

Civil Society

10 DOCUMENTARIES TO SEE IN 2017

OUR GRANDPARENTS' HOME | AN INSIGNIFICANT MAN | CECILIA | INDIA IN A DAY

THE IMMORTALS | MEMORIES OF A FORGOTTEN WAR | SAEED MIRZA

GODS IN SHACKLES | 18 FEET | MOSTLY SUNNY



Sunny Leone in Mostly Sunny

FIGHT TO SAVE OLD GOA

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Independent voices

WITH information increasingly adrift in the choppy waters of the Internet on the one hand and dominated by strong corporate interests on the other, the need for independent and identifiable voices keeps growing. A complex world deserves many stories and they should come from sources that aren't enslaved by technologies and market forces. Documentary films, in this regard, can be very valuable because of the insights they provide into lives and developments. Small efforts, undertaken mostly with spirit and conviction and at a safe distance from box-office ambitions, tend to be honest offerings. You know where they are coming from and you are free to like, dislike and disagree as you may choose.

Civil Society has been reporting on cinema for a long time now. We've also looked at documentary films, but with this cover story we have attempted a listing. Remember it is by no means a rating and as lists go it is not exhaustive. So take it for what it is — a bunch of documentaries we've come across and are happy to bring to your notice. What is interesting about the list is the range — the films go from Sunny Leone to the Aam Aadmi Party and Dalit concerns. It is the kind of diversity we like to present in this magazine.

India's future is linked to its cities. But urban governance is in a mess and it should worry all of us a great deal. Those of us who live in Delhi and the rest of the National Capital Region are aware of its rapid decline. Much the same is the case with other cities, big and small, in the country. Multiple crises haunt them. Can things improve? Will civic administration get better? Or is this a downward spiral from which there will be no return? One reason we should have hope is that the world over cities have clawed their way back from a very poor quality of life. So, we have examples we can learn from. But it is not easy and the urbanisation India is experiencing comes with its own complexities. Better systems will make a difference, but finally it is civic leadership and a responsible citizenry that will make the difference. Right now both are scarce in India. Councillors and mayors, who should be providing the leadership, are way down the political pecking order. They just don't get listened to and they lack the capacity to have a modern and sustainable strategy for the huge territories they are supposed to govern.

But there are also fireflies who provide hope and we are always happy to bring you their stories in the belief that they point to the future. So it is that we have an interview with Manas Fuloria on Gurgaon. Manas runs a software company, but it is with amazing dedication that he pursues the mission of transforming Gurgaon and its hinterland. In this interview he tells us how he thinks it can be done. We also have stories from Chennai and Goa where citizens are trying hard to improve urban spaces — bringing back indigenous species of trees and protecting heritage. It is not easy to undertake such efforts.




COVER STORY

10 documentaries to see

We cast our net to bring in an interesting catch of documentary films that will be worth watching in 2017. Some are just out and others are ready to be released.

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Harvesting Rain for Profit

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

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

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

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

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TVS MOTOR COMPANY

Post Box No. 4, Harita, Hosur, Tamil Nadu Pin: 635109
Phone: 04344-276780 Fax: 04344-276878 URL: www.tvsmotor.com

Publisher
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A-16 (West Side), 1st Floor,
South Extension Part 2,
New Delhi -110049.
Ph: 011-46033825, 9811787772
Printed and published by Umesh
Anand on behalf of Rita Anand,
owner of the title, from A-53 D,

First Floor, Panchsheel Vihar,
Malviya Nagar, New Delhi -110017.

Printed at Samrat Offset Pvt. Ltd.,
B-88, Okhla Phase II, New Delhi - 110020.

Postal Registration No.
DL(S)-01/3255/2015-17.
Registered to post without pre-payment
U(SE)-10/2015-17 at Lodi Road HPO New
Delhi - 110003 Registered with the
Registrar of Newspapers of India under
RNI No.: DELENG/2003/11607
Total no of pages: 36

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EMPOWERING DIFFERENTLY-ABLED



Himalaya has partnered with 'The Association of People with Disability (APD)', a not for profit organisation based out of Bengaluru to support and empower people living with disabilities.

Too often people who are differently-abled are barred from the public sphere, pushed to the margins of society and end up living in deplorable conditions with little or no income. Every year, 70 associates who are differently-abled are trained on a 'medicinal plant program' which enhances their knowledge and know-how on select medicinal plant cultivation.

This program is not just limited to classroom concepts, but Himalaya also provides quality seeds to the associates and imparts best practices on how to increase yield. Additionally, cost of packaging materials and transportation is borne by Himalaya.

Himalaya is also raising funds for other rehabilitation programmes for APD through campaigns and tie-ups including our employees. We are hopeful that through this program, differently-abled person will gain self-confidence and build their self-esteem.

Himalaya
SINCE 1930

VOICES

IN THE LIGHT

SAMITA RATHOR



LETTERS



Water guru

I read about the death of Anupam Mishra, for whom I had great regard, in your magazine's January issue. Your article, 'Water guru is no more,' adds to my profound regard for him as an ardent lover of nature and natural ponds, coming as I do from a family that was brought up around the beautiful ponds of central Kerala's paddy fields.

I had been avidly reading Anupam's writings and, if my memory is right, it was he who advised me in 1997 at the Gandhi Peace Foundation (GPF) to visit the Gandhian institutions in Uttarakhand. I was deeply moved by the affectionate reception I got at GPF. My profound respects to this great lover of Mother Earth. May we try our best to keep alive his traditions.

Uncle Moosa

Really sorry to lose such a remarkable person of great integrity and deep insights into the issues facing rural India.

Nila Vora

Your article on Anupam was beautifully written. I was lucky to have known and interacted with him during my Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) days in the early 1990s. What a soft-spoken, immensely knowledgeable and kind person he was! Thanks to him, GPF gave a lot of support to NBA, including use of their building for meetings, press conferences and as a place to just go and get some refuge on hot summer days. India shall truly miss this man!

Rahul N. Ram

Thank you for this tribute. It does justice to Anupam's work and shows how vital he was to the world of water justice. Thank you also for highlighting the ethical manner in which he worked: such a rare quality today. He was a poet and a visionary, yet so practical and down to earth. We will miss him.

Amita Baviskar

May his soul rest in peace. He was a legend in our society and nation in the water sector.

Bhagwat Prasad

I heard about the unique efforts in the water sector by Anupam, the great inspirer, at a Vidya Bharati meeting and was really motivated. Let all of us be committed.

N.S. Rawal

Anupam was a truly great personality, yet very humble. It is rare in today's world.

Vandana Kulkarni

MFI and cash crunch

Your interview with Ratna Vishwanathan, 'MFIs have coped but going cashless is tough,' was an informative and eye-opening article. The MFI sector is still not well understood. MFIs, it seems, went through an existential crisis and survived thanks to their stellar work, the RBI's receptiveness and MFIN. I wonder when things will be back to normal.

Vivek

Nice details about the MFI sector, the worst affected by the cash crunch. The government should consider the practical difficulties of microfinance borrowers, who are at the bottom of the pyramid, and relax bank withdrawals for them.

Chetan

Kumarakom

Thanks for Susheela Nair's article, 'Tourism makes Kumarakom smile.' We visited Kumarakom three years ago and stayed in city hotels. Only once did we travel to Kumarakom's lakes and canals on our own. It was a truly memorable journey.

Next time, we will certainly try to avail of the Kerala government and village panchayats' rural tourism offer.

Gurmel Mouji

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Mail to: The Publisher, Civil Society, A 16, (West Side), 1st Floor, South Extension - 2, New Delhi - 110049.
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‘Gurgaon can be a walkable, cyclable city one day’

Manas Fuloria on Vision Zero for road safety and urban mobility

Civil Society News
Gurgaon

GURGAON'S rapid growth has come with wide roads, lots of cars, gated communities and shopping malls. It is the exact opposite of the evolved urban experience elsewhere in the world, which is defined by mixed land use, integrated transport, low emissions and inclusiveness.

India's fastest growing and newest city is, in fact, out of date in the priorities it has chosen for itself. But can it be reinvented? Can the clock be turned back?

There aren't many who are ready to give Gurgaon half a chance because its problems seem to have shot out of control. Garbage, traffic, drainage, foul air, crime, water — you name it.

But there are also those who are solid believers that change is possible and they aren't giving up. They think the right trigger can make all the difference. When cities like New York have gone through transformations, why not Gurgaon?

Among the believers is Manas Fuloria, CEO of Nagarro, a software company. He's been cycling to work every day and encouraging Nagarro's thousands of employees to do likewise or at least use carpools.

As the Chairman of NASSCOM's Haryana Regional Council, he has also brought the World Resources Institute (WRI) and the Haryana government together for Vision Zero, an initiative which seeks to eliminate deaths in road accidents.

The idea is that if road accidents can be eliminated through urban design and traffic engineering, and space can be created for pedestrians and cyclists, a great many other changes can follow. People can actually begin to envision life in a city differently.

Civil Society spoke to Fuloria on Vision Zero and what he believes can be achieved.

NASSCOM is teaming up with WRI and the Haryana government for Vision Zero. What is this all about?

Vision Zero is a concept that started in Sweden

about 20 years ago and has since been adopted by major cities such as New York.

WRI recently introduced this concept to India with a conference in Bhubaneswar. We at NASSCOM Haryana have been pushing modern transportation-related topics quite aggressively, so we embraced Vision Zero as another means to the same end.

NASSCOM Foundation, WRI and the Haryana government are finalising an MoU which will have us collaborate across the state to bring down road fatalities dramatically.

The things that are remarkable about this Vision Zero approach are: (a) No road fatality is considered acceptable so all means are permissible to reduce



Gurgaon's traffic jams are now an everyday reality

‘We are going to hire a bunch of road safety associates and allocate each to a district for perhaps six months at a stretch.’



Manas Fuloria (third from left) cycles to work and encourages his employees to cycle or use a carpool

them; (b) human error is no excuse for a fatality; (c) the focus is on the most vulnerable segments — pedestrians and cyclists, children and older citizens; (d) infrastructure design is a big area of intervention.

This seems like just another one of those ideas. You have had Raahgiri and car-free days and none of them has worked. How much of a chance should we give Vision Zero?

First, I wouldn't say that Raahgiri and car-free days haven't worked. While they haven't yet led to a wholesale change in our urban transport paradigm, at least the conversation has changed. Pedestrianisation is being talked about increasingly — Connaught

Place in Delhi is moving from a weekly Raahgiri to a three-month experiment with pedestrianisation.

The car-free days led indirectly to the odd-even experiment in Delhi and it at least made a majority of us see the link between private vehicles and air pollution. We have to be patient with the long arc of history in the making! All over the world, changes like these have taken a decade or two to really have an impact.

Still, if you are a cyclist in Gurgaon, you will agree that the way drivers treat you has changed, even if just a little.

Are you saying that Vision Zero on road fatalities

is the fulcrum on which a new approach to urban governance can be put in place?

I am not an expert on urban governance. But I do know (and have experienced) that the modern ideal of cities is one of walkable streets busy with footfalls, public transport, mixed use of areas, and so on. We have been going in the other direction: of segregated business, residential and market sectors, of gated communities for those who can afford them on one end and slums on the other, of highways in the middle of cities, of cities where it is unsafe to walk because everyone would rather take a car if he or she can afford it. And, of course, the lousy air.

We have tried to approach this from the point of view of walkability and cyclability (Raahgiri) and public transport (car-free days). But Vision Zero, taken to its logical end, also makes cities more walkable. So it is another approach to the same ideal.

So what you are saying is that when you get down to dealing with road fatalities, a whole lot of other systems fall into place and these collectively make urban governance and the urban experience better.

A disproportionate number of road fatalities are those of pedestrians and cyclists. Note that all public transport users are pedestrians for part of their journeys. So, ironically, we are putting in danger the users of sustainable transport options.

All the while we are cutting trees to widen roads to move cars along faster and even putting up barriers to stop pedestrians from crossing city streets.

So a reorientation of our mindsets to prevent road fatalities in a sensible, modern way that puts pedestrians and cyclists first would eventually lead to a better urban experience. Take a look sometime at NYC's key road projects (it's on the web) — almost all of them have to do with better pedestrian and cyclist experiences.

All that you mention is serious stuff. It requires a high level of expertise. Currently it doesn't exist in government.

Unfortunately, the level of expertise is indeed limited, both in terms of the broad concepts and in terms of the detailed interventions required. Also, people are not educated enough, and the media amplifies the myopic middle-class cry that “the roads are jammed so we need even wider roads”.

Speeding down these very same roads in non-peak hours causes a ton of fatal accidents, e.g. when pedestrians have to run across several lanes of traffic. This is why we have roped in WRI India and others to support the process.

We are going to hire a bunch of road safety associates and allocate each to a district for perhaps six months at a stretch.

They will collate historical accident data and also join first responders to major accidents to collect information in a modern, structured way. This data will be analysed by experts to come up with recommendations.

The really interesting question is how the government will organise itself to respond to these recommendations, but I am hopeful. Incidentally, this programme is loosely modelled on the Good Governance Associates programme that the Ashoka

University is running with the Haryana government.

Not many people give Gurgaon much of a chance. It seems in too much of a mess. You and many other businesses are heavily invested here. What do you think?

I have great hopes of Gurgaon. We are one of the newest major cities and perhaps the fastest growing, we have one of the highest proportions of professionals, we have one of the highest per capita incomes.

For better or for worse, we are perhaps the embodiment of the new India. Unfortunately, we started off on the wrong foot, as an American-style car-centric suburb of Delhi rather than as a real city.

If we can embrace the modern city ideal we can go very far. I am happy to note that the government is gradually picking up on this theme, but we, as citizens, need to be far more educated and aware. I do hope Gurgaon can be a beacon to the rest of the country one day.

What is the role municipal administrations should play?

Municipal administrations need to embed the modern ideal of the city in their planning and execution. They need to invest in the infrastructure that supports this modern ideal (public transport, pedestrian facilities) rather than on the old stereotype of the American suburb (wider roads, gated communities).

At the more mundane end of things, they need to organise themselves to act on the recommendations of the Vision Zero experts to make city roads safer. ■

To save Old Goa, people speak up

Abhinandita Mathur
Panjim

WITH its stately and historic churches, Old Goa attracts thousands of tourists every year. But, despite being declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2012, the city is a picture of neglect. The Save Old Goa Committee has been holding regular protests to get the apathetic administration to spruce up the city and lay down regulations.

Constructed by the Bijapur Sultanate in the 15th century, Old Goa was the capital of Portuguese India from the 16th century. But in the 18th century plague struck the city and it was abandoned.

The area is an apt heritage zone. The famed Basilica of Bom Jesus is located here and the inflow of tourists peaks in December at the time of St. Xavier's Feast.

The 'arrangements' made during this time are temporary and fail to solve the actual issues, say committee members.

John Valentino Carvalho, founding member of the Save Old Goa Committee, explains why they are angry. "In 2009 some of us who volunteer at the church came together to highlight the problems of this place. That year the International Film Festival of Goa coincided with the St Xavier's Feast, drawing large numbers of tourists to Old Goa. It caused absolute mayhem. The chaos continues as authorities fail to provide basic amenities and a concrete vision. Parking, traffic, lack of public toilets and garbage bins are a few of the problems that could be tackled but remain neglected."

