensils and other items. Often, Goonj, which has partnered 18 local groups to build a relief network, was the first organisation to access these areas. It won people's trust with its quiet efficiency, low visibility and its cadres' firm commitment.

Goonj has transported 60 trucks of material to flood victims in Bihar and Orissa. Goonj volunteers say the situation in Orissa is grim too but the state received less media attention and consequently less relief.

Goonj, through its main collection centres in Delhi, Mumbai and Jalandhar, has sent over 1,50,000 kg of ration, 6,000 tents, 20,000 blankets, 10,000 mats, 10,000 buckets/pans and over 40,000

saris among other items. To help people tide over the winter months, it distributed 4,000 family winter kits of two thick blankets, two mats and two woollen clothes per family member.

"Bihar has been our biggest campaign. It has taught us so much. We started with a simple, standard email in August after which we received an overwhelming 600 to 700 calls daily from corporate and individuals for many days. We received so much material that we had to rent out additional godown space," says Anshu Gupta who founded Goonj in 1998 as a unique resource mobilisation initiative. His mission is simple— help others by turning someone's waste into another person's resource.

More than big numbers though, it is Goonj's minute understanding of the ground situation that has made a difference. But, despite a committed network and a steady supply of material, Anshu says things are as challenging now as they were on 18 August when the Kosi river breached the embankment upstream in Nepal and changed its course, leading to unforeseen displacement and devastation.

"Accessibility is the biggest obstacle now. In August, people en masse had moved to the roads and highways in search of upper ground. It was easy to reach them. You could get truckloads to them. But, the government establishment has worked to move people back to their villages, often several kilometres away from motorable roads. We have had to walk, use boats and motorcycles to get there. But, this has worked to the government's advantage. It's a smart move that gives an illusion that things are getting better. The fact is people have been pushed into oblivion from where they cannot demand their rights. There is no government machinery to reach these people," explains Anshu.

Goonj's collection and warehousing centres in Delhi carefully sort through and repair old clothes and items to finally decide on what goes in the grey gunny bags sent to the field.

"There are missing links in taking things from the cities and putting them to use in villages. For example, women in Bihar and Orissa only wear saris. But, in cities, we have very few people who donate old saris. Clothing essentials are now so different between the two areas. Also, in cities waist sizes generally start at 30 and keep going upwards. In villages, waist sizes generally never go beyond 30. We have to deal with those difficulties," says Anshu. Also, there continues to be an urgent need for woollen clothes and blankets till up to at least April as people battle the cold in makeshift tents.

With the Bihar campaign, Goonj has pushed its own frontiers and innovated. There is also a keen understanding of what people really need. They launched "Not Just A Piece of Cloth" initiative in Bihar and Orissa to provide sanitary napkins, one of the most ignored relief materials across all camps. Now, Goonj workers make around 5,000 sanitary napkins a day out of waste cotton cloth, and over one lakh have already been sent.

Goonj has also developed centres in Madhepura and Supaul to convert old waste cloth into *gudris* or thick blankets. The *gudris* protect people from the extreme cold in already damp conditions while also generating some much-needed employment. Each person is given raw material for three *gudri* blankets. They can keep two and Goonj takes the third for distribution. At these centres, people are being trained and paid to make *gudris*.

But, one doesn't need to travel to the far-flung villages of Bihar to witness the tremendous work Goonj is doing. You can see it for yourself in the several godowns and workshops that Goonj has in a village near South Delhi's Sarita Vihar area. Each of the 80 or so local workers employed— tailors, sorters, bookkeepers, handloom weavers— exude a fervour that can only come from honest, meaningful and committed work.

Goonj can be reached at J-93 Sarita Vihar, New Delhi.  
Phone: 011 - 41401216





# 'Save Rice' rescues heritage seeds

**Anitha Pailoor**  
Dharwad (Karnataka)

**G**M Hosamani stands proudly in his field, verdant with 25 varieties of paddy. Green and gold clusters sway in the breeze. This paddy is rich and rare for it has emerged from long forgotten traditional seeds.

A team of admiring farmers has come to look and learn. Hosamani tells them how he went from growing seven varieties to 25 on his seven and a half acre field. He points out Kagisali, a black, scented, sticky rice, Ambe, a nutritious rice, the medicinal Karigajivili and Navara.

Prabhu Madival, a farmer from Kamadhenu village in Kalaghatki Taluk, makes a snap decision. He will grow the Selam Sanna variety on his field next season, for sure.

This field trip for farmers was organized by Sahaja Samruddha which has a network of farmers in Karnataka and is leading a Save Rice movement. Several grassroots NGOs like Thanal in Kerala and CREATE in Tamil Nadu are part of this campaign. The objectives are to revive rice culture, conserve rice biodiversity, make local rice varieties popular and form Rice Clubs.

But why does rice need to be saved? Because worldwide fields are shrinking and rice yields are going down. With global warming, the temperature will change and paddy yields will slide further. Also, the world has been consuming limited varieties of rice. But in India we still have a plethora of traditional varieties which are very nutritious and have developed over centuries. These varieties could be more resistant to climate change. We must save them from extinction.

"Farmers and even consumers know the advantages of eating rice that has been refined naturally over centuries. Let the universities work on these varieties which can withstand natural calamities. The focus of our campaign is to stop paddy fields from shrinking further," says G Krishnaprasad, director, Sahaja Samruddha. The NGO gives support to farmers.

Anjaneya, a farmer in Kumbalur of Harihar Taluk, has 31 paddy varieties on his farm. He is proud to have made desi varieties popular in an area ravaged by chemical farming thanks to water from the Bhadra Canal. He was inspired by seed festivals and workshops where he met farmers with similar interest. He travelled widely to understand the nuances of organic farming. He organised farmers in his village. The group realised that high yielding varieties do not go with organic farming. He collected a range of seeds from seed saver conventions.



**GM Hosamani at his paddy field**



## OBJECTIVES

Seed conservation

Documentation

Seed banks

Distribution

Seed exchange

Marketing

BN Nandeesh, a farmer from Shikaripura who grows mainly legumes, is passionate about rare varieties. He has been experimenting with native varieties since seven years. This year six varieties have been grown on 15 acres. His latest prized possession is kala namak paddy, an exotic scented variety. He feels that basmati's over popularity has swept aside more than 300 scented varieties in India, of which some were superior in aroma and taste.

There are also ordinary farmers who have been unknowingly conserving rare varieties of paddy. In the Varada basin, flood resistant

varieties like Nereguli are grown. In drought-prone areas, varieties like Doddabairanellu are preferred. Of course, there are not many studies on the distinctiveness of local varieties that fight too much and too little water.

Farmers value these varieties compared to the ones distributed by government agricultural agencies. Native varieties perform better when it comes to yield, inputs, haystack, paddy-rice ratio and keeping quality. Desi paddy is also pest and disease resistant making it easy for farmers to turn organic.

In fact, to recoup drastic losses due to chemical agriculture, paddy fields have turned to horticulture and commercial crop plots. In Dakshina Kannada and Coorg the shift has been disproportionately

huge. But there are farmers who have realised the danger and are reconstructing organic rice bowls.

Ganni, a farmer in Kirugavalu of Malavalli Taluk, has experimented growing paddy by the system of rice intensification (SRI) method. He has conserved 15 varieties on one acre. He got interested after he became a member of the Sahaja Samruddha network. He says local paddy outshines advanced varieties in taste and fodder. Though Ganni has irrigation facilities, he feels that it is important to limit water usage. His family has conserved 116 mango varieties and is now preserving local paddy.

But there are very few scientists in the Agriculture Department and Agriculture Universities who realise the significance of local varieties. Dr N Devakumar, Coordinator of Honnavile Research Station, is one such enlightened scientist. He has been experimenting exclusively with organic farming and has been growing 70 rice varieties on an experimental basis. He believes that since native varieties have developed over centuries, adjusting to changing climate, they have greater resistance power and go very well with organic farming. Dr Devakumar realised this during his own field studies and by listening to the experience of farmers.

During the Bangalore Krishi Mela when he displayed 15 varieties of seeds, he found more than 1,000 farmers keen to buy the seeds. The Research Station is improving varieties based on the characteristics explained by the farmers. It is also working to scientifically validate these varieties. Dr Devakumar plans to distribute these seeds through Krishi Melas in the coming years. If Krishi Vijnana Kendras partner with seed conservers in their areas, that will enhance the pace of dissemination.



# LEARNING TO EAT RIGHT

The Annam festival in Kerala shows how



Dr G G Gangadharan and Dr C Suresh Kumar

**Shree Padre**  
Thiruvananthapuram



Lilly Bai with her yam dishes

It was a little past midnight, but Lilly Bai was up and about. For the next few hours she was busy making 15 dishes using yam. By noon she had taken her preparations to Thiruvananthapuram to present them in a traditional cookery competition at the Annam festival.

Lilly is a housewife at Parassala, a small town in Kerala. Like her, thousands of middle-aged housewives are waking up to the merits of wholesome traditional cooking. They are rediscovering the variety that used to exist but has been all but forgotten because of the pressures of modern living.

Lilly's yam offering was a special effort. She has the enthusiasm that it takes. "If I had enough time, I could have made another 10 dishes using yam," says Lilly. But for most people putting an old-style meal together is just too laborious. It is a difficult choice to make when quicker, easier alternatives are available.

The Annam festival held in the last week of December, is the first event of its kind. It is a brave attempt to bring focus to the growing concern over the present food habits in Kerala and the deleterious effects they are having on public health.

Among Indian states, Kerala has outstanding social indicators, but changes in diet and lifestyle have saddled it with diabetes and hypertension cases several times the national average.

Everyone seems to agree that Malayalis are eating wrong. They have gone from fibre-rich freshly cooked home meals to processed foods. There is too much sugar and fat in what they consume these days. Most families have no inclination for the good old nutritious morning meal that was intended to keep one going through the day.

The bread and eggs gobbled down in the morning or the buttery biscuits and chips in the tiffin boxes given to school-going children together with the urban weakness for colas, burgers and pizzas are adding up to just far too many calories.

It is not much different in rural areas, where the shifts in cultivation and the emphasis on rubber because of the money it brings in, have seen traditional crops like paddy being replaced.

In a rural area in years gone by, a morning meal would have been made out of

Photographs by SENTHIL KUMARAN



## What is Puttu?

A quick guide to some Kerala preparations that you might not be familiar with.

**Puttu:** A popular traditional breakfast preparation made by steam cooking rice and coconut gratings in a special vessel. It goes well with green gram curry.

**Vellappam:** Appam is a fermented rice pancake that resembles the dosa. **idi appam / nool puttu** are like rice noodles.

**Ragi appam/ Ragi idli:** These are bowl-shaped thin pancakes made from fermented rice flour. They derive their shape from the small appachatti in which they are cooked. **Scented Terali appam:** Sweet

appam wrapped in the terali leaf which lends a special aroma to the appam.

**Edana appam:** Appam wrapped in a jackfruit leaf.

**Ela ada and Kozhukkatta:** Both have the same ingredients – a dough made of roasted rice flour, and a sweet filling of sugar/jaggery and grated coconut. Ela ada is made by

spreading the batter thin on banana leaves and the kozukkatta is essentially a rice flour ball, both filled with the same sweet mixture and steam cooked.

**Avalos podi:** Powdered roasted rice and roasted coconut gratings. It is a popular evening snack. It is eaten with jaggery or mashed banana fruit.

rice, tapioca and vegetables. There would be the idli, dosa, puttu, vellappam, idi appam or nool puttu and so on. Lunch was similarly non-greasy and full of vegetables.

But now the deeply fried parantha, made out of white flour, reigns. Not only does it weigh heavily on the southern constitution, but it is a corrupted version of the original parantha that belongs in the north. The parantha, as it is eaten in the north of India, is made from whole wheat and not white flour. It also isn't fried so extensively.

Ironically, Kerala is the home of Ayurveda which regards food as medicine. It is in Kerala that the kitchen garden used to flourish with all the herbs and vegetables that a family needs for a healthy and balanced diet.

However, to cater to middle and upper class Malayalis who have travelled and lived elsewhere outside Kerala, eating joints have now mushroomed all over the state. The consumption of processed and fast food has considerably increased in the recent decades.

In homes where the women also go to office, there is less time for the kitchen. Traditional cooking can be slow and elaborate. Lilly may be ready to get up early to make her dishes with yam, but the modern woman is not so inclined – even if she is not dashing off to an office.

It is against this backdrop of changing preferences that the Annam festival was conceived by the Centre for Innovation in Science and Social Action (CISSA).

"Compared to the diet that fuelled human evolution, today's so-called affluent diet has double the amount of saturated fat, a third of former fibre intake, much more sugar and salt, flour carbohydrates and a reduced intake of nutrients," points out Dr C Suresh Kumar, general secretary, CISSA.

"Annam aims to create an awakening among communities of the devastating effects of fast and processed food. It also wants to highlight the loss of agrobiodiversity and its impact on food security," he says.

This probably is first time that an effort on such a large scale has been made to bring together NGOs, government departments and working groups on the question of diet and public health.

"The Kerala backyard garden is a model for the whole country. It is biologically intensive. To grow the same quantity of nutrients through less nutritious crops, you need many acres of land," says Dr Vandana Shiva, redoubtable environmentalist and chairperson of Annam's organizing committee.

The cookery competition was a fun way of providing a reminder of past food habits. Boiled tapioca chips with oven roasted fish and chama chor (boiled foxtail millet) were the diet of the poor in yesteryears. Also served up was puttu made from hand-pounded rice and tapioca and moringa toran, which is a dry side-dish for cooked rice.

