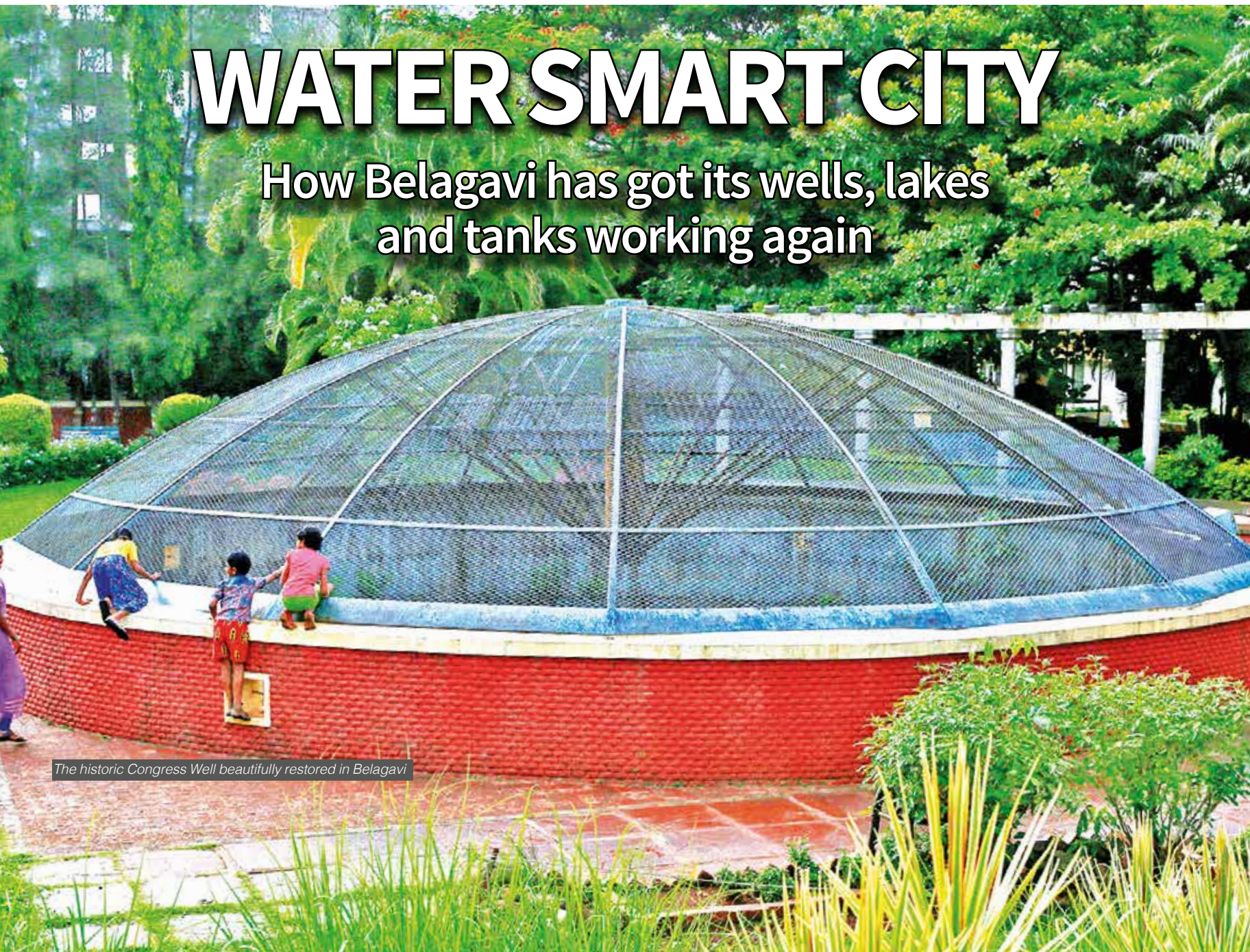


Civil Society

WATER SMART CITY

How Belagavi has got its wells, lakes and tanks working again



The historic Congress Well beautifully restored in Belagavi

BENGAL'S KANYASHREE

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LYNCHING ANGER GROWS

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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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What is smart, really?

THERE is a lot of talk regarding smart cities as though they are all about new technologies, user charges and corporate-style management. But the cities we see getting their act together are just doing the most basic of things and often reviving traditional systems to deal with their problems. Belagavi, which used to be called Belgaum, is an example. The city has revived its age-old network of wells to successfully tackle its water shortages. The wells went derelict when the city, some decades ago, shifted to piped water sourced from a dam. But that didn't last and Belagavi was left high and dry, forcing the civic administration to turn to the old wells. When the piped water came, people were dissuaded from using the wells. Over time they began dumping garbage in the wells. Now, after a major effort over some years, the wells are back and the city's water problem is solved or at any rate much improved.

Belagavi is a good example of how urban solutions should be local and sustainable to succeed. Belagavi's civic administrators also show us that there is no alternative to rolling up one's sleeves and getting down to work. The best solutions are found on the ground and amongst people, not from consultants and funders who could be merely transposing ideas. Elected officials in Belagavi have had to create awareness and change perceptions of what water supply is all about. In our view, therefore, Belagavi is a truly smart city, which knows to address its needs in inventive ways.

All Indian cities need to be more like Belagavi in terms of their civic spirit and overall goal to be sustainable. The solutions, of course, will vary depending on so many different factors. But there is no substitute to active and inventive local self-governance because Indian cities defy standard solutions.

Anyone who thinks corruption has gone down in the country needs to think again. It flourishes and particularly so at the grassroots. The Right to Information (RTI) movement and law came out of the need for transparency so that money meant for development gets spent on development. But in the absence of State support, implementing the law is challenging. Activists who try to help people expose corruption face a severe backlash from vested interests. For getting on the wrong side of a sarpanch, Nikhil Dey and some others of the MKSS have faced a case in which a lower court has ordered them to be jailed. This is just one example and there are innumerable others from across the country. We spoke to Dey about the hazards of taking up causes at the village level.

The NGO sector has generally been under pressure. This is sad because NGOs play an important role in solving the problems of development. The kind of regulatory pressure they have been subjected to under income-tax, FCRA and now GST doesn't allow freedom to pursue worthy causes with passion. Mathew Cherian, who heads VANI and speaks for several NGOs, explains to us in an interview why NGOs need to be treated differently.



COVER STORY

Water smart city

Faced with an acute drought in 1995, the Belagavi City Corporation launched a mission to revive old wells, tanks and lakes. Belagavi now has no shortage of water even in summer.

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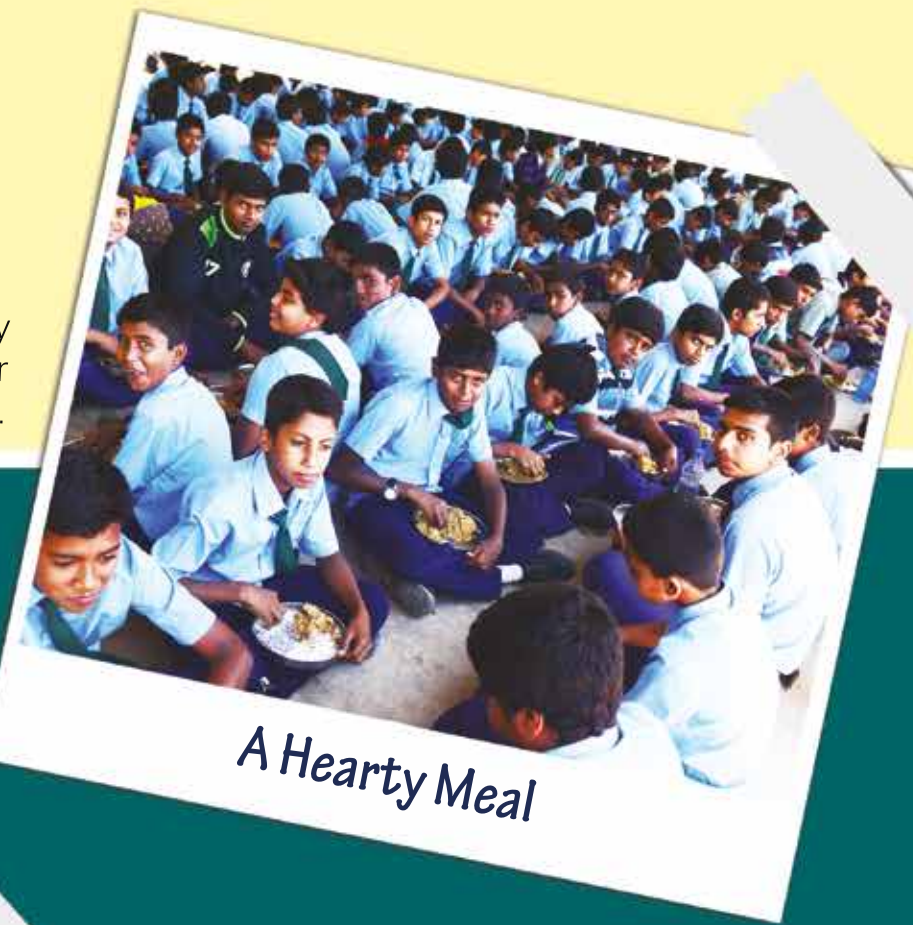
Our Gift to Children



Reaching Out

Himalaya has adopted 34 government schools in Bengaluru and reaching out to more than 5000 students through Akshaya Patra's Mid-Day Meal program.

We are hopeful that a shared meal will create happy memories for children and improve their school enrolment and attendance.



A Hearty Meal



Touching Lives

Through the mid-day meal scheme, the school children are provided a healthy, well-balanced and nutritious lunch. Himalaya has sponsored two vehicles for the distribution of food currently catering to these 34 schools around the city.

IN THE LIGHT

SAMITA RATHOR



LETTERS



In a small compact state like Delhi, it should not be so difficult to conquer the malaise of malnutrition.

If states like Kerala and Tamil Nadu can do it, why not Delhi? *Anganwadi* workers can be given training and an Akshaya Patra breakfast scheme launched for feeding children in *anganwadi* centres.

Shanta Kumari

The citizens of Delhi are enthusiastic about protesting against all kinds of issues at Jantar Mantar. But, sadly, an important issue like child malnutrition is not taken up. We have child beggars on the streets and child domestic workers slaving in homes.

This city is totally uncaring and coldly political.

Rahul Shah

Housing rights

This is with reference to your article, 'Are basic property rights for slums the answer?' Slums are ruining Indian cities. Is there a solution? Very difficult to find an answer in a democracy like ours where the Constitution guarantees freedom of movement. China does not permit that and thus has no slums. A way has to be found to control movement. The answer lies in development of villages and a bigger push to creation of employment there and not in

giving property rights in cities.

Prem Prakash

Water Cup

Your story on the Paani Foundation's great work was very inspiring. Especially noteworthy is their teamwork.

Praveen Ingale

I am very proud of all the water works that Bidal village did. In Maharashtra we will create history by making the entire state rich in water.

Janardan Pandurang Jagadale

Bapurao Jagadale, the farmer from Bidal village, managed to achieve a yield of 20 tonnes of onion per acre. On 10 acres he got 200 tonnes. It is a good yield and reflects the spirit of Bidal. Hats off to them for their participation in the Satyamev Jayate Water Cup.

Dayanand Madane

Review errors

This is about Anjana Basu's review of the book, *Kautik on Embers*. Uddhav Shelke didn't write the novel *Dhag* in 1964, but much earlier. The first Marathi edition was published in 1960. The name of Kautik's husband is Mahadev and not Madhav, which is a more prominent name in upper caste families. The protagonist and her family are not Dalits. They belong to the tailoring caste which doesn't come under the Dalit or Scheduled Caste category.

Amravati

Editor: The errors are regretted.

Letters should be sent to response@civilsocietyonline.com

Nutrition muddle

Thanks for your cover story, 'Muddled nutrition in Delhi ends up in PIL. These three sentences in your story put the whole sad issue in a nutshell: 'No political party has seriously addressed the problem. It hasn't figured in election manifestos. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government has inherited it as a legacy of previous Congress regimes. But despite being three years in power, AAP hasn't acted either.'

Children need priority attention and investments. As residents of India, they are entitled to a few rights and providing them should not be taken as charity or as a favour. It is not that funds are the major crunch - the major crunch is the will from within. A government, a department or a commission is a reflection of society's mindset. Let us accept this fact first.

Dr Chiranjeeb Kakoty

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'NGO FUNDING HAS BEEN FALLING QUITE DRASTICALLY'

Mathew Cherian on the confusing regulations the voluntary sector is grappling with

Civil Society News
New Delhi

THE voluntary sector in India has been under regulatory pressure for one reason or the other. Thousands of organisations have seen their licences cancelled for violating norms relating to foreign contributions. Income tax provisions, on the other hand, make it difficult to show any income at all even though it may come from bona fide social initiatives and be intended to achieve financial sustainability. Now there is GST to contend with as well since there is lack of clarity on what NGOs should be paying at the time of making transactions.

The role of NGOs as agents of development and change is well-documented. They have proved to be reliable and innovative solution providers, especially in last-mile situations. Even as the government draws on them, it makes their functioning difficult — a trend that began with the Congress-led UPA and has continued with the NDA under the BJP.

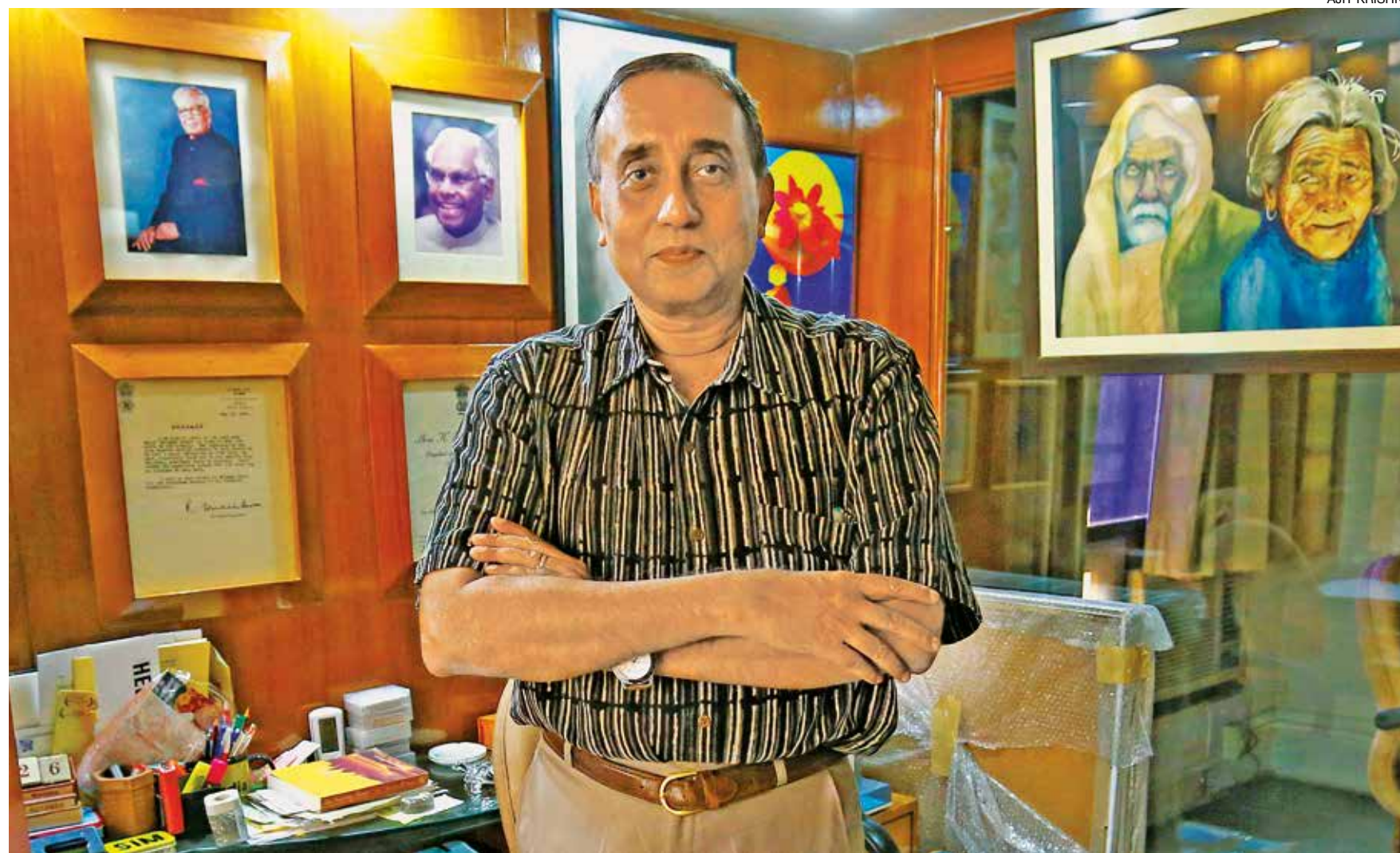
A major reason for the problem is that no clear policy governs the voluntary sector. NGOs themselves have done little by way of self-regulation so that governments can't meddle with them.