"In fact, problems have only increased over the years. We must question the ad hoc construction, unorganised vendors and illogical development happening all around. Our vision is to implement a holistic master plan for Old Goa to develop and protect the land in and around the area in an appropriate manner."

Francisco Fernandes, another founding member of the committee, works as a librarian at the Goa Medical College. He says, "A place this important needs to be treated with respect and made into a model site for heritage and tourism. Unfortunately, we are far from it. There have been several illegalities yet no action has been taken by the concerned authorities. In spite of several written complaints submitted by us, and protests, the concerned authorities are indifferent. It is beyond our comprehension why no action has been taken."



A view of Old Goa. The entire quarter is a heritage zone and needs sensitive protection



Francisco Fernandes: 'Treat Old Goa with respect'



Old Goa is crowded with cars and littered with garbage

PICTURES BY ABHINANDITA MATHUR



John Valentino Carvalho, founding member of the Save Old Goa Committee

'The local community must be made a part of every planning process to conserve, protect and promote Old Goa.'

Fernandes points to the garbage dumps that dot every nook and cranny of the old city. "See, the parking area here is full of garbage. When a tourist steps into Old Goa, the tone is set. They too add to the litter. If we are not going to set the rules and provide bins, how much can we blame them?"

Tallulah D'Silva, a well-known Goa-based architect, points out, "Since the site has a number of heritage buildings, every other element within this area as well as on its periphery is of importance and has to be in sync with the precinct. The site therefore has to have guidelines and a wire frame for all buildings of heritage importance, otherwise how are these going to be repaired, rebuilt and conserved?"

D'Silva says the entire area must be preserved. It can then attract more tourists and generate income for local small businesses. "The local community must be made a part of every planning process to conserve, protect and promote the Old Goa Heritage Site."

One of the best examples of such conservation, says D'Silva, is Quito city in Ecuador. "Quito too is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It follows very strict norms for all residential spaces within. The public spaces all over the city are a huge draw. The locals derive a number of benefits from this. And because of this comprehensive vision it draws tourists the world over."

Besides the problems of infrastructure and amenities, the committee points to the increasing vendors and stalls coming up around the monuments. "We have no objection to anyone's livelihood but certainly feel the businesses and houses coming up around need to be monitored. Why can't the government provide proper regularised carts for food and souvenirs that not only attract the tourists but take care of the vendors?"

A woman who has been selling hats and souvenirs to tourists for 25 years but doesn't want to be named,

fearing intimidation, shares her problem. "I sit in the harsh sun all day, pay *hafta* to the authorities and face intimidation. It would be great if we had shaded carts and better toilets. But that may be too much to ask for. I am grateful I can make some money and feed my children."

Rajat Kumar, a marketing consultant who has been living in Goa for the past two decades, is a lover of Old Goa and founder of the Save Old Goa group on Facebook.

Though not related to the committee, he echoes their feelings and demands. "Old Goa is a place I cherish not only for its religious value but also for its history and old world charm. I strongly believe the entire area needs to be looked after, not only the churches."

Kumar suggests strong yet easy measures to save the 'feel of the place'. "All shops and establishments should follow a particular design. Commercial signage and advertising that make the place look like a cheap marketplace must be removed." Kumar also campaigns for making Old Goa a traffic-free area. "The area should be blocked to private and commercial vehicular traffic. Environment-friendly modes of transport such as e-rickshaws and buggies could be used to take tourists around the complex."

In the past six years, the committee has organised a few protests to catch the attention of the administration but in vain. "We wanted to make the process easier for the government so we proposed well-studied recommendations for a Heritage Master Plan. Our key demands include demarcating a permanent parking area, a feast and exposition, a pilgrim house, a heritage park, provision of police and healthcare, a market and a bus / taxi stand. We also demand removal of all illegal construction within the protected and regulated zones. And eliminating traffic in the complex. Nearly 100 people have lost their lives to accidents in the last few years," Carvalho points out. ■

Cyclone Vardah and Chennai's missing trees

Jayashankar Menon
Chennai

ON 12 December last year, when Cyclone Vardah hit the coast of Chennai, its howling winds uprooted thousands of trees. For the city, it was a wake-up call. Chennai has the lowest green density among cities in India. It has a green cover of just 9.5 percent. In comparison, Delhi has a green cover of 20.20 percent.

"Already, we can feel the heat. This summer is going to be gruelling," says Shobha Menon, founder of Nizhal, a volunteer group devoted to trees and their protection.

The disaster has galvanised the Chennai Corporation and environmentalists. A drive to replant trees has been launched. The corporation recently held a strategy meeting at which it invited environmentalists, NGOs and academic institutions for suggestions.

Representatives from the Chennai Rivers Restoration Trust, CP Ramaswami Aiyar Foundation, Anna University, University of Madras, Madras Christian College, Women's Christian College and NGOs such as Nizhal, Bhumika and Care Earth Trust took part in the meeting.

The Chennai Corporation believes that trees fell because they were planted on pavements and surrounded by concrete. The roots couldn't find room to grow and the soil couldn't hold up the tree. Trees weren't trimmed on time either; so growth was unbalanced, causing many to topple.

"What happened to the trees wasn't just due to the cyclone," says Menon. "Human-induced factors are also responsible. No sensitivity or care is taken in choosing tree species. There is currently no health management plan for existing trees. Unless you take care of them how can they give you their best?"

In 2014 Nizhal partnered Teems India, an engineering and construction company, to map Chennai's trees and compile a tree database. Teems India came up with a GIS application and a DGPS (Differential Global Positioning System) to map



Shobha Menon and volunteers of Nizhal at the Kotturpuram Tree Park in Chennai



The tree park is located on the embankment of the Adyar lake

and digitise tree data. The objective was to survey all trees in streets, locate tree-planting sites, geo tag the trees, extrapolate the results and design a master plan for trees.

The use of data collection and mapping devices to accurately survey each tree by identifying and geo tagging on-site ensures that even a lay person can identify these trees with ease. The system can be customised to capture all types of tree information, mapping and management tools including tree risk assessment, health and structure assessment, hazard assessment, life expectancy ratings and tree management recommendations.

The field data collected by the DGPS system can be exported to GIS database formats for further processing. During the processing the data can be compared with any previous data within the data base for conducting comprehensive analysis and research on tree management. This systematic method of data collection, processing and analysis using GIS application ensures output that is reliable,

accurate and can be accessed using multiple digital formats such as aerial photos, satellite imagery and other digital maps.

Using the same technology, Nizhal and their volunteers undertook a post-cyclone tree survey of Ward 176. The areas included Arunachalapuram, Sastri Nagar, Vannanthurai, Besant Nagar, Kakkan Colony, Urur Kupparam and Elliot's Beach. They found that 16.6 percent of trees were damaged and of these 9 percent were uprooted. The rest were blown away by the cyclone.

Among uprooted trees, 22 percent were indigenous species and 77 percent were exotic. Among windblown trees 60 percent were exotic and 39 percent were indigenous. Tree species that were most vulnerable turned out to be copper pod, elephant ear pod, *gulmohur* and *pungam*. Indigenous trees proved to be hardier.

"This project can be extended to all wards of Chennai. A database should be in place, which is measurable, verifiable and reliable. We need to

PICTURES BY JAYASHANKAR MENON



Nizhal has planted over 800 indigenous trees

develop a strategy for urban tree management in a scientific way. Every bit of information should be in the public domain for complete accountability," emphasises Menon.

The corporation seems to have learnt its lesson. Environmentalists have urged the civic body to plant indigenous varieties, develop green zones and catchment areas. Saplings are being acquired from the forest department. Officials are keen to seek the help of horticulturists to train their department on the right way to plant and conserve trees. Schools and colleges are also being roped in.

The corporation could take a leaf from Nizhal's work. The NGO, started in 2005, comprises volunteers. Nizhal means shade in Tamil.



Volunteers removing fallen branches of trees

"Ours is a *shramdaan* effort," says Menon. "For the past nine years we have been meeting every weekend. We have raised a tree park and regenerated a forest from a dumpyard."

The Kotturpuram Tree Park, which Nizhal has restored, is located on the embankment of the Adyar lake. It is lush with trees. You can see deer roaming free on the shores of the lake. In the distance, the Adyar Club is visible with its manicured lawns and bright walls.

Eight years ago the PWD asked Menon to plant trees in the derelict park. She got a bore-well with a hand pump installed and began planting 800 rare, exotic and indigenous tree saplings in the 300-acre park, accompanied by her loyal dog and an elderly volunteer.

Soon many more volunteers joined her and put in place irrigation infrastructure. Officials from the municipal corporation laid a walking track.

"As part of setting up Asoka Vanam at Kotturpuram Tree Park, we have planted and nurtured a unique grove of endangered Asoka (*Saraca asoca*) trees. Besides, we have started community gardening — volunteers can visit the park during weekends and work with us. We have also set up therapeutic gardening and horticulture for students," says Menon.

Nizhal has a Free the Tree campaign for trees throttled by concrete. A book on the landmark trees of Chennai has been published, along with an

e-book on the tree biodiversity of the Kotturpuram Tree Park. More than 100 species were identified, documented and photographed. "We have initiated *shramdaan* at Madhavvaram, Chitlappakkam, Ashok Nagar and Perungudi Tree Parks. We also conduct seed and sapling collection drives," says Menon.

Nizhal is working closely with the Chennai Corporation. It has launched a campaign to inspire residents to plant and care for trees and feel a sense of ownership for green spaces. Individuals too are joining in. Actor Raghava Lawrence's charitable trust has been planting saplings since 22

December and giving free saplings to those who wish to plant trees at home or in a public space.

"That tree species have to be chosen carefully and trees have to be looked after better, has been agreed, post-cyclone," says Menon.

Another problem the corporation is grappling with is disposing of the fallen trees that are still lying around in 78-odd dumpsites across the city. The Greater Chennai Corporation tried to e-auction the trees but there was hardly any response since the value quoted was too high. Miscreants set some of the trees on fire and fire tenders had to be stationed at these sites. Residents got alarmed and began urging the corporation to remove the fallen trees on a war footing. Some of the trees were dumped in open spaces and playgrounds.

The corporation has to remove 2,366 loads of wood from an open plot in Anna Nagar alone. Out of the 100,000 trees that were uprooted by Vardah, the civic body managed to remove only 17,000 trees along the roads, besides clearing branches from 50,000 trees in the first phase of work. But both the civic officials and the police refused to clear fallen trees from private land in and around Teynampet. Local residents were forced to hire labourers from across the state, who charged them between ₹2,000 to as much as ₹50,000 to remove the uprooted trees.

Replanting all those trees is going to be a mammoth task for Chennai's residents. ■

Samita's World

by SAMITA RATHOR



‘Jazz fest went to Agartala, we are reaching out to the young’

AJIT KRISHNA



Amarendra Khatua: ‘We are trying to diversify, streamline our efforts and ensure absolute transparency’

Civil Society News
New Delhi

CULTURE is India’s most enduring export. Cinema, theatre, dance, music, yoga — they peacefully capture hearts around the world. The connections are intuitive, serendipitous. These are connections that just happen and persuasion is not required.

Journeys to India are made in search of art forms, musical instruments, traditional cuisines, religion, spiritual healing, great architecture, natural beauty and even the exotic chaos of its cities.

As the main official transmitter of India’s soft power, the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) has, over the years, been holding festivals and other events to promote Indian culture. It has been taking India abroad and bringing the world here.

But there has always been the sense that ICCR could do a better job of reflecting India’s rich diversity. It could also be driven more by merit and less by patronage. Measuring up to the complexities of reaching out in an ever-changing world is a challenge in itself.

Efforts to improve ICCR’s functioning have been many, but they have mostly fallen short of expectations. The stodgy and opaque ways of officialdom have prevailed — strengthening the impression that promoting Indian culture is not a role the government should be getting into.

With each director-general of ICCR comes the promise of a new script. Amarendra Khatua, who is among the seniormost of India’s foreign service officers, was recently appointed director-general and he spoke to *Civil Society* about the brief given to him.

What is your brief to promote India’s soft power?

My most important task right now is to streamline the existing work process of ICCR, bring in more transparency and cut down advocacy and patronage.

The ICCR is the biggest recipient of foreign students. We receive nearly 6,000 students. We must earn their goodwill and create a constituency in those countries through them. To do that we are trying to set up an e-portal — from arrival till alumni — so that there is no dilution of our purpose.

‘We need to ensure that troupes from abroad go not only to big cities but to second-tier and third-tier cities too.’

We also send almost 400 troupes abroad — dancers, performing artistes, and groups of academicians. We receive around 300 troupes from abroad. We need to ensure that they go not only to the big cities here, but to second-tier and third-tier cities as well. About 182 million people of the middle class live in those cities and they are keen to know about the world.

Besides, the Modi government has included new elements of soft power like yoga, the pharmacopia of Ayurveda and the diaspora linkage. We must consciously promote these through our chairs in foreign universities, our ICCR international centres

and our missions.

Also, ICCR is not the Ministry of Culture. We are basically the soft power footprint facilitator of bilateral diplomacy. How do we activate it more? These are my mandates.

In one way or the other these mandates have always been there. How do you propose to go about it now?

I can quote some examples. The International Ramayana Festival was performed in Chitrakoot in Ayodhya. We sent the International Jazz Festival to Agartala, Puducherry and Port Blair. We are organising a Bedil conference in Chandigarh. We are doing a Dara Shikoh conference in New Delhi. We did a Kashmir Festival in London.

We are trying to diversify, streamline our efforts and ensure absolute transparency. You can’t reinvent the wheel. But you can make the wheel function better. That’s what we are trying to do.

And what will you do for Ayurveda?

See, for one, we must promote Ayurveda. There are no second thoughts on this. It has its uses and it is alternative medicine. But you can’t sell Ayurveda without selling its pharmacopia. We can appoint a chair on Ayurveda in selected universities whereby we can promote its pharmacopia. The books are there, so are the scientists and the market. Once we promote Ayurveda in a scientific manner, it will not only be a soft power export but a genuine export.

That would, I guess, mean that you would be validating traditional Indian processes in terms of Western science?

That is one. Secondly, this requires inter-ministerial coordination. The ICCR works very closely with the Ministry of AYUSH. Some of the projects are funded by AYUSH. We do send lots of experts. Once we are prepared, then promoting Ayurveda globally is not a problem.

Take yoga. It doesn’t matter if yoga is a branded Indian product or not. First, we need acceptance. After that we package it as Brand India. The success of the first and second International Yoga Day will contribute to the third one and make us prepare better.

For example, we can introduce yoga as a course in universities and export yoga as essential for well-being. Earlier, we used to send teachers of yoga. Now we plan to send, to selected countries, teachers not only of yoga but those who can teach Sanskrit and the Vedas at the same time. All this adds up to soft power facilitation.

You have expertise within India and globally as well. Teaching of Sanskrit is happening in international universities of repute. Do you propose to draw on a wider pool of talent in civil society, industry, academics and so on?