Tubers exhibited by the Central Tuber Crops Research Institute (CTCRI) and the MS Swaminathan Research Foundation gave some idea of the tuber varieties the state has. About 50 traditional varieties of paddy including the

medicinal Navara, scented Gandhakasala, Chennellu, Ponnari, Vellari, Medapuncha, Arikkurai, and Varinellu were on display.

Families visited the food festival and parents were overheard telling their children about paddy --- "after removing the husk from this, we get the rice that we eat regularly." Such is the urban-rural divide that the festival has sought to bridge.

**A RALLYING POINT:** The concern over eating habits has been steadily building in Kerala. There is a growing market for organic food and traditional preparations. Restaurants cater to this demand and at least one rural bazaar helps farmers market their organic produce.

The government has done its bit as well. It promoted a terrace garden programme so that urban people would take to growing and eating vegetables.

Similarly, The Kutumbashree movement sponsored by the Kerala government consists of families who make quick meals the traditional way and sell them. It is healthy fast food.

The festival brought several of these efforts --- commercial and voluntary--- together in a useful way.

Pathayam, a natural food restaurant, which had a stall at the festival offered ragi appam, scented terali appam, edana appam, ela ada and kozhukkatta.

There was a lot of interest in examples of food as medicine: the original Kerala way of eating. Four such preparations made by a Kutumbashree unit had many takers. "We got these four recipes from an old lady", Bindu, a member of the Kutumbashree unit, told us. Adalodakam koottu, a mixture made from Malabar Nut leaves and other herbs helps to purify blood and get rids of lung related health problems like coughing, phlegm etc. Brahmi kurukk, from the leaves of the Indian pennywort is an energizer, good for memory and mind development. Malathangi kukrukk from Cissampelos pareira leaves etc relieves against tastelessness, weakness and chest pain. Poovarash kurukk (mainly made from Thespesia populnea leaves) is a general tonic.

Puluk, a mixture of boiled tubers, has yam, dioscorea, arrowroot and cassava in it. Kappa, cooked tapioca, once the main breakfast item, has vanished from the cities. It is still there in villages but tuber consumption as a whole has decreased considerably even in rural areas.

**SEASON SPECIFIC:** Earlier, certain herbal food preparations were season specific. Consumption of karkadaka kanji during July- August is now being revived. Kanji is rice gruel.

Bindu's stall offered marinnu kanji, or medicinal gruel, every day. It also served Navara, a medicinal rice cooked with various herbs. Different regions have different herbal combinations.

Says Anil Kumar C.B. who runs Altermedia, an eco-shop at Thrissur: "Consuming marinnu kanji is like getting a vehicle serviced. It removes toxic deposits from your body and puts back deficient nutrients, if any. In and around Thrissur alone there are about a hundred variations of this kanji."

These food practices are both medicinal as well as nutritional. Eating ettangadi --- eight kinds of tubers like yams, dioscorea, cassava etc --- in winter is another custom.

Similarly, in the Thiruvananthapuram area it was common to consume pathila --- 10 varieties of leaves (Neyyurni, Thalu, Thakara, Kumbalam, Matha, Vellari, Aanakkodithuva, Cheera, Chena and Chembila) --- in the monsoon.

Says L Radhakrishnan, Secretary to Government of Kerala and working chairman of the Annam festival, "Every year, NRIs send Rs 30,000 crores back to Kerala. The unofficial figure could be much higher. A good chunk of this gets spent on food habits that are mostly an imitation of the West. Then, the lower middle class goes and imitates what the rich do."

The younger generation's food mainly consists of fat and carbohydrates. One school in Thiruvananthapuram provides only hamburgers to its students. A study conducted by a local hospital among people in the below 20 age group, found lifestyle diseases like hypertension and obesity to be as high as 20 per cent.



Visitors taking a look at traditional rice varieties which are difficult to find these days

Radhakrishnan feels that the Kutumbashree anti-poverty programme is a local example worth following. "It is a great success," he points out. "Several small families are producing clean homemade food. It is fast food, but done in the traditional way from inputs from home gardens. For example, in chicken preparations it's not the broiler chicken, but local chicken that is used."

"Eighty-five per cent of our food comes from outside the state. Although we are literate, we aren't quality conscious about food," says S Usha, director, Thanal. "Very few people in society are aware of environmental degradation. Similarly most people do not realize that what they get from super markets and expensive restaurants need not be healthy."

Thanal has been popularizing organic practices among small farmers. It started an organic bazaar in Thiruvananthapuram five years ago. Originally it was held once a month and now it is held twice a week. Hundreds of farmers directly sell their produce to consumers who come from 10 and 20 km away.

Prices at the organic bazaar are generally at par with the general market. The odd items are costlier by Rs 3 or Rs 4. But the important thing is the prices are steady --- they don't go up and down with the rest of the market.

**GOOD DEMAND:** Usha says that there is a demand for organic produce in the state. "There are enough buyers. One great advantage is that villages are located very near to towns and cities in Kerala. There is good scope for marketing. Local vegetables fetch a better price and are seen by people as being healthier."

She adds, "The only leafy vegetables we eat are amaranthus and occasionally moringa. We have scope for cultivating many more. Like cowpea, pumpkin, etc. Our upper classes consume a lot of meat. In Europe and US though a lot of meat is eaten it is balanced with vegetables." "We have to include more cereals in

our diet. Food made from ragi (finger millet) is almost unknown in the state except for ragi gruel taken by diabetics," says Usha. "We need A good amount of fiber. We can learn to use ragi from our neighbouring state of Karnataka."

**RESTAURANTS:** There are several restaurants that serve only natural food. CV Gangadharan, a pioneer in this sphere, runs Pathayam in Thiruvananthapuram.

Pathayam doesn't serve the regular restaurant menu. It excludes tea, coffee, white sugar, milk, maida, chillies and many spices. For breakfast, it serves different types of puttu --- vegetable puttu, ragi puttu and jowar puttu. These are steam cooked in the traditional way in the shell of the coconut. Dosas are made minus fenugreek because then they are easier to digest.

Instead of coffee and tea, coriander coffee, that is now locally popular as Jappi, is served. Though milder in taste and stimulation, it is refreshing. Instead of cow's milk, coconut milk is added. Demand for readymade Jappi



Steam-cooked gooseberry in honey



**NIDS exhibition of homestead farming and food diversity**

powder is increasing.

Gangadharan says that he does not believe in using chillies and tamarind. "We rely only on turmeric and coriander," he says. Pickles and papad are also not served. If a sour flavour is required, tomato or lime juice is used.

His restaurant does not serve water during a meal either. "It is not good for the digestion. Neither do we provide water nor do our customers ask for it," he says. For dinner, kanji is provided with chutney and thoran. A meal of green gram sprouts is another option.

A main meal at Pathayam costs Rs 50. A breakfast is for Rs 20 or Rs 25. "If it is nutritious food you need to eat very little," says Gangadharan.

"All our customers are very health conscious," he says. "We try to be as natural as possible in all that we do but it hasn't yet been possible to ensure that every input is organically grown."

Soon Gangadharan plans another restaurant in Thiruvananthapuram. He plans to serve uncooked food only on one day of the week. "If it catches on we will add more days," he says.

The story of a company called Lumiere is interesting. It owns a restaurant called Sea Grill at Ernakulam. Manjunath, an IT professional who has returned from the US, has been growing organic vegetables on his farm for the past six years. He has not been able to sell them at a viable price. Then the idea of starting an organic restaurant occurred. A regular visitor to Grasshopper, a natural food restaurant also at Ernakulam, he knew Ambrose who was running it. Grasshopper is closed now. But they joined hands to launch Lumiere.

Lumiere, apart from using its own vegetables, sources organic inputs from different parts of the country. Vegetables from Tamil Nadu, cereals and pulses from Rajasthan and wheat flour from Himachal Pradesh and so on. Sea food and vegetarian meals are its specialties. Despite good demand, the popular parantha has been kept out of its menu. Reason: "First because organic maida is not available. Second, it has no nutritional value. It has no fibre and is full of oil."

Manjunath says: "We source most of the products directly from farmers and we pay a higher price. Our objective is to show that organic is sustainable and financially viable. Once it is profitable, more people will come into this."

All the nature food restaurants have not been a success. Some, like the Prakruthi Bhojanashala at Thiruvananthapuram have closed down. Others, despite serving good food at normal rates aren't doing very well. Manjunath clarifies: "Only when a person is ill does he start thinking about healthy food. He may go there daily too. But the majority of the people don't take link diet to health."

Manjunath believes that nature food restaurants have to make themselves attractive. "I love the food served in nature food joints. But I am not able to take my children along. They want a good place to eat in, music, a bunch of choices etc," he explains. "As they say, you have to serve the food in the new generation's format. It is just not enough to provide healthy food. Ambience and variety are also important. If it was 20 years ago, just serving the good food would have been sufficient."

Though Lumiere seems to be very successful, Manjunath observes that "very few people know what is organic. Others are used to whatever they are getting now. They aren't interested in knowing more. A serious awareness campaign by

the government and media is required."

**ROOFTOP VEGGIES:** One such effort was the Kerala government's incentive to grow vegetables on rooftops. It was called Village in a City. It was started in 2004 but unfortunately petered out.

But in two years it succeeded in developing an interest in rooftop farming among several thousand people resident in urban areas.

The Sisuvihar LP School is one place where it is still running. Though the school has limited space, the students grow half a dozen vegetables. It is used in curries for their midday meal. "Whenever related lessons come, we tell students about the poisons in food and the need to grow our own vegetables without chemical inputs", says Sindhu, the teacher in charge. "The result is that all of them know at least something about these issues."

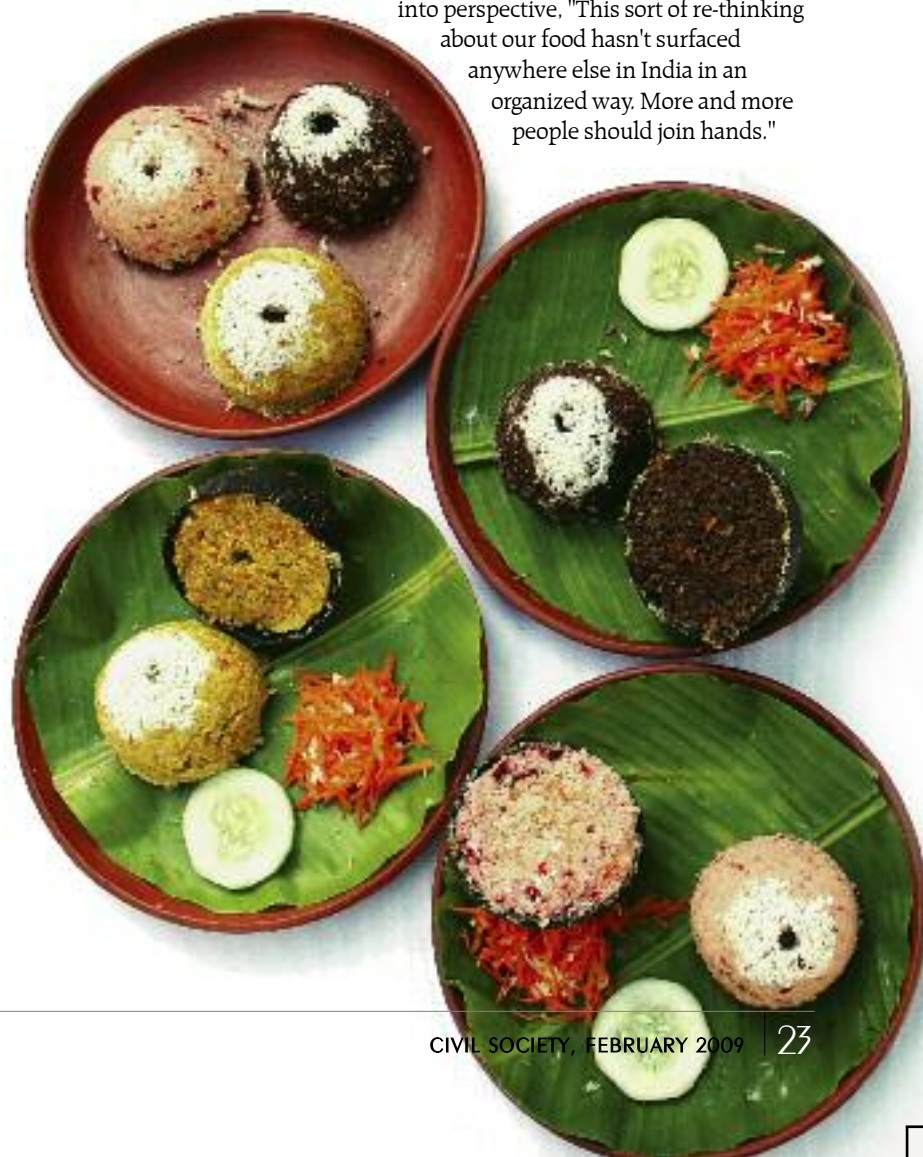
R Sridhar, the president of the parent teacher association, says: "The pride of eating vegetables they have grown themselves inspires them to discuss organic food at home and with friends."

The Neyyattinkara Integral Development Society (NIDS) reconstructed an impressive model of the Kerala

kitchen garden at the Annam festival. All the local vegetables were also exhibited. For the last one decade, NIDS has been popularizing backyard gardening integrated with poultry, animal husbandry etc. It has influenced thousands of families. An indication of NIDS' success was tangible in at the Onam feast this year. About 3,000 families had the pleasure of having at least three homegrown vegetables in their feast. "Society and the government aren't recognizing the pains farmers take to produce food. Our goal is that consumers of food should also be its producers," says Fr. D.Shaj Kumar, director, NIDS.