In response to a public interest litigation (PIL), the Supreme Court in July asked the Union government to consider drafting a law to regulate NGOs. Such a law was drafted under the UPA but it didn't see the light of day.

We spoke to Mathew Cherian, head of Voluntary Action Network India (VANI), an apex body of NGOs from across India, for his views on what could be the way forward.

It is being said that grassroots NGOs are under severe stress because of government regulations and taxation. Is this so?

We have been facing a lot of scrutiny both from the Income Tax Department and the Union Home Ministry. Slightly large NGOs have been getting scrutiny notices. There seems to be some internal circular that the moment an NGO crosses ₹50 lakh of overall income it will come under scrutiny. In the scrutiny, the officer can ask for anything — all details, accounts, passbooks. In certain organisations, that would run into thousands of pages. So you have to take multiple copies of that and leave it with the scrutiny officer. He can demand



Mathew Cherian: 'Nobody is aware of what the implications of GST are for the NGO sector'

more documentation. Most NGOs have one accountant or half an accountant so it's very difficult for them to handle all this.

The other issue is if NGOs are doing slightly commercial work, they have to declare it else this income will be taxed in full. So NGOs selling books, magazines, artisanal craft or handicrafts all come under Section 215 of the income tax rules. Their income is treated as commercial income and not charitable money. A demand notice is sent to them.

The process is first you pay what is demanded in the notice and then you go in for appeal. If you win the appeal you can get your refund from the Income-Tax Department which is not a simple procedure and can take anywhere between two to three years.

Nobody is aware of what the implications of GST on the non-profit sector are. But one area that is going to cause concern is CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) funding. Some companies have brought CSR under their service tax provision. So non-profits getting CSR funds become vendors of services. As a result, we will also come under GST.

The company may deduct 18 percent GST and give you the chit. Then the only way you can offset that 18 percent GST is through some other GST which you can claim. But no chartered accountant is clear about the rules. So we don't know.

Does GST apply to all NGOs?

There are two opinions. One says if you are in the nature of providing services you may have to pay GST. So if you are providing medical services you may be classified as a service provider of medicines. If you are running educational services, and to cover costs charging a nominal ₹50, they can classify it as a service. The quantum of charge is not important. Even for ₹50 you will have to pay service charge.

Should the non-profit sector have been treated differently?

Yes. We should have been treated differently because the nature of the service provision is not a for-profit provision. It's a charitable service. You can speculate whether a nominal charge of ₹50 for remedial education or a token fee of ₹10 for charitable health services is commercial. Many NGOs in the health sector charge a small amount for medicines.

Now this will fall under the ambit of GST and cause problems. Many organisations will not pay this GST because under each receipt you can't say 'GST ₹2'. Supposing you are charging ₹10 for a service. Instead of 18 percent you will charge ₹2. Then they will say you charged 20 percent so you violated the 18 percent rule. You should be charging ₹1.80 paise on a ₹10 provision. So there are lots of

things that can happen. The problem is many chartered accountants are not clear on this. There is overall confusion.

VANI doesn't do any service for which it charges. But the sector is much larger than VANI so they might have problems with this.

There seems to be a sense that the government is deliberately doing all this to harass the voluntary sector. Is this a fact?

The scrutiny notices by the Income Tax Department seem to go to NGOs whom they want to harass. Even VANI has got one notice, by the way.

What impact is this having? Are NGOs closing down? Is the sector shrinking?

On the FCRA (Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act) front there have been huge implications. Mostly NGOs dependent on foreign funding have been struggling. There were 18 international organisations on the banned list and they have all started closing shop. Many have sent off their employees. The FCRA accounts of Henri Tiphagne's organisation, People's Watch, was closed and they had to lay off their employees. They have gone in for appeal.

Other smaller NGOs have closed down because they have no money to pay salaries. NGOs being

supported by CORDAID (Catholic Organisation for Relief and Development Aid) or DAN Church Aid have all had to shut down or pare down their operations. In that sense, there has been a shrinking of the sector.

But because of this trouble the membership of VANI has grown. Non-profits find that we are raising our voice. They say that if tomorrow they come for us at least there will be somebody who will speak up for us.

How many NGOs have lost their FCRA licences?

About 10,000 NGOs were not given their FCRA. Some of the reasons cited were that they were not showing their full accounts. But many of these were simple clerical issues. The ministry also seems to have lost some of their submissions. VANI appealed so they allowed those NGOs to once again file online and fill in whatever was missing.

At last count about 8,000 out of 10,000 NGOs had cleared their FCRA. At least that outcome was good and VANI's services were found to be useful.

'Some companies have brought CSR under their service tax provision. So non-profits getting CSR funds become vendors of services.'

This also led to an increase in our membership.

But the government's online system still doesn't work completely. When you try to upload, the system often goes on the blink. And this happens in Delhi. So you can imagine how difficult it must be for a small rural NGO in UP or Bihar to file online. Digital connectivity is so poor.

During the UPA rule there was a move to have a law for the voluntary sector. The NGO sector leaders opted for self-regulation. Do you think a proper law might have prevented this sort of situation from developing?

There was a move for self-regulation. I had chaired an accreditation committee with the Planning Commission and suggested ways to accredit. Credibility Alliance and Bright Star were also doing accreditation. We have at least 40,000 NGOs who have uploaded their accounts. It may not be a huge figure compared to the millions of NGOs around but at least so many filed.

A PIL was filed in the Supreme Court which has now established a committee to examine the issue of a law for the voluntary sector. Again we have revived the same law we had drafted during the UPA regime. Nobody in the law ministry took it up then. The issue was which ministry will deal with it. They tossed the draft law to the Ministry of

Corporate Affairs, saying they have lots of experience since they have recently drafted a Company's Bill. The ministry tossed it back to the law ministry.

What were its highlights?

It said to implement a new law, put in an accreditation system, bring transparency into the system, etc. NGOs want to be transparent and accountable but the government is not creating the systems for it. They simply publish a report each time, saying only so many NGOs have filed their returns. Under the Societies Registration Act, 1860, there is no provision that says you have to file your returns. Only Uttar Pradesh has a five-year registration law with a provision of filing your returns. So NGOs in Uttar Pradesh have been filing because it is mandatory.

NGOs working with VANI are mostly in health, education, environment and grassroots issues. Are they getting financial support from companies or the government?

Funding has been falling quite drastically. CSR money is accessed mostly by the better-off NGOs who can draw up proposals according to corporate standards. Rural NGOs don't have access to CSR funds except if there is a factory around or a company near their place of operation. Many of them are not getting funds. The amount available to NGOs under CSR has been drastically reduced because a lot of it is being lost to Swachh Bharat and Skill India. Other ministries, too, are grabbing that money, especially from public sector companies.

Is VANI taking any measures to bring NGOs up to date on the new regulations?

Actually, VANI has done more than 15 regional workshops across the country in places like Raipur, Guwahati and Lucknow. We take chartered accountants with us to explain these rules. We have started a VANI southern hub in Chennai and an eastern hub in Kolkata. We also want to start VANI Shiksha which will explain service tax, income tax, GST and all financial regulations to NGOs.

Is VANI thinking of helping NGOs to access funding from the government or from companies?

We have been discussing this. But there are already some organisations like the Charities Aid Foundation and United Way and some so-called consulting agencies who are trying to access corporate money for non-profits. There was an article in the *Mint* describing them as the new set of middlemen. Actually, within VANI, there is a division of opinion on whether we should go down this route. Once we become a funding agency it will change the nature of our organisation.

Are young people keen to join or start NGOs? Is the surge to join or start non-profit building on the decline?

The surge is still continuing. BITS in Goa has started a non-profit incubator. They want to create five million NGO start-ups which can solve India's problems. Atul Satija of Nudge Foundation has started an NGO incubator called N/Core in Bengaluru. Youngsters are coming up. New NGOs have ideas and passion but even they don't know about the tangle of new laws. ■

Impoverished girls of Medinipur find a friend in Kanyashree

West Bengal scheme helps them through school and into jobs

Subir Roy
Kolkata

MONIKA Soren, from Paschim Medinipur district of West Bengal, was born into the impoverished tribal Santhal community. Her father was the sole bread earner of her six-member family. As a little girl she would plant a stick into the ground, hang a basket from it, take her father's bow and arrows and keep shooting at the basket.

When her father saw her determination, he ignored peer advice and sent her to school instead of arranging her marriage at adolescence. She first represented her school in shot put and then, when her teachers saw her obvious talent in archery, organised professional training for her from 2012. Eventually, she moved to the Sports Authority of India (SAI) facility in Kolkata for rigorous training under top professionals.

Over the past few years she has won many national awards. In 2015, at the age of 19, Monika was part of the national team that won an Asia Cup bronze medal in Bangkok. Her crowning glory till now has been being part of the national team that last year won gold at the Second Stage Asia Archery Cup Tournament in Taipei.

An important reason why Monika, who is still quite poor, is not already married and a mother is that she is a recipient of the West Bengal government scheme, Kanyashree Prakalpa, which offers poor girls financial incentives so that they keep going to school and do not get married too early.

The scheme seeks to improve infant and maternal mortality rates by preventing early marriage and resultant health risks and acts as a deterrent against trafficking. It is also a pushback against poverty which causes parents to get their daughters married as quickly as possible so as to have fewer mouths to feed.

The two-part scheme, launched in 2013, offers an annual scholarship of ₹750 to school-going girls (Classes 8-12) in the 13-18 age group and a one-time grant of ₹25,000 on reaching 18. Girls have to meet two conditions — not be married and come from a poor family with an annual income of less than ₹1.2 lakh — and keep going to school regularly.

The most visible sign of the West Bengal government's strategy is groups of girls going to school, neatly dressed and self-confident, on

bicycles early morning in semi-urban and rural areas. The bicycles come from the scheme Sabooj Sathi, which seeks to distribute four million bicycles to children in Classes 9-12 to reduce dropouts. They have been distributed in the past two years, 2015-17. The bicycle is an enabler which helps the main programme, Kanyashree, succeed.

The big thing about the Kanyashree scheme is that it works, is visible across the state and in a few years has secured a space for itself in the popular imagination. Over four million girls are currently enrolled under it and nearly nine million have benefited from it till now.

In June, Kanyashree secured international recognition by winning the 2017 United Nations Public Service Award, becoming one of the three schemes across the world to be placed in Category I for "reaching the poorest and most vulnerable through inclusive service and participation". Globally acclaimed for being comprehensive, efficiently implemented and easy to access, it has been adopted as a model for the central government's Beti Bachao Beti Padhao scheme.

Kanyashree runs on information technology, both in doing things and monitoring the work done. It is delivered through a dedicated web-based portal (www.wbkanyashree.gov.in) which reduces paper work and response time. The system was developed in just two months in 2013 by the National Informatics Centre in West Bengal, taking in data on millions of girls, 17,000 institutions like schools, 13 government departments and 130 bank branches. UNESCO is a partner for the project and technically helps watch over it through a robust monitoring and evaluation process. The project began with a baseline survey so as to help evaluate progress over time.

To enrol for Kanyashree a girl has to manually complete a form and get it certified by the head of her educational institution. When this form is presented at a bank branch it opens a 'zero balance no-frills account' and uploads the data. If the application is accepted, the amount is transferred to this account. All primary data on the scheme is entered by educational institutions.

"The fact that Kanyashree is a user-friendly programme has certainly helped," Ersed Ali, teacher-in-charge at Howrah Unsani High School, is quoted as saying in a report, "Celebrating the Kanyashree Success" which bears the West Bengal government and UNESCO imprimatur. "The



Bicycles distributed under the Sabooj Sathi scheme enable girls to get to school

procedure for completing forms and registration is hassle-free. We have to update the school's database on the portal weekly, but it is a task we are happy to do as it helps the students."

How well has Kanyashree done on the ground? When Naureen Sultana, then 16, came back to her home in North 24-Parganas district from school one day, she found it decorated for some special do, only to learn that it was her engagement. Her impoverished father was an agricultural labourer. In protesting against this family decision, unbeknownst to her, she roped in the persuasive powers of her school teachers.

They were able to make her parents change their mind, partly by pointing to the financial gain from registering under Kanyashree. They also contributed an extra ₹750 so that Naureen could buy a second-hand sewing machine. With vocational training made possible by Kanyashree, she was able to earn ₹3,000 a month which she gave to her mother. This made her an asset instead of a liability for the family.

Pressure began to mount on Anima Mondal after she turned 13 to get married. She resisted the family's plans, going to the extent of contacting the prospective groom to say that she already had a boyfriend! But by the time she reached Class 9 the pressure became unbearable as she was told by her family that by not marrying she was jeopardising the future of her younger siblings. When her family stopped paying her school fees she was able to continue with her studies by giving private tuition to younger children.

After thus 'saving' herself, Anima went on to play a leading role in a group called Khoj set up by the District Child Protection Society which trains young girls to become change agents by sensitising

adolescents to the evils of child marriage, human trafficking and child abuse. Alongside, she trained to acquire the skills to get a job in the IT sector.

In line with this, Kanyashree Sanghas are coming up across the state. These are set up in consultation with the local authorities and offer school-going girls a safe platform where they can voice their concerns and raise issues affecting them. These forums give the girls courage to discuss their fears, insecurities and experiences of growing up in a society which is often unkind to them. They go beyond girls' education to strengthen their life skills and access vocational training. Critically, the girls act as change agents — literally going door to door to convince parents about the need to send their daughters to school.

Once girls join the club they get to choose the skills they want to develop. Among the popular choices are making soft toys, paper flowers, tailoring, computer training, theatre and martial arts. Trainers are brought in from local self-help groups, health centres, Rotary Clubs and the police department. In spreading the messages about nutrition, hygiene, trafficking and early marriage, the Sanghas use devices like role play and street theatre.

These are still early days to get a quantitative measure of the success of the project but, says Manmeet Kaur Nanda, district magistrate of North 24-Parganas, "We have already met the targets for annual scholarships and one-time grants but it is not only numbers that make the Sanghas a success. There is a substantial change in the girls' confidence. Today they and their parents ask me questions like, when can we expect to have another toilet in our school, or what does the future look like after Kanyashree? The Sanghas have played a significant



Monika Soren

role in instilling self-confidence in these girls."

The Nadia district administration has gone a step further in preparing girls who are ready for the one-time grant for jobs. It has used a private agency, JIS College of Education, to take 32 of them through a four-month pilot training programme to prepare them for jobs in the business process outsourcing sector. A new world is opening up for Anita Das who can now use the computer, make internet searches and speak basic English. The cost of training, ₹10,000 per head, is borne by the district administration. Says Sheela Singh Ghosh, a trainer, "Within four months we have seen remarkable change in them. They have become confident and articulate."

Kanyashree enables girls to complete school education. But what happens to them thereafter and to the still large numbers who fall through the net? In Coochbehar district which has few large urban centres, Kanyashree is working with Sabala, the government programme that puts out-of-school adolescent girls back into school and imparts livelihood skills.

SATWIK PAUL



Over four million girls are enrolled under the Kanyashree scheme

SATWIK PAUL

SATWIK PAUL



The big thing about the scheme is that it works

To enrol for Kanyashree a girl has to manually complete a form and get it certified by the head of her educational institution.

In collaboration with Landesa, an international research and advocacy organisation, the district administration devised a training module to help Sabala girls build homesteading skills like running kitchen gardens and rearing poultry and goats. The training includes imparting entrepreneurial skills to enable the girls to run their own small businesses. On completion of the training, the girls are given seed capital by way of seeds and chicks by Sabala to get started.

Manjuri Sil almost got married. But government officials intervened and she went back to school. Then, with her one-time grant and Sabala training, she was able to financially help her parents. This has enabled her to take up graduate studies in college. Sabala helps a family see "value" in their girls. The Kanyashree-Sabala team identified some of the most vulnerable girls and put them through a four-day vocational training. The administration was "amazed to see how motivated the girls were" after receiving the training. "Leveraging the two complimentary programmes" was a "great learning experience", pointing which way to go. ■

Campaign against lynching gathers steam

Saibal Chatterjee
New Delhi

If not now, then when? That unequivocal call to action stirred thousands of citizens. They took to the streets on 28 June to register their protest against the mob violence being perpetrated against minorities across the country in the name of cow protection. A pivotal part of a Facebook post by independent filmmaker, researcher and writer Saba Dewan, the rhetorical question was triggered by the killing of teenager Hafiz Junaid on a Mathura-bound train.

The appeal went viral and culminated in the countrywide 'Not in My Name' campaign. Carrying placards proclaiming "Say no to hatred", "Hindus against Hindutva" and "End Islamophobia", people came together to "reclaim the Constitution" and position themselves against political forces bent upon decimating the "idea of India".

Junaid, who was on his way home after Eid shopping in Old Delhi, died on 22 June after being beaten and stabbed by a mob that hurled communal slurs at him following an altercation over seats. Dewan reacted to the crime on 24 June. Four days later, citizens were out in strength in 26 cities. The spontaneous mobilisation demonstrated the positive potential of social media, which otherwise has today been appropriated by an army of abusive Hindutva trolls and hate-mongers.