Continued on page 14

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Under the direction of the Prime Minister and the Minister of External Affairs we are now reaching out to our 16 Sanskrit universities. They are very good. We are getting in touch with our Yoga Vidyapeeths and eminent yoga teachers.

Instead of selecting from the same list and panel, which we used to do over and over again, we are trying to build a national resource base. We aren't doing it in an ad hoc manner. We are releasing advertisements in more than 16 regional and national newspapers. We are picking up a Vice Chancellor to be on the jury. It will be different.

Before March we will have a panel ready for the long term or at least for two years. Obviously, every second or third year we must change the panel. Others should also get a chance. In fact, very soon whether it is centre, chair, artistes or academics you will have new, efficient, talented and able people to man these positions.

Very recently India gave the Sanskrit award to Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn of Thailand, a lovely gesture. Similarly, the keeping of texts is globally very well done. Any new thinking on this?

Yes, in fact we are not the experts in many of our seminars and conferences. For the Bedil conference we are getting experts from the Central Asian Republics, from Iran and Afghanistan. On Indology we are talking to alumni. We are also giving five awards. One is being given to a person from Myanmar who did his doctorate here and has now created a revolution in the education system of Myanmar.

We are inviting three Nobel Prize winners in chemistry to facilitate things here and take them to think tanks. That helps to generate interest in the subject. We have increased our Distinguished Visitors Programme. We have organised a conference on Indology, on *sunya* (concept of zero), on quantum physics and we did one on Vedic maths in Kolkata.

But this is a process. It needs a lot of effort. The end result must be good and have long-term value.

You are also promoting Indian culture in China.

We are trying to produce a Chinese opera of *Awaara* (Raj Kapoor's classic film). Similarly, in Fudan University, one of the biggest in China, we have a Centre for Gandhian studies. We organised an Indology conference in China. We are reaching out to countries which are as big or bigger in size than us where we have strategic interests to nurse a constituency.

To produce *Awaara* with a Chinese opera must require a huge amount of bonding?

Bonding is not an issue when the interest is there. The script will be ready with the approval of the Kapoor family. The Chinese National Philharmonic Opera is a huge team. Once they produce *Awaara* we will take it all over China. In this way we are creating something with Chinese collaboration and popularising it among people there. We are not

simply exporting material from India. This creates a constituency for better understanding and for people-to-people contact. Also, it contributes to trade and tourism.

***Awaara* was equally popular in Russia.**

Yes, the film was popular in most of the (former) Communist countries but especially in Russia and China among the older generation. In Beijing, when we announced our collaboration with the Chinese National Philharmonic Orchestra, we got a lot of press coverage. Almost 70 to 80 newspapers carried the story.

Has Bollywood got stuck in the *Awaara* age in its outreach to these countries?

Bollywood is as independent a constituency as our classical performing arts. In ICCR we have to balance both. Our performing arts date back to the *Natya Shastra*. Bollywood is a part of daily life. Bollywood has its avenues and opportunities to promote its films.

We too promote them but not that much. We have 25 million Indians living in 80 countries. They support Indian cinema. The performing arts don't receive that kind of patronage.

The Ministry of Culture is doing a remarkable job in announcing Festivals of India in many countries. Working in synergy with them we will be sending younger artistes from the performing arts, folk arts, martial dance forms and so on.

Do you have a youth exchange programme?

We do. Under the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas we have

a Know India programme. Many young people come and we help them. Besides, for the students who are studying here, we arrange summer and winter camps for them. In fact, for this year's winter camp we are taking them to the northeast — to Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam. We are working with the Northeast Council and they are very eager.

What do people in other countries want to see about India's culture?

Well, for example, just doing yoga is not enough. We do a yoga related conference. Just talking about Ayurveda in a conference is not enough. We set up Ayurvedic centres so that people can regularly come back there. We send a beautiful Bharatnatyam dance troupe and people show a lot of interest. We also send a Bharatnatyam teacher. These kind of activities are small but have medium-term uses. Culture without continuity is like trying to impress without long-term generation of contact. But it is a work in process.

There is also growing interest in Buddhism globally. Will you be promoting that as well?

Yes, of course. We did a conference on Buddhism in Mongolia and we are planning to donate a statue there. We are translating Buddhist *stutis* into Cambodian as well. ■



Tomatoes grown by Ranjit Chitteth with grafts from KAU



Grafted plants need gentle hands. Here, a set is being shifted to a mist chamber

PICTURES BY SHREE PADRE

Kerala gets the tomato it always wanted

With grafting, farmers get to grow vegetables they didn't earlier

Shree Padre
Thrissur

GROUPS of farmers regularly visit Mala in Thrissur district after learning of this prime vegetable growing belt from the media. They invariably return impressed by the profusion of tomatoes. Apart from tomatoes, fields in some 20 acres are dotted with brinjals and chillies.

But it is tomatoes that capture their attention. What's so special about growing tomatoes? It's unusual in Kerala. Apart from three panchayats in Palakkad, tomato is not cultivated anywhere in the state because farmers are fearful of bacterial wilt, a disease that tomatoes catch easily in coastal states.

But now there is hope. The Kerala Agricultural University (KAU) in Thrissur has grafted tomato plants resistant to the disease.

Grafting is a method by which two plants are joined to form a single plant. The upper part (scion) of one plant grows on the root system (stock) of a tougher plant.

"KAU is the only university in India that has technologically perfected grafting of vegetable plants and made them commercially available," says Dr K. Narayanan Kutty, professor, horticulture.

This new development is significant for Kerala. Tomato is the highest consumed fruit in the state. No housewife's shopping list is complete without a kilo or two of the red fruit. The state imports nearly its entire tomato requirement from Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.

But this is now changing. Last year KAU produced 400,000 grafted vegetable plants. Most were tomatoes followed by brinjals and chillies.

Grafted vegetable plants, unlike fruit grafts, can't be kept for too long. Their stems are slender and delicate and they have to be transported carefully.

So the grafted vegetable plants aren't kept in ready for sale condition. Farmers place orders for the grafted plants months in advance. They buy the seeds of their choice and hand them over to KAU which then raises plants and grafts them. It takes around 45 days for the grafted vegetable plants to be ready for delivery.

THREE FARMERS

Three years ago, Ranjit Chitteth, with a diploma in engineering, became a full-time farmer in the Ashtamichara area of Mala. He started growing tomatoes on just 30 cents and then increased it to three acres. "One acre fetches me a profit of ₹1 lakh," he says.

Along with Sinoj K.S. and Joseph Pallan, Chitteth practises staggered planting. "We plant 3,000-4,000 tomato plants every month. Our tomatoes are

much sought after because they are tasty and grown under the 'safe to eat' concept," says Chitteth.

The three farmers sell their tomatoes to six high-end vegetable shops in Ernakulam and Kodungloor. In August, Tamil Nadu tomatoes sold for ₹10 per kg here. The three Mala farmers sold their tomatoes for ₹35 per kg.

"Our tomatoes generally sell at between ₹40 to ₹70," says Sinoj.

Abdul Razak, a kitchen garden campaigner from Parappanangady in Malappuram, travels 100 km to buy grafted tomatoes, chillies and brinjal, the three solanaceous cousins, from KAU. He grows them in his model garden to inspire others and he distributes some plants to schools and associations when they invite him to speak on homestead cultivation.

"I give beginners two or three grafted tomato plants. When they see tomatoes grow wondrously, they are sure to take to cultivation," says Razak.

Balachandran, a vegetable farmer from

Kottarakkara, Kollam district, has been growing tomato, brinjal and chillies from KAU on 10 acres for several years. He is happy with two Indian Institute of Horticultural Research (IIHR) varieties — Arka Rakshak and Arka Samrat, which yielded 10 kg fruit per plant.

Balachandran has put in place a 'safe to use' network of farmers and a retail outlet called Krishimitra where they sell their produce.

"I sell tomatoes for ₹90 per kg," he says proudly. "So do my fellow farmers." His 3,000 plants yield nine tonnes. He makes a neat profit of ₹3 lakh.

T. Nallappan, a farmer from Palakkad and a member of the Vegetable and Fruit Promotion Council of Kerala, cultivates KAU's grafted tomato plants on 20 cents. Not only are the tomatoes resistant to bacterial wilt, they yield fruit for a longer time. The expense is only 10 percent higher.

But it's tougher for him to sell tomatoes at high prices. Tomatoes from Tamil Nadu pour into Palakkad. "Recently, tomato prices fell to ₹4 per kg. Unless we grow organically and have a strong marketing set-up we can't expect high prices," he explains.

NEW TRENDS

"We have a very virulent strain of bacterial wilt in Kerala," says Dr Kutty. "Coastal areas like Goa, Odisha and West Bengal are similarly affected. Even if we bring resistant varieties from elsewhere

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Dr Narayanan Kutty holding up a graft in a greenhouse at KAU

Vegetable farming in Kerala has undergone major changes in recent years. Farmers have taken to hi-tech methods.

Continued from page 15

and plant them here, they contract the disease.”

The problem is that inoculums of the bacteria get embedded in the soil so sooner or later other crops get affected. In the past, when farmers in Mala tried growing chillies and tomatoes on a large scale, they had to give up because the crops just wilted and died, says Joseph Pallan, an experienced farmer.

Though grafted plants have played a major role in the success of farmers, other factors have contributed too. Vegetable farming in Kerala has undergone major transformation in recent years. Farmers have taken to hi-tech methods, like precision farming and poly houses. Practices like plastic mulching, drip irrigation line embedded



Ranjit Chitteth in his tomato garden

beneath the mulching sheet and fertigation (supply of nutrients through irrigation) now enable farmers to get the right yield at the right time. So they can plan their marketing strategies in advance.

The quality of the crop is also the same because of uniform irrigation, scientific manure and micronutrient management.

The ‘safe to eat’ concept has caught on among consumers. To implement this farmers don’t use any chemical pesticides once the crop has reached the flowering or fruiting stage. Only a mild dose of pesticide can be used if needed before this stage.

“We have been popularising the use of pheromone traps and sticky traps for insect attacks at later stages,” says Dr Kutty.

Most vegetable farmers undertake cultivation on leased land. Since they aren’t sure of getting the same plot the next season they don’t build permanent irrigation pipelines in the soil. Temporary pipelines that can be quickly dismantled are used.

An interesting innovation by farmers is the bonus crop. After the tomato or ladyfinger crop has reached fruiting stage, farmers dibble cowpea into the same hole where the tomato is planted. By the time the tomatoes are ready for harvesting, cowpea vines begin climbing the tomato stem which acts as a prop.

“We just have to give a fertiliser dose and keep irrigating,” says Sinoj. “We are easily earning ₹60,000 per acre from cowpea. That’s why we call it a bonus crop. In this way we are reducing the

production cost of tomato and ladyfinger.”

CLIPS AND WILT

Solanum torvum, a wild brinjal plant (pea eggplant), is used as rootstock for grafting all solanaceous plants. It is a well-known grafting technique. But when KAU took it up for mass production many problems came in the way.

In 2013 vegetable grafting got underway seriously at KAU. A major hurdle Dr Kutty faced was reinforcing the slender tomato plant. The rootstock could not hold the newly joined top without external support.

The clip method turned out to be the most suitable. Chinese clips were procured but they were of inferior

Karnataka. The feedback they received is that the yield from brinjal was higher and the plants lived longer.

In Kerala farmers hope that tomato cultivation will pick up. “Three years ago Chitteth started farming with grafted plants. Now a dozen farmers are following in his footsteps. Farmers from other districts have been coming here to take a look. People are seeing a successful model in front of them,” says Pallan.

But since grafted plants can’t be stored and sold, decentralisation of commercial grafting is the only solution for farmers far away from KAU.

KAU has already trained staff at AVRDC in grafting. But they faced problems of germination in the rootstock plants. “However, we bought grafted plants from KAU and gave them for trials. The results are quite encouraging,” says Sephy Joseph, Deputy Manager of Vegetable and Fruit Promotion Council Keralam (VFPCCK) at Ernakulam.

S.K. Suresh, CEO of VFPCCK, confirmed that demand for vegetable grafts exceeds supply. “We are not able to meet the demand. But we are submitting a proposal for large-scale production of vegetable grafts.”

“Easy availability of vegetable grafts will scale up commercial production of these vegetables and urban vegetable farming will get new impetus,” says Chitteth.

Unlike Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, Kerala does not have private nurseries for grafted plants. There wasn’t any demand so far because mostly big seeded vegetables like snake gourd, cowpea and pumpkin, which didn’t require nurseries, were grown.

Dr Kutty cautiously started a nursery for winter vegetables some time ago, unsure if Kerala farmers would be ready to pay ₹2 or more for a plant. The state government had started various schemes to encourage terrace gardening, grow bag vegetable cultivation and so on, all of which required nurseries. But the hectic purchase of grafted vegetable plants at ₹4 apiece shows that the Kerala farmer is willing to pay.

The agriculture media in Kerala is also very active and disseminates information quickly. Kerala has a government-run Farm Information Bureau and a regular TV documentary series, *Kissan Krishideepam*. There are also several TV channels, farm journals and farm pages in Malayalam dailies that provide information in real time.

“Thanks to grafted plants, Kerala can definitely produce its own tomatoes,” says Dr P. Rajendran, Vice-Chancellor of KAU. “Tomatoes from neighbouring states have considerable pesticide residue and consumers are getting health-conscious. This safety angle will be another big incentive to grow tomatoes locally. We will be training staff in all our 27 stations in the state. Hopefully, in another decade our state will produce 50 to 60 percent of its tomato requirement.”

The other two diseases that could strike tomato are leaf curling virus and early blight. But these are not that serious, assures Balachandran.