"The food sector is being encroached by big business. What worries us most is that we are losing our precious diversity. Once food diversity dies, agriculture diversity also has to go that way", cautions Dr.G.Gangadharan, president, CISSA. "If India stands out as a biodiversity rich nation, Kerala has a special distinction in the country. Our aim is to lend respectability to local traditional food. One of the strategies is to get celebrities to speak in defence of this kind of food so as to influence the masses."

"This is a beginning of a bigger awakening", says Radhakrishnan putting things into perspective, "This sort of re-thinking about our food hasn't surfaced anywhere else in India in an organized way. More and more people should join hands."



# “ Let food be your medicine”

Dr GG Gangadharan was one of the moving spirits behind the Annam food festival in Thiruvananthapuram. He is a respected Ayurveda physician who heads the hospital and wellness centre at the Foundation for Revitalisation of Local Health Traditions (FRLHT) in Bangalore. His column in *Civil Society* every month is hugely popular.

We spoke to him on the festival, slow food and how traditional diets can be brought back and given a contemporary relevance. Excerpts from our interview:

## What was the purpose of the Annam festival?

Growing, harvesting, preparing food and coming together to eat has been the focus of family and community life from time immemorial. It has been the social adhesive that has sustained communities. The gradual shift to new trends in eating, especially the rapid and pervading growth of fast food, is destroying this vital food culture. We have the responsibility to make better choices to create a better food chain. Educating and inspiring consumers is the most effective means to change their buying and eating patterns.

Reviving traditional food and sources of good food in the minds of people is also a big step towards reinforcing food security. The food habits of the modern era are decided by the companies that manufacture and process food. A fast-unfolding food shortage is engulfing the entire world, driving food prices to a record high. The need of the hour is to make the people aware of the importance of maintaining agro-biodiversity and dependence on traditional diversity of local foods for ensuring sustainability of resources and diversity in food. The Annam festival sought to showcase the rich agriculture and food diversity of India. It sought to establish the link between agriculture and biodiversity.

## It would seem that it is impossible to change modern living as we know it today. How can traditional eating habits and foods be popularised when lifestyles have changed and so have agricultural systems and crops?

We are poorer as the biodiversity of our farms and the cultural diversity of our food systems disappear. It is high time that we took a proactive role in moving towards a new food culture that ensures not only supply of healthy and ethically produced food but also facilitates conservation of rich biodiversity at the grass roots. Eating locally available food is now gaining importance throughout the world as a philosophy, initiated by the Slow Food Movement. It is important to fight dependence on highly processed food.

## Why have you chosen Kerala? It is after all the state with the best social indicators and any one visiting the state would think that the eating habits here are very traditional?

Kerala is becoming the epicentre of lifestyle diseases. Changes in food habits and the shift to 'fast', processed, treated and stored foodstuff of low nutritional value and the changing lifestyles could be considered as the major reason. The drastic decline in the diversity of crops and vegetables in our food also play a part towards this. Growing diverse crops and using the rich agro-biodiversity for preparing food coupled with eating it together has been the focus of family and community life and remained as the social adhesive that has sustained communities. Diversion from these habits has resulted in social tensions as well. Even though the social indicators are positive, the morbidity rate is increasing so are life style diseases such as diabetes and blood pressure.

## Are most illnesses related to changes in diet? How has the moving away from traditional eating habits affected public health? Give us your opinion as an Ayurveda physician.

Ayurveda, India's ancient science system, has given India a comprehensive system of health, diet and nutrition. India's cuisine has been shaped by this science. Ayurveda is the common thread that runs

through the various sub cultures/regions of India. Otherwise, the cuisine can be vastly different from region to region. According to Ayurveda, the best preventive medicine and support of the natural healing process is a diet and lifestyle specific to the constitutional needs of the individual and in line with the seasons and cycles of nature.

Since Ayurveda deals with a holistic approach to healing, it covers the diet factor in depth. In Ayurveda food is not only a mixture of all the basic ingredients like proteins, vitamins, fats and carbohydrates, but it is something, which serves as a source of energy for mind and soul. Food is considered to be one of the most important aspects of Ayurveda as it provides the basic nutrients, which are necessary to carry out the essential activities of digestion and metabolism. Ayurveda has categorized personality traits into three different kinds, based on food habits: the Satvic or spiritual quality, Rajasic or active quality and the Tamasic or material quality of the mind are all affected by the food we eat. Satvic food is elevating while Rajasic food leads man to a materialistic, selfish way of living. Tamasic food is one which leads to a devilish streak in a person

## What are the types of diets and foods that are being recommended?

Since diet, along with daily habits, is crucial to the health of an individual, it must be made clear at the outset that there is no standard ideal diet for all people in general as everybody has a different body structure and digestive system. Ayurveda encourages the use of herbs and aromatic spices,

which are also considered medicinal substances, to create a balanced mix of all tastes. Toxins that accumulate from improperly digested food can also be greatly reduced by slowly introducing these spices into the diet. Ayurveda knows that the action of any medicinal substance starts in the tongue, so let your food be your medicine!

## Please give us specific examples of traditional diets that promote good health. For instance, there is much confusion over the use of ghee. Most modern physicians would not recommend it, but in Ayurveda the view is different.

One of the things that Ayurveda promotes is eating food of diverse taste. There are six tastes basically and each food can be classified based on their tastes to body building, tissue depleting, improving metabolism etc., Food is considered as basic substratum, which builds not only the body but also the mind which controls our thoughts process. This paradigm of Ayurveda on food is not understood in modern dietary science.

The best example is ghee. Ghee which is properly prepared from cow's milk converted through different stages of processes, if consumed by a healthy person appropriately cannot cause any harm to the body. In fact, ghee is the only substance equated to longevity in Ayurveda if it is prepared and consumed in accordance to the shastras.



Dr GG Gangadharan

**We are poorer as the biodiversity of our farms and the cultural diversity of our food systems disappear. It is high time that we took a proactive role in moving towards a new food culture.**



# Business

- Enterprise
- Inclusion
- CSR
- ICT
- Go Green

## Ujjivan's tough competition

*Success of microfinance is spawning multiple lending*

**Subir Roy**  
Bangalore

WHEN Bangalore based Ujjivan started off three years ago it was a virtual pioneer in bringing microfinance to India's urban poor. Today, one of the key issues it faces is competition. Microfinance, in India as well as many other poor countries, has matured and this form of lending is now considered a successful business model. Hence global private equity is pouring in on the trail of high and stable returns. And, as with all successes, this one has brought problems in its wake.

But first, the story of Ujjivan. Set up as a non-banking financial company (these entities are supervised by the Reserve Bank of India), it produces detailed and highly transparent financial statements which are more common in the corporate world. One reason for this is that it has been founded and is led by Samit Ghosh, who as a banker has worked in India and abroad for names like Citibank, Standard Chartered and HDFC.

Unsurprisingly, it has won a process excellence award recently from the Royal Bank of Scotland for delivering small loans to poor people without any tangible security (only group guarantee from fellow borrowers), in the



Samit Ghosh

manner of Grameen Bank, while following efficient modern retail banking practices. It has also just raised a fourth round of private equity funding which has upped its capital over seven times to Rs 108 crore. Among its equity holders are now Unitus (through its Mauritius arm), Bellweather and Sequoia Capital.

Ujjivan spent the first 18 months of its operations developing and stabilizing its working model and since then has been growing exponen-



SHG with Shanta Kumar who works for Ujjivan

tially. Last year it added 46,000 customers, achieving a total of 68,000. In the current year (2008-09) it will add about five times more, taking the total to 290,000. Similarly, total outstandings of loans given will go up in one year to this March-end by nearly five times to Rs 170 crore. And the number of branches will go up during the year by over three times to 134. From being a south India centric organisation working only for the urban poor, it is now rapidly expanding in the east and the north and into semi-urban areas.

Ujjivan follows Bangladesh's Grameen Bank methodology by lending to women who form groups and stand guarantee for each other. It gives business loans to the self-employed; family loans to buy durables, for marriages or for medical emergencies, or even to repay high interest loans taken from elsewhere; combo loans that are for

both business and consumption; top up loans to those with a good payment record; emergency loans; educational loans and most recently housing loans for home improvement. A loan is at most for up to a year, ranging between Rs 8,000-10,000 and carries an interest of around 25 per cent per annum. There is a security deposit of 10 per cent and additional security deposit of Rs 20 per month per customer. The last can be withdrawn or adjusted with the prepayment.

There is also a prompt repayment. Ujjivan has a phenomenal repayment record of over 99 per cent. But it is still running at a loss. It lost Rs 3 crore last year (2007-08) and ended the year with an accumulated loss of Rs 5.2 crore but aims to break even in the current financial year and offer a long term return on equity of 15 per cent. In the last six quarters (till June this year) its operating



Meeting with clients

cost ratio (cost to loan outstanding) has come down by nearly half to 34 per cent. It is quickly moving towards self sufficiency. Its operational self sufficiency ratio (the amount of total expenses covered by income from operations and investments) has gone up in two years from 13 per cent to 83 per cent in the quarter ended June last year.

What makes Ujjivan tick? To find out I met some of their branch managers and young professionals. Rajat Singh, a financial analyst, is an IIT Kharagpur graduate whose background is agriculture and food engineering. When I quiz him on the knowledge of agriculture he acquired in engineering school, he confesses it was mostly centred around agricultural machinery.

But far more interesting is his take on pay and job satisfaction. He reckons he earns about 40 per cent less than some of his batch mates but reveals that, according to his information, around 90 per cent of them don't like what they are doing. Other than the few who joined firms like Hindustan Unilever and McKinsey, a lot of them, particularly those who joined IT firms because the pay offered was good, don't see much in their jobs. Singh obviously likes doing what he does.

Another young professional I meet is Navitha, who takes me through a slide presentation. She belongs to the first batch of management trainees whom Ujjivan has inducted. She earned her business administration degree, specialising in HR and marketing, from a management school in Mysore.

Ujjivan now works out of its own new premises, which strikes me as functional, spotlessly clean, unostentatious and with about the same number of computer terminals as any other modern office would have. The branch managers' meet that I sit through for a while, discusses how operations are being streamlined by rectifying defective loan applications through the help desk, removing the need to send pieces of paper back and forth unless of course it is a missing signature that has to be affixed. Today's successful microfinance organization is like any other modern office, except perhaps, that it does not look posh.

The branch managers capture the flavour at the

grassroots. Shanta Kumar works in the semi-urban areas of south Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, Jagadish in north Karnataka. Poverty levels in north Karnataka and north Tamil Nadu are about the same; south Karnataka is better off. Borrowers who own between one and four acres usually take loans for cultivation. Sharecroppers and landless labourers often take loans to rear cows and sheep. Coolies who work as stone cutters are taking loans to start their own business as stone suppliers. In semi-urban areas loans are also taken for rolling agarbatti, making papad or pickles. In urban areas it is often maids or vegetable vendors who take loans.

Talking of the challenges that lie ahead, managing director Shamit Ghosh highlights the issue of multiple lending to the same person by different microfinance organisations. "In any area that we operate four or five entities are fighting for the same customer," he says.

An IIM study in Ramnagar, a semi-urban area near Bangalore, found five to six MFIs operating there. Hence, there is extensive multiple borrowing, with on average an individual taking loans from three organisations and total borrowing being Rs 30,000-50,000. No one MFI will lend that much to one person. Such borrowers, for whom time is precious, have to spend a lot of time attending meetings of different groups of borrowers they belong to.

Lately, the more traditional microfinance organisations have started to complain that the biggies are snatching away their customers. There is talk of a self-governing code for microfinance organi-

sations but it is still a talk.

What is most serious is that, as Ghosh frankly asserts, "this multiple lending is affecting the quality of lending." He narrates the story of a lady in a semi-urban area, Dakshineswar, near Kolkata, who lives in a three storeyed 'pucca' house, has a 29" TV set in her sitting room and is a centre leader. He will not be surprised if she is a moneylender using benami borrowers to access microfinance funds to onlend at traditional moneylender rates which are typically several percentages a month. "It is these loans which are the first to default, whereas we have no problem with loans taken by the genuinely poor."

Why is this happening? Ghosh's explanation is that microfinance is now big business all over the world and there is a race to get to the top of the league tables as size is what matters. This is creating pressure on the field staff, many of whom are on incentives, to pursue customer numbers, increasing outreach, single mindedly. "Shortcuts to meet outreach targets is creating problems." Private equity players are calculating valuations on the basis of size. "They are attaching a 'lifetime revenue value per customer' of say \$50 and so if a micro-

finance organisation has a million customers then it is valued at \$50 million." He takes the words out of my mouth to recall this is the way topline were used for valuation during the dotcom and telecom bubbles. The parallel is chilling.

But where is Ujjivan in all this? It is also growing exponentially and taking on board a lot of private equity investment. Ghosh says in the first 18 months Ujjivan had only 13 branches and 20,000 customers. It started to grow fast only after it had perfected its delivery model. "We feel uncomfortable beyond the third loan for a customer. We tell our staff to avoid areas where there are already three or four microfinance organisations working." But competition is still changing lending norms. Levying the 10 per cent security deposit depends on the competition. In semi-urban areas where Ujjivan is branching out, there is no security deposit.

Besides, Ujjivan is working on a measure of impact evaluation to benchmark itself to its basic goal of fighting poverty. Its declared aim is to take a customer out of poverty in five years. But it is also keenly conscious that microfinance alone cannot remove poverty. So it has started the Parinaam Foundation to address those needs of poor families that are beyond the ken of microfinance. It will take a holistic approach to removing poverty with emphasis on healthcare, education, vocational training, job enhancement, basic community service and capacity building. So a legend should underpin its logo (the way, say, 'Applying thought' appears below Wipro's rainbow sunflower) – 'Microfinance and beyond'.