A part of Dewan's long and impassioned FB post read: "Shouldn't there be protests against the lynchings, especially after the killing yesterday in Delhi-NCR of a 16-year-old Muslim boy? Why wait for political formations to organize a demonstration? Why can't all of us as citizens repulsed by the violence get together in protest...?" She did not have to wait for answers to her questions. The response was instant and overwhelming.

Large numbers of Indians, both ordinary and well-known, taking a cue from her call, organised protests in Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Lucknow, Kochi, Allahabad, Thiruvananthapuram, Jaipur and Patna, besides London, Toronto and Boston. On Mumbai's Carter Road, the likes of Shabana Azmi, Kalki Koechlin, Konkona Sen Sharma and Ranvir Shorey lent their weight to the campaign. In Kolkata's Dakshinapan,



Hundreds of citizens gathered at Jantar Mantar to protest against mob lynching and communal hatred



People carried their own banners with their own slogans

'I am a citizen of one of the finest democracies in the world. That is why it is important to respect and protect the tenets of our Constitution.'

actor-filmmaker Aparna Sen and rights activist Ratnaboli Roy were among the protesters. In Bengaluru, an ailing Girish Karnad and historian Ramachandra Guha turned up to express their solidarity with the campaign.

Addressing the gathering in New Delhi's Jantar Mantar, Dewan spoke of her "massive sense of disquiet". She said it was time for action because "this is not the India we grew up in". That sentiment was the leitmotif of the evening as filmmakers, writers, journalists, civil society activists, human rights campaigners and ordinary citizens joined the Not in My Name campaign. Hindus and Muslims, men and women, old and young, spoke in one voice against the continuing violent depredations of thugs posing as cow protectors with the tacit support of and wilful incitement by their political masters.

Mohammad Asaruddin, Junaid's 22-year-old elder brother, told the protesters at Jantar Mantar: "Even I was called a terrorist in college. This issue is of identity and we have reached a point where we have to hide our skull caps and other symbols that define who we are."

PICTURES BY SRISHTI BHARDWAJ



The people who came were from all walks of life, young and old, celebrities and ordinary folk

Mumbai-based actress Renuka Shahane, active on social media, lent her support through a powerful post. It read: "There has been a long list of these lynchings. It has become so common that no one talks about it. Nobody asks what happened to the perpetrators — whether they were caught and given the strictest punishment or whether they were released to unleash more violence. I stand firmly against the lynch mentality that has an active political patronage in our country."

She added: "I am a citizen of one of the finest democracies in the world. That is why it is important for all of us to respect and protect the tenets of our Constitution."

Understandably, the success of the campaign did not go down well with Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders. Prime Minister Narendra Modi was compelled to speak out against the violence being perpetrated by cow vigilantes. Yet mob lynchings have continued unabated.

The script took a slight turn on 10 July, when seven Amarnath Yatra pilgrims were gunned down by terrorists in Kashmir. Instantly, rightwing leaders and television channels found a stick to beat the Not in My Name campaigners with. They asked: Where are they now?

BJP spokesman G.V.L. Narasimha Rao tweeted: "Pilgrims brutally attacked on return from Amarnath

Yatra. When & where is the 'Not in My Name' gang protesting or are protests only for Akhlaqs, Junaids, Pehlu Khans not for Lord Shiva devotees."

To prove him wrong, the anti-lynching campaigners were back at Jantar Mantar. One of them said: "We are not here because we are under any pressure. We are against all forms of political violence."

The Not in My Name campaign was by no means a one-off. Actress Swara Bhaskar, also a part of the campaign, petitioned the prime minister for the enactment of Manav Suraksha Kanoon (MASUKA), a law against lynching, in the next session of

Parliament. It calls for making lynching a non-bailable offence.

In her fervent appeal, the *Nil Battey Sannata* and *Anaarkali of Aarah* star wrote: "Every time I read about a new case of mob lynching, my head hangs in shame. I am a proud Indian and have always believed that our country's strength lies in its diversity and acceptance of different cultures, religions and languages... Lynching does not find a mention in the Indian Penal Code. I believe in a violence-free India. I, therefore, appeal to the lawmakers to enact a strict legislation against mob lynching."

Bhaskar's plea coincided with the unveiling of a draft MASUKA law in the presence of political activist Prakash Ambedkar and eminent lawyers Sanjay Hegde and Shehzad Poonawalla. Referring to mob violence inspired by religious hate, Ambedkar said: "It should be nipped in the bud before it develops roots in India. For that, a bill against lynching should be passed in Parliament to convey a clear message."

The Not in My Name campaign, on its part, is all set to move to the next level and assume the form of an even more concerted movement. They are digging their heels in for this is a pitched battle of ideologies with no room for half-measures. ■



Saba Dewan, who initiated the campaign, speaking at Jantar Mantar

'We are facing a backlash'

Nikhil Dey on fighting corruption at the grassroots

Civil Society News
New Delhi

It's an open secret that corruption flourishes at the grassroots. As money gets siphoned off development plans suffer and villages don't get the roads, irrigation, drinking water, health facilities and so on that they deserve. Invariably, it is the sarpanch of a village who orchestrates the corruption.

The Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS), led by Aruna Roy, Nikhil Dey and Shankar, has been fighting this kind of entrenched corruption in Rajasthan for many decades. They realised early on that information was their most potent weapon against corruption. Thus, they launched the epic Right to Information (RTI) movement which culminated in a strong national law in 2007.

But taking on entrenched local interests remains fraught with challenges. Recently, four MKSS comrades — Dey, Naurti Bai (in the Civil Society Hall of Fame), Ram Karan and Chotu Malakar — found themselves sentenced to four months in jail by a Kishangarh court on trumped-up charges of 'voluntarily causing hurt' and trespassing.

This obscure case dates back to 1998 when the activists were merely trying to get information from the obdurate sarpanch of Harmada gram panchayat, a liquor contractor named Pyare Lal Tak. Villagers had complained to the MKSS that they weren't getting their entitlements to a slew of government schemes including one for housing and toilets.

Nikhil Dey spoke to *Civil Society* about the case and why the fight against corruption at the grassroots is running into rough weather and getting derailed.

Tell us how the MKSS got involved in the fight against corruption.

We began fighting against corruption and for basic legal entitlements like minimum wages, employment, and food back in the mid-1990s. That's the time when MKSS and its activists were always being called liars. Those who were thieves were taking the high moral ground. One example: people weren't being paid their minimum wages and being told, you are *kaamchor*, you do less work so you get less money.

We realised it was extremely important to get the papers out and expose the real thieves. When those muster rolls came out it became clear that 20 people who had worked were being paid less and 40 people who had not worked at all were being paid full



Nikhil Dey: 'We got roughed up. We did not lift a finger'

'We get out the papers, we show the corruption taking place, the money is returned, we say don't do it again and we move on.'

wages. The whole picture became clear. Fighting on the basis of truth is impossible until the papers come out.

Our first set of public hearings took place in 1994-95. The government closed all access to records, saying that our public audit was not acceptable. We not only got the papers out, we showed it to the people. It became clear that there were a whole lot of 'ghost works' that existed only on paper.

So our battle for information began. In 1996-97 changes in the Rajasthan Panchayati Raj rules allowed us access to information through inspection in 1996 and copies of records in 1997. We went on a 40-day *dharna* in Beawar in 1996, a watershed in the Right to Information movement, and a 53-day

LAKSHMAN ANAND

dharna in Jaipur in 1997.

What happened in Harmada gram panchayat?

What happened in Harmada was the immediate consequence of us using those provisions to get information from the panchayats. Harmada, in fact, is one of the first excellently documented cases of the MKSS trying to get information.

The country owes Harmada a lot because Ram Karanji, one of my co-accused and co-convicts, documented every one of our instances of trying to get that information. We went there 73 times. The government issued several orders to the sarpanch to give information or action would be taken against him.

We used the Harmada documentation and example even in the Parliamentary Standing Committee and various places while negotiating for the national law to show that if you don't bring in penalties then people will never get information because you will keep issuing orders that will get ignored. So what do you do? That's why you need an independent appellate authority like a commission, and penalties. We showed them the documentary proof from Harmada and that's why it's significant.

Did you eventually get the information?

Well, we got roughed up. We did not lift a finger. But what we did do was to go back. Aruna immediately sent a fax to the Collector, the SP and the Chief Secretary. To cut a long story short, they filed an FIR two days later. We decided not to file an FIR since for us information was more crucial. We have been roughed up hundreds of times, shouted at, threatened, we don't want to make that the fight.

Unfortunately, those guys filed an FIR, so we filed an FIR. The decision was that if they file, we will file but we will give a reference that we have informed the Collector and the SP. Our FIR copy has a reference to our letter sent two hours after the incident.

After that the police filed a final report saying that there was nothing worth prosecuting. But their case got reopened three years later in the court. And we were served notice nine years later. By then we had totally moved on.

We pursued this guy for information. We went there 73 times. We have all that documentation. We finally got the information. He returned ₹4-5 lakh to people he had stolen money from so for us that was enough.

What we do is we get out the papers, we show publicly the corruption taking place, the money is returned, we say don't do it again and we move on.

We don't want everyone in jail. We want a change in the paradigm of the way governance works. That is the power of RTI.

How much has the RTI helped in curbing corruption?

The biggest jump was the really powerful RTI law with all its shortcomings but still powerful and a rare instance in India where a law becomes a big fillip to the movement.

Often, a movement results in a law but it is so poorly implemented. This law still results today in six to eight million users. Every one of those applications has elements of Harmada in it. There is someone who is trying to hide and you are asking that someone to reveal himself. The eventual aim is to change the culture of governance and democracy from one of secrecy to one of openness.

Today, yes, there is corruption but ghost works in places where RTI has been used have come down nearly 90 percent. At that time, when we were getting records out, there were works upon works only on paper. Now, what you have is collusive corruption. Muster rolls, bills and vouchers are now pro-actively disclosed everywhere. They are on the Internet, painted on walls and so on. It's a revolutionary change. It's not like things have reached their zenith. There isn't a limit to transparency or the truth.

Do you see a backlash from vested interests?

There is a massive backlash because in our culture of opaqueness, even though people in government accept that they have to part with information, there is not a single government, including the Delhi government, that has put in place Section 4 of the RTI Act to pro-actively create transparency. It actually saves the government money.

People are asking for information and getting it reluctantly. So you get half the information you want and then get caught in the commission's long waiting list. Ninety percent of that can be avoided if governments tell their various officers to put out all their information in the public domain regularly. We

can then have a more open government and we can move into the next level of openness which is how policy is formulated. But despite 10 years of the RTI law governments are not implementing Section 4.

What are RTI activists facing now?

During the Congress rule the RTI had an impact. Many officers were sharing information. Now there

series of these cases. They are all being filed by MGNREGA employers. They are going on *dharna* against Sanjay, demanding his arrest.

Basically, the department is being forced to part with information. Sanjay takes it one step further because he has built a *sangathan* to use the information. He is trying to sort out the system, not just one individual. MKSS has been more fortunate. We have more experience, more people and we speak English. Sanjay is a Hindi-speaking village *saathi*, an electrician. Who can he turn to? He will spend his life in court.

What can be done?

The whistleblowers law that was passed by Parliament during the UPA rule has still not been notified. I think a government that is not putting this law into effect has blood on its hands because it can at least provide some help, some succour, some support to all of us. They want to amend it and reduce its effect. The Lokpal law was passed and also not put into effect. They want to reduce its powers too.

The fight against corruption is important to ensure government schemes work in reality.

Absolutely. The government, instead of seeing allies, is buckling under its own corrupt employees and standing by them. None of us are paid people. We are going out of our way, putting our lives at risk.

We are told, oh, people misuse RTI. This question was put to me in the IAS Academy by several officers. Their batchmate said, let me answer. Everyone in this room knows I was unfairly targeted in an inquiry. If it wasn't for RTI I could never have proved the truth. I would not have been sitting here among you.

We knew the Modi government was not supportive of MGNREGA, the right to food or the right to education. They dismissed these as doles. We are sceptical of all government structures but we thought that at least in transparency and accountability they will be active. But their record on this is abysmal. ■



The MKSS' Ghotala Rath yatra with Shankar

is a bleak atmosphere of fear even among officers and the Modi government has said, don't talk to the press. Public consultations have come down to a trickle. Access to information is reducing.

At the ground level getting information, whether on mining, on land, liquor, MGNREGA, the PDS, mid-day meals, cases against women and Dalits, GM foods... you can face violence, because vested interests are threatened by your asking for information. All of us face threats day in and day out. The second level is where they use violence and the third is where they kill people and then there are false cases. What has happened with us is an inversion of justice. Actually, we were roughed up and we were convicted in a case going back 19 years.

Sanjay Sahni (also in the Civil Society Hall of Fame) has six false cases against him. Two of them are attempt-to-murder cases. In both he wasn't even present. In one case he was with Jean Dreze in Ranchi, in Jharkhand, a different state. Jean has written to the DGP in Patna, saying there are a

Samita's World

by SAMITA RATHOR



GOA STILL IN KNOTS OVER COCONUT TREE



Goans vehemently protested when the status of the coconut tree was at stake

Derek Almeida
Panaji

IN Goa, where an argumentative mindset is part of the local identity, there are always two sides to a story, sometimes three. The coconut tree issue, which catapulted the Goa Forward Party (GFP) from one MLA to three, is one such story.

For much of the debate, which started in December 2015 when the then Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government decided to strip the coconut palm of 'tree' status, the approach has been to save this ubiquitous tree or at least give the impression of saving it. Goa without its coconut trees is like the US without the Grand Canyon.

So, when the GFP found itself in the new government, thanks to some deft political manoeuvres by Chief Minister Manohar Parrikar, it was time for a solution, even a symbolic one.

About a month ago the GFP and the BJP released a common minimum programme, which, among other things, promised to re-designate the coconut palm as the state tree. All seemed hunky-dory and the symbolic issue appeared headed for a symbolic solution. It was then discovered that Goa already had a state tree — *terminalia elliptica*, or *matti* as it is commonly known. Nobody knew about this and it took former forest minister Rajendra Arlekar to remind the government that it already had a state tree.

So, what happens now?

The government, and particularly the GFP, finds itself in a bit of a spot. In order to make the coconut tree the state tree it first has to denotify the *matti* and cabinet approval is required for this. Said Vijai Sardesai, President of the GFP: "The government

has the power to review and we can have a new state tree."

But this is easier said than done. The former forest minister has a different point of view. He explained that there is no need to declare the coconut tree the state tree as it already enjoyed that status. "When we think of Goa we think of the coconut tree. The tourism department uses it extensively to promote Goa as a destination, so there is no need to declare it the state tree," he said.

The former minister foresees a problem in elevating the status of the coconut tree. "First, the government will have to take a decision to denotify the *matti* tree and then declare the coconut tree as the state tree." This could prove to be difficult. Sardesai said, "The promise to make the coconut

'When we think of Goa we think of the coconut tree. The tourism department uses it extensively to promote Goa, so there is no need to declare it the state tree,' said Rajendra Arlekar, former forest minister.



A busy road blocked in protest

tree a state tree is part of the common minimum programme and it will be implemented." He did not say how long it would take.

Miguel Braganza, secretary of the Botanical Society of Goa and former agriculture officer, agrees that the move to declare the coconut tree the state tree is symbolic but adds that it will make a difference to the people. "Ninety-nine percent of the people don't know anything about the *matti* tree. Not all foresters know about it. The coconut tree, on the other hand, is easily recognised and is therefore symbolic."

In any case, giving the coconut palm state tree status is largely symbolic because the real problem lies elsewhere. Goa's coconut production has remained stagnant over the last 15 years. Between 2000 and 2015 the total number of nuts produced fluctuated in the narrow range of 125 to 129 million nuts per year. More important, the figures did not rise after the coconut tree was brought under the Forest Act in 2008 by the Digambar Kamat government. The conclusion is, the debate on the coconut tree tends to remain in the domain of symbolism and no government felt the need to go beyond it.

At the heart of this story is economics. Coconut tree planters are not getting enough for their

No one seems to be addressing the economic side of the story and it would not be out of place to say that the coconut tree has gained little from political vicissitude over the last 15 years. It never enjoyed any status under the Forest Act and no one really bothered about it.

produce. Second, the yield is as low as 27 to 30 nuts per tree per year. What they ought to get is at least 135 nuts per year. "The yield is poor because hardly anyone takes care of trees. Fertiliser has to be put at least once in three months, but here, once the tree grows it is forgotten," lamented Braganza.

No wonder planters prefer to sell their property to either builders or industrialists. In fact, it was a project to set up a brewery in the village of Amdai in Sanguem taluka that started it all. When it became known that over 500 coconut trees would have to be felled to make way for the project, people woke up. Then came the amendment and people put two and two together and the fate of the government was cooked.