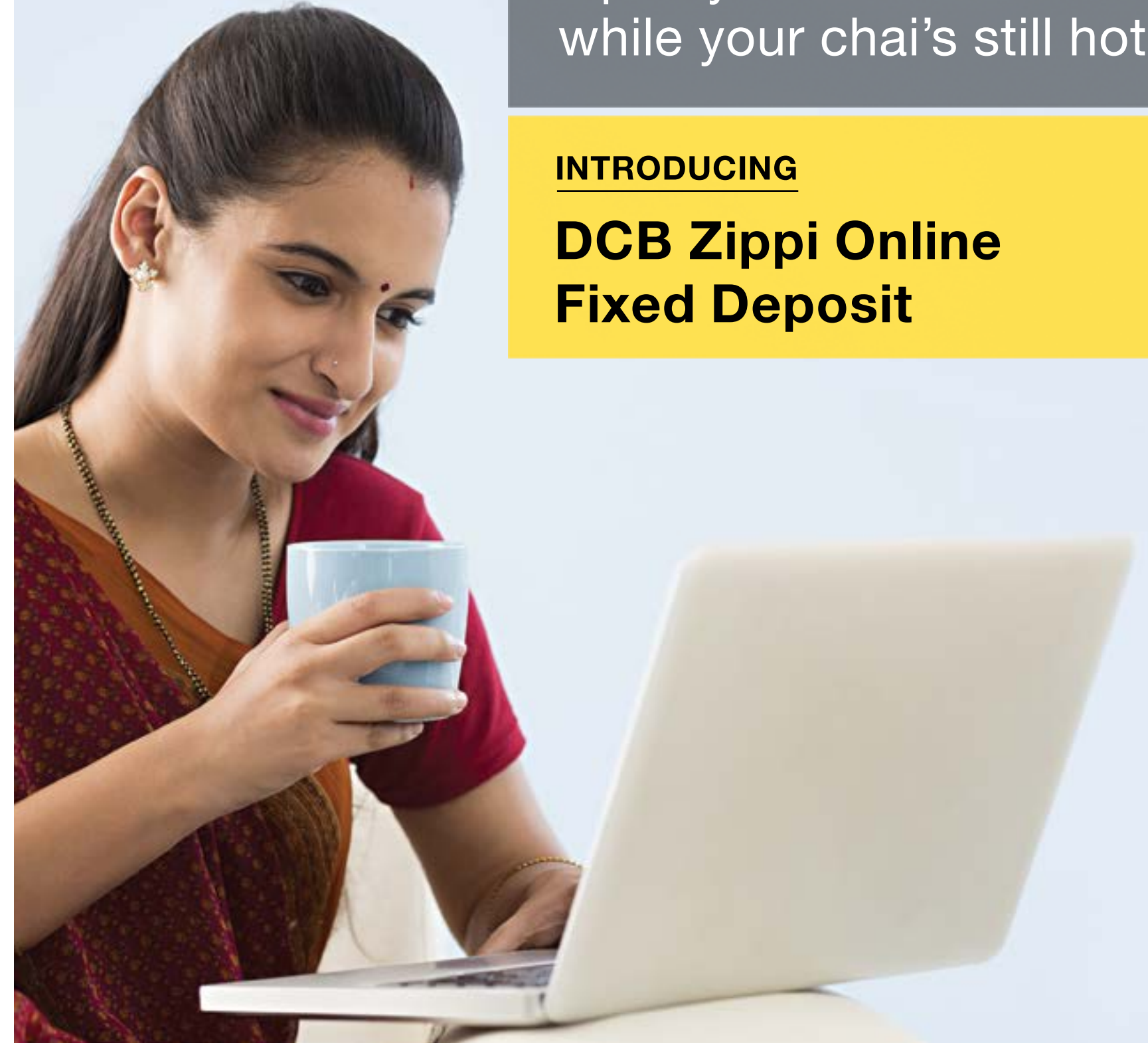
“There is also fusarium fungal disease and the nematode problem. They aren’t a major headache thus far. As the area under commercial cultivation expands new problems might come up but we will deal with them,” says Dr Kutty. There is no need for Kerala to be wary of the tomato anymore. ■

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FROM SUNNY LEONE TO AAP TO DALITS...

10 FILMS FOR YOUR 2017 BUCKET LIST

Saibal Chatterjee
New Delhi

DOCUMENTARIES go where fictional feature films usually cannot. Driven by a spirit of enquiry, they unveil reality, ask questions and seek answers. Documentary films blend research, creativity and precise delineation to craft illuminating accounts of exceptional individuals, of far-reaching trends and developments, and of a nation and a society in flux. Why, then, do documentary films rarely make it to India's multiplexes?

This year, led by the remarkably successful *The Cinema Travellers*, which premiered at the Cannes Film Festival in May, a bunch of Indian documentary films focussed on unmasking the many faces of this vast country that are attracting international attention.

Yet, it is unlikely that any of these films will play in a theatre near you any time soon. But they deserve to be seen and celebrated.

Here is the lowdown on 10 Indian documentaries made over the past year and some more that are crying out for wider exposure in the land they have sprung from.

Put them on your must-watch list and seek them out. One thing is for sure: these films will be well worth your time — and patience.

OUR GRANDPARENTS' HOME 45 Minutes



OUR Grandparents' Home is Supriyo Sen, a much awarded documentary filmmaker's latest exploration of the Partition and its emotional, social and political after-effects. As 16 young scholars from India and Bangladesh (former East Pakistan) are engaged in a process to collect the memories of the third generation of Partition survivors, two granddaughters, one each from Bangladesh and India, embark on a journey to find the homes that their grandparents were forced to leave during the Partition.

Through the means of these academic and emotional journeys, the film seeks to relive the memories of Partition while trying to understand the meaning of identity, nationality and home among succeeding generations of survivors.

Our Grandparents' Home, in many ways, is of a piece with Sen's abiding interest in the trail of disruption and misery that the Partition left. It is a follow-up to his award-winning 2003 documentary, *Way Back Home*, in which the Kolkata-based director narrates the story of his parents who left their small town in East Bengal in 1947. The film takes them, 50 years later, on an emotional journey to the place of their birth. Like *Way Back Home*, *Our Grandparents' Home* is as much a record of personal journeys as a recapitulation of a cataclysmic historical event that tore into many lives, but has rarely got the kind of play in films that it merits. Sen, of course, uses the medium, as he does here, to probe the repercussions of what is one of the biggest forced migrations in human history.

AN INSIGNIFICANT MAN 95 Minutes



KHUSHBOO Ranka and Vinay Shukla's *An Insignificant Man* is a riveting observational documentary about the people's movement that culminated in Arvind Kejriwal's newfangled Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) wresting a brute majority in the Delhi Assembly in 2015.

Like *The Cinema Travellers*, *An Insignificant Man* is resonating with audiences globally. After premiering at the Toronto International Film Festival in September, it came home to the MAMI Mumbai Film Festival in October. It also made the cut at the International Documentary Film Festival (IDFA) Amsterdam, a Mecca for non-fiction filmmakers.

An Insignificant Man plays out pretty much like a political thriller in which the key players encounter dramatic ups and downs as the electoral process unfolds. Its appeal stems principally from the manner in which it encapsulates the energy and complexity of an Indian election.

Co-directors Ranka and Shukla are both first-timers who spent a year and a half recording AAP's rallies, meetings and war-room confabulations in the lead-up to its first electoral battle in 2014.

An Insignificant Man, produced by Anand Gandhi (director of *Ship of Theseus*), chronicles a crucial transition point in contemporary Indian history with a fly-on-the-wall approach that lends the film great kinetic energy and heft.

At no point does the film appear to be taking sides or pushing any particular political line, choosing instead to focus squarely on a ragtag group of individuals fighting the establishment and questioning the status quo.

Even if you aren't an AAP supporter, or even if you happen to be among those who feel terribly let down by how Kejriwal has gone about the task of ruling Delhi, there is enough in *An Insignificant Man* that is of lasting thematic significance.

Neither judgmental nor over-indulgent, *An Insignificant Man* shows how anti-establishment forces can deliver results only if they are channelled in the right direction by determined leaders.

Our Grandparents' Home seeks to relive the memories of the Partition while trying to understand the meaning of identity, nationality and 'home' among generations.

MOSTLY SUNNY 84 Minutes



MOSTLY Sunny is the odd one out in this selection of the best documentaries made in India, or about India, in the recent past. It is about the life and times of a Bollywood starlet who wouldn't normally make it to the pages of this magazine.

This film is here because it is the breeziest and most entertaining documentary made by an Indian in a while. *Mostly Sunny* isn't a prurient, manipulative study of sleaze and exploitation. It is a social and cultural exploration that seeks to make sense of the rare phenomenon of a former adult movie star carving a niche for herself in the mainstream Mumbai film industry.

The career graph of Sunny Leone, one of the unlikeliest of stars Hindi cinema has ever seen, provides the narrative grist to photojournalist and filmmaker Dilip Mehta's documentary. But there is much more to the film than just an eventful life story packed with action.

As the film tracks the Canadian-born former porn actress's emergence in Bollywood, it examines, with humour, insight and empathy, the dynamics of the industry itself — and of Indian society as a whole, by extension.

Mostly Sunny is a social and cultural exploration that seeks to make sense of the rare phenomenon of a former adult movie star carving a niche for herself in the mainstream Mumbai film industry.

Mehta uses the Sunny Leone story as a vehicle for obliquely probing the new India where deep social contradictions are rife and anything is possible. The film seeks to understand why Sunny, the most googled personality in India five years in a row, has takers among mainstream Hindi movie fans.

Notwithstanding the many dramatic changes that India has seen in recent decades, the country hasn't had a genuine sexual revolution. "Sunny Leone is spearheading a revolution in mindsets," says Mehta, whose work as a photojournalist has appeared in *Time*, *Newsweek* and *National Geographic* magazines.

Mehta captures the actress speaking at length about her childhood, her equations with her orthodox Sikh parents, and the choices she has made in life. She points to the fact that the Indian community in Sarnia, Ontario, (her birthplace) has disowned her, but Bollywood has embraced her with open arms. To provide a contrast, Mehta zeroes in on three Bollywood extras who see Sunny as a role model even as they themselves struggle on the fringes of a ruthlessly

exploitative movie industry. She has everything that a Mumbai film actress can aspire to, these girls say with not a little envy.

Adman Suhel Seth offers an explanation for the 'social acceptance' in India for Sunny Leone. "She is married. She is not an available porn star," he says. On the other hand, Mehta's film has former police officer Kiran Bedi blaming pornography and the likes of Sunny Leone for sexual violence. ■

18 FEET 77 Minutes



A profoundly moving documentary that erases the boundaries between detached observation and deep emotion, *18 Feet* is the debut film of 34-year-old Renjith Kuzhur, who trained as an editor at the Satyajit Ray Film and Television Institute, Kolkata. It maps the rise and rise of the folk music band Karinthalakkootam, which sings defiantly of the Dalit identity of its members and traces the history of oppression the community faces.

The band was founded by Remesh, an employee of the Kerala State Road Transport Corporation. In the film, he opens up about his music, his aspirations and the psychological impact of the injustice he has faced.

Remesh's mother was pregnant with him when she cleaned the cow dung in her Brahmin neighbour's home in order to feed herself and her husband. In his growing up years, too, he faced ridicule from schoolmates. The percussive music that Remesh produces and the songs he sings are his tools of protest.

Renjith, a Nair who belongs to the same village as Remesh (Vadama, Thrissur district), began filming the band four years ago, but it was only two years later that he managed to get its members to move beyond their sound and speak about their individual histories.

The title of *18 Feet* refers to the distance that the lower castes had to keep from the Namboothiris and Nairs in the days when untouchability was prevalent in Kerala.

THE IMMORTALS 52 Minutes



THE Immortals was commissioned by the Busan International Film Festival as part of a special programme, 'The Power of Asian Cinema,' initiated to celebrate its 20th anniversary last year. That is where filmmaker and film conservationist Shivendra Singh Dungarpur's second documentary had its world premiere. His first, *Celluloid Man*, about the life and work of film archivist

P.K. Nair, was critically acclaimed the world over.

The Immortals delves into Indian cinema history via physical objects and fading memories associated with some of its greatest personalities. It travels through time and space to pick out hidden stories and rediscover objects and images that at one time were an integral part of the lives and films of these industry stalwarts.

The film is a visual exploration of physical artefacts, personal spaces and living memories where the image speaks for itself, capturing the essence of each of the iconic figures while telling the story of Indian cinema.

Among the things that find space in *The Immortals* are Dadasaheb Phalke's car, Raj Kapoor's shoes used in the 'Mera joota hai Japani' number in *Shri 420*, and K.L. Saigal's harmonium.

While some of these elements were easy to bring in, a few others were infinitely more difficult to locate and acquire. While the Kapoors were accessible, Saigal's family had to be tracked down and convinced to help out before Dungarpur could begin his research.

The story behind Phalke's car — the one that he used to ride to his shoots — is a chapter in itself. It was found lying in a mechanic's garage in Nashik. Nobody had any idea of the 'importance' of the abandoned vehicle until the filmmaker got wind of it.

The Immortals also travels to the homes of Satyajit Ray and Baburao Painter to probe the cultural milieu and creative impulses that drove their cinematic output.

The Immortals is a personal essay that works on many levels both simply as a collation of little-known stories as well as an informed overview of Indian cinema.

GODS IN SHACKLES

Director: Sangita Iyer

92
Minutes



GODS in shackles is a feature-length documentary that delves into the dark side of Kerala's cultural festivals of which elephants are an integral part. Many of these pachyderms are captured from the wild and subjected to torture in the name of religion.

Canada-based environmental journalist, broadcaster and wildlife filmmaker Sangita Iyer, who was born and raised in Kerala, peels off layers to reveal a horrifying story.

In the film, we are told the stories of Lakshmi, a female elephant in a Thrissur temple, and Sunder, an elephant who was rescued from a temple in Kolhapur after being severely abused by his mahout.

She takes the help of a wide range of stakeholders, from elephant owners, festival organisers and mahouts to researchers and conservationists to piece together an ugly portrait of neglect and exploitation and issue a call for urgent

Gods in Shackles tells us the stories of Lakshmi, a female elephant in a Thrissur temple, and Sunder, an elephant who was rescued from a temple.

action to save these highly social animals.

Kerala has over 3,000 religious festivals which culminate in the grand Thrissur Pooram celebrations. In all the attendant rituals, ornately decked-up elephants play a key part. But the animals rarely receive the care they deserve. In the past three years, more than 150 captive elephants have died due to inhuman negligence.

Kerala has over 700 elephants in captivity and, as *Gods in Shackles* points out, the campaign to protect the endangered Asian elephant has to be stepped up drastically if it has to achieve success. The film is a telling statement on behalf of the cause of saving the large, gentle elephant.

MEMORIES OF A FORGOTTEN WAR

Director: Utpal Borpujari

109
Minutes



MEMORIES of a Forgotten War, directed by critic-turned-filmmaker Utpal Borpujari, is about the crucial World War II battles that were fought in the northeast, especially in Manipur and Nagaland, but which have faded from public memory. The film was selected in the non-features section of the Indian Panorama of the 2016 International Film Festival of India, Goa.

These battles, fought by soldiers completely unacquainted with the topography of the battlefield and its environs, took a heavy toll of young lives, while dragging the local population into the vortex of the conflict. In what was then known as the Burma Front, a rough terrain with dense forests, the Allied army and Japanese forces fought decisive battles that stopped the latter's advance into India.

World War II veteran Lt Gen J.F.R. Jacob puts the plight of the soldiers in perspective: "Soldiers don't make wars. Politicians make wars. Soldiers fight, give their lives. And who makes the peace? Politicians sit down and make the peace. Horrible."

Memories of a Forgotten War is about the crucial World War II battles that were fought in the northeast.

While focussing on aspects of the Battles of Kohima and Imphal, the film presents constant reminders of the human cost of military conflict. What was true seven decades ago is just as true today. While celebrating the valour of the soldiers — this comes out in the reminiscences of the combatants (all of them now in their nineties, some deceased since the making of the film) and the witnesses to the war — the film also upholds the spirit of reconciliation, justice and peace.

Until the recent declaration by the National War Museum of Britain that the Battle of Kohima was the most important operation by the Allied Army during World War II, ahead of even the Normandy landing, these battles of Manipur and Nagaland hardly attracted any attention. This feature-length documentary seeks to bring them out of the shadows of time and succeeds.

Memories of a Forgotten War serves the purpose of ensuring that we do not forget the sacrifices of the men who were dispatched to stop the Germans in World War II but found themselves fighting in an alien land and confronting the Japanese.