Navitha



Rajat Singh

# Bank goes to ragpickers

**Na. Karantha Peraje**  
Dharwad (Karnataka)

FOR a long time, M Dhananjaya, chairman of the Karnataka Vikas Grameena Bank, Dharwad, wanted to extend his bank's services to the ragpickers of Laxmisinganakere but he didn't know how to do it.

The ragpickers were an aloof and quiet bunch. It wasn't easy to communicate with them. They spoke a mix of Marathi and Hindi instead of Kannada and belonged to the Gosavi clan. Moreover, the ragpickers didn't exactly welcome outsiders. They were pointedly suspicious of people they didn't know.

Dhananjaya's public relations officer, Ullas Gunaga, decided to give it a try anyways and thereby fulfill the chairman's dream.

Gunaga found two key allies. One was Geeta Patil who has a teashop and STD booth right at the entrance to the ragpickers colony. As a teacher in an adult literacy programme being carried out at Samudaya Bhawan in Laxmisinganakere, she was in close touch with the ragpickers. They trusted her. Gunaga's second ally was Raju Savadatti, a social worker and now a corporator of the area.

Laxmisinganakere with 1,000 residents comes alive only after 5 pm. With Geeta Patil's help, Gunaga visited the settlement in the evening. He befriended the ragpickers and they started speaking to him about their lives. As he listened, Gunaga began to understand their predicament.

The ragpickers were society's outcasts. They began work at 4 am. With a sack on their backs, the ragpickers trudged from street to street, dustbin to dustbin rummaging for paper, metal, pipes, plastics, bucket, sheets...anything they would earn them a little money from reselling junk. On an average, each rag picker covered 30 km every day.

By evening the day's pickings would be sold to the kabari for less than Rs100 and the rag picker would trudge home. Children, left to fend for themselves, didn't go to school and took to petty crime. The plight of the aged was pathetic. Health facilities were non-existent.

Gunaga also learnt that most ragpickers were deep in debt. They borrowed from the local moneylender and most of their income went into repaying the interest on the loan. ragpickers, too, had their own dreams. Mostly they wanted to save money to build a home. But they didn't know how to do it.

"I realised building their confidence and faith



Karnataka Vikas Grameena Bank's representative handing over an ATM card at a function

was of prime importance," says Gunaga.

The bank decided it was time to step in. For a whole month, officials instructed the ragpickers on the importance of saving, how to invest, the rate of interest, the meaning of a pass book, how to deposit cash, how to withdraw money and so on.

Thirty days later, 100 ragpickers opened savings accounts. Since the ragpickers were shy about going to the bank, the bank came to them. Samudaya Bhawan was converted into a temporary bank. Geeta Patil helped collect their savings, fill up account slips, deposit the money and get the pass book updated. For photographs the bank sent a photographer at its own cost. "See, see, there is Rs 500 in my pass-book," declared Maya Kaur proudly brandishing her newly acquired pass-book.

"Weekly savings are in the range of Rs 50 and Rs 100. Earlier, whatever little the women would save, was snatched by their husbands. This does not happen any more as all the money saved is put into their savings account," says Geeta Patil.

Two Self-Help Groups (SHGs) of women have been formed, one of 28 members and the other of 15 members. They can access credit from the bank. Loans are routed through the SHG to individual members. Some of the women want to buy sewing machines to augment their incomes.

The men too are hard working. They pick up sheets discarded by workshops and convert the cloth into sacks for carrying mud. If machines are provided, the output can increase and the men can augment their incomes.

The bank intends to convert all the ragpickers into clients in the near future. "It is a long term venture with slow returns," said Gunaga. "We have come this far, which itself is an achievement."

Another facility the bank is providing is the ATM card. ragpickers don't have time to visit the bank during banking hours. They are on duty at that time. So if a rag picker needs money, he or she will have to borrow from the moneylender again. To prevent their clients from reverting to the money lender, four literate rag picker women have been given ATM cards by the bank so far. Geeta Patil trained the women on how to use the ATM machine.

Next the bank intends to tackle insurance, education, extension of government schemes, widows' pension and retirement schemes for the ragpickers. Also, Raju Savadatti has plans to improve Laxmisinganakere's infrastructure and services. "The colony does not have proper roads or drainage. Most of the houses have no electricity," he notes.

The chairman, M Dhananjaya, is very upbeat about the progress made so far. "Rag picking business is to be given a proper direction," he says enthusiastically. "We should not treat them as outcasts. In fact, 80 per cent of the waste is transported by them. It is good work."

The ragpickers now don't see the bank as some hostile entity. "When I go to the market, they greet me," said one bank official. "They are very courteous. But they will not stop to chatter, as it would delay them in the course of their 'duty' and deny them that extra rupee. They dream of sending their kids to school. ragpickers never stoop to begging. Society has a lot to learn from them."

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Ragpickers of Laxmisinganakere

**For a whole month, officials instructed the ragpickers on the meaning of a pass book, how to deposit cash, how to withdraw money, how to invest and so on.**

# Insights

- Opinion
- Analysis
- Research
- Ideas
- Angst

## No work, no pay under NREGA

MILINDO CHAKRABARTI

In an earlier article (*Civil Society December 2008*) I raised issues related to the refusal and effective rates of employment in public works under NREGS as were revealed through data from the 63rd Round of Survey conducted by the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) during 2006-07.

To recap: It was found that refusal ratios were significantly high across the country varying from 38.51 per cent in Karnataka to 89.80 per cent in Haryana. Refusal ratio among women was found to be a shade higher than their male counterparts. For a scheme that derives its significance from being compliant with the spirit of right to employment, such findings are clearly worrisome. However, the commitment to provide unemployment allowance to those refused employment has been a welcome component that enhanced the spirit of 'right to development' in a more meaningful way. Let's clarify.

As per guidelines of NREGA:

- Any individual above the age of 15 years is eligible to demand employment for a maximum period of 100 days in a year.
- The unit of registration being a household, even though every adult member of the household can be registered, the total number of employment days provided to a household in a year will be restricted to 100. Relevant job cards that incorporate the names and photographs of all adult members of the household willing to be considered for employment at the prevailing minimum wage rate are issued by the Gram Panchayat.
- A job card holder has the right to submit a written application to the Gram Panchayat demanding employment for a period of not less than 15 days.
- Employment will be provided within 15 days of application in regions within 5 km radius of the village and 10 per cent of the prevailing wage rate will be paid as extra if the distance of the work place is more than 5 km from the village.
- If employment is not provided within 15 days, a daily unemployment allowance, in cash, will be paid. Compensation provided will not be less than one-fourth of minimum wage for the first 30 days of refused employment and not less than half of



NREGA work site in Tamil Nadu

the minimum wage for the rest of the days.

In view of the high refusal ratio observed during 2006-07, it will be worth looking into the extent of compensation paid to those refused the privilege in spite of seeking employment. NSSO figures clearly reveal that no compensation was offered to the members of the households refused employment in public works in spite of their interest to join the work force. Estimates are available under two criteria – monthly per capita expenditure (MPCE) class and States/UT. To clarify MPCE refers to monthly per capita expenditure incurred by a household during 2006-07 and households surveyed have been classified under several classes depending on their estimated monthly per capita expenditure.

A family having an MPCE of Rs 380 will fall within the MPCE class 365-410. Similarly, a household registering an MPCE of Rs 2,500 will be considered to belong to MPCE class of 1155 and more. As we go down the MPCE classes, we come across richer families. The table provides an estimate of the percentage of jobseekers who complained on refusal of job opportunities under public works but did not receive any compensation. Obviously a larger value will indicate a higher awareness among the rural residents of India about their right to receive employment opportunities in public work post-NREGA.

It is interesting to note that the extent of complaint does not vary much across the gender divide at an aggregative level, even though gender differential exists across MPCE classes. No set pattern emerges about variations in differential as MPCE classes vary. The level of complaints by females appears significantly higher for households belonging to the poorest MPCE class. However, the trend reverses as one move up the MPCE class, only to record significant changes at the middle of the MPCE rung (365-455 and 580-890).

The variations look far more interesting as one looks across the states and union territories.

- None in Kerala formally complained against refusal, even though the extent of refusal was quite high.
- None among the women complained in

*Continued on next page*

### JOBSEEKERS WHO COMPLAINED ABOUT REFUSAL (Across States/UTs)

STATES/UT	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
Andhra Pradesh	21.5	20.5	21.0
Assam	56.0	39.7	52.1
Bihar	7.2	5.6	6.6
Chhattisgarh	8.2	9.2	8.7
Gujarat	2.8	4.1	3.3
Haryana	46.6	44.6	45.6
Jharkhand	0.9	0.0	0.6
Karnataka	44.4	54.5	48.2
Kerala	0.0	0.0	0.0
Madhya Pradesh	24.2	20.6	22.6
Maharashtra	20.0	17.8	18.9
Orissa	3.1	0.7	2.1
Punjab	30.1	89.6	37.8
Rajasthan	14.2	13.9	14.1
Tamil Nadu	11.3	7.7	9.5
Uttar Pradesh	0.9	1.2	1.0
West Bengal	19.7	27.6	21.4
All-India	13.9	14.0	13.9

# Ethical GPF to invest in India

KAVALJIT SINGH

**T**HE recent decision by Norway's Government Pension Fund-Global (GPF) to invest \$2 billion in Indian markets has come at a time when most foreign institutional investors are fleeing the markets.

This is a very significant development as there are very few institutional investors in the global markets who can provide liquidity when it is most needed. However, the true significance of GPF lies in its role as an ethical and socially responsible investor. The GPF was in the news last year when it sold stake in the UK-listed Vedanta Resources for alleged environmental damage and labour rights violations in its four Indian subsidiaries.

The GPF is the second largest SWF in the world with assets of over \$390 billion. It invests surplus wealth produced by Norway's petroleum sector, mostly revenue from taxes and licensing agreements. The return on the GPF is added to the Fund's capital and therefore there are no transfers to the government budget.

Thanks to rapid rise in international oil prices, the Fund has now become bigger than Norway's GDP at \$360 billion in 2007.

The Norwegian economy is a model of welfare capitalism and mixed economy, combining both free market activity and government intervention. In particular, the government controls key areas, such as the vital petroleum sector, through large-scale state enterprises. The country is rich in natural resources such as oil, hydropower, fish, forests, and minerals. Oil and gas account for one-third of the country's exports. Only Saudi Arabia and Russia export more oil than Norway.

Created as a savings fund for future generations, the GPF was established to manage Norway's petroleum wealth in a sustainable manner, helping to meet the challenge of rising pensions and social expenditures in the future.

The ultimate responsibility of the management of the GPF lies with the Ministry of Finance which issues guidelines for its investments. The Ministry of Finance has defined a benchmark port-

folio for the Fund's asset allocation. The GPF's current exposure to equities is 40 per cent and the rest 60 per cent is devoted to fixed income instruments such as bonds and government securities.

Till date, the Norwegian fund has remained a low-profile non-strategic financial investor. Though the Fund has invested in more than 7,000



Forest at Niyamgiri

companies globally, its stakes are small. The average ownership stake is less than 1 per cent. The Fund deliberately does not invest more than 10 per cent in each company to underscore its role as a financial investor.

Unlike other sovereign wealth funds from the Middle East and Asia, the GPF follows some of the strictest disclosure and ethical standards. The GPF regularly publishes its assets, investment portfolio and earnings.

In 2004, the fund adopted ethical guidelines that bar investment in companies if there are serious violations of human rights, labor exploitation, corruption or environmental damages. Of late, the GPF has made child labour an important priority of concern.

The ethical guidelines of GPF are in conformity with other international frameworks such as UN Global Compact, the OECD Guidelines for Corporate Governance and for Multinational

national average.

The revelations from NSSO survey are indeed startling. First, in spite of so many job seekers lodging complaints against non receipt of job opportunities, no one was paid any compensation in lieu of refusal. Secondly, people in many states are yet to be aware of their rights to be compensated as per the terms and conditions specified under NREGA in case of refusal of employment opportunities. One is not very sure if those refused job opportunities could not formally lodge complaints in spite of their willingness due to some extraneous reasons beyond their control.

Enterprises, and ILO Conventions.

In 2007, the GPF also published its voting records for 2007 which provides the basis for its voting decisions. The voting records reveal that the Fund engaged with several important issues such as global warming, labor standards and freedom of access to the Internet, as part of its active ownership approach. For instance, the Fund voted its shares in favor of shareholder resolutions at ExxonMobil and Ford Motor Co, calling for the companies to adopt carbon emission reduction goals.

The evaluation of the investment portfolio from ethical perspectives is frequently carried out by the Norwegian fund's Council of Ethics.

On the recommendations of the council, the fund had sold its equity stake in several major corporations in the recent past. In June 2006, for instance, the Fund sold its holdings in US-based Wal-Mart, the world's largest retailer, for "serious and systematic violations of human rights and labor rights."

The divestment process of the GPF is intentionally designed to avoid any downward price pressure in order to minimize the losses from divestment. Therefore, such penal actions had no adverse impact on the fund's financial performance.

Undoubtedly, the GPF has opened up new avenues for human rights and civil society groups to influence corporate behavior. The negative publicity generated by the Fund's disinvestment helps in creating awareness about the issues involved. For instance, the Supreme Court, while deciding on the case against Vedanta, took note of the decision of the GPF to exclude Vedanta for violation of human rights and labour laws.

The ethical guidelines and governance standards practiced by the GPF could act as a valuable reference point for other institutional investors to follow. Despite so much talk on ethical standards and investments, very few international institutional investors have actually implemented them.