"The project had nothing to do with the

amendment," argues Arlekar who spearheaded the amendment. "The process to amend the Forest Act was started by the previous minister in response to demands from planters." But few believe him.

Goa has a large and thriving tourism industry. Government statistics show that at least 50 lakh tourists, both foreign and domestic, visit the state every year and it's no wonder that there is a huge demand for tender coconuts which fetch a price of up to ₹35 a piece in the market.

If planters shift to tender coconuts they could earn at least four times more. But this is not happening because of a mindset that places kernel above water. "They are not reacting to the market," explained Braganza who was recently called by a planter in Mercedes, which is about three kilometres

from the capital of Panaji.

"The planter was earning about ₹20,000-25,000 per pluck and had an offer of ₹80,000 for tender coconuts. He called me because he was worried if plucking tender coconuts would damage the tree," said Braganza. "So there is a psychological block."

No one seems to be addressing the economic side of the story and it would not be out of place to say that the coconut tree has gained little from political vicissitude over the last 15 years. It never enjoyed any status under the Forest Act and no one really bothered about it. Then, in 2007 the Goa Bachao Abhiyan started an agitation after coconut trees were felled in a village called Nauxim. The then government understood the political implications and in 2008 brought the coconut tree under the Forest Act. "It was still not a tree, but it was brought under the Act to prevent cutting," explained Braganza. And that is where it remained until January 2016.

The government needs to go beyond symbolic gestures. Braganza is of the view that if the benefits extended to mango growers like a subsidy of ₹2 lakh per hectare was extended to the coconut planters, it might inject some hope. However, the key lies in reacting to the market conditions and beating cheaper imports from neighbouring states. ■

Srinagar starts boat transport

Jehangir Rashid
Srinagar

IN the old days, people from Srinagar often travelled by boat down the Jhelum to towns and villages along the bank. Now, the state government of Mehbooba Mufti plans to revive water transport in the summer capital. The idea is to decongest road traffic in the city and curb pollution. Travelling by boat or motorised *shikaras* would also be attractive for tourists.

If the plan works out the government will extend water transport facilities to other districts of the Kashmir Valley.

The divisional administration has started the service on a trial basis. "Free water transport will be available to the public on the Jhelum river for one month on a trial basis from 15 July. The Chief Minister has a futuristic vision to develop water transport in the city for which two water channels have been earmarked, the Jhelum and Dal Lake," said Baseer Ahmad Khan, Divisional Commissioner. An action plan, based on water transport standards prevalent in Italy and other European countries, has been prepared.

"It will generate employment opportunities for *shikara* owners and for unemployed youth," said Ahmad Khan. The timing of this free service is from 10 am to 4 pm. Boats journey from Peerzo to Veer Chattabal and back. Later, these services will be extended to Pulwama, Anantnag and Baramulla.

For the trial run, two motorboats of the Jammu & Kashmir Tourism Development Corporation and one motor-driven *shikara* were pressed into service. The motorboats can carry 18 persons and the *shikara* can carry eight.

The Deputy Commissioner of Srinagar, Farooq Ahmad Lone, took a trial ride accompanied by senior officers of the district and divisional administration. After the ride, he directed the tourism department to deploy two more new motorboats so that people wouldn't face any difficulty. The rides are on a first-come first-served basis and can't be booked in advance.



Travelling in boats and shikaras will decongest the city and attract tourists, say officials

Motor-driven traditional shikaras will pass under the famous seven bridges of the Jhelum.

Lone said that this service would not only revive traditional water transport, but would also promote heritage structures on the banks of the Jhelum. Motor-driven traditional shikaras will pass under the famous seven bridges of the Jhelum. The Irrigation and Flood Control Department has been directed to maintain the *ghat* as an anchor point for the motorboats.

People have welcomed the initiative and agreed it would lead to some decongestion of traffic in

Srinagar city. They demanded that the frequency of the service be increased so that more people could avail of it.

"It will be prudent to use traditional *shikaras* instead of motorised boats. This will ensure that we do not pollute the Jhelum. We have already paid a price on the environment front by causing irreparable damage to water bodies like the Dal Lake, the Jhelum and Wular Lake. It is important that further damage is avoided to our water bodies," said Imtiyaz Ahmad, a resident of Srinagar.

Mohammad Imran, a student, said the hours of the service should be increased. The current timing of 10 am to 4 pm is not practical, he felt.

Some years ago, a cruise service had been introduced for visitors to Srinagar. It started from Zero Bridge and culminated near Chattabal in downtown Srinagar. However, it did not last.

Hopefully, this experiment will also inspire the state government to clean up its rivers and lakes so that a recurrence of floods does not take place. ■

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WATER SMART CITY

Belagavi gets its wells and lakes working again

Shree Padre
Belagavi

EVERY summer, until a few years ago, tempers would rise in the municipal corporation of Belagavi (formerly Belgaum), a city in northwest Karnataka. Armies of women fortified with *kodas* (water vessels) would barge into the mayor's office, demanding water. They led *morchas* after *morchas* for water. Officials from the corporation, wherever they went, would be encircled by people demanding water.

Such heated protests have been petering out over the past 10 years. The city has revived a great many of its traditional wells, tanks and lakes, and there is water for everyone. "We are now in the third week of June," says Sanjyot Bandekar, mayor of Belagavi, with relief. "The monsoon hasn't really set in. If it was those difficult years, we would have been really tense. From early morning, corporators would have been besieged with phone calls from aggrieved housewives saying, 'Give us water'."

In 1995 the city faced acute drought. The monsoon was late by a fortnight. Belagavi's water supply came from the Rakoskope reservoir, 22 km away. That year, the reservoir dried up. The municipality found itself supplying water to angry citizens just once a week. Corporation officials didn't know what to do.

At this critical juncture, people began to recall how their old wells had served them. Before the Rakoskope reservoir was commissioned in 1964, these open wells were a reliable source of water. But, alas, most of them had been crammed with garbage or were lying abandoned since the city had switched to piped water sourced from the reservoir.

During the drought year the municipal corporation hesitatingly began to revive the Kapileshwara tank, a huge water body about half an acre in size. About 100-150 volunteers from five or six *yuvak mandals* worked, digging shoulder-to-shoulder with officials from the municipal corporation even on Sundays, recalls Vijay More, ex-mayor. It took a month. Lo and behold, the tank began to yield water.

Encouraged, the municipal corporation turned its attention to the disbanded open wells. They were familiar with a British-era document that mentioned the existence of 700 wells topped with water. M. Vishweshwarsayya, a legendary engineer who designed the Rakoskope water supply scheme, had mentioned in his project report that the city's chain of open wells could sustain its water supply. The Rakoskope reservoir was needed just for the city's projected population growth, he had said.



Women drink water from the Navagraha well as R.S. Nayak, city engineer of Belagavi Corporation, looks on

So Belagavi's municipal corporation embarked on a mission to revive its old wells and water bodies. In 22 years it has restored more than 100 wells and 10 lakes. Thirty-two large wells provide 400,000 litres per day round the year. Nearly one-third of the city's population of 600,000 citizens gets part of its water supply from wells. There is no shortage of water even during the peak of summer.

Belagavi has been recently selected for the smart city programme. But what the municipal corporation has done with its water is even smarter. It is weaning the city away from dependence on rivers, dams and canals, and showing other cities the way forward.

THE INITIAL STEPS

The first well the municipal corporation revived was Math Galli. Recalls R.S. Nayak, city engineer of Belagavi Corporation, the brain behind the well revival plan: "We were very apprehensive about whether we would succeed. We hoped the well would yield clean water in sufficient quantity to supply to residents." Fortunately, Math Galli fulfilled all expectations. This boosted the corporation's confidence. It went on to revive another well, Shetty Galli.

Well water was tested to find out if it was potable. Next a filter, pump and pipeline were installed. Only 40 litres per day was drawn to augment the existing supply. The Shetty Galli well, a perfect rectangle, was constructed by the British in 1885. Math Galli was also built by the British in 1883. A fire station was located near it.

Amazingly, both wells contained an unbelievably large quantity of water. "In one well we installed four 5 HP pump sets to drain the water but for seven to eight hours, the water level appeared unchanged," recalls Nayak. "We could easily lift 400,000 litres of water from each of these wells. Surprisingly, water levels don't go down in these wells even at the end of summer."

The corporation paused at this stage and decided to seek expert opinion before going ahead. Fortuitously, Dr Adivappa G. Chachadi, Professor,

Department of Earth Sciences, Goa University, was in the city for some work. Officials from the corporation sought his opinion on scaling up their well revival plan. Dr Chachadi surveyed the city and prepared a groundwater flow map and report. Most public wells were located on water flow lines.

This encouraged the corporation to go ahead with its plan. The Rotary Club, Lions Club, Indal factory and local people pitched in. But the leadership for the effort came from the Belagavi City Corporation.

City engineer Ravindra Satu Nayak, 58, the driving spirit behind the mission, explains what restoring wells entails. "It's more labour-oriented," he says. "The muck has to be professionally removed. We employ only qualified well-diggers. The wells were filled with foul-smelling debris and, sometimes, poisonous gases." Workers were given masks and gloves. Cleaning was carefully monitored to ensure no worker was injured.

THE CONGRESS WELL

In 2004 the historic Congress Well was revived. Built in 1924 to commemorate the Congress' historic Belagavi convention which was presided over by Mahatma Gandhi, the well cost ₹4,370 and three annas at the time. The Congress Well went on to supply water to half the city. But once tap water was introduced, this well, like scores of others, turned into a dustbin.

"Later it became infamous as a 'suicide well'" says M.K. Hegde, resident editor, *Vijaya Karnataka*. "Wild plants grew around it. It became a den of rowdies. Decent folk were afraid to come near." Today the well, surrounded by a beautiful garden, brims with light blue water.

Another successful revival was of a well at Hutatma Chowk named 'Barah Gade' because 12 pulleys used to be deployed to lift water from it. Households would collect water from this well and *paaniwallahs* would supply its water on small hand-pulled carts to residents.

In 1964, when piped water was introduced in Belagavi, households were ambivalent about getting connected to the pipeline. When efforts to woo



The Khanjar Galli well was repaired in 2010-11 and now supplies water to 12,000 people



The second Kapileshwara tank that was dug by the corporation only for immersing Ganesh idols

residents failed, the then divisional commissioner had what he thought was a brainwave. Since residents were refusing piped water, he ordered closure of the wells. Barah Gade was closed. Ironically, 50 years later, the same government machinery had to work hard to reopen it.

Over the years, the area where Barah Gade once flourished had become a parking lot. When corporation officials began their revival efforts, there was resistance. Auto drivers and the owner of an ice-cream parlour objected vehemently. It took the corporation two years to overcome the opposition. In 2013, it revived its efforts. Then, corporation officials realised they didn't know where precisely the well was.

Nayak then hit upon an idea. He began combing the locality for its oldest residents. Finally, 94-year-old Yalagi offered to help. He said he used to play near the well as a boy. Nayak took him to the spot. Yalagi placed four stones on the ground after looking at the spot carefully. "The well was between these stones," said the old man. "This used to be called 'freedom fighters' circle'. Elderly people would gather here for chit-chat."

Thereafter, the Barah Gade well was found and cleaned. It now supplies water to the surrounding locality. To retain its old charm, 12 iron dummy pulleys have been mounted on the well on all four sides.

A similar strategy was followed for rejuvenation of the Kudachi well. Corporation officials sought out the oldest person of the locality. He led them to a place where there was a big stone. At first there was no sign of a well having existed there. After digging through mounds of garbage for a considerable period, the well revealed itself.

The Rotary Club shouldered the revival of six wells over three years. Their most outstanding achievement was the revival of the well in Veerabhadra Nagar. “The well had become a dumping ground,” says Chaitanya Kulkarni, former club president. “We got a matching grant of \$26,000 from Amwell Rotary Club of England. They were impressed when we told them revival of the well would provide water to 10,000 people. In fact, three representatives of that club came all the way from England to attend the inaugural function.”

Built by the British in 1908, the Veerabhadra well is a three-in-one well. Two underground tunnels six feet high connect the three wells together. The well is flush with water. Another one is being revived in the cantonment area. Workers finally found it after digging more than 60 feet.

Around 70 smaller wells, connected to a plastic tank, are used for local supply. According to need, one or more standposts are constructed. Water is not lifted from the 10 lakes the corporation has revived. The lakes are intended to recharge groundwater and ensure drinking water is always available.

PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

Initially, when the team from the municipal corporation went to inspect the wells, anti-social elements used to protest. But they finally came round and even helped out. “Where water is concerned, no one is an anti-social. There are cases of rowdies joining the mainstream after cooperating to restore water,” says Nayak.

A notorious rowdy named Maruthi had his *adda*, a den for drinking and gambling, near the Veerabhadra Nagar well. When officials from the corporation began trying to revive it, he threatened them. But the team under Nayak refused to budge. They tried reasoning with him. Maruthi pleaded that his *adda* was his only source of income. Out of compassion, the officials offered him a job as valveman, a post he had aspired for in the past. He took the job and became a changed man for a while.

“His mother thanked us. He used to hand over his earnings to her,” says Nayak. But, in a twist of fate, Maruthi went back to his old ways as a rowdy, landed in jail, and passed away.

Ironically, another challenge the corporation faced was getting people to accept well water. The water was always tested to find out if it was potable. But convincing people to drink it wasn't easy.

Nayak went from house-to-house with two assistants and a *koda* of water. He would request the lady of the house to bring him a glass. He would then extol the virtues of well water and drink it in front of the family. The mayor, corporators and even the local MLA had to employ this strategy. “I had to literally market water from the well,” laughs Nayak.

Fortunately for the corporation, none of the revived wells was contaminated. But the corporation found the problem of contamination in one or two private wells. The process of salvaging these wells could be a model to follow for thousands of other contaminated wells in the country.

“If a well is contaminated, there is the danger of the contamination spreading to other areas. We have to identify the source. It could be a gutter or faulty underground drainage. We use dyes that are generally used by laundries to check the point of contamination,” explains Nayak.

It is far better to eliminate contamination of a well and make its water potable than to dig a new well. House owners abandon contaminated wells, not realising they can be made usable. Every corporation should spread knowledge of such techniques.

“This is not rocket science,” Nayak reiterates, “Contamination is always local. You have to observe where it is originating and then reverse it. Corporations should be trained in such techniques.”

IMMERSION TANKS

Another challenge the corporation faced was preventing contamination of water sources during Ganesh Chaturthi, a festival that is celebrated exuberantly in Belagavi. The idea of preventing contamination appealed to the people but they asked where idols should be immersed.

The corporation came up with a solution. It built 10 immersion tanks across the city. Of these, a sufficiently big tank, also named Kapileshwara tank, is widely used. In 11 days around 300 idols — more than 50 percent of the idols in the city — were immersed in the allocated tanks. After the rituals were over, the corporation cleaned all the tanks and refilled them with fresh water.

The corporation is now exploring the possibility of reducing electricity costs still further by harnessing solar pumps. Out of 76 paise required for distributing a kilo litre of well water, 40 paise are spent on electricity. Trial runs with solar pumps were carried out two years ago.

Very shortly, the Barah Gade well will be fitted with a solar pump while the old



The Barah Gade well at Hutatma Chowk with 12 dummy iron pulleys



The Barah Gade well being desilted and cleaned

electricity pump will be retained as a standby. This hybrid system will scale down costs.

TOPOGRAPHY AND RAINFALL

How do scientists explain Belagavi's successful turnaround, with nearly three dozen wells supplying four lakh litres per day, through the year? The answer, say scientists from the National Institute of Hydrology (NIOH), lies in the city's topography and the rainfall pattern in its catchment area.

“The topography of the city is shaped like a bowl, surrounded by hillocks on three sides. Its basaltic terrain permits maximum groundwater recharge. The ability to recharge and hold water is very high in this terrain,” says Purandar B.K., a scientist with NIOH. “If the surrounding environment is kept suitable for recharge and not more water than can be recharged is lifted, these wells can supply water for at least 50 years.”

“Kanakumbi and Chambotti that are just 25 to 40 km from Belagavi are high-rainfall areas. They get around 5,000 to 7,000 mm of rain. The old wells are on the flow path of groundwater. Fortunately, till now urbanisation has not affected these lines,” explains Dr B. Venkatesh, also a scientist with NIOH. “There are a



Vijay More, ex-Mayor



Shashidhar Kurera, Commissioner of Belagavi City Corporation

‘The topography of the city is shaped like a bowl, surrounded by hillocks on three sides. Its basaltic terrain permits maximum groundwater recharge.’

few low-lying marshy areas where rainwater remains stagnant long into the season. The cantonment is on a huge flat area of 500-600 acres. Such undulations are good for groundwater recharge.”

SMALL IS BETTER

Belagavi's decentralised water system keeps the city hydrated at low cost. “We have water in the Hidkal dam, commissioned in 2000, which is 54 km away. But here there is clean water right under our feet. It's a time-tested source,” says Nayak. “You don't know whether tanker water is contaminated or not. Yet people wait hours for it and even squabble over it. No one is sure about the quality of water from a borewell. But you can see water from an open well right before your eyes. Well water is like 24/7 water. You press a button and 10,000 people get water in their homes.”