CECILIA

Director: Pankaj Johar

84
Minutes



A personal documentary that puts a human face on the horrors of trafficking of household helps from poverty-stricken tribal regions of India to the country's big cities, *Cecilia* is about a tough, long-winded fight for justice waged by a maid engaged in Delhi journalist-turned-filmmaker Pankaj Johar's home.

"This film is not just Cecilia's story," says Johar, who is also the film's narrator. "It is a story of every poor tribal who is being sold glitzy city dreams and being lured miles away from their land. It is also a story of every middle class family that has been indirectly contributing to trafficking by hiring these trafficked girls and children. If I could have been so ignorant, then I am sure there are plenty others like me."

Housemaid Cecilia Hansda, working in the home of Johar and his lawyer-wife Sunaina since 2014, learns one day that her 14-year-old daughter is lying in a morgue in Faridabad. The girl had been trafficked without her knowledge and hired as a help by a family in Delhi.

Cecilia is under pressure not to pursue the case and accept compensation and move on. But she decides to fight with the support of Johar and Sunaina. The odds are heavy and there are points in the course of the struggle that are tinged with utter hopelessness. They are up against a society for whom the dead girl is just another statistic in the never-ending story of trafficked women.

One interesting aspect of this film is the manner in which it explores the line between filmmaking and activism, with Johar raising questions over whether he is putting Cecilia and her family, as well as his own family, at undue risk by unrelentingly probing the world of the traffickers. The journalist in him wins out in the end although the story that Cecilia tells is tragic.

SAEED MIRZA: THE LEFTIST SUFI

Directors: Kireet Khurana and N. Padmakumar

60
Minutes



SAEED Akhtar Mirza hasn't made a film in years. But he continues to exercise Shuge influence on the minds of young filmmakers and other socially conscious youngsters through the power and purity of his thoughts.

India has moved miles away from the ideals that Mirza espouses — a reason for severe personal angst for him — but he carries on regardless, standing up and speaking out for causes he holds dear. This and other aspects of his personality come out loud and clear in this 60-minute documentary.

Saeed Mirza: The Leftist Sufi probes his ideology as a film director and a human being. It turns the spotlight on the FTII alumnus who was among the pioneers of the parallel cinema movement in Bombay with such critically applauded films as *Albert Pinto Ko Gussa Kyoon Aata Hai*, *Salim Langde Pe Mat Ro*, *Arvind Desai Ki Ajeeb Dastaan* and *Naseem*.

Mirza straddles temperamental polarities: he is a philosopher and an iconoclast, a hermit and heretic, a charismatic recluse and a lively conversationalist, and a poet and a crusader. He combines in him a liberal worldview that willingly embraces contradictions: this is what makes this documentary such a delight to watch.

Mirza's contribution to Indian cinema and our times hasn't been duly recognised. This documentary fills a long-felt gap and delivers a vibrant cinematic essay on a man whose films always focussed on underdogs fighting to break free from rigid social shackles.

The Leftist Sufi has been shot in Mumbai, Goa (Mirza's second home), Pune and Leh. It revisits many locations at which Mirza's films were shot three decades and more back. The film tracks him from the spaces that define his leftist being to the areas where he transforms himself into a Sufi looking for peace and harmony in a world where neither is easy to come by.

The film features interviews with Kundan Shah and Sudhir Mishra, who owe their careers to Mirza. They talk about his approach to filmmaking. Also on camera is Mahesh Bhatt, who throws light on why he was inspired by Mirza's outlook and films.

INDIA IN A DAY

Director: Richie Mehta

86
Minutes



INDIA in a Day, directed by Indian-origin Canadian filmmaker Richie Mehta, is a freewheeling cinematic sketch of a country and its people. The film provides a record of a day in the life of India — midnight to midnight — to bring alive a country overflowing with human stories of both beauty and pain.

India in a Day, powered by Google and produced by Ridley Scott and Anurag Kashyap, is an 86-minute documentary composed of videos shot on a single day — 10 October, 2015 — by thousands of people across the country.

In Mehta's own words, the story of an evolving India is the story of an evolving world. Mehta, who was born and raised in Canada but is now based in London, says: "This film presents a continuum of all our achievements. Parts of India still live the way we did 1,000 years ago, while the country has sent a mission to Mars."

As part of an initiative by Google, Mehta received 400 hours of film in the form of 16,000 submissions made using varied forms of technology. He and film editor Beverley Mills spent three months watching the videos before getting down to editing them.

India in a Day is like a filmed diary composed of entries from different parts of the country — it reflects the diversity of the land, with all its capabilities and drawbacks, with a delightful lightness of touch and a sense of playfulness.

India in a Day captures the challenges of living in India while reflecting the energy and humour of its people, which is palpable in every frame of the film.

Touches of earthy wit liven up the film. In the opening video, a young man talks of five families in a building sharing a single wi-fi router. A little later, a boy in a car says his age is 25, but his sister in the backseat is quick to correct him: "You're 26."

The film abounds in moments like these, which reflect the nature of the exercise. *India in a Day* does not have a whit of artifice. It is a real portrait of a people caught in the flow of time. ■



Sameer Khanna and Arun Bhati, co-founders of Orahi, at their office in Gurgaon

PICTURES BY AJIT KRISHNA

It's a smooth ride with Orahi

Carpooling company tackles commuter concerns

Kavita Charanji
Gurgaon

FOR a large section of National Capital Region (NCR) residents, the daily commute from home to office and back is a hellish experience. People are stuck in traffic for hours in their cars amid clouds of noxious fumes. But there are few options. Public transport is crowded and awful.

Arun Bhati and Sameer Khanna, two tech-savvy entrepreneurs, have developed a user-friendly app-based carpooling platform called Orahi which is making it easier for office-goers to commute. Carpooling reduces the number of cars, thereby reducing air pollution, and makes sound business sense as well.

"We say you are not stuck in traffic, you are the traffic," says Bhati, Orahi's Chief Operating Officer (COO). An alumnus of IIM Calcutta and former Ericsson employee, he was rated among the top 100 technocrats of India by *Exhibit* magazine.

With almost 100,000 registered users, Orahi, which is based in Gurgaon, has rapidly emerged as the most popular player in the NCR's carpooling business.

Flexi-timings, flexi-members, safety, fuel economy and cashless payments are the main draws of Orahi, say users. Besides, the platform is a good social leveller.

Vivek Agarwal, assistant manager at Blackberrys Apparels, makes the daily two-hour commute of 45 km between his home in Vaishali, Ghaziabad, and Gurgaon twice a day. "There are so many things that have happened with Orahi. With four co-travellers the daily commute has become easier for sure but networking is great too and I have made so many friends along the way. Sometimes we stop off to get a bite to eat," he says with a smile.

Unlike other carpools, the service offers flexibility. Agarwal is a member of an Orahi chat group that offers him freedom to decide when and with whom he will make the Ghaziabad-Gurgaon commute every day. "We don't have to fix rides for a month in advance so if I am travelling with someone in the morning I can travel with someone totally different in the evening," he says.

Users can also switch from being passengers to being car owners. Deepali Pandey, an office manager at Belarusian Potash Company, chooses to drive her own car every day between Dwarka and her workplace in Gurgaon. She has three co-passengers, two of whom are men. But she is not worried, "I have a trust factor with them," she says. Besides, she says, carpooling has helped her cut her fuel bill of ₹8,000-10,000 a month by half.

That's possible because a passenger pays ₹3.5 per km, of which 50 paise goes to Orahi. The amount is transacted between passenger and car owner through an Orahi wallet mechanism.

The Orahi carpool venture was launched in 2013 by Bhati and Khanna, colleagues at Ericsson. They were part of the Ericsson team that created an Apps Store with 60,000 applications that were then sold to Idea Cellular and Reliance Communications.

The applications were for phones based on Symbian and Java technologies. This was way before Android and iOS phones became the rage. Later, Bhati and Khanna played key roles in Ericsson's thrust into mobile advertising and the creation of a community-based social media portal for telecom operators that preceded Facebook. It is at this point that they learnt the ropes of creating, building and scaling up communities.

They could have coasted along comfortably at Ericsson, except for their own terrible experiences of commuting. "I was very frustrated with getting stuck in traffic for over an hour though it was a 20-minute ride to Gurgaon from Vasant Kunj where I live," says Khanna, CEO of Orahi. He is a postgraduate in IT and telecommunications from Delhi University and has worked with Cisco TAC and Huawei.

Meanwhile, Bhati too was finding the daily commute from DLF Phase 5 to his workplace at DLF Cyber City an exhausting and stressful experience. He had grown up in Udaipur, famous for lakes, palaces and greenery. He nostalgically recounts his delight at being able to view the magnificent Aravali range from his home. The filthy air of Gurgaon and Delhi was "killing him inside", he says. His agony was compounded by the idea of his six-year-old daughter growing up in such an unhealthy environment.

SMALL START

Bhati and Khanna began to explore several business options that would improve the environment. They hit upon the idea of setting up an app-based carpooling mechanism that would challenge their technical skills, be eco-friendly and yet a solid business venture.

Pooling in a modest ₹6 lakh, the duo launched Orahi in March 2013 after thorough market research. A sample survey with 2,000 people in India, the UK, Sweden and Vietnam revealed similar inhibitions regarding carpooling. Khanna says that people were concerned about finding the right people to commute with, flexibility of timings, safety and an easy method to pay. To get around these issues was testing. But the Orahi co-founders hit upon the solutions. A location mechanism was put in place to match commuters. Much like any social media platform commuters could then send requests and responses to each other.

Concerns about flexibility of timings were overcome by connecting people with each other. "We said we will connect you to not one but a huge pool of users so that you can decide who you want to travel with, at what time, so nobody is bound to leave at a particular time. The Orahi mechanism is designed so that everyone has multiple options and does not depend on a single person," says Khanna.

Safety is a major issue, particularly for women. The Orahi technology assures that only educated, like-minded people travel together. A three-tier verification system is in place so users can make sensible decisions about whom they wish to travel with.

To become an Orahi user, OTP verifications about corporate email ID,

government ID and mobile phone numbers have to be run through. The painstaking process enables users to view other commuters' names, home and office addresses, and the ratings of the past six rides. A women-only carpool has also been created.

As for payments, the development of an Orahi wallet ensures that transactions do not have to be made in cash. "We created a wallet system in 2013, way before Paytm gained fame," says Khanna with pride.

There are other things Orahi is happy about. "Collectively, Orahi has been able to reduce 1.2 million kg of carbon dioxide emissions," says Bhati. "That figure is likely to climb to 600 million kg by 2020 with Orahi's entry into other Tier 1 cities."

It hasn't always been easy. When Orahi began they found people were suspicious of the idea of carpooling. It became a chicken and egg situation.

People wouldn't come onto the platform unless there was a pool and if they didn't come on board there couldn't be a pool. But Orahi was able to build trust, win over many commuters by understanding community psychology, create lists of neighbours, connect them and let them coordinate their commutes.

Orahi has made the commuting experience easy. To start with, you set your date and time for the ride on the Orahi app or website, invite or accept a commute request, ride with your friends and tap the rupee icon to finish the trip.

EVENTFUL YEAR

The past year has been eventful for the 35-member Orahi team and its carpoolers. The company raised ₹3.5 crore from Indian Angel Network in January 2016 to fund technology and team expansion. In April, when the Delhi government introduced its odd-even policy to reduce traffic congestion and pollution levels, Orahi took over odd-even.com, a platform for carpoolers created by Akshat Mittal, a 13-year-old student of Amity International School in Delhi. Mittal is now on Orahi's technical advisory board as a domain adviser.

Mittal has attracted a great deal of media attention — some of which has spilled over to Orahi. "The introduction of the odd-even formula was a big boost for us as people were forced to think about carpooling as an option," says Bhati.

The company has had 500 percent growth on parameters like user base, number of rides and recharge of the Orahi wallet over 2015-2016. About 10,000 new users are coming on board every month. Their users have clocked over 10 million km so far — "equivalent to 16 round trips to the

moon," says Bhati on a light note.

There's a huge, unexploited market out there for Orahi. According to the company's estimates, 5.4 million people in the NCR make the home-office-home commute daily. Besides, there are one million college students and 4 million school-goers who need to be ferried every day. All this makes for a whopping number of commuters each day — not only a good business opportunity but a boon to the environment as well, says Bhati.

For now, Orahi plans to expand its operations to Pune followed by Mumbai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Chennai. ■



Deepali Pandey drives and has three co-passengers, two of whom are men. They live in Dwarka and go to their offices in Gurgaon

'With four co-travellers the daily commute has become easier. Networking is great too and I have made so many friends.'



Amit Pal at the wheel drives from Tilak Nagar to Gurgaon picking up Jasleen Kaur Seth and Rajesh Bhatnagar on the way

The mushroom lady

Rakesh Agarwal
Dehradun

DIVYA Rawat's mushroom factory is housed in a three-storied building on the outskirts of Dehradun. Climb up to the first floor and you will see a plethora of mushrooms sprouting everywhere. There are big ones and small ones — white, pink, brown and grey. There are button mushrooms, oyster mushrooms, milky mushrooms and more.

Divya's enterprise, Soumya Foods, produces 350 kg of mushrooms per day. It is undoubtedly a profitable venture. But her enterprise does more. As a social entrepreneur she spreads knowledge of mushroom farming to remote villages in Uttarakhand and enables women farmers to earn a lucrative income by growing mushrooms.

In September 2016 the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) in Solan, her former *alma mater*, honoured her with an award during the annual National Mushroom Fair.

A postgraduate in social work from the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), Divya graduated from Amity University, Noida. She initially worked with an NGO in Delhi.

"But I didn't want to be in a job where you enter a pipeline from one end, only to be come out from the other end," she says.

So she enrolled for a course in mushroom farming at ICAR in Solan and then worked with the institute's Directorate of Mushroom Cultivation. Divya then got a job with Flex Foods, a company specialising in mushroom farming in Dehradun.

In 2013 Divya began Soumya Foods with ₹3,00,000 given to her by her family. "Today, we grow mushrooms in large quantities and provide employment to others. People know us because of her," says Shakuntala Rawat, her elder sister and partner. In villages across the state, women farmers affectionately call her the 'mushroom lady'.

Soumya Foods' factory is well-equipped. It has a lab with a cold-room and an incubator on the ground floor. The first floor is reserved for mushrooms and for spawn production. Youth from all over Uttarakhand, Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Jharkhand and even Tamil Nadu come for three-day training workshops after which they return to their villages to grow and sell mushrooms.

Divya didn't have premises when she began. So she started by growing mushrooms in abandoned buildings and terraces in Dehradun and Garhwal districts which no one wanted. "You need to invest just ₹30,000 to start a small mushroom farm. The seeds cost about ₹15,000 and the rest is for infrastructure like bamboo shelves and cages," says Divya. "Ingenious villagers save money by sourcing local bamboo sticks like ringal from the forest," adds Shakuntala.



Divya Rawat with her mushrooms

Divya has spread knowledge of mushroom farming to remote villages especially to women farmers.

Why did she choose mushrooms? "Simple. It is a profitable farming venture that needs little space and no land. Potato sells at between ₹8 and ₹10 per kg. But mushrooms sell at between ₹80 and ₹100 per kg," says Divya. Also, since farming is the most important source of livelihood in the state, growing mushrooms isn't an alien concept and therefore easy to propagate.