*Kavaljit Singh works with Public Interest Research Centre, New Delhi.*

## Continued from previous page

Jharkhand in spite of high refusal ratio.

- Uttar Pradesh and Orissa are the other two states recording a significantly low level of complaints against refusal.

- Complaint rates are higher in Assam, Karnataka, Haryana, Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Maharashtra and Rajasthan - all recording rates higher than the national average.

- Among the women, the complaint rates are high in Punjab, Karnataka, Haryana, Assam, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Rajasthan - again well above the

Methods used to collect information on complaints during NSSO survey would neither confirm nor rule out such a possibility.

The provision of unemployment allowance is considered to be a revolutionary component of NREGA and is often hailed as unique compared to employment schemes in other countries of the world. With such a large number of willing individuals being refused employment and to top it all, refused compensation in spite of having lodged formal complaints, perhaps does not augur well for an employment guarantee scheme India is so proud of.

# Bringing down the Himalayas

HIMANSHU THAKKAR

If you are talking about the Himalayas, then *Mountains of Concrete* is not a very apt title for a report in many ways. The Himalayan mountain chain extending from Pakistan in the west to Arunachal Pradesh in the east is well known for its fragile, erosion prone nature and young age. So there seems to be a contradiction.

In fact, when a meeting to launch this report in Delhi was announced, some officials of the water resources establishment were angry. They felt this was an insult to the dam building plans of the government. But that is quite another matter.

Still, there is no contradiction here. The report in question is about dam building, or rather building of big hydropower projects in the Himalayan countries of India, Pakistan, Nepal and Bhutan and the danger such construction poses to the Himalayas. The threat from the concrete works would include huge walls damming the rivers, underground tunnels that could go scores of kilometers and could completely bypass and dry up rivers for even longer lengths, the massive blasting that would be required for those tunnels, the power houses, the roads, the townships, the mining that would be necessary to procure materials for the projects, the hundreds of kilometer long transmission lines meant for the power promised to be generated. The threats from all this is indeed of Himalayan proportions. And even if dam building cannot dwarf the Himalayas, such activity has the potential to destroy the mountains permanently.

Particularly when you consider the proportions: the total capacity that is proposed to be added just over the next 10 years in this region (in fact in just the four countries listed above, excluding the massive plans of China, which are not included in this report) is equal to 80 000 MW. That is equal to about 80 Tehri kind of projects. Think of it, a Tehri project coming up every 45 days. The estimated finances required is about \$ 95.8 billion (excluding the cost escalations, the real social and environment costs that remain non-monetised and a number of related infrastructure like the transmission lines). So it means spending about \$ 800 million every single month, for 10 years, and possibly more.

And all this, to go back to where we began, in a fragile, erosion prone, landslide prone, active seismic zone. Even more importantly, in areas like Arunachal Pradesh, which is one of a handful of biodiversity rich hotspots on the entire earth. It is the catchment of rivers that are the economic, social, hydrologic and cultural lifelines of hundreds of millions of people.

Now add climate change threats to this picture. Climate change that is already leading to receding of glaciers (which provide 70 per cent of the non monsoon flows in most of the Himalayan rivers), which is going to increase rainfall and the frequency of high intensity rainfall events, that would also add to the threat of increased events of what is called Glacier Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs in

short, which happen when the stream flow blocked by natural causes like landslides, bursts and leads to flood disasters in the downstream area), and also increased sedimentation in the streams.

The proposed hydropower plans in the Himalayas will only accelerate climate change threats. First, because, as Senior Advisor, Surya P Sethi from the Planning Commission said at the meeting in Delhi on January 12, where this report was launched, "Large water reservoirs also significantly contribute to the emission of greenhouse gases". Secondly, all the massive activities



LAKSHMAN ANAND

## Hydro project at Manali

described above for the colossal gigantic projects will make huge contributions to climate change. Thirdly, these projects would also destroy vast stretches of natural forests which are themselves huge carbon sinks and thus add to global warming.

Thus, *Mountains of Concrete*, authored by Shripad Dharmadhikary and published by International Rivers tries to give the big picture and the implications of these plans. As Mahesh Rangarajan, well known environmental historian from Delhi University said at the meeting, this report is a first step in a long journey at understanding this picture and also forging trans-national civil society alliances to fight the destructive projects.

A step in that journey was also taken when at least two persons to be affected by the proposed dams spoke up at the meeting. Ratan Bhandari from Water & Energy Users' Federation Nepal, to be

affected by the proposed 750 MW West Seti project in Nepal, said, "Unless, the people of Nepal, India and the region work together on these issues as common needs and threats, there will only be more conflicts in water and river sectors in the future."

Kebi Pulu from the Idu-Mishmi tribal community in Arunachal Pradesh, to be affected by the proposed 3,000 MW Dibang Hydropower project (if it does come up, it will be the largest installed capacity hydropower project of India) was clearly angry when he said: "The answers that the project developer National Hydroelectric Power Corporation of India gave at the so called public hearing are tantamount to killing us by torture. The environmental impact assessment of the project is totally fraudulent and in fact listed some marine animals as existing in the Dibang Valley. When we protest against such unacceptable projects, we are branded as anti national." In fact, a 33-minute documentary film 'Rhymes and Reasons of Confrontation' on the people affected by the proposed project gave a stark picture of the life of the Idu Mishmi tribal community, whose entire life supporting ecology will be destroyed by the proposed project.

In the end, the searching question posed by Rangarajan remains unanswered: Why is the dam building technology, essentially a 20th Century idea, found new force in the 21st Century? This question is also important when in the West over 500 dams have been decommissioned over the last decade, and where this technology is already described as outdated by no less than a Western media icon like *The New York Times*.

The answer will take time to arrive.

But a glimpse is provided by the list of dam projects that the now infamous MAYTAS infrastructure company, belonging to Ramalingam Raju, the biggest corporate fraud of India, has been involved. The partial list includes the multi billion dollar and already proving to be faulty Narmada Canal, the canals of the Polavaram Dam in Andhra Pradesh, that will displace close to two lakh tribals, the Larji Hydropower projects (so expensive that even the state electricity regulatory company refused to accept the stated cost), Upper Indrawati Hydropower project (so expensive and disastrous that even the dam friendly World Bank got out of the project), another hydropower project in Himachal Pradesh and two in Arunachal Pradesh. We will possibly get more such glimpses if we look at the right quarters. But I guess it will take some doing.

Till we do that, our challenge to the architecture that is pushing such unjustifiable and non developmental projects will remain significantly incomplete.

*Mountains of Concrete*, in spite of the seemingly inapt title, is a useful warning for those who are still open to such warnings.

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# Sponge iron blackens Bellary

RIFAT MUMTAZ

**T**HE fifth largest producer of iron ore in India is Bellary district in Karnataka. The district has 31 operational sponge iron units and 25 are in the pipeline. The reason is obvious – iron ore, the mineral required for the steel industry is available in plenty here. Since 2004, the number of plants has multiplied.

It's easy to understand why. The Indian steel industry is the fifth largest in the world contributing almost four per cent of total steel production. Large steel makers procure iron ore from big captive mines and regulated markets. But most sponge iron units, almost 60 per cent, are small-scale enterprises dependent on illegal mining. They do not follow any environment norms and blithely pollute the air, water and soil of surrounding communities.

**Renegade units:** Take Bellary. Till a year and a half ago, none of the sponge iron units had installed pollution control equipment like the Electrostatic Precipitating device (ESP), notes Kiran Kumar, Assistant Environmental Officer of Karnataka State Pollution Control Board (KSPCB) based at the District Pollution Control Board (DPCB) office in Bellary.

The ESPs are highly efficient filtration devices that remove fine heavy metals and gases from the discharged air stream.

The pollution board succeeded in persuading only four units in the Hospet Road area to run the ESP more regularly. "I have been trying to convince the KSPCB to put compulsion on the units to install an interlocking system between the power supply and the kiln," says Kumar. "This mechanism will ensure regular running of pollution control equipment because it automatically disconnects power supply to the kiln if the ESP is off."

According to pollution control norms, the units should conduct air quality checks regularly every month for 24 hours and forward that data to the pollution control board via testing centres. The units consistently delay submitting these reports. As a result, their data is outdated by the time it reaches the pollution board's office. To avoid delay, the DPCB installed facilities for online reporting of air quality. Not inclined to abide by the rules, the sponge iron units simply avoided submitting any online information.

"To support industries, the reports are made to show that everything is fine with the air quality," remarked a senior officer. The only testing laboratory where ambient air quality standard data can be tested is at Dharwad. According to sources, the laboratory can be pushed to giving reports favourable to the industry.

Hospet and Sandur areas are known for illegal mining and supply cheap iron ore to the iron ore crushers and sponge iron units in Bellary. Ahiraj, an activist and newspaper correspondent says, "Since July 2006, there are 221 iron ore crushers in the district. A task force comprising of the Deputy Commissioner and DPCB officials was formed by the state government to probe into illegal mining. The task force's report said the iron ore crushers are operating without permission on agricultural land and without proper machinery. The overall iron ore feed source to these crushers was from illegal mining. Their report said 150 crushers were violating rules. It suggested that these be shut down. The crushers relocated to Malappangudi in Andhra Pradesh just 10 kms away."

"During a raid the investigation team also inspected Bellary Steel on Anantpur Road. The unit failed to produce the purchase invoice of the iron ore lying within the plant compound," said Kiran Kumar. Most sponge iron units thrive on illegal iron ore purchased from the open market. The large ones like Jindal Steel Works have captive mines in collaboration with the State Mining Corporation. The Deputy Commissioner also brought to notice that the district faces an estimated loss of almost Rs 230 crores owing to the destruction of roads caused by heavy transport carrying illegally mined ore.

The irony was that this raid cost an official of DPCB very dearly. He was issued a memo by the KSPCB and litigation was initiated against him by the unit for loss of Rs 75 lakhs. It appears the task force report also impacted political equations in the district and state.

**Local impact:** "The city of Bellary is just finished," said Satyanarayan, a retired professor of English and a former KSPCB member. "Black smoke, dust, road accidents, fast depleting greenery and excessive water use are just the tip of the iceberg."

Halkundi is a village 10 kms from Bellary on NH 4. More than 13 sponge iron units operate here. A sea of coal dust is visible from the highway itself. Santosh Martin, an environmental activist says, "Most of the land close to the plant in this village has been bought by industrialists and put to industrial use without changing land status. Excess land has been used as dumping grounds for raw and waste material. None of the plants use the main stack to release air emissions. Instead they divert emissions towards the ground with the help of ID fans that diffuse the thickness of the smoke. This saves them power and cost and helps in avoiding the use of ESPs. Pollution remains."

Dr Arvind Patil, member of a citizen's group which undertakes free tree plantation, remarked that the green area development record of the sponge iron industries has been very poor. The condition by the KSPCB to maintain a minimum of five rows of trees inside and outside the unit's boundary wall is never followed. There is water scarcity since the sponge iron units extract groundwater.

"The whole issue is of money and political power," says Kiran Kumar. "We wanted to shut these sponge iron units for pollution and violation of environmental norms since we have a case against every operating unit. But political pressure is stronger than us."

*Rifat Mumtaz is with the National Centre for Advocacy Studies, Pune*

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## Heritage, rare birds at Pulicat



**Historic Dutch cemetery**  
**Susheela Nair**  
*Pulicat*

We reached the fishing hamlet of Pulicat in Thiruvallur district of Tamil Nadu after an hour's drive from Chennai. Known locally as Pazhaverkad, after the thick vegetation of Vela trees in the area, its claim to fame rests on a lagoon, a bird sanctuary and many historical monuments.

The Buckingham Canal, lighthouse, fishing hamlets, fisherwomen handpicking prawns, bullock carts and ferry boats transporting fisher folk to the seaside form the backdrop of Pulicat. In days of yore, the Portuguese, the Dutch and the English anchored their ships at Karimanal village on the shores of Pulicat Lake.

With a 10th Century Chola temple, old Dutch churches, cemeteries and a fort, Pulicat is a heritage zone. The Portuguese were the first to set foot here in 1515 AD. They built a church, Our Lady of Joys, which is now renamed, Our Lady of Glory. The Portuguese were followed by the Dutch who have left many vestiges of their histo-

ry and culture.

Pulicat was once a flourishing trading post of the Dutch East India Company which exported the famous Coromandel textiles and medicinal herbs, silks, diamonds and spices procured from

the hinterland. The Dutch built Fort Geldria which was destroyed and rebuilt several times. Today, all that remains of the fort are scattered pieces of a mud moat covered by thorn bushes. Several battles were waged over Pulicat and eventually, the British captured it in 1825. Pulicat remained in their possession until India gained independence in 1947. The heavily guarded Sriharikota Island located here houses India's space centre. Jamilabad is a nearby village dedicated to boat building and Senjamman Nagar is a tribal hamlet.

As we entered the village, the first thing that caught our attention was the Dutch cemetery and its weird tombstones. The entrance to the Dutch cemetery (now maintained by the Archaeological Survey of India) is flanked by stone pillars, each with a skeleton carved on it. The skeleton is supposed to depict life and death. The cemetery has 76 beautifully carved tombs and mausoleums with inscriptions in Dutch. The inscriptions tell us the story of the Dutch at Pulicat, from 1606 to 1698 AD.