“The carbon footprint of our decentralised water system is much lower than cities with an equal population in the rest of the country. This has been evaluated by government officials from other regions,” says Nitin Koth, a social activist.

Also to be noted is the sharp contrast between a distant mega project and a tiny local one. Three-stage pumping and 900 horse power (HP) is required to fetch water from the Hidkal dam. Electricity charges alone work out to ₹1 crore per month. Fetching water from the Rakoskope reservoir requires 600 HP, one-stage pumping and costs the corporation ₹20 lakh every month.

Well water requires only 10 HP. Water from a large and distant project costs ₹12.50 per kilo litre while well water costs 76 paise. Around 40 percent of the city relies on well water as an additional source now.

Before the Hidkal dam was built the corporation used to spend ₹20-25 lakh per annum on tanker water. Fifty tankers used to be hired from March to June. Even after the dam became operative, tankers were needed. Now the corporation has only two tankers as a standby. Digging of borewells in the well-concentrated areas has stopped completely.

A civil engineer, Nayak says he learnt his lessons about water working for the corporation and interacting with the people. “We learn new lessons every day,” he remarks. He says that every city should have a separate department to map and tap water sources. Instead, a multiplicity of agencies is involved in water issues. “The Karnataka Urban Water Supply Board, State Geology Department, Hydrology Department and Water Resources Department should all be integrated. There should be an officer to coordinate and ensure information is shared,” advises Nayak. Certain areas in the city marked as ‘green zones’ should be off-limits for industries.

Nayak has received eight awards to date for his outstanding contribution. Among them are the National Urban Water Award (2010) by the Ministry of Urban Development, Government of India, the Outstanding Award during the Bangalore World Water Summit (2012), the Giles National Award in 2015 (an award usually reserved for civil servants), and the Skoch Order of Merit Award in 2015 for smart governance.

“My estimate is that Belagavi has 4,000 to 4,500 wells. Out of these 800 may be in use. If we make more wells functional and bring in greater efficiency in water supply management, we can free ourselves of dependence on the Rakoskope reservoir or Hidkal dam,” says Chaitanya Kulkarni whose firm, Chaitanya Associates, has been reviving private wells in homes. So far he has revived 12 wells. “Many sensible builders are doing this in our city,” he says.

Hegde, however, is not happy with the pace of well revival. “It is a big achievement. But the good work done by the corporation should have created awareness about traditional water treasures. Once people realised their value, well revival should have been taken up as a movement. The problem is the common man still treats wells and tanks as dustbins. Their attitude hasn't changed.”

Nithin Koth and Purandar also emphasise that people need to be convinced about the importance of shallow

aquifers, how sustainable they are and why they have to be kept clean and protected.

Nayak is popular among ordinary people and does make efforts to create awareness. But this is not enough. The corporation really needs to make the people of the city respect water. It is painful to see plastic bottles and garbage being thrown into beautiful antique wells, though such cases are fewer now. NGOs and social groups could help.

“NGOs are coming forward to revive wells. An NRI lady contacted us, keen to revive a well that was built by her grandfather. In some areas, there are issues with underground drainage,” explains Shashidhar Kurera, commissioner of Belagavi City Corporation and managing director of Belagavi Smart City. “We have to do more. Having an inventory of wells and closed wells is really a good idea. What we have is scattered information. Even in the master-plan of the smart city we have added this component. In fact, the importance of wells is included in the policy itself.”

LESSONS FOR CITIES

Noted water activist S. Vishwanath, who heads the Rainwater Club of Bengaluru, says the message from Belagavi is that local water resources and community involvement are key to resolving water issues. “Community attention to wells will subsequently make them think about tank development. Local resources are energy-efficient and cheap. A local engineer can do far more result-oriented work than an outside expert. One has to study local history very well and the community's usage patterns,” he says.

Every city must map its groundwater, the quantity being used, recharge areas and drainage areas. A combination of groundwater, water from rainwater harvesting and treated water can make our cities sustainable in water, says Vishwanath. Instead of fighting over the Kaveri river, Bengaluru and also Delhi can learn from Belagavi. ■

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Booster shot for rooftop solar

\$650 m World Bank comfort for SBI to lend

SRISHTI BHARDWAJ



Simon Stolp: 'The issue we are trying to address is the lack of affordable financing'

Civil Society News
New Delhi

THE Indian market in rooftop solar installations has been growing because of falling asset prices, beneficial changes in legislation, new financing arrangements and the zeal of entrepreneurs.

Photovoltaic panels are now visible atop a greater number of buildings than ever before. As word has spread, domestic and commercial consumers have begun to consider solar power as an alternative to conventional grid-supplied electricity.

But much remains to be done for the market to mature and rooftop solar power to become commercially sustainable.

Many more consumers need to be reached. Technology and services from solar companies should be made more widely available. Power distributors must feel enthusiastic about solar so that grid interconnectivity becomes smoother.

Banks have a crucial role to play in helping shape the market by lending to solar power developers and end-users and structuring loans on affordable terms.

It is with this in view that the World Bank has recently signed a \$650 million agreement with the State Bank of India (SBI) to discount loans which are expected to lead to the installation of more than 600 MW of rooftop solar power. The funds will be available at concessional rates of under nine percent.

The World Bank will essentially be pump priming the rooftop solar market to get it moving. It is hoped that disbursement of \$650 million in loans by a big public sector lender like SBI will provide the momentum needed to achieve commercial viability.

Apart from solar developers, SBI will be encouraged to lend to end-users like small and medium enterprises, which it might not have looked at otherwise.

An important aspect of the agreement involves capacity building. While SBI is an experienced and sophisticated lender, it is new to the solar power market. The World Bank will be helping SBI orient itself to the needs of the market.

Civil Society spoke to Simon Stolp, the World Bank's Lead Energy Specialist for South Asia, on the

terms of the agreement and how it is different from straight forward project finance.

How will the agreement with SBI impact the whole process of asset creation in rooftop solar power?

The issue that we are trying to address is the lack of financing or the lack of affordable financing. There is a lot of resistance from the current financial sector to enter this market at an affordable level of financing and at the volumes required. It is a new market which poses significant risks alongside a parallel market which already represents significant non-performing assets. There is a lot of trepidation about moving in from a financier's perspective. So, we agreed with the government to try and get things moving within the market, try and establish some familiarity with the banking and non-banking finance institutions that will have to provide the finances so that they will be comfortable with increasing scale. Through this financing, we are trying to provide a cost incentive.

We have done that by accessing concessional finance and blending that with our finance to provide financing at a discounted rate.

So, it is a mix of many rates?

It is a mix of many rates and some of them highly concessional. What we have done is we have gone out on behalf of the Government of India, and accessed the Clean Technology Fund (CTF) which provides highly discounted financing to clean technology. We have blended that with our own resource and we have come up with a pot of money which is more substantial than the CTF.

What is the size of the fund?

It is \$650 million for this facility of which \$125 million is from the CTF.

What is your expectation of SBI? What do you expect it to lend at? This goes beyond a business arrangement. This is a social initiative.

Absolutely. Rates in the market change over time but they have generally ranged between 13 percent and 18 percent. We wanted to discount that. SBI came up with a rate, depending on creditworthiness, that sits between 8.3 and 8.9 percent. It is sub-nine percent. So, it is a very significant discount to what the market was and still is providing.

I think there is also the issue of availability and what we have done with this facility is to incentivise SBI to lend to riskier parts of the market such as small and medium enterprises where the cost of financing is not so much the issue as the access to financing.

By providing \$650 million to SBI we are asking them to put aside \$650 million of their own resources and dedicate that entirely to solar power at discounted rates to have the effect of moving the market. It is not just financing \$650 million worth of assets but creating a context in which much more significant financial players can take part.

We are moving towards much more sophisticated ways of providing financing, going beyond just straight sovereign debt that provides you an asset. We are looking at ways in which we can leverage our financing to create much larger volumes of financial flows towards sectors that are important to India's and the world's development. You will see

this in the World Bank across the board, but you will see this more and more in India in the coming years.

So, rather than finance \$650 million worth of assets, somewhere in the vicinity of 600 MW to 800 MW in solar rooftops, we are trying to do it in ways that will also incentivise or provide comfort to the banking sector to go beyond that.

In project financing we know what the asset is and we lend a portion of the money that is required to cover a portion of that asset.

With SBI we are doing something different. We are saying the government has a solar rooftop programme. It wants SBI to provide finance in that programme. What we are going to do is to provide concessional finance to SBI, not for specific assets but to support that programme. So, we will disburse that money as SBI uses a similar quantum of money to finance solar rooftop installations. For every dollar, every megawatt it invests in we will provide this concessional financing to it. We have given SBI the capacity to lend at sub-nine percent.

'We are looking at ways in which we can leverage our financing to create much larger volumes of financial flows towards sectors that are important to India and the world.'

Are you planning to work with other banks which might be more aggressive than SBI in reaching out to a new sector like solar?

I don't think so. We see our role as being limited. We are not principal financiers to this sector. We wanted to help dislodge greater volumes of affordable financing and make that available to the sector. But we want the market to stand on its own feet. We want solar rooftop assets to be commercially viable and commercially financeable.

So, is \$650 million the limit of the fund?

At the moment. Hopefully, by the time the \$650 million has been disbursed you would have seen the business start to grow to the point where, particularly in the commercial and industrial sectors that we are targeting initially, there is a strong commercial case for solar.

Who will SBI be funding? Your press release talks of developers.

We are talking specifically of solar power developers. Whatever we finance will produce solar power.

So, you are looking at companies which can do solar rooftop projects and they should have certain credentials.

Yes. But we also want to reach out to the small and medium enterprises which will struggle to present their credentials.

We don't want to exclude, for example, someone who has a small industrial facility that recognises that they have space on their warehouse roof where they can set up their own facility and own it and produce their own power and use it at a discount to what they can buy from someone else.

They can also access this financing alongside renewable energy services companies that will act

as aggregators which will go out to warehouse owners, commercial and industrial establishments and say, look, you have a rooftop and I can provide you the installation and sell you the power at a discount to what you can purchase otherwise. So, we want to entertain all of these business models.

When we talk of a developer, it could also be a housing developer who recognises that the rooftop of the housing estate could be developed for solar power and that it can own that asset alongside the housing estate. Now, we are only going to finance the solar asset.

What you are essentially trying to do is join the dots. Basically, you will finance the companies that provide solar power services but you would also help the SMEs connect with them.

Or provide the finance directly to the SMEs if they want to own the asset themselves and have sufficient equity. They can go to SBI with the project proposal to finance their own facility.

What we have recognised is that there will be

some small and medium enterprises that will struggle, given the size of their balance sheets, and present a credible risk to SBI. So, within the structure of their programme, we have also asked SBI to set up a small first-loss facility. We provide some risk coverage to incentivise SBI to go and work with much smaller companies.

So what you hope to do is to bring a lot more detailing to SBI's lending in this sector.

Detailing, yes. SBI simply hasn't dealt with this sector. SBI is a sophisticated institution and deals with sophisticated project financing across the board, but it hasn't yet dealt with the small solar rooftop market. What we have done through this programme is to provide incentive to SBI to look at that business and structure its own internal processes and continue to improve them.

Does this mean working very closely with SBI?

Absolutely.

There is a lot of homework to be done.

A part of the GEF grant will be used for capacity development, which will be aimed at SBI. We will be working alongside SBI to develop some of their processes to aid in their understanding of the rooftop market, and to help them see how this market has grown in places like California. We will also be helping developers understand how to tap into finance.

What about learning from successful Indian projects?

I agree there is a lot already happening out there. A lot of that experience is also specific to the Indian situation and realities here. It may have more relevance than learning from California. ■



Kapil Mandawewala, founder and CEO of Edible Routes

Farm in your home

Kavita Charanji
New Delhi

ANITA Mani, editor and publisher of *Child Friendly News*, a tabloid newspaper for children, has a rooftop organic garden that must be the envy of her neighbours in Vasant Vihar. In it she grows a profusion of seasonal vegetables. At the moment, it's time for chillies, brinjal, bitter gourd, ridge gourd, bottle gourd, *okra* and *chaulai* (a nutritious, leafy vegetable). Peeping through are stray spring onions, Swiss chard, colocasia roots and ginger. She is looking forward to growing winter root vegetables like radish, carrots, beetroot, spinach, fenugreek, beans, salad varieties and herbs like rosemary, thyme and coriander. Mani's little "farm" yields enough *okra*, brinjal, *chaulai*, Swiss chard and spinach to meet the family's needs. "There is joy in experimentation," she says.

An exciting business venture called Edible Routes has helped her set up the garden and is always at hand for consultation. Besides, she's a member of the Edible Routes' WhatsApp group whose enthusiastic members are only too willing to exchange gardening tips. Even as we speak to her, a team from Edible Routes has begun work on expanding her garden. Three raised brick beds with drain trays have been laid out. Weed cloths are ready to layer the beds, after which sand and rich potting mix from the Edible Routes farm will be added to prepare the beds for planting.

Edible Routes is expanding from urban farms and home gardens to schools, hotels, restaurants and communities. "Our focus is on edible and productive plants that have some benefits. They could range from medicinal or air-purifying plants to herbs, vegetables and salads. We are also going into native, traditional plants," says Kapil Mandawewala, founder and CEO of Edible Routes.

Mandawewala and his 12-member team work from a 2.5-acre farm in Aya Nagar, near Ghitori in Delhi. The farm is located on a large piece of land that has 11 owners, mostly artists. Near the entrance you see studios of well-known artists Vivan Sundaram and Jagannath Panda. Traverse farther in and there seems to be chaos all around — mind-boggling varieties of basil grow in proximity to chillies while creepers like black-eyed peas, bottle gourd and *okra* compete for space. *Arhar dal*, drumsticks and *kalmi saag* (water spinach) too grow next to each other haphazardly. "The farm is intentionally chaotic. The idea is to grow plants in a way that we can multiply our yield and minimise our risks," says Mandawewala. Companion planting is a science he believes in. "This is synergy, not competition. If you go into a forest, you don't see one variety of tree or plant. The principles of nature are diversity and resilience," he says.

There's a shop too at the farm where avid gardeners can pick up organic potting mix, organic pesticides, bio-fertilisers, gardening tools, pots, seeds, saplings, composting kits and much else. Mandawewala has a deep affinity with organic farming though his background is radically different. A student of Management of Information Systems & Finance at the University of Texas in Austin, he went on to a career as a senior consultant with Deloitte Consulting in San Francisco. But he



A rooftop farm filled with different vegetables

was restless and in 2008 decided to relocate to India. His family happened to have a sprawling 22 acres in Jamnagar, Gujarat, so he decided to develop that into an organic farm. "I realised my passion lay in questions of health and food," he explains.

With the expertise he gained over the next five years, he was able to set up a sustainable farm that supplied local, seasonal and fresh produce directly to consumers in the area. Friends and family roped him in to embellish their balconies, terraces and backyards with herbs. It is from this point that the idea of urban farming took shape in his mind. His intensive research and growing knowledge about urban farming evolved into Edible Routes, a Delhi-based company officially registered in August 2016.

There are great reasons for urban farming, says Mandawewala. For one, the grower is certain about the freshness and nutritional value of the food. "Any produce will start losing its nutritional value as soon as it is harvested and loses half its nutritional value in about 24 hours. It may look fresh by different artificial means but what you are eating is empty calories," he says. Equally important, he says, are three questions: "Who is growing our food?", "Where is it being grown?" and "How is it being grown?". "We have lost the connect component with all our food," he says. "Urban farming is how you bring that connection back. The moment you grow, for example, a pot of spinach in your balcony you have answers to these questions. Obviously, you won't put any chemicals into it," he adds.

Greening urban spaces is what Edible Routes is all about. The venture holds workshops on subjects like urban farming, waste management, water harvesting, composting and even eco-construction. It also offers consultancy and products that support its mission. The standard package for consultation costs around ₹10,000 and includes designing the space, getting the project started and managing it for about two months. For small balconies, where only material costs and a bit of handholding is required, the costs range from ₹3,000 to ₹5,000. Urban farmers put in ₹1.5 lakh to ₹3 lakh a year as consultation fees.

Edible Routes' vision extends far beyond. The company targets younger minds as well. Among the educational institutions where it holds workshops and involves children in greening their own campuses are the Shiv Nadar School and the British School. For the massive British School project which will run into multiple lakhs, Edible Routes will help convert what today is a concrete jungle into a green space.

Hotels Raas Devigarh, Udaipur, and Raas Jodhpur, and communities like Garden Estate and Magnolia in Gurugram are also looking at projects.

Edible Routes will be hugely helped by its alliance with non-profit California Native Garden Foundation (CNGF) that specialises in designing native gardens and runs similar school programmes. ■

OPINION | ANALYSIS | RESEARCH | IDEAS

Govt, NGOs can be an ideal match



DILEEP RANJEKAR

HE was a relatively young IAS officer in charge of education in a large state. Very energetic and action-oriented. We had a relationship of mutual respect and could freely discuss several issues related to education and more. He found our foundation different from the other NGOs he dealt with and was very informal with us.