Divya has also brought down costs by practising vertical cultivation using bamboo racks instead of costly metal structures. Most mushroom farmers grow only the button variety. Divya concentrates on raising three varieties: button, oyster and milky. These can be grown indoors in temperatures up to 35°C Celsius without air-conditioning, through the year.

In 2013 when floods devastated Uttarakhand, Divya journeyed to her village, Kotkandara, in Chamoli district to help villagers get back on their feet and learn mushroom farming. She then spread

this knowledge to other disaster-affected villages like Kavilthagaon in Rudraprayag district and Kirtinagar in Tehri district.

A group of women in Nahinkalan village in Dehradun district who have learnt mushroom farming from Divya says it has really improved their income. "Our farms are small so we can't spare land. Mushrooms don't need much space and are a real boon. The crop is ready in 20 days and sold almost immediately," says Roshni Chauhan. "And not much work is required," chips in Nirmala Devi.

"We earned more than ₹30,000 in the first three months. Now there is no looking back," smiles Kanti Rawat of Kangsali village in Tehri district.

Divya says her objective right from the beginning was to work with 'ghost' villages where nearly all families migrate for work. She wanted to reverse this.

She cites examples of success. Just three households were left behind in Seriadhar village in Chamoli district. Now four families have returned. Three families have come back to Bariagarh village in Tehri district too.

"Altogether, more than 30 persons, including me, have returned to Uttarakhand, thanks to mushrooms!"

she says with a laugh.

At her factory we meet Mamta Joshi of Aamaghajunsar village in Tehri district. She came back from Delhi in 2015. So did Reeta Devi of Kalsi village in Dehradun district and Bharat Singh from Dharkot village, also in Tehri district.

It's a slow process. Divya's efforts show that if lucrative livelihoods are possible in villages, people prefer to return.

She is also expanding her efforts to remote corners of Kumaon region, "Four mushroom units are getting ready in Almora and Champawat districts," she says.

Divya expresses a lot of gratitude to grassroots mushroom farmers who taught her and gave her important tips on mushroom farming, "Farmers in Thailand taught me how to save mushrooms from decaying," she says. Mushroom, being a fungus, can get infected with moulds. Soumya Foods spreads a fungicide on the husk in which mushroom seeds are grown to prevent this. "But it's not a problem in the hills as the rivulets' water is naturally sprinkled with lime which is a natural fungicide," she says.

Harish Rawat, the Chief Minister of Uttarakhand, has made her the brand ambassador of Uttarakhand. She will receive a monthly honorarium of ₹10,000 and Class I officer entitlement during her visits to villages. Also, the Department of Horticulture intends to utilise her services for holding training workshops.

Soumya Foods is all set to become a cooperative for mushroom farmers modelled along the lines of Amul. ■

INSIGHTS

OPINION | ANALYSIS | RESEARCH | IDEAS

The importance of pretence



DELHI
DARBAR

SANJAYA BARU

THE arrival of a politically powerful leader heading a single party government with absolute majority in Parliament has renewed the debate on institutional autonomy and checks and balances within the governance system. These issues have come up each time there is a perception that the executive, rather the Prime Minister, has taken a decision unilaterally without going through even the formal motions of routine consultation through established institutions like the cabinet, cabinet committees, and so on.

The most recent instance, of course, pertains to the decision on the demonetisation of high value currency notes. We knew on day one that the Union Cabinet was merely informed and its formal approval sought at the eleventh hour and that it was then kept locked up till the PM addressed the nation. It has also been reported that only a couple of individuals in the Ministry of Finance and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) were in the know and that both institutions had to merely implement instructions issued without prior consultation.

In defence of this manner of doing things it has been said that the PM showed leadership and courage, took a tough decision and ensured its quick, if messy, implementation. The secrecy surrounding the decision was necessary to ensure its effectiveness. While all this is okay, a controversy has been generated on the role of the central bank in this momentous monetary intervention.

The larger issue of central bank autonomy has been brought into sharper focus by former RBI governor Y. Venugopal Reddy when he made some critical remarks in a television interview. The supporters of the government and the PM have argued that the RBI never really had that 'autonomy' and that it had yielded to the government of the day on many occasions and many issues, including such radical policy initiatives as the nationalisation of banks and the role of the central bank in the appointment of bank chairpersons, and so on.

Indeed, the financial media has recorded over the years many examples of political bosses in Delhi issuing orders to money managers on Mint Street. Journalist T.C.A. Srinivasa Raghavan, who has studied the history of the RBI and has written extensively on it, has argued that this unequal relationship dates back to the very origins of the RBI. The idea of 'autonomy' is a well-practised pretence.

There are two aspects to the issue of institutional autonomy and institutional checks and balances. First, that formal systems ought to be followed where they exist. Second, even if formal systems are not followed or are nebulous and, therefore, subject to multiple interpretations of what should be and should not be done, the executive should act in a manner that protects the idea of institutional autonomy and of checks and balances.

Appearance is as important as essence in the legitimisation of institutions. It is not merely what institutions do, but what they are seen to be doing,

anything that would demean the status of the central bank governor.

It was only during the tenure of finance minister Pranab Mukherjee that the Ministry of Finance started pushing the envelope and deliberately slighted the central bank. While Mr Chidambaram as FM deferred to the PM and did not seek to exert too much pressure on the RBI, Mukherjee had no such qualms. After all he was an FM when Dr Singh was the governor and had no hesitation letting the governor know who the boss was. Both D. Subba Rao and Raghuram Rajan benefitted from the fact



RBI Governor Urjit Patel with Finance Minister Arun Jaitley

pretend to be doing, that makes a difference to their status and dignity.

In the case of the RBI, its ability to project its institutional 'independence' was always a function of the relative stature of the PM and FM. A PM like Indira Gandhi left no one in doubt who the boss was. Weaker or softer PMs gave more policy space to the governor. Consider the experience of Dr Reddy himself. As RBI governor he had serious differences with Union Finance Minister P. Chidambaram on many issues. On one occasion even Prime Minister Manmohan Singh lost his cool. A message was delivered to the RBI governor that New Delhi was not happy with him on a couple of issues. In due course some differences were ironed out, while some were not. The media sensed the tension and speculated on the differences between Delhi and Mumbai, but no one in Delhi, not even the irrepresible Mr Chidambaram, would say or do

that Mr Chidambaram returned to North Block in 2012. The game changed in 2014 and reverted to a past in which the PM made sure the governor knew who the boss was.

But much of this was done in a manner so that reality did not always bite the governor. Form was maintained. Pretence has a purpose. Even if the central bank has no option but to do the bidding of the central government, no harm is done if both behave as if the central bank has a mind of its own. It not only preserves the image of central bank autonomy but also dignifies the central government, by showing that the PM and FM respect institutional norms.

In the specific case of demonetisation, the fact is that the PM took a unilateral decision that was then imposed on all. True. But, the PMO could easily have played the game differently by letting the

Continued on page 26

Listen to Bastar's agony

BHARAT DOGRA

THE recent efforts by state agencies in Bastar region of Chhattisgarh to implicate members of fact-finding teams in serious allegations and to harass them relentlessly are a big blow to the invaluable democratic initiatives of citizens to draw attention to important but neglected problems of our country.

The recent reports from Bastar by fact-finding teams, journalists and activists are an important positive democratic contribution. They have helped to increase the knowledge and consciousness of the nation and its justice system about the disturbing increase in the distress of tribal communities, serious disruption of their community life, assaults on the dignity of women and the glaring violation of legal norms.

The members of fact-finding teams and their local contacts risked their safety in travelling to difficult areas and meeting people who have suffered a lot so that the nation and its justice system become aware of a fast deteriorating situation and can initiate remedial action in time. This is just the kind of intervention which is so important for corrective actions in a democratic system.

Such corrective initiatives by socially conscious citizens are not possible in dictatorships but can play a very timely important role in democracies. We need to protect and promote such democratic initiatives but the recent news from Bastar has been one of intimidating and suppressing such initiatives.

This is not an isolated incident in this region. Earlier a Gandhian activist who used to be an important contact point for journalists and researchers to find out the factual situation in the region was harassed very badly and his ashram was demolished. Then, unnecessary and unreasonable obstructions were created for journalists in collecting facts. This is in addition to the even more extreme harassment of local journalists including those working for some leading newspapers.

Thus it is clear that harassment of members of a recent fact-finding team is by no means an isolated incident but rather only one link in a chain of unfortunate events aimed at obstructing the collection and presentation of the truthful and

factual position in the region.

As the officials who initiate such undemocratic actions have to function within the limits of a democratic and legal system, they generally try to justify their actions by saying that their victims have some link with Maoist rebels. This goes back to the extreme harassment and imprisonment inflicted on Dr Binayak Sen, who apart from being a very senior doctor had also been a leading human rights activist of Chhattisgarh.

However in the case of most of these victims of completely unjustified harassment, including journalists, there has been no credible evidence of such links with Maoist rebels, or of any involvement in the violent activities of these rebels. Without the existence of any such evidence, the noise of Maoist links is merely raised to prevent fact-finding teams, peaceful social activists and professional journalists

Fact-finding teams, citizens' groups and journalists make the nation aware of injustices. Govt must listen to such voices.

from performing their democratic role and duty.

This happens because some officials and politicians do not want the nation and its justice system to know the truth of what has been happening at ground level in recent years. In the case of the members of the recent fact-finding team who were harassed one can easily find out from their reports that they also raised serious questions about the role of Maoists. They are not just one-dimensional critics of the government but are quite willing to take note of any positive role of government programmes, while criticising several aspects of the role of Maoists.

It is clear from their writings, for example, a recent book by Nandini Sundar titled, *The Burning*

or the FM force the RBI to fall in line they should leave enough space for the governor to pretend that he was in fact not forced to fall in line but chose to do so after due consideration of the issues at hand.

One can extend this logic to other institutions as well. Consider, for example, the media. There is no reason to visibly browbeat the media, call journalists 'presstitutes' and worse and rub their noses into the ground to be able to get a favourable press. In a democracy, the idea of what constitutes a 'favourable' press should be defined in a manner that leaves space for criticism. After all, even the government should want the media that supports it to have public legitimacy. To safeguard the

legitimacy of the 'friendly' media, it is necessary to ensure the legitimacy of the 'unfriendly' media. So, be it the judiciary or the civil service, the security forces or the media, these are all necessary pillars of a modern, democratic nation and no one would be better off if any one of them is worse off. In the end, prime ministerial authority is best exercised by protecting the legitimacy of the institutions through which such authority has to be enforced. If one of them is a deviant and proving difficult, a wise leader must find ways of dealing with that challenge and ultimately doing what the leader wants to do without visibly hurting a deviant's dignity. ■

Forests, that their commitment is to the suffering people of Bastar and it was to bring relief to them that fact-finding and public interest litigation were taken up. However there are very powerful people out there who do not want the truth to come out. This what Amartya Sen said about this book, "A very important and interesting book...A deeply disturbing analysis of the sacrifice of tribal lives and communities caught between the camouflaged barbarity of the security forces and the violent arrogance of a deflected rebellion. The appeal for reasoned humanity cannot be any stronger-or more eloquent-than this."

The reason for giving this quote is that the challenge before concerned citizens, activists and journalists in this region is to present the truth about the sufferings of people caught between two kinds of unjustified and often indiscriminate violence. In the early 1980s when the famous labour leader of Chhattisgarh, Shankar Guha Niyogi, was arrested and repression was unleashed on iron ore miner members of his union, I had also gone to Chhattisgarh (then a part of Madhya Pradesh) as a member of a fact-finding team. In the mining township of Dalli Rajhara the situation was very tense and we were trailed everywhere by policemen and intelligence men, but at no time were we stopped or harassed. Whether at the time of interviews or holding a press conference we were kept under observation but not stopped from performing what we considered to be our important democratic role. Back in Delhi after my highly critical reports and articles had been published, a senior journalist, well connected to the Congress government in Madhya Pradesh, approached me very politely and asked me to go back and play a helpful role in sorting out the tense situation. I could not accept the offer, but appreciated the fact that instead of feeling aggressive towards me the government had noted our criticisms and was trying to reach an agreement. Soon enough an agreement was actually reached and Niyogi was released, at least for the time being.

Recalling that time I strongly feel that democracy will be strengthened if the government has a better appreciation of the important constructive role of independent and unbiased fact-finding teams, citizens' groups and professional journalists. ■

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So, be it the judiciary or the civil service, the security forces or the media, these are all necessary pillars of a modern, democratic nation and no one would be better off if any one of them is worse off. In the end, prime ministerial authority is best exercised by protecting the legitimacy of the institutions through which such authority has to be enforced. If one of them is a deviant and proving difficult, a wise leader must find ways of dealing with that challenge and ultimately doing what the leader wants to do without visibly hurting a deviant's dignity. ■

A govt teacher's challenges



DILEEP RANJEKAR

IT takes around 90 minutes for us to reach the government school, about 65 km from Dehradun. The school is in a jungle and primarily caters to the children of the tribal community in the region. It is a two-room school managed by a head teacher (who also teaches) and another teacher, who teaches children in five grades. As we find in many such government schools, both the head teacher and the teacher are diligently trying to do meaningful work in the school. The classrooms are full of teaching-learning material prepared by the children and are very relevant to what they need to be learning.

While the head teacher is quite cooperative, the person who stands out is the young lady teacher who is completely immersed in her role. She lives about 30 km from the school and reaches it by public transport about half an hour before classes begin. This requires her to wake up at 5 am each day and complete household chores before leaving home.

The teacher very enthusiastically greets us and explains various teaching-learning practices that she follows. She proudly shows us the individual files she has personally built for every child, which includes their history since joining the school, their family background and their progress in learning. It is truly impressive since it has helped her so much to deal with every child with greater understanding and depth. Everything is so neatly documented. She also gives very interesting projects to groups of children that she has evolved by observing the children.

We are inside the classroom for almost 45 minutes. Not a single child looks at us, nor do they come up to her to ask for anything. They are completely focussed on the activities they are doing in groups. It is like a classroom on auto-pilot, smoothly sailing on pre-set norms. The teacher tries to give credit for all this to her recent association with the teacher learning centre of the Azim Premji Foundation. However, we know that she is a different teacher. While the discussions and events at the teacher learning centre might have helped her by shaping her ideas better, in essence she is a creative teacher who has a mind of her own. More important, she has the ability to think and interpret education in her own manner.

Imagine the enormous job the teacher has to perform while minding 30 to 40 children in a classroom — day in and day out. Many young mothers have shared with me how exhausting the job of looking after just one or two children is. Children come from different family backgrounds, different socio-economic strata, different abilities, different health levels and different aspirations. In a rural government school, most children, when they enter Class I, have no exposure to education at all since they have no experience of early childhood education — unlike their urban counterparts who often go through two to three years of nursery / kindergarten exposure in some manner or the other. Most children have no parental support in their education preparation since their parents are either illiterate or first generation literates — or are fully occupied with livelihood issues.