The Adi Narayanaswamy Vishnu Temple, though in a pathetic state, is worth a peek for its architecture. One can also visit the Palmyra Leaf Cooperative Society where local women craft elegant utility articles out of tender palmyra leaves. The cottage industry articles are exported to foreign countries too! Pulicat also specialises in export of seafood like white prawns, tiger

**Continued on next page**



**Pulicat Lake**



# Lovely birds at Hokersar too

Jehangir Rashid  
Srinagar

**M**IGRATORY birds have been arriving at the Hokersar Wetland Reserve. More than the usual number is expected this year because weather conditions are favourable thanks to the early snowfall.

The birds usually begin arriving after 20 October. There is no fixed date for them to leave, but the first departures are noticed by 15 February.

The reserve is a rare and very enticing habitat, both for the birds which visit it and the human visitors who come here to spend time in the midst of pristine nature.

Mohammad Maqbool Baba, Wildlife Warden, says the reserve was kept ready earlier than usual this year as more birds were expected. The birds come from Europe, elsewhere in South Asia and Southeast Asia.

Preparing the reserve for the birds involves creating boatways, de-weeding and plugging breaches so that optimum levels of water are maintained. Artificial feed is needed for the birds when the water freezes. It is also necessary to be prepared to check poaching. Poaching used to be rampant at one time but is now believed to be under control.

The reserve is blissful at these times. Dawn arrives with the migratory birds chirping loudly. The morning sky is full of birds soaring higher and higher. The afternoons are usually quieter with the birds busy preying on fish and insects.

On average 300,000 to 400,000 birds visit Hokersar. This is an estimation as no definite data are available, says Baba. You will find the Egret, Gadwall, Pintail, Mallard, Common teal, Brahmy duck (an endangered species), Grey-leg goose, Vision, Red-crowned crane, Showeller, Star limps and many more varieties. The highest congregation of Mallards in north India is reportedly noted



YASIR IQBAL

**Birds take off at Hokersar**

here.

Migratory birds like the Cotton teal and Fizan tail jacana have stopped visiting the wetland.

"No case of bird flu has been reported here, so far. Birds are constantly monitored. We are equipped with mechanism to check it, if detected," says Baba.

Hokersar is an internationally protected wetland under the Ramsar Convention. But it is not without its problems. It was originally 14 sq km but is now down to just about half that.

Encroachments have been going on unchecked. Hokersar is surrounded by Lawaypora, Gund habitations and Srinagar-Baramulla highway in the north; Soibugh, Daharmuna and Margillar in the south; Zainakote, Haji Bagh habitations in the east and Gund Khaliq and Raki Arath in the west.

"We make all efforts to avoid poaching. Water that gets collected in paddy fields attracts birds, which increase the chances of poaching. Once they move out of the protected area there is little that we can do," says Baba.

He said that six cases of poaching were filed in court last year. "To prevent poaching we should be supported by the police and judiciary," says Baba.

The resources of the reserve are limited. Four watch towers, two boats and 20 employees are available for overall supervision of the wetland. Two guards, one daily wagger and an orderly are available in each boat.

A project for 'ringing of birds' is expected to be started soon by the Bombay Natural History Museum and Society, the oldest organisation working with birds.

## Continued from previous page

prawns, jellyfish and green crabs.

Pulicat Lake has an amazing topography, running parallel to the Bay of Bengal. It is said to be the second largest water body in India after the Chilka Lake in Orissa with small tracts of land here and there. The lake is reputed to be the breeding ground for several species of bird and marine life. White prawns, tiger prawns, mud crabs and oysters fuel a major fishing community. The Pulicat Lake falls partly in Tamil Nadu and partly in Andhra Pradesh. Many inhabitants of villages surrounding the lake make their living by fishing in it. Designated a Ramsar Site, this unique wetland system hosts an incredibly large number of migratory water birds including flamingoes, pelicans, kingfishers, storks, ducks and curlews that fly down to the lake between November and February.

According to a recent study on the Pulicat Lake by the Loyola Institute of Frontier Technology, the lake which was once 460 sq km has now shrunk to

350 sq km and its depth has reduced from four metres to 1.5 metres. This shrinkage of the lake is largely due to rapid silting of its northern end. The reduction of water spread and depth and also the silting of the mouth of the lake have endangered aquatic life in the water body. Indiscriminate fishing with fishing nets of very fine mesh which capture even tiny organisms vital to the food chain in the lake, does not allow for recharging of aquatic life in the water body.

The increase in motor boats chugging along on the lake causes disturbance to the aquatic and bird life, thereby affecting its ecology. Prawns which used to enter the lake only late at night when the water is relatively calm, have reduced in number. Large scale dumping of plastics has degraded this magnificent lake further.

During the monsoons, from October to November, the lake rises by several feet. In the dry season, from April to June, it acts as a large evaporating basin. Two rivers from Tamil Nadu and Kalangi from Andhra Pradesh drain into the lake.

In Andhra, around 4,700 hectares has been released for a marine chemicals and salt manufacturing plant. On the Tamil Nadu side, a petrochemical complex, power plant and the satellite port at Ennore Creek are major threats. Although the lake is protected, the presence of the Satish Dhawan Space Centre, ISRO's satellite launch station, and several industries discharging untreated effluents into the Buckingham Canal which empties into the lake is cause for concern.

Pollution has an adverse impact not only on all life forms in the lake and the bird population, but also on the livelihood of 40,000 people living in 34 villages. What needs to be done is to set up an independent organisation on the lines of the Chilka Lake Development Authority in Orissa for the continued ecological health of Pulicat lake. The restoration and conservation of the historic monuments in Pulicat also needs immediate attention.

Contact for details: Wildlife/ Forest Dept offices  
Wildlife Warden, Chennai (Tel: 044-24321471, 09884121414);  
DFO (WLM), Sulerpet, Andhra Pradesh Tel: (08623-242158);  
When to go: November to February.



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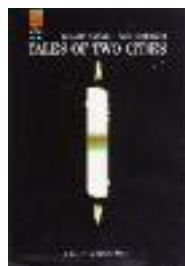
**HUMAN RIGHTS AND PEACE: IDEAS, LAWS, INSTITUTIONS AND MOVEMENTS**  
Ujjwal Kumar Singh  
Sage  
Rs 420

This book has illuminating essays which redefine peace and its connection with human rights.

Peace, we all know, is almost a pre-condition for human rights. War begets a spreading web of violence and mistrust. The state and its institutions step in to take away human rights. This is why peace has been linked only to security. But this is a narrow definition.

Chapters in the book show how peace is connected with equality, dignity and recognition of equal worth. Peace means freedom from deprivation and discrimination. Achieving peace and human rights needs democracy and political consciousness.

The book is not a fusty theoretical exercise. It is up to date and tackles real time issues faced by India and the South Asian region. Research papers include the future of SAARC, the uneasy relationship between nationalism, women and the state, dignity and Dalits, Pota and Salwa Judum. The second half of the book examines movements for human rights at a time of conflict and repression by the state. Human rights, terrorism, the insurgency in Punjab and internally displaced people of Sri Lanka are analysed. There is also an extracted chapter by Ram Manohar Lohia on the concept of civil liberties.



**TALES OF TWO CITIES**  
Kuldeep Nayar/Asif Noorani  
Lotus Roli  
Price: Rs 295

In that tortured year of 1947, Kuldeep Nayar left his beloved home in Sialkot, Pakistan, to find a new life in Delhi. In 1950, Asif Noorani

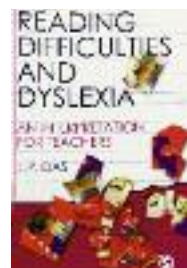
with his family migrated to Karachi from Mumbai, crossing a rocky sea on the SS Sabarmati. So many bewildered Hindus and Muslims left lives they had lived for generations to escape the communal bloodbath that followed Partition. 1947 gave birth to an intense, searing hostility between India and Pakistan which has worsened in the last decade.

Kuldip Nayar and Asif Noorani are well-known journalists. Their narrative of Partition and its aftermath is interesting because it is a personal account. Most readers will relate to the book.

Kuldip Nayar recounts how his family's peaceful life in Sialkot was disrupted when Partition happened. His father was a respected doctor and he, a law graduate. Almost overnight Sialkot turned into a hostile town as Muslims fleeing India tumbled in. The family fled to Delhi where Nayar got his first job, ironically as a journalist with an Urdu newspaper.

Asif Noorani was a child when his family set off for Karachi in 1950. He describes his life in Lahore where his father set up business with a partner. The family then migrated to Karachi and Noorani describes the difficulties Muslim migrants faced, how some of these problems were tackled and the emergence of Karachi as a cosmopolitan city. Unlike Lahore, Indian Muslims migrated here for economic reasons.

Partition and its aftermath have made Kuldip Nayar and Asif Noorani strong votaries of peace. Let's hope such lonesome voices find mass support one day.



**READING DIFFICULTIES AND DYSLEXIA**  
JP Das  
Sage  
Rs 295

This book demystifies dyslexia and brings us up to date on current trends in research. The author, JP Das, explains remediation processes a teacher could use in her classroom to help dyslexics, instead of

throwing up her hands in despair. The book would be useful to school psychologists.

In the first two chapters, the author dispels myths about dyslexia. It is not true that children with dyslexia have low IQ. He recommends the PASS (Planning, Arousal-Attention, Simultaneous Processing and Successive Processing) model to determine a child's intelligence. This system of rating assesses the many stages by which a child processes information. It helps to identify the exact stage at which the problem occurs. The author also explains how children learn to read, write, spell and comprehend.

The second part of the book deals with remediation techniques. The author emphasises that remediation has to be tailored to the individual child. The COGENT method includes several modules to tackle the exact problem the child is facing. These include 'Squeeze and Say' to help verbal and motor responses, 'Funny Relatives' to help figure out the relationship of one thing to another and 'Name Game' which assists spelling. There is also the PASS reading Enhancement Program which is for children finding it hard to read, spell and comprehend. The case studies in the book are useful.



**DISPLACED BY DEVELOPMENT: CONFRONTING MARGINALIZATION AND GENDER INJUSTICE**  
Edited by Lyla Mehta  
Sage  
Rs 295

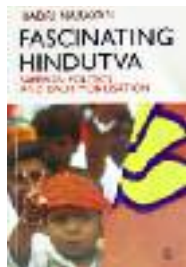
The book is a compilation of research on displacement, eviction and resettlement with a focus on its impact on women. Contributors include well known activists, researchers and representatives of peoples' movements. There is a foreword by Medha Patkar, who has led the struggle against forced eviction with passion and courage.

In recent years displacement and eviction of villages and slums has increased. But resistance has also grown stronger. It is women and children

who bear the brunt of being uprooted and this book analyses the situation from their viewpoint.

In the first part of the book Lyla Mehta analysis how policies on displacement and resettlement are biased against women, specifically in the Narmada Valley, and the impact displacement has on women: joblessness, poor health, increased morbidity, loss of common property resources amongst others. Amit Mitra and Nitya Rao, examine the gendered implications of displacement on the Santhals of Dumka. Amita Baviskar writes about the large scale eviction of Delhi's slum dwellers. Nearly three to four million have been banished. The middle class is silent.

Children suffer enormously when their homes are destroyed and this issue is analysed by Enakshi Ganguly Thukral. Yet policies on resettlement do not include child rights. Walter Fernandes discussed the loss of common property resources and its impact on women. Part Two of the book critically examines the role of the World Bank and the notion of 'eminent domain' and 'public purpose'. Deepa Shankaran writes on mining in Orissa and its impact on Adivasi women. The last part of the book focuses on peoples' movements against displacement. The first person accounts by women victims are interesting.



#### FASCINATING HINDUTVA

*Saffron politics and Dalit mobilization*

Badri Narayan

Sage

Rs 295

Badri Narayan uncovers how the Hindu Right politically mobilized the Dalits in UP and Bihar and attracted them to the BJP fold. The Hindu Right actually used culture and identity more than development. It dug out myths, memories, heroes and legends of Dalit castes. This culture was reinterpreted and connected to Hindu traditions.

Dalit heroes were celebrated either as warriors who protected the Hindu religion against Muslim invaders or as reincarnations of Lord Rama or as Hindu mythological figures. In this way Dalit folk tradition has been made part of the Hindu meta narrative. The identity of the Dalit is sought to be changed.

One such mythical hero the Hindu Right has appropriated is Bhar Pasi King Suhalddev, who is supposed to have killed Sayyad Salar Ghazi Mian, a Mughal, in the medieval period. An elaborate fair is organised by the Sangh Parivar in Chitora. The aggressive posturing by fair organisers and participants have caused a deep communal rift.

One reason why the Hindu Right has been somewhat successful is that the Dalits, who have always been denied status, hunger for recognition from the upper castes. The BJP-Sangh combine portrays them as the foot soldiers of Hinduism, a position some Dalit communities are willing to accept.

The BSP has been competing for the same vote bank, using a similar strategy. It has been much more successful than the BJP. With Dalit identity strengthening at the grassroots and more regional parties coming up, the battle for the Dalit vote bank is going to get more fierce.

# Talaab in Braille

LAKSHMAN ANAND

**A**N iconic study of traditional water systems in India and the role they play in rural prosperity is now available in Braille thanks to an initiative by the Blind Relief Association in Delhi.

*Aaj bhi khare hain talaab* is the lifework of Anupam Mishra and comes out of years of research conducted from the environment cell of the Gandhi Peace Foundation (GPF). The Hindi version of *Talaab* was first published in 1993. GPF has so far put out five editions totalling 22,000 copies.

Since Mishra and the GPF do not exercise a copyright on the contents, another 11 editions of the book have been brought out by various organisations with print runs totalling some 65,000 copies. In addition there have been translations in Bengali, Punjabi, Gujarati, Urdu and Marathi and together they account for another 50,000.

With more than 100,000 copies in circulation, *Talaab* probably holds a record among books originally published in Hindi. It has also been broadcast by some 22 radio stations.