In one of our conversations, he mocked NGOs in general. He said he found NGOs rather difficult to work with since they were so short-term in their approach. They decided which state they would work in, the duration of their work and they wound up unilaterally without notice to the state. And the state could do nothing about it.

While technically he had a point, I decided to represent the other side.

I said, there was no point in blaming NGOs since the problem lay with the state. Ideally, the state ought to evolve a long-term educational vision and develop a concrete strategy to realise that vision. Thereafter, the state needs to identify the areas where it will need help from outside the government. It then has to evaluate various NGOs and what they are good at. It is the state that has to make decisions about the geography, the area of competence, the duration and the NGO that would best deliver the results. It must be recognised that NGOs constantly struggle for funds and are totally dependent on donors. Many times, the donors dictate decisions such as geography, kind of project, duration of work, and so on. Therefore, once the state is decided about deploying the NGO, it must also fund it to attract and employ necessary talent.

The fundamental problem is that, generally, a state has no such vision and strategy. Even the continuance of the education secretary or commissioner is in serious doubt, thereby preventing any long-term planning. As a result, the state is unable to make systematic decisions about planned and meaningful deployment of

NGOs in a sustained manner.

The key contributors to society are the government and the NGOs. In India, corporates are particularly identified as a separate category though they too are non-governmental organisations. It is critical that these three components collaborate in the most effective manner to help society fulfil its commitment to achieving equity, justice and humanity. In reality, these constituents struggle to collaborate primarily due to their inherent nature and often due to conflicting interests.

PITFALLS AND PLUSES

Most NGOs find it rather challenging to work with the government.

When the Azim Premji Foundation decided to contribute to improving the quality of public education in India, it was imperative for the

There were some critical issues that helped us build such a meaningful relationship.

First, it had to do with our basic belief that most people intrinsically want to do something positive and constructive. People within the government are no exception. While government as an entity may face several challenges, there is a significant proportion of people within the government who are sincere, hard-working and well-meaning. The odds they face — in terms of serious constraints in resources, political interference and poor enabling conditions — are huge and yet they manage to focus on their responsibilities.

Second, we have to recognise the scale on which and the constraints within which the government operates. Despite the relatively large irrevocable amount that Premji has set apart, our funds are insignificant compared to those deployed by the government. Further, the government has a constitutional responsibility for one and all — and cannot differentiate or discriminate between sections of society to provide higher benefits.

Third, we cannot approach the government with readymade solutions. It is important to analyse the problems together to evolve solutions. Incidentally, this process itself is a great capacity-building one on both sides. There are no silver bullets for the mammoth and interlinked problems relating to the quality of public education. We made special efforts to understand ground realities before suggesting any solutions. Our question was: "How can we contribute?" or "How can we help?" and not "This is what you should do."

Fourth, while the Azim Premji Foundation enjoyed a certain brand with the government, we consciously ensured that unless our people themselves had the necessary capacity, they did not engage in the capacity-building efforts of teachers and other education functionaries. It was clear to our members that just because one is from the Azim Premji Foundation, one does not have a right to inflict mediocrity on teachers or other functionaries. This clearly perceived "value addition" was the most important factor in our relationship.

Fifth, we were very sensitive while interacting with them. It is a tough balance between not being subservient and not coming across as disrespectful. Winning a point is not as important as achieving long-term change. If, for this, we have to adjust or compromise for the time being, we are prepared for

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Madhu Pandit Dasa of Akshaya Patra has changed the scale of school midday meals

foundation to collaborate with the government. For the first 10 years, we worked through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed with the state in which we worked. We soon found that due to serious lack of continuity of the leadership at state level, the continuity of the MoU, both in letter and spirit, suffered. In addition, it created a certain dependency on the government that was rather dysfunctional. We therefore evolved a method of working with the government that involved voluntary participation of teachers, head teachers (school principals), teacher-educators and other education functionaries without a formal MoU or government orders.

Today, we can easily state that we are among the NGOs that have a very effective, cordial and mutually respectful work relationship with the government.

Unused land isn't returned



**FINE
PRINT**

KANCHI KOHLI

EVER since India enacted the new land acquisition law in 2013, people have been debating its clauses related to repatriation of acquired but unused land. Does land acquired for 'public purpose' remain in the government's custody endlessly, or can it be restored to its original owners? What happens when compensation has been paid, but people are still tilling their land? What if only 50 percent of the land acquired is being used and the remainder has just been fenced off?

These are only a few of several scenarios that have come to light while interacting with people affected by land acquisition. These issues have also emerged because the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013, enacted the possibility of the return of unused land to its original owners, perhaps for the first time in the history of land acquisition in India. The 2013 law replaced the 1894 law, a legacy of India's colonial period.

What happens to unused land acquired under the 1894 law?

This issue is dealt with in Section 24 of the 2013 law. It envisages three scenarios for land acquired under the 1894 law. First, when the final award has been made under the 1894 law and, second, where no final award has been issued. The responsibility of issuing this 'award' rests with the district collector, after carrying out a complete inquiry on the cost of the land and determining compensation.

In cases where the final award has been issued, the status quo is maintained and the land remains with the government. Where the final award has not been issued, even though the collector might have calculated the amounts to be paid earlier, compensations are to be handed out using the provisions of the new 2013 law. Several people, like

the farmers impacted by an SEZ on the Gujarat coast, have gone to court, seeking higher compensations as provided for in the 2013 law. A decision on this case is pending.

Where it gets interesting is in Section 24 (2). If the collector has made an award five years before the enactment of the 2013 law, but "physical possession of the land has not been taken or the compensation has not been paid", the proceedings will lapse. If the government chooses, the process can be initiated afresh, invoking all the safeguards of the new law. This includes invoking provisions of seeking consent from land owners and carrying out Social Impact Assessments (SIA) to determine public purpose, amongst other things. There is a conditionality for the implementation of this clause, but it still allows for reopening negotiations between people and the government.

What about land acquired under the 2013 law?

This scenario is yet to come into play, as it applies only to land acquired under the new law and remaining unutilised for five years. Section 101 of the 2013 law says that such land "shall be returned to the original owner or owners or their legal heirs". But there is also another option provided which allows for enlisting the land into a government-prescribed 'land bank'.

This is where a conflict with the idea of repatriation is beginning to emerge. It is rare for a state government that has once acquired land to give up its claim even if the acquisition was the result of over-estimation of the immediate requirement or the purpose for which land was taken away does not exist anymore. The case of POSCO's steel plant and port in Odisha is an example of both scenarios. While it was in the running, the company was seeking acquisition envisaging a four-fold future expansion.

Legally, too, state governments clearly prefer the option of a land bank. The land banks "mean a governmental entity that focuses on the conversion

Seventh, it is important to create a framework that is clear and does not involve financial transactions. Right from the beginning, our MoUs specified the responsibilities of the foundation and of the government and no exchange of money in any form took place.

Eighth, there are certain apprehensions within the government system as well as in civil society about the motives of an NGO promoted by a corporate philanthropist. It is important to communicate clearly and, most important, demonstrate through your work that you are here to stay in the long run and genuinely help government and society to improve overall quality. It is important not to remain in the limelight, not to take

of government-owned vacant, abandoned, unutilised acquired lands and tax-delinquent properties into productive use". The 2013 law allows every state government to formulate rules to implement the law. The Odisha government's 2016 rules have adopted the idea of the land bank under Section 42 of these rules with no provision for repatriation to original owners.

What would be the status of land acquired through other acquisition laws?

The 2013 legislation lists 13 other laws under which acquisition has been carried out by the government for various purposes. These include the 1957 law related to coal-bearing areas, the 1989 Railways Act and the 1956 legislation for acquiring land for national highways. There is nothing in the 2013 law which talks about return of unused land, if acquired under any of these laws.

The only possibility is revisiting compensation. For instance, if land has been acquired under the coal-bearing areas law, then people losing land and livelihoods can be paid compensation and be rehabilitated using the parameters of the 2013 law, provided it is for the better.

On a recent visit to Sundargarh district in Odisha, I came across a reference to a "ban" area, where the government sets up limited health or education facilities for people as it is ultimately going to be used for coal mining. While notices were issued to people almost 10 years ago, none of the beneficial provisions of the 2013 law can be extended to the people if one is to go strictly by the law. In future, a progressive court might decide to adjudicate on this, but till then there isn't much that can happen.

The land acquisition question remains a wicked problem. Imagine being served a notice one fine day to give up your home, work, and comfort zone. It needs to be sparingly demanded and cautiously implemented. After all, one would never want to give back land once it's in one's possession. ■

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credit, not to display overt money power, but to establish healthy principles of relationships with other NGOs and implement decent but frugal work practices.

Ninth, the core of our relationship is with the people in the government at ground level. We do not make any effort to manage our work by establishing relationships at the level of the minister or secretary; we deal with people who are more permanent in the system and are the key interface with children and parents.

As we expand, we will take special care to preserve these principles that have helped us work effectively with the government. ■

Dileep Ranjekar is CEO of the Azim Premji Foundation

There is another option provided which allows for enlisting the land into a government prescribed land bank. States opt for this option.

Gujarat's blueprint for farm sector



**MACRO
VIEW**

SANTOSH MEHROTRA

FOR some years now, surveys have indicated that a significant proportion of farmers want to give up farming. Underlying this phenomenon are two contradictory trends. One is the distress of the poorest, the small and marginal farmers (those who till less than two hectares and form 85 percent of cultivators), and, to some extent, the rural landless labour (who accounted for some 30 percent of India's 220 million workforce in agriculture in 2012).

At the micro level, for the small, marginal farmer, when the crop fails due to unseasonal rain and if he is indebted, his situation becomes hopeless. If he also happens to be a share-cropper and not an owner-cultivator, and is then indebted (especially to moneylenders), hopelessness can lead to suicide when the crop fails.

At the macro level there are two positive forces at play in agriculture. First, it was only after 2004-05, when the GDP growth rate (including agriculture) rose sharply, that for the first time in India 37 million workers left agriculture in the seven years leading up to 2011-12. While the share of the workforce in agriculture had been declining prior to 2004, investment in construction grew rapidly between 2004-05 and 2011-12, leading to landless labour leaving agriculture to become construction workers. A Lewisian structural shift had begun.

The second path-breaking development was that for the first time in India's history there occurred an absolute decline in the numbers of the poor as real wages rose rapidly. While poverty incidence declined by 0.7 percentage points per annum between 1993-94 and 2004-05, between 2004-05 and 2011-12 it tended to decline at over double that rate (at 2 percentage points). However, further hastening the rate of poverty reduction will be crucially dependent upon the fortunes of agriculture (both crop and non-crop).

In post-independence India the growth rate of agriculture has rarely exceeded three percent per annum, and even then it has barely risen above three percent. Hence we cannot claim that there has been an agricultural revolution in India, despite the Green Revolution in the 1970s and '80s. East Asia achieved a six percent growth rate in agriculture between 1950 and 1980.

LESSONS FROM GUJARAT

The Indian paradox is that mechanisation is occurring in agriculture and rural consumption is rising, but farm yields are growing too slowly. The government could have taken action to benefit

farmers by simply learning from Gujarat's success in agriculture.

Increasing crop yields requires that inappropriate use of fertiliser — arising from the market-distorting and soil health-destroying fertiliser subsidy to manufacturers — is put an end to quickly and replaced by cash transfer to farmers. But the government has only recently shown signs of fertiliser subsidy reform, other than advocating that each farmer should get his soil tested and maintain a soil-health card (as is done in Gujarat). Raising yields also requires the rapid rejuvenation of the farm extension system, whereby extension workers help the farmer with new knowledge.

The agricultural research and extension system had deteriorated in Gujarat, as in the rest of India. But, after 2000, the Gujarat government unbundled the massive Gujarat Agricultural University into four independent universities and increased the



Drip irrigation has spread rapidly in Gujarat

resources allocated to them. Scientists at the four universities were then mobilised to rejuvenate the moribund 'training and visit' extension model. Partly due to extension work, farmers in Gujarat have shifted en masse from a 13:7.5:1 nitrogen-phosphorus-potassium composition in fertiliser use which was harmful to crops and soil, to a 6.5:3.5:1 composition, thus reducing cost, increasing production and improving net income.

Raising crop yields also requires better management of water and pricing of electricity for farms. In both Gujarat has shown the way — which partly explains why the state experienced a growth rate in agriculture that is at least twice (about 6.7 per annum) the national average, despite being semi-arid. While excessive groundwater use in the grain belt of Punjab and Haryana has caused a serious fall in the groundwater table there and elsewhere in India, Gujarat's government, in contrast, supported farmers in undertaking decentralised rainwater harvesting and groundwater recharge work. This started as a mass movement.

Second, the government popularised micro-irrigation (sprinklers, drip irrigation) to prevent inefficient use of water, common all over India. While the UPA government underfunded the subsidy for sprinklers/sprayers/drip irrigation,

which requires capital investment by farmers, the Gujarat government developed a subsidy-loan programme which is by far the best offered by states to adopters of micro-irrigation. As a result, the spread of micro-irrigation is more rapid in Gujarat than other states. To be fair, the 2015-16 Budget did introduce the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sinchai Yojana to provide 'per drop more crop'.

Gujarat's approach to power supply for agriculture also offers lessons for other states. All over the country, electricity is in short supply, including for agriculture. Yet, most Indian states charge a subsidised flat tariff for farm power supply. But Gujarat ensured quality power supply for limited hours, for which farmers were willing to pay.

Raising farmer earnings also means whittling down middlemen. That requires reform of APMC (Agriculture Produce Marketing Committees) Acts. Gujarat was among the early states to amend its APMC Act to enable farmers to directly sell their produce to wholesalers or exporters, without having to operate through *arhtiyas* or commission agents. The amendment also enabled conditions that encouraged the spread of contract farming. The government encouraged large corporates to establish retail chains and source their produce directly from farmers.

Next was diversification into non-crop production. Gujarat has been a leader in milk production in the country (due to its rural road network) since 1970 and offers lessons for the rest of India. Since rural roads are now in place in most of the country, there is need to extend beyond crops to livestock and fisheries. What is holding back the central government from encouraging states to adopt Gujarat's best practices?

THE PRESENT IMBROGLIO

It is a great pity that Indian agriculture faced two successive years of drought in 2014 and 2015. Farm incomes hardly grew at all in those two years. Finally, there was a good monsoon in 2016 and hence a bumper harvest. But when farmers brought their produce to the market, liquidity collapsed due to demonetisation. As a result, agricultural commodity and vegetable prices fell sharply in late 2016. The distress of the preceding two years of drought deepened. Farmers came on to the streets in many states earlier this year, as prices had really recovered in farmers' markets, while their loans repayment and interest were coming up for payment.

This situation can only be addressed if an agricultural investment strategy is put in place, backed by institutional lending to not just medium and large farmers but to small, marginal farmers. Crop insurance needs to spread rapidly. Under such circumstances, if the crop were to fail, it would not lead to worsening distress despite the already precarious situation of small, marginal farmers. Crop insurance would keep their distress from turning into ruination. ■

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States of enterprise



**DELHI
DARBAR**

SANJAYA BARU

ANXIETY about the future within the business community created by the break-up of the united state of Andhra Pradesh has been replaced by renewed hope in both the new states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. It is business as usual in the metropolis of Hyderabad-Secunderabad-Cyberabad.

The hope generated among business leaders by the end of three decades of Communist rule and the decisive victory of Mamata Banerjee, on the other hand, has given way to renewed concerns about what lies ahead. Similarly, political stability in Bihar under the leadership of Nitish Kumar has not had much impact on inward investment in that state.

On the other hand, the move to New Delhi by Gujarat's supremo, Narendra Modi, and his replacement by lacklustre leaders has not dampened the enthusiasm of business-persons to invest in Gujarat. And the political uncertainty in Tamil Nadu following the death of Jayalalitha and the split in the ruling party has not made any difference to the environment for business in the southern state.

What does all this add up to? Economically developed and business-friendly states continue to attract new investment despite political change and less developed states continue to remain unattractive to new investors despite political change.

It may surprise many to know that the regional divergence in industrial development and economic growth that we see today in India has persisted for well over a century despite far-reaching political changes across the subcontinent.

In British India the more developed regions were the Bombay and Madras Presidencies, followed by undivided Punjab. The less developed regions included the Bengal Presidency and the United and Central Provinces. Fifty years of planning after Independence did not alter that pattern. Free India's more developed states have been Gujarat, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Haryana, Karnataka and erstwhile Andhra Pradesh.

Economists who have analysed regional patterns of development have put forward various

hypotheses to explain this phenomenon. Some believe peninsular India has done better than the states of the Gangetic Plain because of access to the sea, higher levels of education and a higher degree of urbanisation. Some believe the Green Revolution has only helped perpetuate a pattern first established during British rule because agricultural development too was localised in states that were industrially advanced. Perhaps all these factors are responsible in their own way.