The National Curriculum Framework speaks of attention to the individual child, helping every child



This school in a jungle caters to tribals and has sincere, committed teachers

realise his or her potential and also the child being at the centre of the educational process. The teacher is expected to be responsible for implementation of various government programmes and schemes. She is expected to be part of the midday meal programme arrangements each day. She is also expected to deal with the parents and the members of the School Management Committee. In effect, she is expected to be like Goddess Durga with 10 hands and multiple weapons in her hands.

In practically all formal ceremonies the role of the teacher (guru) in society is eulogised as the one next to that of the mother. And yet, in most conversations about school education, the teachers are often the butt of all the criticism. They serve as the favourite punching bag for one and all. Even well-educated people loosely blame teachers for today's quality of education. References are made to teacher absenteeism without recognising the absenteeism that prevails in all government departments.

And what do we do to enable and support the

teacher before or after she becomes a teacher?

Given the poor quality of graduation, we expect a person to become a teacher through a 10-month B.Ed. programme (recently extended to two years). A programme that is delivered in non-multi-disciplinary institutions run by people who have nothing much to do with education; with a curriculum that is outdated and does not aim to prepare the teacher to successfully meet the enormity of the challenge in the classroom. A curriculum and a process that does not prepare the teacher to deal with the multigrade situation that prevails in more than 75 percent of our schools. A curriculum that at best provides only lip service to concepts such as "constructivism". A programme that is managed by poor quality faculty members. A programme where the assessment of the teacher is not rigorously made.

The selection of teachers happens by and large merely by ranking teachers who pass their B.Ed.

courses in the institutions described above. There are no additional criteria used to select teachers. In certain states, the selection process is highly politically influenced. The selection of teachers is not followed by a high-class induction or assimilation programme.

During the service, hardly anything is done to motivate the teacher or enable her to deal with the humungous responsibility of nation-building. Most states had a budget of a paltry ₹500 per teacher per year. That too was not actually spent by the teachers due to the fear of audit of their expenses. In certain states, during the past five years, this budget has been discontinued. The in-service training of teachers is designed centrally and delivered by poor quality teacher educators. Most institutions that have been

created at state, district, block and cluster level do not have people of necessary quality as well as of required number. The budgets provided for the in-service teachers are not sufficient to carry out programmes of superior quality.

Despite all these challenges, there are teachers who take charge of their all-important role and devise strategies that are innovative and useful for the realisation of the potential of the children. We need to have systems in place that would encourage and motivate more and more teachers to build the perspective of their important role in nation-building. Of the eight million teachers we have, about 20 percent are competent and self-motivated. That makes a whopping number of 16 lakh teachers. We need to take steps to progressively increase this number to over 75 percent! This would go a long way in delivering education of the quality aimed at in the education policy and moving towards the society envisaged in our Constitution. ■

Dileep Ranjekar is CEO of the Azim Premji Foundation

EIA needed for real estate



**FINE
PRINT**

KANCHI KOHLI

JUST 12 years after building and construction projects first came under the purview of the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) regulation there is a major turnaround. In an amendment to the EIA notification of 2006, issued on 9 December 2016, the environment ministry has assured the sector that if “objectives and environmental conditions that can be monitored” are included in the permissions granted to building by-laws and related permissions, then no separate environmental clearance will be required from the ministry.

The notification states upfront that this decision is in response to suggestions received to enhance “ease of doing responsible business” and streamlining permissions in the light of the government’s ‘Housing for All by 2022’ scheme, which is a flagship programme of the prime minister. While this decision requires a review, a careful look into the negotiations that the building and construction sector had on environment regulations and responsible institutions since 2004, provides a crucial background to the case.

EIA AND CONSTRUCTION

On 7 July 2004, the jurisdiction of the EIA was extended to construction projects such as “new townships, industrial townships, settlement colonies, commercial complexes, hotel complexes, hospitals and office complexes”. What this essentially meant was that most real estate and construction projects which required investments of ₹50 crore and would discharge sewage of 50 litres per day, could not be set up anywhere in India without an assessment of their environmental impact and a public hearing.

But this was soon to change. The real estate sector and its associations were not happy with this inclusion. When the EIA notification of 1994 was being reviewed for its 2006 version, there was a move from both the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) and representatives of construction-related associations to say that the sector is not damaging enough for environmental scrutiny.

Comments submitted by a reputed builder said: “Real estate development is by nature non-polluting, non-hazardous and environment-friendly and is subjected to close monitoring; therefore, it needs to be exempted.” It was argued that construction is a low-impact activity and should not be clubbed with more polluting activities such as industry and mining.

The environment ministry had argued that a full and detailed environment clearance process be applied to building, construction and real estate

projects. Eventually, the EIA notification of 2006 did include a process of environmental scrutiny but of a limited nature. All building and construction projects equal to or greater than 20,000 sq m and greater than 150,000 sq m built-up area were placed under Category B projects, to be approved by a state-level regulatory agency and without a full EIA and public hearing. Similarly, all townships and area development projects covering an area of 50 ha and above or a built-up area of 150,000 sq m and above required the same level of scrutiny.

Over the years the negotiations continued, with clarifications and amendments ongoing. In 2011, it was clarified that the general condition of the

construction projects, including those exempted in the EIA notification, will simply have to follow an online submission process. Once all the necessary documents are uploaded along with an environmental appraisal fee, a special Environment Cell will do a review, following which a specialised expert committee will suggest conditions to be included within the building permission. No separate environment clearance will be issued. The task of monitoring the conditions included in the building permissions will rest with state governments.

In addition, the notification says that two additional permissions related to air and water



The real estate sector argues that it is a non-polluting sector

‘Ease of doing responsible business’ and the ‘Housing for All by 2022’ scheme have been cited as reasons for leniency.

notification, which upscales all B category projects to A (as high impact) and seeks approval from the central government, did not apply to construction and building projects. This condition applied to all projects within 10 km (now reduced to five km) of national parks, sanctuaries, ecologically sensitive areas and inter-state boundaries.

In 2014, a range of construction activities was exempted from the building and construction projects, including schools, colleges, hostels for educational institutions as long as they followed parameters for sustainable environmental management, waste management, water harvesting, use of flyash bricks and so on.

THE NEW AMENDMENT

Even as we try and analyse this notification, state governments are already in the process of forwarding proposed changes in their by-laws to the Union environment ministry. Once examined, the new process will fall into place. Building and

pollution will not be applicable to building and construction projects. With this the amendment extends itself into a discussion on not just whether the above level of environmental scrutiny is adequate but a larger legal issue of whether subordinate legislation, issued under one law (in this case the Environment Protection Act, 1986) can actually put in place exemptions that apply to two other national laws. The prevention of air- and water pollution-related consent needs to be done under two separate national laws of 1981 and 1974, respectively.

Back in 2005, CREDAI, the apex body of private real estate developers associations, had argued that the real estate sector be removed from environment clearance processes. Further, the EIA should be done at a macro level with master plans, development plans and regional plans. A close version of what was being pushed back then is now in place, and being legally challenged before the National Green Tribunal. ■

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A play in progress at the Under The Sal Tree theatre festival

Theatre in the jungle

Under the Sal Tree attracts thousands

Saibal Chatterjee
Goalpara

IT is a nippy mid-December morning. A quiet forest in the middle of nowhere comes alive as the stage is set for a play to get underway. It is a sight to behold: a stream of unlikely theatre enthusiasts — men and women, young and old, villagers and small-townners — emerge from all directions and cram themselves into a clearing in the jungle. A temporary stage has been created here, under sal trees, entirely with locally sourced bamboo and hay.

It’s magical. One minute there isn’t a soul in sight, the very next the forest begins to buzz with activity and excitement. The spectators, mostly members of the Rabha community that inhabits this part of the world, come on foot, on bicycles, and on motorcycles. They quickly fill up the rows of planks

that have been built in a semi-circular curve in front of the proscenium.

The occasion is the four-day Under the Sal Tree International Theatre Festival 2016, hosted by the Badungduppa Kalakendra of Rampur, Goalpara district, Lower Assam.

Rampur, a small hamlet off NH 37, which links Guwahati to Goalpara, a distance of about 150 km, no longer languishes in anonymity. The village is now on the to-do list of theatre gurus who believe that the medium is not just about performance and entertainment, but also about community engagement and empowerment.

Under the Sal Tree is the brainchild of Sukracharjya Rabha, a self-effacing, visionary theatre activist who has for long been employing performance art as a means for cultural change and social assertion in this once severely disturbed, remote rural outpost of Assam.

“In the initial days, the audience here would be foxed by the experimental theatre that they watched. But now they have developed a taste for it and know exactly what they are in for,” says Sukracharjya.

Sukracharjya, now in his early forties, was a student leader during and after the Assam agitation. He was at one point the Goalpara district president of the All-Assam Students’ Union (AASU). But disillusionment with politics drove him into the domain of theatre, which he now uses as an effective tool for positive change by pulling the Rabha populace into its fold.

He started directing plays in the late 1980s, addressing the many ills that plagued his society — alcoholism, deforestation, government corruption, lack of focus among the youth, the greed of the builders lobby and so on. By the mid-1990s, he also made a name for himself as an actor.

Continued on page 30



The plays attract local people from villages and towns who watch in silence

In 1998, Sukracharjya set up the Badungduppa Kalakendra on a patch of land owned by his father. He named his theatre centre after a bamboo string-and-drum instrument that is an integral part of Rabha music. The very next year, at the Assam Natya Sammelan in Barpeta, Badungduppa staged a Rabha-language play for the first time.

The botany graduate from Goalpara College had witnessed how his village and its young people had suffered owing to the political unrest that rocked the state in the 1980s and its aftermath. He sees theatre as collective therapy for a scarred community. The one-of-a-kind theatre festival is the cornerstone of his palliative strategy.

Under the Sal Tree was born in 2008. It draws inspiration from nature and taps homegrown talent. This year, it went international. Held over 15-18 December, it had participants from Poland, South Korea, Brazil and Sri Lanka, besides troupes from West Bengal and Odisha. A performer from Poland, Wojciech Marek Kozak, and Brazilian actress Marilyn Nunes held the audience in thrall with rivetting solo acts.

Badungduppa Kalakendra, on its part, presented a Rabha-language version of William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, a spin-off from an adaptation by Kannada poet and playwright H.S. Shivaprakash, a longtime supporter of Under the Sal Tree.

"When we started this festival, we had only three to four rows of seats. Today, at the seventh edition, we have 16," says Sukracharjya. In 2008, Badungduppa Kalakendra erected tents on its premises for the visiting participants. "They did not blend with the surroundings and looked awful," says Sukracharjya. In 2009, the second year of the festival, the tents were replaced by thatched structures that enhanced the beauty of the setting.

The evolution of Sukracharjya's approach to theatre had begun a few years earlier. He developed new insights into his craft as an actor and director under the tutelage of the late Manipuri theatre doyen, Heisnam Kanhailal.

He had done a few National School of Drama workshops before he first met Kanhailal at a 2003 month-long theatre workshop organised in Guwahati by the Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre and Srimanta Sankardev Kalakshetra.

"He exposed me to experimental theatre and a



Sukracharjya Rabha, founder of Under the Sal Tree

new vocabulary of minimalist stagecraft and acting," says Sukracharjya, who went on to spend two years at Kanhailal's Manipur Kalakshetra.

Kanhailal passed away in early October in 2016 and the latest edition of Under the Sal Tree was dedicated to the theatre legend's memory.

Shivaprakash's involvement with Under the Sal Tree goes all the way back to the festival's very first edition. On that occasion, Badungduppa Kalakendra's home production was a Rabha version of a folk tale that the Kannada writer and academic had dramatised.

The audience here is made up exclusively of local villagers and two plays are staged every day — one starting at 10 am, the other at 2.30 pm. The performances take place on a low, open-air proscenium stage. The festival does not use any kind of sound equipment so as not to harm the environment.

As South Korea's Inhyun Song, in Rampur with a solo act, puts it: "The natural setting provides a great impetus. I could feel the spirit of the forest guide me as I performed."

"This theatre festival demonstrates that it is possible to do an event of this nature without using microphones and speakers," adds Song.

Sukracharjya also encourages all performers, even the visiting ones, to use the available natural

backdrop and not insist on putting up black screens that interfere with the view the forest provides.

"Our idea is to promote dramaturgy that is flexible and free from elaborate props so that plays can be performed anywhere and everywhere," says Sukracharjya.

"There was no tradition of daytime performances when we began and the audience here had no exposure to experimental theatre," says Sukracharjya. "Things are now very different and the locals are amazingly receptive to plays of all kinds and in all languages." Most performances at the festival now attract up to 15,000 people.

Subodh Pattnaik, whose Bhubaneswar-based school of people's theatre, Natya Chetana, has been successfully experimenting with participatory and roving theatre, says: "The audience here sets a great example. They are in their seats on time and they stay attentive to plays in languages that they do not understand."

One important function of Under the Sal Tree is to spread awareness about the need to save the forest that yields what is regarded as the finest timber. Sal wood is known to be indestructible but unfortunately the forest is highly vulnerable as locals are increasingly going in for rubber plantations, which are usually ready for commercial exploitation in seven years. A sal tree, on the other hand, takes 20 to 25 years to yield wood.

Says Rampur village headman Hamar Singh Rabha: "Only sal trees that stand around our temples and cemeteries aren't touched. They are regarded as sacred. Everything else is fair game."

Amiya Rabha, a member of the audience from the nearby Kakuapara village, says at the end of a play: "The forest is sacred for the Rabhas. It has to be saved at all cost." It is clear that the theatre festival is making a dent, however small.

Sukracharjya is a stickler for punctuality. He waits for nobody, not even VIPs, and every play in his festival begins right on the dot. "In the initial days, people who arrived late would miss parts of a play," he says. "But now everybody arrives well in advance."

Goalpara and the adjoining district of Kamrup are home to the Rabhas, who have a rich cultural and social heritage that has forever been under threat. Under the Sal Tree festival goes a long way in defining their identity.

Says Shivaprakash, who teaches at JNU's School of Arts and Aesthetics, "The plays staged here are not only for entertainment, but also for community assertion."

That, indeed, is the primary rationale behind Sukracharjya's activities. Today, Badungduppa Kalakendra is a permanent space where, among other things, Sukracharjya and his band of committed theatre enthusiasts organise workshops for local children during the summer holidays and at other times.

In addition, Badungduppa has an 18-strong theatre repertory with nine floating members who come in as and when their services are required.

The Under the Sal Tree theatre festival may have taken firm roots, but its work is far from over. Nobody knows that better than Sukracharjya. "Sal trees produce fruit with wings," he says. "When they fall off, they fly and land far and wide. New trees grow." That is the way he wants his experiments in theatre to evolve. ■

The stunning city of Hampi

SUSHEELA NAIR



The Lotus Mahal with its beautiful archways

Susheela Nair
Hampi

ORANGE County is undoubtedly an imposing contemporary palace resort. I stepped into its portals through a massive, fort-like gateway. The stone-paved boulevard and the pink façade grabbed my attention. The domes, hallways with dainty floral arches and the bay windows are all reminiscent of regal elegance. Stucco paintings of village and market scenes grace the walls and lotus motifs pervade the resort. The Indo-Islamic architecture takes design cues from the historic site of Hampi.