The Braille version adds to *Talaab's* records. There are few titles (Mahatma Gandhi's autobiography being one of them) that come out in Braille. Mainly educational text-books get put into Braille. Of these too there was a shortage till the High Court in Delhi intervened.

The challenge is to go beyond text-books and bring a much wider range of reading to the blind. "A blind person is an equal member of society," says Kailash Chandra Pande, Executive Secretary of the Blind Relief Association.

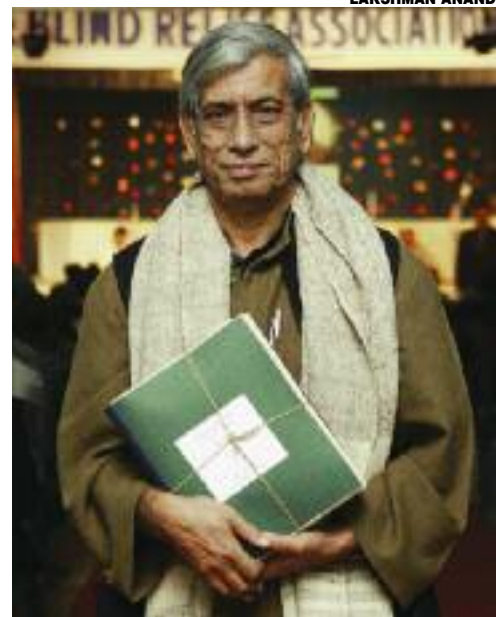
He cites the example of a blind student at St Stephen's College in Delhi University who helped conduct a survey under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme. He is now into advocacy.

So there are blind people with a keen interest in social issues. They would definitely take an interest in *Talaab*. In addition, the book would create awareness on water and its management, which is a burning topic of the day.

The problem with Braille publishing is that it is cumbersome. The paper has to be thick craft paper of between 130 and 150 GSM. Even with the help of computers that read languages and convert them into Braille, it takes a while to bring out a book.

In Hindi, *Talaab* is 120 pages, but in Braille it is 260 pages. A single copy costs Rs 270 to produce. With financial support, it will be possible to sell it for a subsidised price of Rs 135.

"We don't print many copies altogether in Braille," says Pande. "We normally print 20 or 25 copies and then print on demand. It is too costly otherwise. There is also a problem of storing the books." But how does the Blind Association know which books to publish? How did it decide to publish *Talaab*? Pande says:



Anupam Mishra

"You don't get a very large demand in Braille. What you do get are individual requests. In the case of *Talaab* it is a very fine publication and has come to be regarded as a classic. It has also been included in college curricula."

The blind have benefited hugely from computers. It is possible today to use email with voice guidance. Audio books are also available. But as technology has become available, Braille has suffered. The danger is that fewer people will be proficient in Braille, which is the grounding that they need.

In India there is the additional problem of inadequate availability of computers. Many blind people here are just too poor to be online. They need Braille for a basic education and to understand the contours of the world they cannot see. You don't get newspapers and magazines in Braille because of the cost involved and the difficulties that arise in mass production and distribution. Computers through the Internet partly solve that problem. The blind now have an opportunity to be connected and updated. But it is also necessary to ensure that Braille doesn't lose its position.

In the Delhi region, there are two heavy duty production centres at Bahadurgarh and Rohini. The first is under the National Federation of the Blind and the second is run by the All India Confederation of the Blind.

The Blind Relief Association's unit is a small one with a very limited output. It usually puts out functional material such as a guide to orientation mobility and a book on acupressure for blind people who take up massage as a career.

*Talaab* in Braille, therefore, does not come too soon. But the question is whether it will be just one of those random titles that happened to get selected or the beginning of a new trend in which the blind get the reading they deserve.

# Your personality, your diet

Dr GG GANGADHARAN



## KNOW YOUR PRAKRUTI

By knowing one's Prakruti/ constitution one can understand one's health status and select an appropriate lifestyle to suit his/her nature. It helps to understand a person's attitudes/ tastes and live appropriately by adjusting with the environment. It helps you to take control over your food habits. Selecting food items according to Prakruti will keep a person healthy. It helps to be aware about the susceptibility to diseases and to become cautious about food and deeds. It also helps to prevent diseases.

## TYPES OF PRAKRUTI

In nature, individuals with Sama Prakruti are almost absent. Those with a single predominant Prakruti are rare. Most individuals are a combination of two dominant Prakruti. In those individuals the doshas exhibit characteristic features of both the Prakruti in different intensities. Therefore, Prakruti are – Vata Pitta Prakruti, Vata Kapha Prakruti and Pitta Kapha Prakruti.

Various factors influence the Prakruti of an individual. Life is a combination of Pancha Maha-Bhutha – the five elements that constitute the Universe. They are Aakaasa (space), Vayu (air), Agni (fire), Jala (water) and Prithvi (earth). Of these five, the predominant element of the sperm and ovum at the time of fertilisation determines the Prakruti of a person.

Prakruti are influenced by Kaala garbhasaya – the time and season of conception and the condition of the uterus; Aahaara vihaara – the food habits and behaviour of the mother during pregnancy; Prathyathma – the lifestyles of the parents, their thoughts and even occupation which in turn influence the Sukra and Sonitha; Jaathi prasaktha – the unique features of the parents' race; Kula prasaktha – the unique features of the community to which the parents belong; Desa anupathini – the unique features his/her country or region of birth and, Kalanupathini anupathini - the age of the parents.

## FEATURES OF KAPHA PRAKRUTI

The skin is oily, smooth, soft, delicate and fair. Sweetness produces abundant seminal fluid. The body is compact, stable and has good body development. People in this category are slow in speech, food intake and action. Heaviness produces slowness and stability in movements. They have loss of appetite, thirst, less body temperature and they sweat much less. They have strong joints, clear eyes and clear voice. Kapha Prakruti

IN Ayurveda, the biological constitution or the genetic make up of an individual which remains constant throughout one's life is called Prakruthi - personality. The Prakruthi of an individual manifests as the physical attributes and physiological and psychological responses. 'Pra' refers to before, beginning, commencement or source of origin, in different contexts. Similarly 'kruthi' means creation or to do. Therefore, Prakruthi on the whole means 'the first formed nature' or 'the original form of the being'. Every individual is unique with a constitution of his/her own. This is called Prakruthi.

people like pungent, bitter and astringent tastes. They like dry and hot food and dislike humid and cold climates.

People in this group have excellent memory but their receptive speed is slow. They have dreams of birds, garlands, swans, rivers, lakes, ocean and romantic events. They are prosperous, self controlled, merciful, stable in friendship, lovable, generous, intelligent, greatly enthusiastic, strong, having plenty of wealth, progeny and friends. Individuals with Kapha Prakruti show certain similarities with the behaviour of animals such as lion, horse, elephant and swan due to features like strength, self-esteem, gratitude, steadiness, long standing friendships, etc.

## FEATURES OF PITTA PRAKRUTI

Pitta is described as being hot, sharp, liquid, fleshy in smell, sour and pungent. Hotness produces intolerance to heat. The facial skin is usually fair with moles, freckles, black patch, acne etc. Pitta produces excessive hunger and thirst. People with Pitta Prakruti have early appearance of wrinkles, grey hair and hair fall. Hair is usually short, scattered and brown. Their food and drink intake is more. They are intolerant to hard physical work. Liquidity produces laxity and softness in joints, muscles and profound sweating. Fleshy nature produces bad breath and body odour. Pungency and sourness produces insufficient semen and inadequacy in the sexual act.

They like sweet, astringent and bitter tastes. They crave for cold things, food and drinks. They do not prefer hot food and drinks. They usually have dreams of gold, sun, blazing fire, lightening and glow in the sky, fights, quarrels and struggles. They have moderate strength, wealth, life span, knowledge and understandings. Individuals with Pitta Prakruti show certain similarities with the behaviour of animals such as owl, tiger, bear, cat, monkey and mongoose due to features like courage, anger, etc.



## FEATURES OF VATA PRAKRUTI

Vata is described as being dry, rough, light, mobile, abundant, swift, cold, coarse and non slimy in quality. Each quality has a specific effect on the formation of Prakruti. Vata produces roughness and dryness in skin and shortness in body. The development of the body is not proper. Body strength is less, the

voice is weak, low and hoarse and these people are vigilant. It produces lightness and unsteady movement.

Vata Prakruti individuals are frail and eat less. Mobility produces instability of joints, eyebrow, jaw, lips, tongue, head, shoulder, hands, and feet. Their movement of eyebrow, lips, hands and legs are conspicuous. They are intolerant to cold. They are often affected by cold. Hands and legs are cold and it produces stiffness in the body. They have coarse hair. The hair is usually short; face, hand, feet, nails and teeth are small.

Non sliminess produces cracking in body joints. They prefer sweet, sour, and salty tastes and crave warm food, warm drinks and like warm climates. They are highly irritable. They often they have dreams of running, jumping, climbing trees and mountains. They do not readily trust others. They are unstable in mind, gait and sight, poor or medium in the sexual act. Individuals with Vata Prakruti show certain similarities with the behaviour of animals such as goat, jackal, rabbit, camel, dog, and crow due to features of restlessness, cunningness, timidity, alertness, etc.

In the next issue we will present diet plans suited to each personality.

E-mail: [vaidya.ganga@frrht.org](mailto:vaidya.ganga@frrht.org). Dr GG is a senior physician with FRLHT, Bangalore.

# Tips for a new, spiritual you

SAMITA RATHOR

**S**PIRITUAL development is the key to inner awakening. It brings us closer to our true nature and self. Spiritual growth is the rising of the consciousness beyond mundane existence, and awakening to some Universal truths. It means going beyond the mind and the ego and understanding who you really are.

Spiritual growth is a process of shedding our wrong and false ideas, thoughts, beliefs and perceptions and becoming more conscious and more aware of our inner being.

Once we discover who we really are, we take a different approach to life. We learn not to let outer situations pressure our inner being and state of mind. We manifest equanimity and objectivity. We give rise to the growth of inner power and strength, the key tools to a peaceful existence.

You can walk on the path of spiritual growth and at the same time live the kind of life you choose. You do not have to live an isolated life in some far away place.

Ask questions. Why do we always pretend? What are we trying to achieve? Why do we try and hide our real self?

If the inside and outside is the same then there is harmony with the self. If the inside and outside is not the same it causes disparity which emerges in the form of fears, insecurity, aggression, depression and restlessness. A little bit of self contemplation could lead to answers to some of these questions. By contemplating on the self we open the doors towards spiritual growth.

It's better late than never and the time is always

## SOUL VALUE

right to implement any kind of positive change. Start today. Start now.

Here are some tips that could help you take the first steps towards a constructive change. A constructive change is the foundation for spiritual enhancement.

- Focus and appreciate what you already have as opposed to what you don't.
- Do not assume or make judgments on anyone and anything.
- Accept others for who they are.
- Reciprocate a kind gesture.
- Don't hold anger for too long. Let go.
- Do not encourage anything negative around you.
- Do not try and control other people's lives according to your feelings or ideas.
- Do not support any negative or wrong action.
- Take responsibility for your own actions.
- Overcome your ignorance and keep working towards deleting it rather than accumulating it.
- Be kind to animals and those lesser than you.
- Be a good human being not to please others but for your own sake.
- Be honest and do not hesitate to speak the truth.
- Think twice before you say anything.
- Remember life is full of ups and downs.
- What is most important is to face ups and downs with equanimity to help manage one's life more systematically and efficiently.
- Eat right and in moderation.

- Respect your body and keep it going. Do not compromise on sleep.

- Do not gossip or hurt feelings of others.

- Donate to those who are in need.

- Smile. Not only is it beneficial but also improves the quality of life. And remember it requires no special gadget.

- Pray and thank the universe for giving you what you got. Remember it could have been a lot worse.

- Read books written by pious people who have experienced spiritual growth. There is no dearth of such people, especially in India.

- Training the mind to be quiet for five minutes everyday (to begin with) through concentration and meditation techniques will give mind control.

- The truth is that you are a soul with a physical body which is just a covering and not the other way round. By understanding and accepting this concept you can really change your attitude towards many things in your life.

- Always think positive. If you find yourself thinking negatively, immediately become aware of it. By doing so you will be conscious of your negativity.

- Develop the happiness habit by always looking at the bright side of life. Happiness comes from within. Do not let your outer circumstances decide your happiness for you.

- By exercising your will power and decision making ability you can strengthen and gain mind control.

- Develop tolerance, purity, progression, patience, tact and consideration for others.

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## CHIKANKARI-BATIK FUSION

Fashion pundits predict fusion is going to storm fashion ramps in 2009. And the spotlight will shine on chikankari from Lucknow. The chic salwar kameez with ethnic jewellery and a stole will be the look to watch out for.

"The demand for mukesh work, beads and stones all woven into the chikankari designs mixed with a batik background have really become popular.

I am expecting demand for such apparel to go up here and abroad in 2009.