It cannot, however, be said that the developed states have consistently had better political leadership than the less developed ones. After all, states like Bihar, West Bengal and Rajasthan have had some very good chief ministers and long periods of political stability. That, however, does not seem to have made much difference.



A crowded IT park in Hyderabad

Less developed states continue to remain unattractive to new investors despite political change.

One consequence of the regional coincidence of higher levels of education, a more productive rural economy and higher degree of urbanisation has been that the developed states have also been home to new business enterprise. Indeed, the emergence of new 'local enterprise' in one or more sectors of the economy — agriculture, manufacturing and services — seems to distinguish in a significant way developed states from the backward states.

Home-grown enterprise is the big differentiator. When Gujarati business invests in Gujarat, Tamil business invests in Tamil Nadu, Punjabi business invests in Punjab, others come in. Local enterprise development 'crowds-in' overall investment. The absence of dynamic local enterprise acts as a dampener on non-local enterprise. Thus, if Bengali business will not invest in Bengal, who will? The argument can also be extended to the national level. If Indian business stops investing in India, which foreigner will come and invest here?

The business development of Hyderabad and Bengaluru in the 1990s and since 2000 has been largely on account of local enterprise. That phenomenon explains the overall economic development of Gujarat, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu as well.

All this is not to deny the role of political leadership. In Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Jalagam Vengala Rao made all the difference. Andhra Pradesh before Vengala Rao was industrially backward. Andhra Pradesh after Vengala Rao began competing with industrially developed neighbours like Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra.

Development-oriented local political leadership is a necessary but not sufficient condition for development to strike root. Thus, when a young, educated, forward-looking political leader like Akhilesh Yadav became chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, many businessmen from the state decided to invest in it. However, they were soon disappointed to find that change of leadership was not a sufficient condition.

On a recent visit to Uttar Pradesh, I met young entrepreneurs who had pinned their hopes on Akhilesh. Some had even returned from the United States, giving up promising careers there, to invest in UP. They were all disappointed. They are now praying that Yogi Adityanath will prove different and will not disappoint them. If Chief Minister Adityanath wants to bring in new investment into UP and keep existing investors from moving out, he will have to show that UP is as good a place as any to do business in. One consequence of the new Goods & Services Tax is that the role of area-based incentives is less relevant to the economics of business. In any case, it will take a lot for states like Bihar, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh to bring in new investment, competing with the states of peninsular India and the region around New Delhi.

To add to all the problems that plague less developed states, it now seems as if most of the law and order problems occur in these very states.

From terrorism inspired by religious radicalism, sectarianism and Maoism to cow-protectionist vigilantism, most recent law and order problems also seem to be largely localised in the less developed states of northern and central India. This would further scare investors away and encourage them to remain invested in the states of peninsular India.

For India to be able to sustain upwards of 8.0 per cent annual economic growth it is necessary that development takes root in the subcontinent's less developed regions. This requires better governance, better infrastructure, better law and order and a forward-looking political leadership. The Gangetic Plain has waited patiently for the growth process to move up from Peninsular India. There is not much Delhi can do. It tried, with half a century of central planning, public investment and incentives for private investors to move in. That model has failed. It is now up to the local political and business leadership to step in and pull these regions up. ■

LIVING

BOOKS | ECO-TOURISM | FILM | THEATRE | AYURVEDA

Coffee, rain and a spiritual high in Chikmagalur



A Buddha statue in the garden of the Java Rain Resort



The eye-catching Vanadevatha statue

Susheela Nair
Chikmagalur

THE drive to Mullayanagiri, the highest peak in Karnataka, is full of hairpin bends and scenic sights. We passed sprawling coffee plantations before arriving at a shrine dedicated to Lord Shiva, shrouded in mist. We inched our way forward, whiplashed by the wind, and clambered up 420 steps to reach the shrine. With the wind at our backs, we made our way to Seethalayangiri, where a temple adds to the spiritual allure of the place.

After an arduous drive and climb, we zoomed into Java Rain Resort in Chikmagalur, the coffee heartland of Karnataka. The resort's reception area was striking. The space was embellished with three-pillared structures shaped like coffee flowers in bloom. The resort derives its name from two of Chikmagalur's most famous attractions — coffee and rain.

Designed by Cadence Architects, innovation is the buzzword in this resort and coffee the recurring theme. All the cottages and restaurants have names that mean coffee — kaffa, qahva, fika and mirra. The reception area doesn't have conventional walls so it offers bracing mountain air and a 360-degree view



The temple atop Seethalayangiri

of the valleys that lie below and the coffee plantation on the other side. A staircase leads to Mirra — which is Turkish bitter coffee — the restaurant that overlooks the infinity pool. The rejuvenating air at the al fresco dining area is as delectable as the Malnad specialties served there!

This four-acre sylvan retreat is the brainchild of the Shambala Group, founded by Shubha and Shiv Talur, who have rich experience in the hospitality business. Escorting us through the resort's dense canopy, Shubha explained, "These villas were built with minimal clearing of land. We have ensured

that all the plants and trees around this resort were retained so that tree canopies provide natural shade." Adding to the verdant ambience are the silver oaks, wild fig and orange trees around the villas with statues of Buddha sprinkled in strategic nooks and crannies of this rustic retreat.

There are 18 villas encompassing single, twin and presidential suites. All the rooms have a lavish deck with glass walls and offer a spectacular view of the estate. The colour schemes of the rooms complement the surroundings outside. Balinese artefacts match the architecture perfectly. The furniture includes intricate details of Toraja work handcrafted in

Java, Indonesia. True to the resort's tagline, 'Luxury Brewed Strong', this is the place to be.

We were ushered into our cottage called Fika (the Swedish name for coffee). As I sat by the bay window of Fika, the presidential suite, sipping cups of piping coffee, the sight of Chikmagalur town in the distance caught my eye. At night, the town glittered and twinkled with lights. You can cycle and go on long walks in this picturesque resort. You can also scramble up to Crimson Peak, the tree bar, and enjoy tranquility while you have a drink.

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Room with a view. The presidential suite at the Java Rain Resort



The Chennakesava temple on the outskirts of Chikmagalur

Continued from page 29

The next morning, we trekked to the Baba Budan hills to see the shrine of the Sufi mystic, Hazrat Dada Hayat Mir Khalander, who smuggled seven seeds from the famous port of Mocha, on his way back from Mecca, and planted them on the ridges of the mountains that rise above Chikmagalur town, giving India her first coffee plantation.

Revered as Baba Budan for his healing powers, the mountain ranges that he made his home came to be named after him. The Inam Dattatreya Peetha, venerated by Hindus and Muslims, is located in this range. A cave is believed to have been sanctified as the residence of Dattatreya Swami as well as Baba Budan. Religion scores over nature here, as this town attracts both Hindus and Muslims, all of whom participate in an annual *yatra* or *urus*. These hills find mention in the *Mahabharata* as the Chandra Drona Parvat where Bhima unearthed a waterfall to quench Kunti's thirst.

Interestingly, the district takes its name from its headquarters, Chikmagalur, which literally means younger daughter's town. Chikmagalur shot into the limelight in 1977, during the historic election when Indira Gandhi entreated the voters of this

SUSHEELA NAIR

little township, "Please treat me as you would your own little daughter. I am your Chikmagalu," she told them. They gave her a thumping victory. Chikmagalur arrived on the tourist map and since then has attracted adventurous travellers and nature enthusiasts.

We ended our Chikmagalur *yatra* with a visit to the Coffee Museum, an initiative of the Coffee Board of India. Large vinyl posters with bright illustrations depicting processes like picking, drying and grinding coffee along with pictures of different varieties greet the visitor. A one-hour multi-media presentation turned out to be an incredible learning

experience for us. It traced the entire life-cycle of the red berry, through farming, harvesting, drying, blending and roasting before it reaches millions in steaming cups of fresh brew. Various apparatus used for curing, roasting, grinding and other coffee paraphernalia were on display in the lab.

Coming down from the hills, we marvelled at the gigantic statue of Vanadevatha installed by Siri Coffee and then joined other tourists for a coffee break. Cloaked in green and heightened by a splash of several varieties of blooming beauties of all hues, the aesthetically landscaped Vanadevatha is Chikmagalur personified. She is nature entreating tourists to keep Chikmagalur 'clean and green.' ■

FACT FILE**Getting there:** Bengaluru – 250 km.**Nearest airport:** Mangalore (150 km).**Where to stay:** Java Rain Resort, Mullayanagiri Rd, Chikmagalur**For reservations:** 09008666000.**What to shop:** Spices and coffee.**To do:** Visit Marle Chennakesava temple, Belavadi Hoysala temple and stop by Town Canteen to try their special masala dosa.**BOLD FILMS ON POLITICS, PATRIARCHY****The Internet is an impartial distributor**Saibal Chatterjee
New Delhi

IT may not quite be the rage yet, but web films have certainly begun to make their presence felt in the Indian entertainment landscape. Streaming platforms have opened up a whole new world of opportunities for independent filmmakers out to tell bold, provocative stories that do not subscribe to mainstream practices. Mumbai-based writer-director Bikas Ranjan Mishra has made two such films this year. Both are screen adaptations of important plays — one relates a sly and daring political tale, the other is a searing portrait of patriarchal smugness.

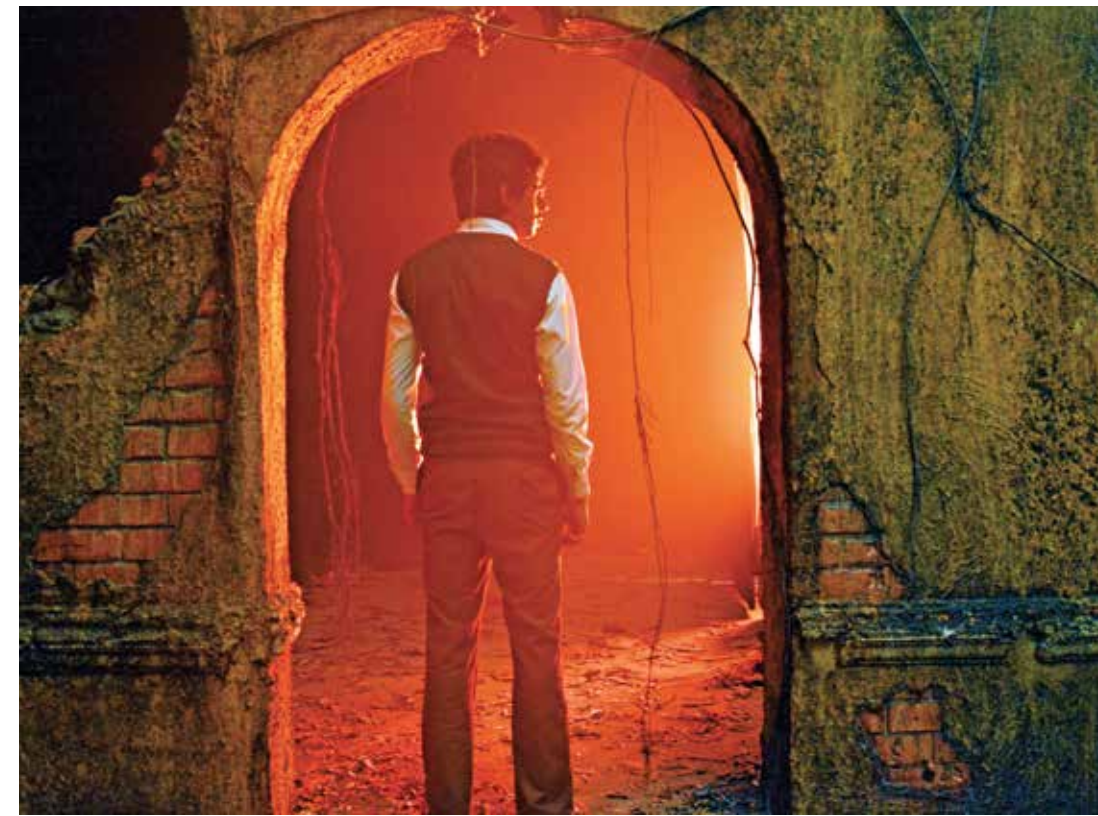
Indian filmmakers working within the conventional distribution-exhibition eco-system usually shy away from political themes for fear of running afoul of the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC). On a digital platform, however, there is absolute creative freedom because the film censors have no jurisdiction over the domain, not as yet at any rate. Mishra has made the most of this latitude in *Guy in the Sky*, a hard-hitting, thought-provoking web film that pulls no punches in satirising India's current fractious, you're-with-me-or-against-me political discourse.

The 70-minute film, produced by CinePlay, a company that actor Nandita Das and entrepreneur Subodh Maskara launched in 2014 to bring Indian theatre to the web via cinema, began streaming in June on Hotstar, STAR TV's web exhibition platform. "Making a film like this for theatre distribution is unimaginable in the current scenario. It wouldn't get past the censor board," says the director who made his big-screen debut last year with the critically acclaimed *Chauranga*, a film about patriarchy and caste oppression in rural India.

"In the political climate that we live in, filmmakers have learnt to resort to self-regulation in order to avoid courting censorship trouble," he adds. "In *Guy in the Sky*, too, we tried to safeguard our interests by editing out bits of the script over several rounds of vetting," says Mishra. "I have done nothing in this film that could be construed as objectionable."

Guy in the Sky, loosely adapted from an early 1980s Kannada play, unfolds in a single living room inhabited by a young Mumbai couple, musician Raghav (Sunny Hinduja) and social activist Mehek (Maanvi Gagroo). The film has only one other character, an unnamed intruder (Tannishtha Chatterjee) who barges into the apartment armed with an assault rifle and a sinister plan.

"*Guy in the Sky* is a departure from Chandrashekhara Kambar's play (*Harakeya Kuri*) because its original premise of a manipulative



Pagla Ghoda is an adaptation of Badal Sircar's famous play



Still from Guy in the Sky

politician wouldn't have worked anymore. Today, it is a given that politicians are manipulators, so I had to put a contemporary spin on the source material," says Mishra. Without naming any political dispensation or individual, *Guy in the Sky* makes it amply clear what or who it is getting at.

But it isn't agitprop cinema. The web, says Mishra, is essentially a medium for the young. So any film made for this platform has to be light on its feet. "So the idea," he says, "is to tell a story in the most powerful way possible." But Mishra admits that the web is a medium that is still evolving. "It is a tricky medium. It is screen agnostic. A web film can be watched on a mobile phone, a laptop or on the television screen. This is still essentially cinema, but as a filmmaker one is still trying to figure out how to use it best."

The curtain goes up on *Guy in the Sky* with a

masculinity as its defining quality. "The film at the same time mocks the shallowness of both the supporters and detractors of this politics. It critiques the superficiality of the notions of revolution propagated on social media," he adds.

The dialogues in *Guy in the Sky* are peppered with words like *chaudi chaati* (broad chest), *gaumutra* (cow urine), *bhakt* (acolyte) and *vikaas* (development). Talking specifically about the word *bhakt*, Mishra asserts that nobody has a copyright on it. "It is a Sanskrit word; it is just that it has acquired an overt political connotation today."

Guy in the Sky hinges on an obsequious campaign jingle exhorting Indians to wake up; a half-baked social media agitation and a protest march driven by the hashtag "netajishameshame"; and an angry rebel with an assassination plan. From their respective points of view, the three characters have a go at each other's political and social leanings.

Earlier this year, Mishra had helmed another CinePlay production, *Pagla Ghoda*, an adaptation of Badal Sircar's iconic 1967 play of the same name. *Guy in the Sky* marks a natural progression for Mishra not only in relation to *Pagla Ghoda* but also to his first film, *Chauranga*.

In the latter, he addressed the dynamics of the caste system in a rural society where patriarchy holds unquestioned sway, where the dominant power ethics determine social relations and roles. *Pagla Ghoda* was an even starker depiction of patriarchy reflected through four men drinking and playing cards at a cremation ground as the body of a young woman burns on an off-screen pyre.

Guy in the Sky, on its part, probes the political ramifications of patriarchy. It focuses squarely on how masculinity draws strength from dividing and manipulating people and pitting them against each other in dangerous ways. That Mishra has got away with a film of this nature bears testimony to the power of the web.

In *Pagla Ghoda*, a 114-minute adaptation of a theatrical production that ran well over three hours, the sheer indifference of the four men at the cremation ground is chilling. Referring to the dead woman, one of them observes: "She was born a girl. That was her only fault." Another says: "It's young flesh. It won't take long to burn."

The spirit of the dead girl, attired in spotless white, hovers over the quartet. She personifies the women that these men have loved, exploited and lost. She gets into the conversation with interjections and questions as the men reminisce about their past and reveal aspects of their deeply skewed personalities. The men's recriminations, which often sink into accusations and self-pity, are interspersed with the crackle of the fire and the howls of a dog, suggestive of the destructive and predatory quality of their relationships with women.