In Orange County accommodation is available in different categories — Jal Mahal, Nivasa and Nilaya. The rooms are large and the interiors modern and minimalist. The highlight is the Jal Mahal, the quintessence of luxury. The regal ambience was perceptible, as I luxuriated, like the ladies of the palace, in Zenana, a swanky suite inspired by the Queen's quarters.

The boutique resort matches the opulence and grandeur of the bygone Vijayanagara Empire (1336-1646). The restaurants, Tuluva and Badami, are named after the two erstwhile dynasties of the region. Another palace, inspired by the Lotus Mahal, houses the spa and the Badami restaurant where I enjoyed a candlelight dinner. I relaxed in the Tuluva restaurant, overlooking a pool, and watched the water while savouring Vijayanagara fare with its tangy flavours.

Guided by Hussain, the resident historian at the resort, I embarked on a trail to the monuments and temples in Hampi. One can spend days just soaking in the atmosphere of the place. Every ruin, every defaced statue, speaks volumes of a bygone grandeur and opulence when kings weighed themselves against grain, gold or money, and distributed it to the poor and merchants stocked diamonds, pearls, fine silks, brocades, horses and everything under the sun.



Orange County Resort

SUSHEELA NAIR

rectangular pieces of granite with each piece numbered, indicating its exact position in the construction.

From the Palace Enclosure, I went to the Hazare Rama temple, once a royal temple for the private worship of the Vijayanagara kings. I gazed in wonder at the exuberant scenes from the epics carved on the pillars and walls with friezes depicting processions of horses, elephants, dancing girls and soldiers attired in their splendid weaponry.

From here, we walked to the Zenana area, which contains the base of two queens' palaces, the remains of several lofty watch towers and the Lotus Mahal, an elegant two-storied palace which derives its name from the beautiful recessed archways arranged in geometric regularity, like the petals of a flower opening to the sun. To the east of the Zenana area are the elephants' stables with domed ceilings and arch-connecting doorways, eaves and chambers.

The Sacred Centre contains the four gigantic stone-carved icons of the gods. One is the Badavilinga, standing in a ruined shrine. Part of this monolithic structure is in running water, supplied by the great canal. The other is the awesome Lakshminarasimha, with great bulging eyes, seated on a seven-hooded snake in a walled enclosure. The journey to Hemakuta hill, adjacent to the Virupaksha temple, begins with a visit to the two monolithic statues of Ganesha located on the southern part of this hill. They are the Sasive Kalu Ganesha (ironically named after the mustard seed) and Kadale Kalu Ganesha (named after the tiny groundnut) in an elegant shrine with a pillared hall in front.

The Virupaksha temple, dedicated to Lord Shiva and his consort, Pampa Devi, enshrines a *shivalinga* and is the only temple in active worship in Hampi. As we wandered through the complex, the smell of incense wafted through the air and we could hear temple bells pealing. But the most beautiful part of this structure is the Rangamandapa built by Krishna Deva Raya to commemorate his coronation.

We ended our sojourn at the Vijay Vitthala temple, which is the most splendid monument in the World Heritage Site. I was entranced by its towered gateways, its elaborate small stone *rath* (temple chariot), the large Ranga Mandapa with 56 pillars, each carved out of a single piece of rock.

An unusual and especially delightful feature are the floridly elaborate musical pillars, designed to produce musical notes when tapped. Also eye-catching is the stone chariot which stands proudly in the temple courtyard. Delicately carved in varied styles from seven pieces of rock, it boasts of superb engineering as the wheels could rotate once upon a time. I returned exulting over the archaeological wonders of Hampi. ■

FACT FILE

Road: Hospet – 13 km, Bengaluru – 365 km
Air: Dabolim (Goa) – 300 km, Bengaluru – 365 km
Where to stay: Orange County Resort
Contact: hampi@orangecounty.in / info@orangecounty.in
Best Season: October to March

The image of Ma

By Anita Anand



Embodying Motherhood: Anu Aneja and Shubhangi Vaidya, SAGE/ Yoda, ₹795

MOTHERHOOD is complicated business, and more so in India. The book aims to look at the motherhood discourse in urban India in the context of prevailing motherhood ideologies, from a feminist perspective. The authors say that in ancient religious iconography, the maternal body has been deified and idealised. In contemporary consumerist cultures, it may be commodified or devalued, depending on an 'enabled' or 'disabled' body.

The authors, who are also mothers, bring their personal experiences into their thesis. They locate their work within larger intersectional frameworks and various influences among women from urban/rural areas and class, caste and regional divides.

The book explores the role of the Goddess or Devi in Indian mythology and culture and points to contradictions in the daily lives of Indians. The recent increase in the incidence of violence against women, especially sexual violence, calls into question this contradictory perception of women in a patriarchal society. The authors suggest that women are violated because of the idealisation of a desexualised maternal which validates the desecration of the irreverent, sexual female body as a pariah, in a cultural context which promotes the splitting up of the maternal object into a divine spirit and a profane body.

They further point out that the role of women in Hindu religious texts, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, continues to exert relevance in Indian life today. They examine, in some detail, the role of Indian cinema and iconic films such as *Mother India* and *Deewar* and the projection of sacrifice, nationhood and motherhood in the films, and how some contemporary films are attempting

to change the narrative to a more realistic one.

Cut to modern-day capitalist India and the authors suggest that patterns are fast changing and there is growing acceptance of women's contributions; and that equality, emerging educational and employment opportunities as well as increasing participation of men in childcare and parental responsibilities, are positive signs for the future. At the same time, the underlying sexist attitudes of a traditional patriarchal society are not necessarily disturbed. In this environment, notions of maternal autonomy, desire and sexual agency are repressed.

There is some detail in the book on the sexuality and agency of motherhood and the contradictions between them. This poses challenges for women, who must find ways to negotiate both their sexuality and agency as women and mothers. Other emerging issues, such as surrogacy and the continuing abuse of women's bodies are highlighted.

The book includes the philosophy, psychology, history, sociology and ethnography of motherhood in India.

The authors, both academics based at the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) have experience and interest in disability (specifically autism) and French literature. Thus, the book deals with disability, autism and motherhood as well as feminist perspectives on motherhood in France. While single motherhood and disability are important issues, they could have been woven more adroitly into the book. And, as the book is primarily concerned with perspectives from contemporary India, the French experience does not add real value.

The book is well researched and covers a fair amount of territory around women as mothers and the topic of motherhood in India. The span is wide. It is written in an academic style and language and will appeal to scholars and researchers working in women's studies, gender, motherhood and the intersectionality of issues around motherhood. ■

'Decline in working women is worrisome'

IN recent years, news about the declining number of women in the workforce in India has surprised economists and feminists. The downward trend has been a bit of a mystery. After all, during a period of rapid economic growth more women should be out there working. Why would they stay at home?

Surprisingly, this phenomenon isn't limited to India. It extends to other countries in Asia, a dynamic economic region. Now a new book, *Transformation of Women at Work in Asia: An Unfinished Development Agenda*, unravels this puzzle. It critically examines why women's participation in the labour force in Asia is declining or is stagnant except for a few exceptions.

The volume comprises a series of very well-researched papers on India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Indonesia and China and more. It is a holistic study of all the factors that impact women and work — economic change, labour supply, education, fertility and social norms.

The book has two excellent chapters on India, including a primary study in Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat, that underlines the constraints women face if they want to work.

Sukti Dasgupta and Sher Singh Verick, both with the ILO, have edited the book. Verick, who is Deputy Director at the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Decent Work Team for South Asia, was interviewed by *Civil Society*:

How significant is the decline of women in the workforce? Do we need to worry?

The decline in the female labour force participation rate in India is significant. In 2004-05, it stood at 42.7 percent for women aged 15 and above. By 2011-12, the rate had fallen dramatically to 31.2 percent. More recent data from the Labour Bureau for 2013-14 indicates that the participation rate for women stands at just 31.1 percent.

While the decline of women in the workforce in India is due to various factors, we should be concerned. After all, if India is to sustain high levels of inclusive economic growth, it is absolutely essential that women's participation in the labour force increases. The issue should, therefore, be of central concern to economic policy.

What would be the key reason for this decline and is the picture totally bleak?

There has been considerable research and debate on various explanations for this puzzling trend. In our recent book we have highlighted four explanations: First, increased educational attainment; second, rising household incomes, which pulled women out of the drudgery of agricultural labour; third, mis-measurement of



Sher Singh Verick at the ILO office in New Delhi

women's participation in the labour force; and fourth, the lack of employment opportunities for women in the non-farm sector.

Based on small-sample primary surveys, there is also some evidence that the mechanisation of agriculture has contributed to the decline in demand for female agricultural labour.

The picture is bleak and there can be no complacency about the challenges women face in the world of work. At the same time, new opportunities are emerging for women.

Would skilling programmes help? What are the sectors in which women could find employment?

A key factor in determining whether women can access decent and productive employment is education. In fact, education beyond secondary school is needed to ensure that women have the opportunity to access better jobs. In addition to formal education, vocational education and training are essential because both soft and hard skills are demanded by employers. For this reason, skilling programmes are important for women, but these programmes should ensure that women gain skills in new, growth sectors, which would help them overcome the occupational segregation they face. As technology is rapidly changing, women need skills that are not only relevant now but also in the future.

Traditional sectors for women to find employment outside agriculture include labour-intensive manufacturing and service sectors. However, the challenge for women in India is in being able to access jobs that are near where they

live and allow them to operate within social norms which govern how and where women can work outside the home. Moreover, women need help to overcome the care burden and infrastructure constraints (such as access to water and energy) they face.

'The challenge for women in India is in being able to access jobs that are near where they live and allow them to operate within their social norms.'

What are the three things the government can do to make it easier for women to work?

Policy-makers are carrying out many right steps to enhance women's employment. Overall, a comprehensive and integrated approach is needed to promote women's participation in the labour force and access opportunities for women to access decent and productive employment and establish their own businesses. A number of dimensions should be addressed but the top three interventions include:

- Promoting women's employment as a central theme for economic policy, and facilitating investment in locations where women can access jobs, particularly outside the metros.
- Improving access to quality higher education and training.
- Enhancing women's rights and protection in the workplace, which would, in turn, encourage women to join the labour force.

Two other important areas for policies include: reducing the time burden for women through better access to water, energy and childcare; and improving infrastructure so women have safe and affordable options to access jobs.

Have other countries in South Asia done better than India? What are the reasons for their success?

The trends in South Asia suggest that female labour force participation has increased in Bangladesh (and to some extent, Pakistan). However, barriers exist in all countries in the region.

There has been an increase in the female labour force participation in Bangladesh, a low-income country, alongside the acceleration in economic growth since the 1990s. In line with other countries' experience in export-oriented industrialisation, Bangladesh has witnessed a substantial increase in female employment in labour-intensive export-oriented industries in urban areas. The rapid expansion of microfinance in rural areas has supported women's employment in poultry and livestock.

But other countries in South Asia struggle: Sri Lanka is, in this regard, an interesting example.

Despite progress on human development over many decades and more recent positive economic trends, female labour force participation in Sri Lanka has remained stagnant. In this context, there is evidence of important differences in the factors that enable or constrain women from participating in the labour market, notably education.

The critical stage in the education cycle for participation is secondary education, beyond which the likelihood of participation rises. The findings suggest that investment in education beyond secondary school and vocational education and training are critical, while highlighting the importance of cultural and household-based constraints, particularly to married women's participation in the workforce.

A key factor is household work and the care burden deriving, on the one hand, from the lack of institutional support for the care of young children and elderly people and, on the other hand, social norms that impose on women the responsibility for care and household work. Better implementation of policies and revision of laws is needed to promote opportunities for Sri Lankan women in paid work. ■

CALL FOR THE POST OF ASSISTANT EDITOR, HINDI FEATURE SERVICE, CHARKHA

Charkha Development Communication Network is an innovative non-profit organisation that empowers rural communities in remote and conflict-affected regions of India with the necessary skills and means to improve their ability to communicate and access information. This enables them to become part of the larger, networked world through the creative use of media.

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PICTURES BY AJIT KRISHNA

Dhokra redux

TRADITIONAL dhokra metal art is given a new twist by young craftsman Soubhik Daw. He has combined it with wood and then designed a range of products — serving trays, towel holders, napkin holders and salad spoons. There's also dhokra jewellery.

Daw is from Santiniketan. A traditional dhokra craftsman, he says the idea struck him while visiting upper class homes. He experimented and then set up a workshop which now employs seven people: three women and four men. So his business is a source of income for seven families, he says.

Dhokra is one of the oldest metal crafts in the world, dating back to the Indus Valley Civilisation. It has survived because of the delicate artifacts crafts persons make with it and because it has been constantly updated.

Daw uses akashmoni wood (*acacia auriculiformis*). It has a smooth feel and looks pretty with dhokra artwork. The monsoon is a lean season for Daw because dhokra needs sunshine to dry. He says many tourists who visit Santiniketan buy from him. Like most craftspersons he relies on exhibitions too. But the



idea of having his own e-commerce site doesn't interest him. "My business is very small. I would need to invest in a whole lot of infrastructure to do that," he says. ■

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Frames and bowls

SHANTI Bai and her husband, Chand Ram, live in a slum in Bhopal. They work as daily labourers, mostly in the construction sector. Shanti Bai says there were times when they had no

work, or couldn't go out and look for work. But she had an additional skill. She knew how to make products from papier mache, a skill that her mother had taught her. A loan she got through Dastari Haat Samiti enabled her to invest in brushes, wastepaper, colours, painting pots and she got down to work.

Shanti Bai makes photo frames and frames with mirrors in different sizes, wall hangings, animals and bins, all encrusted with bangles and bits of glass.

The artwork on her products is reminiscent of Gond paintings. She sells mainly at exhibitions. This is the second time she has come to the Dastkari Haat Mela at Dilli Haat. People are buying and Shanti Bai is confident of returning home with additional income.

Handing over her visiting card with pride, she strongly recommends people buy her *mitalini*: a bowl that keeps *rotis* warm and soft. ■

Contact: Shanti Bai, 9644198288, 9165688797



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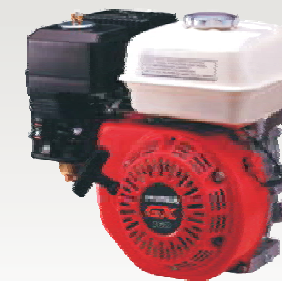


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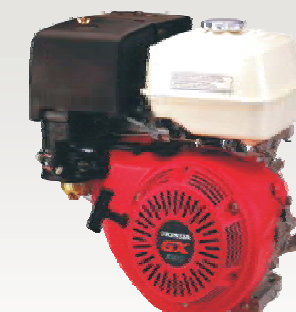
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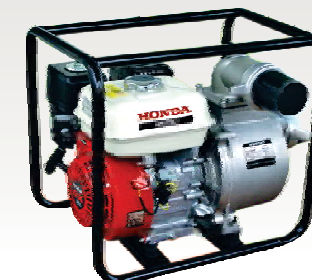


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government agencies to implement healthcare programmes of Central and State Governments, including the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM). In 2014, nearly 3.50 lakh people benefited from primary healthcare services in areas of operation.



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