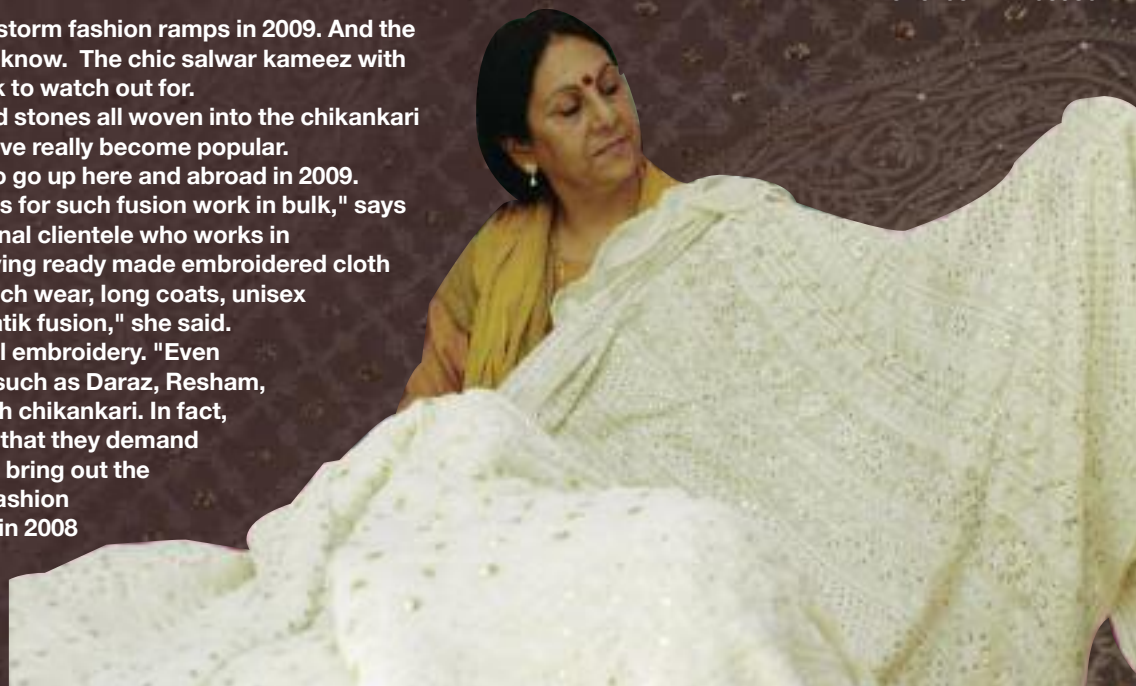
Buyers from Chennai are sending us orders for such fusion work in bulk," says Veena Singh, a designer with an international clientele who works in Lucknow. "International designers are buying ready made embroidered cloth and designing it into western blouses, beach wear, long coats, unisex kurtis and kabayas with the chikan and batik fusion," she said.

What is also attracting buyers is traditional embroidery. "Even lesser used and quaint embroidery styles such as Daraz, Resham, Meenakari and Kundan are being used with chikankari. In fact, Western buyers are so excited with fusion that they demand it to be done with simple cotton threads to bring out the look," says Vikram Mahendra, a budding fashion designer. Even the Lakhme Fashion Week in 2008 had some eye catching men's wear with chikan and batik which was very well received.

— By Anjali Singh

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# Revisiting the forest rights act

RITA ANAND

WHEN the UPA government took office five years ago, it roused many hopes in the hearts of activists. The coalition government's Common Minimum Programme looked promising. There was the National Advisory Council, all set to push forth legislation which peoples' movements were passionate about – the right to information, employment guarantee, a rehab policy and so on.

The UPA government managed to pass these laws in Parliament. It will be remembered for some truly landmark legislation. The government can thank the activists for the pressure that they put.

Yet, there is some disillusionment among peoples' movements about certain policies of the UPA, most notably, the SEZ policy, the bungling over the rehab bill, Bhopal, Vedanta and what activists see as the government's cosy relationship with industry at the cost of the people.

There is also a sort of tiredness over implementing this basket of legislation. True, activists fought for these laws. But there is impatience with the bureaucracy and a sense that some states are not acting with full sincerity.

Take, for instance, the historic Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, which Parliament passed in December 2006. Forest rights activists held rallies and *dharnas*, garnered political support and shouted down the hysterical wildlife lobby which said the new law would ruin forests and wildlife.

For all their efforts, forest rights activists found that the wildlife lobby managed to get its chunk of flesh by declaring certain areas as 'critical wildlife corridors' and thereby cutting off more land where forest people won't be able to get rights.

Despite this, the activists gamely accepted the new legislation. As Ashok Chaudhury, convener of the National Forum of Forest People and Forest Workers, (NFFPFW) put it, for the first time they had a law that recognised the rights of tribals and forest people.

Just like people live in cities, tribals, nomads, pastoralists, historically lived in forests. The British converted forests into government property to extract timber. Forest communities got thrown out and were branded as 'encroachers'. The *taungiyas*, brought here as slave labour, also settled in and around forests with no legal rights.

Since in India we continued with the forest policy of the British, tribals and forest people continued to live precariously in and around forests, subjected to harassment and the threat of eviction by the forest department. Such villages were given no access to health care, schools, roads or any basic facilities. This is an important reason why tribals and forest people are the poorest communities in India.

Now under the new legislation, they can get legal rights to small plots of land which they have been living and cultivating. The new law also recognises their right to collect forest produce and

to protect the forest.

## Ground reality

But let's look at the ground reality. Are tribals and forest dwellers finally getting land tenure and resource rights in the forest?

Well, the NFFPFW now battles the forest bureaucracy and indifferent state governments to implement the new law. Roma, an activist, was thrown into jail under a draconian law. At the Rajaji National Park, even the orders of the



spunky Nainital High Court, the first to enforce the new legislation, were ignored by the arrogant forest bureaucracy.

The Campaign for Survival and Dignity, a forum of 200 grassroots groups, has also been trying to implement the new legislation. They too get stonewalled by irritating roadblocks invented by the bureaucracy.

This is what they have to say:

To give land titles, a process has been spelt out in the law. Land rights have to be first verified by a forest rights committee of about 10 to 15 people who are local residents. After verification, the forest rights committee places its recommendations before the gram sabha (village assembly) which makes the decision.

To set up a forest rights committee, a gram sabha has to be called. But gram sabhas can be called at three levels – as the assembly of all voters in a gram panchayat, as the assembly of all the residents of a revenue village, or as the assembly of the residents of a hamlet.

Ideally, the gram sabha should be called at the smallest level, that is, either at the hamlet level or revenue village level. It should not be called at panchayat level because a typical panchayat consists of many revenue villages and hamlets and hence meetings would be large, unwieldy and less democratic.

The Act too specifically says gram sabhas

should be called at revenue village level, and in Scheduled Areas, at hamlet level. Yet, in almost all states, gram sabhas are being called at panchayat level.

Secondly, no deadlines should be set. The Rules only state that, from the date on which the gram sabha calls for claims, the claims should be filed within a period of three months. The gram sabha may extend the deadline if required. Yet states are setting short 'deadlines' and declaring that no claims will be accepted after those dates.

Verification of rights is the job of the forest rights committee. Yet in Rajasthan, Gujarat and West Bengal, the forest department insists its approval is required for every spot verification. In Madhya Pradesh, the sub divisional level committee which screens the gram sabha decisions has been granting the forest department veto power over rights claims.

The Act and Rules spell out the evidence required while filing claims to land. Yet some states add on additional evidence and verification forms which require the signature of an official.

## Green gold

So far the new law has been seen as a means to settle land claims and provide security of tenure. Actually, as campaigners say, it goes way beyond that. "The most powerful sections of the Act concern the community's right to manage, protect and conserve forests, the first steps to a genuine democratic system of forest management," points out the Campaign for Survival and Dignity.

The income of some of the poorest communities in India could change dramatically if they were genuinely given user rights to forests. They could organise, collect and sell non timber forest produce and also undertake conservation. Joint forest management has failed because states do not share profits fairly with communities though they are happy to use them as labour.

Minor forest produce like honey, neem and amla has a big market. These leaves and shoots are used by the herbal and pharmaceutical industry. In Madhya Pradesh where 31 per cent of the area is classified as forest, the income from minor forest produce has been rising and now fills state coffers. Andhra Pradesh, too, has been depending on income from minor forest produce.

Are states willing to pass on this revenue to the poorest communities in India? They will not. This explains their reluctance to fully implement the new legislation. Like the British, the states do not want to give up their zamindari over forests.

It is time to fully implement the new forest rights law and move on to community managed forests. This can enrich communities and green our forests. The forest department should just be a good regulator. Let's liberalise, but let's do so inclusively this time.



# Changing Lives.

## Empowering Self Reliance.



Empowerment of Women



Self Help Groups

Income Generating Projects

### my story...

"I belong to a family of agricultural labourers and our income is largely seasonal. Though I dreamed of earning a regular income, I needed some activity that I could do from my home. Being a member of a Self Help Group, the opportunity knocked at my door when Srinivasan Services Trust started tailoring training program in my village. After completing the one month tailoring programme, I availed of a group loan of Rs. 5000 to buy a sewing machine. I now earn Rs.150 per day which gives me a steady income of Rs. 3000 per month, working from my home."

**Jayavidhya, Kalasamudram Village,  
Polur Block, Thiruvanamalai District.**

### Sowing the seeds of Change. Continuously.

	05-06	06-07	07-08
Self Help Group Savings in Bank	98 Lakhs	1.45 Crores	3.04 Crores
Financial Assistance Received from Banks	4.95 Crores	7.33 Crores	11.08 Crores
Savings Bank Account	11773 Nos	14477 Nos	21188 Nos
Earning through Income Generation	800 to 1500	1000 to 2100	1500 to 2500

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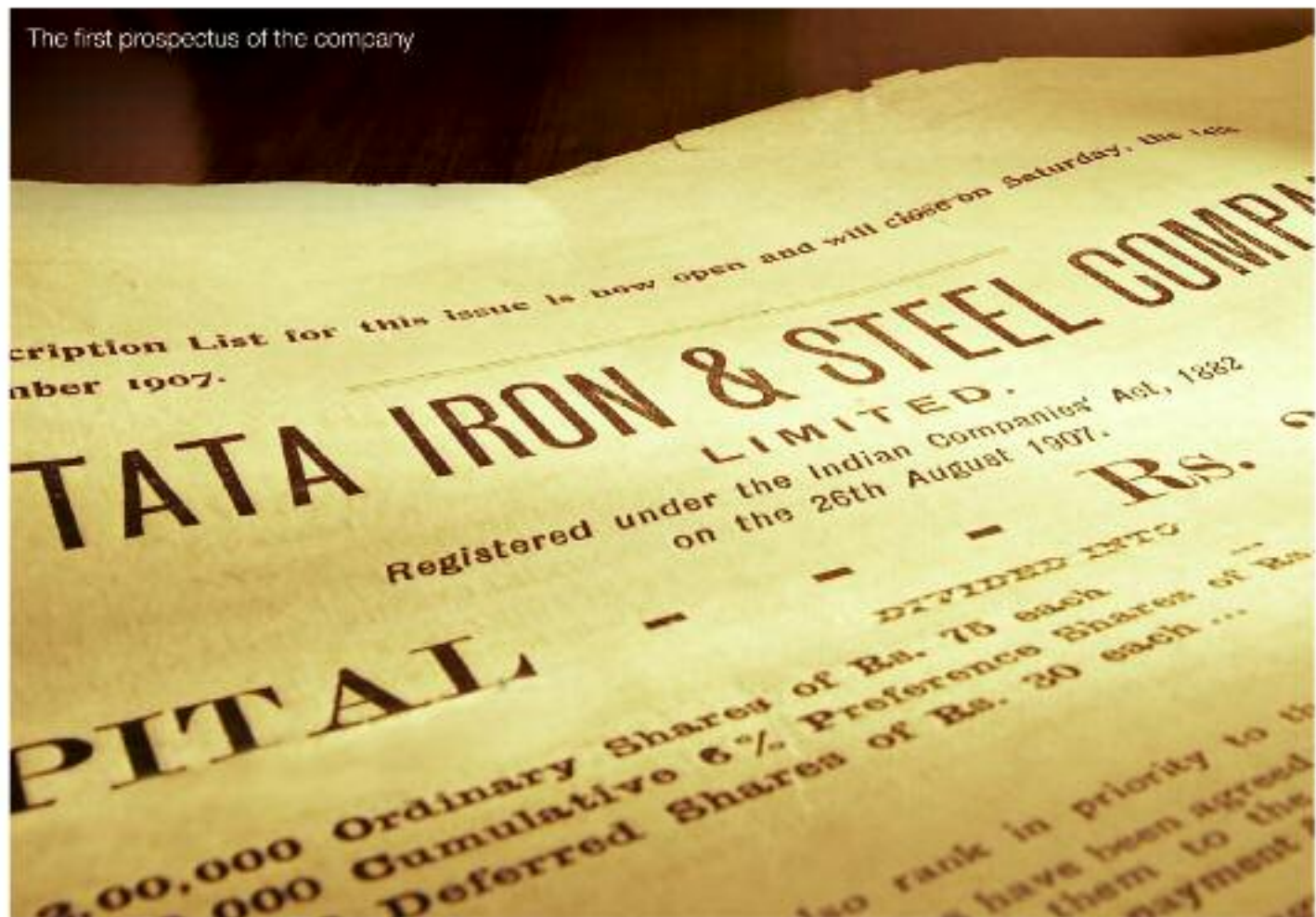
# Celebrating a hundred years...

of values as enduring  
as the steel we make

26th August, 1907 was a momentous day in the history of our nation. It marked not just the formation of our company, The Tata Iron & Steel Company Limited, now Tata Steel, but the birth of the Indian Steel Industry. Since then, never losing sight of the values propounded by our Founder Jamsetji Nusserwanji Tata, we continue to create wealth and well-being for the communities and the nations where we operate. Making business a tool to improve the quality of life, we follow the highest standard of corporate governance, delighting customers, reinforcing the trust all stakeholders repose on us, filling every member of the Tata Steel Family with pride.

On our hundredth year, we continue to enhance India's stature on the global stage and look forward to enriching more lives across more communities for another hundred years and more.

The first prospectus of the company



## TATA STEEL



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