To them, the death of the young girl is just another interlude. One of the men says: "Cemeteries inspire great stories — eternal love stories." But their individual accounts contain nothing to suggest that their love was either great or eternal. The irony is lost on them. ■

The Himalayan storyteller

By Anjana Basu

LIKE a tall tree in the forest, Ruskin Bond's stories cover the hills and valleys of Mussoorie and its folk with their flutes, driving cows up beyond haunted places. At the root of it is a boy who never grew up looking out onto the world from a room on the roof. Over the decades many have wondered about Bond's life and his lonely, idyllic existence. He took on a kind of *sadhu* avatar, the old man of the hills overflowing with wisdom.

Now 83, Bond opens up his life, telling readers a little more than they already knew, with a series of three books — one on his life with his father, another which covers snippets of memory down the years and this, his third, an autobiography quirkily named *Lone Fox Dancing*. He saw a 'lone fox dancing in the cold moonlight,' a scene out of Narnia, on a deserted hill road and took it for his own. Of course, there is a Shakespearean touch as well, a star dancing in the tremendous sky.

Bond reveals some of the sources of his tales — some because most of the book takes Bond's life up to his thirties. The rest of the pages very quietly drift through life with his adopted family and thoughtful descriptions of flowers and trees. He has, of course, as he himself admits, diaries of his life where he writes all the details that catch his eye or snatch his thoughts.

He does acknowledge sources, two old ladies whom he met at separate times in Mussoorie and Dehradun who happened to live next door or downstairs. Bond has a gift for nattering with the

lonely and finding the stories that he needs, like that of Pari Tibba, not to mention the true ghost story of a luminous head.

He also tells the story of Sushila who was half his age and whom he loved only to fall into the tangle of the Indian social system where impoverished — his word is 'failed' — writers were not considered eligible matches. There is more, he confesses, that he has no intention of telling since the people involved are still alive and most matters of the heart should be kept where they belong, in secret warmth.

What the reader does realise is that the room on the roof belonged to Bond's mother and that the only time he was really solitary was in his London bedsit with a mouse for company. Otherwise, despite missing his father desperately, he had a sort of fallback consisting of his mother, stepfather, half-brothers, uncles and aunts. He was lucky enough to get cottages at a pittance and he also worked for an American welfare company called CARE, supplying books and buffaloes to the underprivileged of all kinds.

Bond, however, did not want the steady comfort of a well-paid job in a big city — he wanted to write and he wanted the peace of the hills. His father, we learn, was buried in Calcutta which is why he



Ruskin Bond opens up his life cautiously to his readers

disliked that particular city — not to mention the fact that Professor P. Lal of Writers Workshop sat on his manuscript and then rejected it.

Nuggets like these are interspersed with Bond's sunshiny writing and his stories of days in Junagadh or drinking with *maharanis* and their ilk. His Junagadh cook was later transformed into Jim Corbett's cook in a slender book of tall tales and a man-eating lion more appropriately into a tiger.

What comes through is his intense dedication to his craft and the fact that solitude is the fate of the dedicated writer.

The oak tree returns to its rootedness — life does come full circle. It does what comes naturally, bringing happiness into the lives of those who pass through the sunlight and shadow under its branches. It obviously has more confessions to make since the rings in its trunk are age-old but for those we shall have to sit under its leaf fall and wait. ■



Lone Fox Dancing My Autobiography Ruskin Bond Speaking Tiger ₹599

When relationships crumble

By Anjana Basu

AMBITIOUS architects, live-in relationships, stressed partners and lives in the bustling city with a dose of corruption and bad weather thrown in — this is the stuff of bestsellers. But you don't expect Marathi writers known for their classic works to weave such stories.

Half Open Windows is a tale of those who play games with property and use real estate as their storey-by-storey rise to power — a narrow, almost claustrophobic, existence dominated by ambition. The book opens with Sushrut and Sanika, both architects, who are in love but have never married. Sanika is part of a young group of builders on their way to the top, a star always flashed in the media. Sushrut is looking for a job but hasn't found one so he spends his time downloading stuff and looking after his dog.

Various characters take over the pages, covering the everyday aspects of city living with flashbacks to the past of the main protagonists. Ganesh Matkari's

novel has quite a bit of the short story to it. Each of the chapters seems to be complete in itself, with a different voice taking over, ending on a note of inner conviction, not with the high drama one would expect given the subject. Occasionally it takes time for the links to the main story to build since this method of narration is very different from the usual linear progression we expect with individuals like these. Matkari breaks up the expected context of narrative and, while dealing with the big picture, conveys it through small details like the interior of a car, a verandah in a small Mumbai apartment or the exterior of a cafe.

In the end it is all about relationships and the choices one makes in life. Issues come to a head over the building of the oddly named Elena, a high-profile construction that houses all the ambitions of Sanika and her group, spearheaded by a brilliant, wheeling-dealing Bengali. But at its foundations lies a work-related argument between Sanika and her once best friend that sends the whole Mumbai

dream toppling like a house of cards.

The ending of the book is not unexpected. This is the way big dreams and loves that cannot commit crash in the superficial 21st-century world. A bonfire of vanities, one might say, though not as dramatic as that might imply. However, Matkari's endings happen silently off-screen almost, and at the crux, presumably because he is a filmmaker, he cuts to a sudden downpour rather like the flights of pigeons that signal a catastrophe in a Satyajit Ray work. The technique of flashbacks continues throughout the narrative, and the book ends where it started — with Sushrut's voice musing about Sanika. A different musing this time because a cycle has been completed and the half-open windows finally closed.

Jerry Pinto's translation makes lively reading — so much so that it is hard to believe that the novel wasn't written in English in the first place. He does decline to translate things like '*bhasha*' but that is unimportant in a world of Hinglish and other hybrid languages. ■



Half Open Windows Ganesh Matkari Translated by Jerry Pinto Speaking Tiger ₹299

What battered Indians say

Anita Anand
New Delhi

HARSH Mander's collection of stories are by no means a reader's delight. Nor are they meant to be. Rather, they are a window, an intimate one, into the lives of boys and girls, men and women, families and entire communities who are born into and live on the margins of Indian society.

Through no fault of theirs, but by being in the wrong place at the wrong time, they have lost their lives, been attacked, molested, raped and burnt, their meagre belongings lost in the blink of an eye, taunted for being Dalits, Muslims, Sikhs, poor, unlettered and just being.

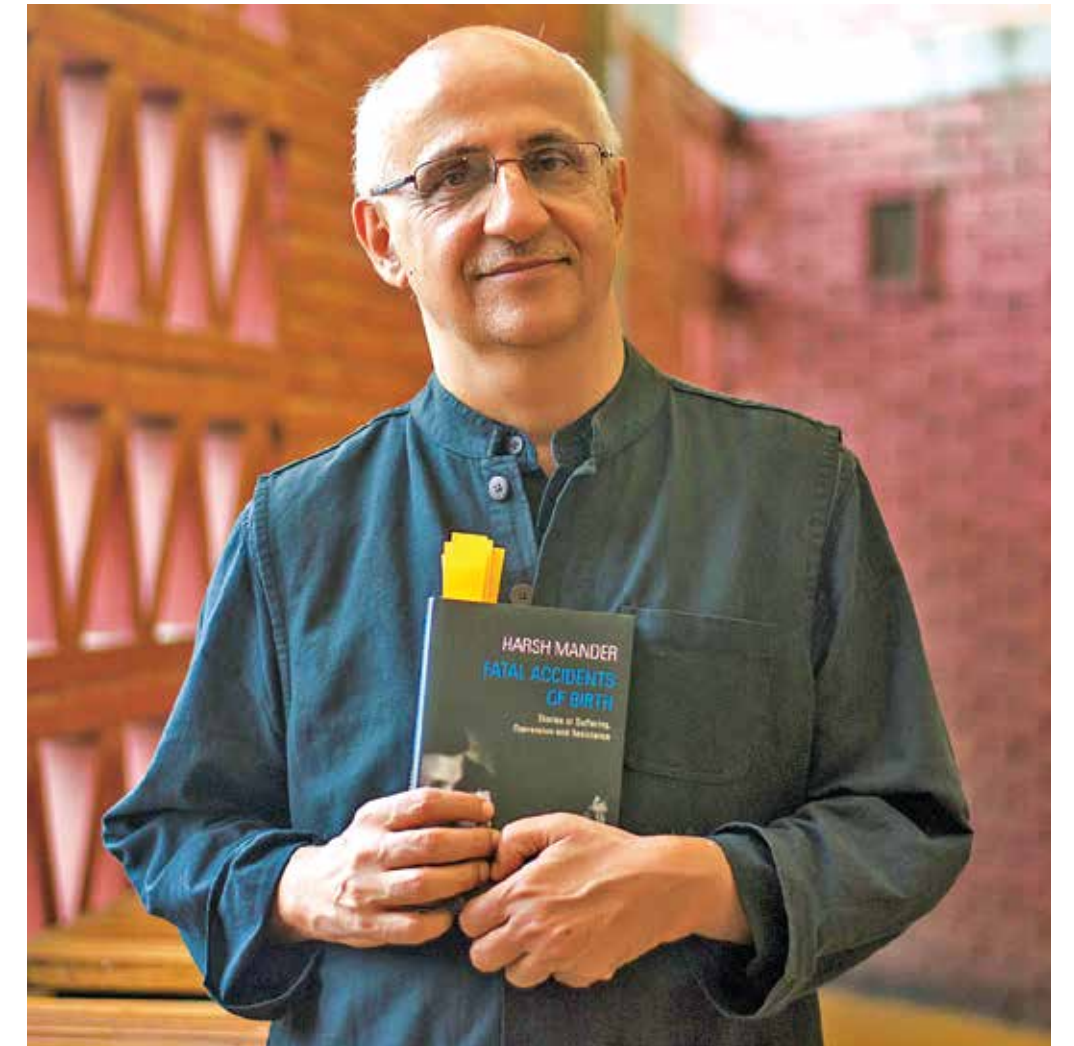
Mander dedicates the book to Rohit Vemula, a Dalit and doctoral candidate at Hyderabad University who committed suicide in 2016. He takes the title from Vemula's letter which said, among other things, '... some people, for them, life itself is a curse. My birth is my fatal accident.'

Mander is not an armchair writer. After a career in the Indian Administrative Services, he systematically began to work with survivors of mass violence and hunger, with the homeless, including street children. He and his colleagues have actively worked with the underbelly of the marginalised in India.

So, who are the people featured in the book? Naseeb, who was widowed when her entire family was wiped out in the aftermath of the Godhra massacre in Gujarat in 2002 and relocated in a colony for widows and their children. Krishna Gopal, a Dalit from Rajasthan who decided to build a Hanuman temple, as Dalits were not allowed to worship in the village one, and was boycotted and hounded out of the village, along with his family. Not surprising.

There is Sushila in Bengaluru, who was infected with HIV/AIDS by her husband, and her struggle to raise her two children. And other stories of children and adult men, women and transgenders who are reduced to begging and homelessness on the streets and rounded up by police, beaten and locked up. The institutions for orphans and homes for the destitute and mentally challenged are places where care is a distant word.

Underlying the stories in the book is a thread of failure and neglect — of governance, law and order, religious and educational institutions and community — that have turned their faces away from the suffering of those disenfranchised in society. Not only have they turned away, but often actively inculcated hate and intolerance — of Muslims, Dalits and the less fortunate.



Harsh Mander: 'For some people, life itself is a curse'

The stories, while depressing and sad, also show the resistance and resilience of the protagonists. Being beaten down is not in their vocabulary.

While India may have a quota system for minorities and Scheduled Castes in educational institutions and government jobs, they are still treated as less than equal by Indian society. Laws on paper cannot change hearts and minds.

The stories, while depressing and sad, also show the resistance and resilience of the protagonists. Being beaten down is not in their vocabulary. Mander not only shares the stories as stories but also how human rights activists, lawyers and civil society organisations have stepped in to help bring about justice, and help people, difficult as it may be.

Reading the stories, I cannot imagine middle-class and privileged Indians coming close to overcoming the adversities of the poor and marginalised among our midst. Our sense of entitlement ensures that through connections,

money and patronage, we do not suffer. In our blindness to those less privileged around us, we immerse ourselves in acquiring wealth, property, leisure and luxury. But, as it is said, the poor will always be amongst us.

For those who are in the NGO sector, the stories may not be new. Yet, some lessons can be learned. In one story Mander asks that we withhold judgement. A couple gave their daughter to a community person who offered to take care of her. In return, he paid off their debts. A police report was filed against them and the daughter was brought back to them. Four months later she died. The couple didn't have enough to feed her. Would she have been better off in the home of the person who offered to raise her? We'll never know. ■

Anita Anand is a development specialist and author of *Kabul Blogs: My Days in the Life of Afghanistan*.



**AYURVEDA
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Dr SRIKANTH

That bloated feeling

I work as a copy writer and spend long hours at my desk, working on my laptop. I exercise moderately. Yet I find my days are made miserable because of bloating. An hour or so after eating my stomach feels like it has swelled into a balloon. I have tried antacids but they give temporary relief. Please help.

Asit Sengupta

WHY BLOATING OCCURS

Bloating, gassiness and abdominal discomfort might look very simple but the problem can be quite painful and embarrassing to those who suffer from it. Severe bloating and pain often disrupts the daily routine of patients. • Overeating is probably the most common cause of bloating. • Eating too fast adds to the risk of bloating after a meal. The remedy is simple – eat at a moderate pace. Satiety signals can take up to 20 minutes to reach the brain and dampen one's appetite. • Another most common cause of temporary bloating is 'gas in the abdomen'. About half of gas in the digestive system is air that has been swallowed. The rest is produced by bacteria in the gut that help digest food.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Avoid habits like drinking through a straw, guzzling carbonated beverages, chewing gum and sucking on hard candy. These habits tend to increase the air we swallow, which, after a while, might cause bloating. Each person's reaction to a range of food differs. This isn't an inclusive list, but often some of these foods might be the culprit. Try to strictly avoid or reduce consumption of these foods. • Beans, chickpeas and lentils contain indigestible sugars called oligosaccharides. • Fruits and vegetables such as cabbage, green peas, potatoes, cauliflower, carrots, apricots and sprouts may cause gassiness and bloating. • Sweeteners can also cause gas and bloating. Sorbitol, an artificial sweetener, can't be easily digested. Fructose, a natural sugar, added to many processed foods, is difficult for many people to digest.

• Dairy products can be a source of intestinal distress and bloating if you have trouble digesting lactose or milk sugar. However, buttermilk seems to be an exception. • Whole grains, recommended for their many health benefits, can sometimes cause bloating and gas problems. • Difficult-to-digest foods can cause gassiness and bloating. Eating rich and fatty food can make one feel uncomfortably stuffed. Fat takes longer to digest than protein or carbohydrates, so it keeps the stomach full longer. Staying hydrated is essential to beat bloating. Always drink enough water. At least six to eight glasses of water per day is a must.

Stress and anxiety impact our digestion in a big way. We must adopt stress management techniques like exercise, meditation, prayer, listening to soothing music and spending more time doing things that we love.

HOME REMEDIES

If eliminating or reducing consumption of hard-to-digest foods doesn't solve the problem of frequent bloating, try any of the following home remedies and Ayurvedic medicines for about two weeks. • Chew and swallow one teaspoon of fennel seeds (saunf) after every meal. • Take about half a teaspoon of carom (ajwain) seeds with warm water once a day. • Take a tablespoon of cumin (jeera) seeds and boil in two cups of water for 10-15 minutes. Drinking this 'jeera water' is a good natural remedy for curbing gas production. • Take a quarter to half teaspoonful each of asafoetida (hing) and rock salt (sendha namak) mixed in fresh buttermilk (chaach) after meals. This decoction is helpful in relieving bloating. • Half teaspoonful of fresh ginger juice along with one tsp of fresh lime juice after meals will help to avoid bloating. Ginger tea is also an effective remedy against gas.

MEDICATION • Hingwashtak churna (Baidyanath) or Ashta churna (Kottakkal/Vaidyaratnam) — half teaspoonful thrice daily with half to one teaspoonful ghee along with a few morsels of food first. • If constipation is the cause of bloating take Triphala tablet (Himalaya/Zandu) — one or two tablets, twice daily, before meals for two to three weeks. • If indigestion is the cause, then take Trikatu tablet/syrup (Himalaya) — 1 tablet/5ml syrup, twice daily, after meals till the symptoms subside. • Gasex tablet (Himalaya)/Gaisantak bati (Baidyanath) — 2 tablets, thrice daily, after meals.

If, in spite of following all the above measures, bloating still persists it may be a signal of some potentially serious condition. Do consult your doctor. ■

Dr Srikanth is a postgraduate in Ayurveda and has been a consulting physician for the past 17 years. He is currently National Manager, Scientific Services, at The Himalaya Drug Company.

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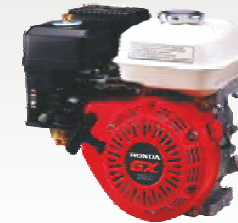


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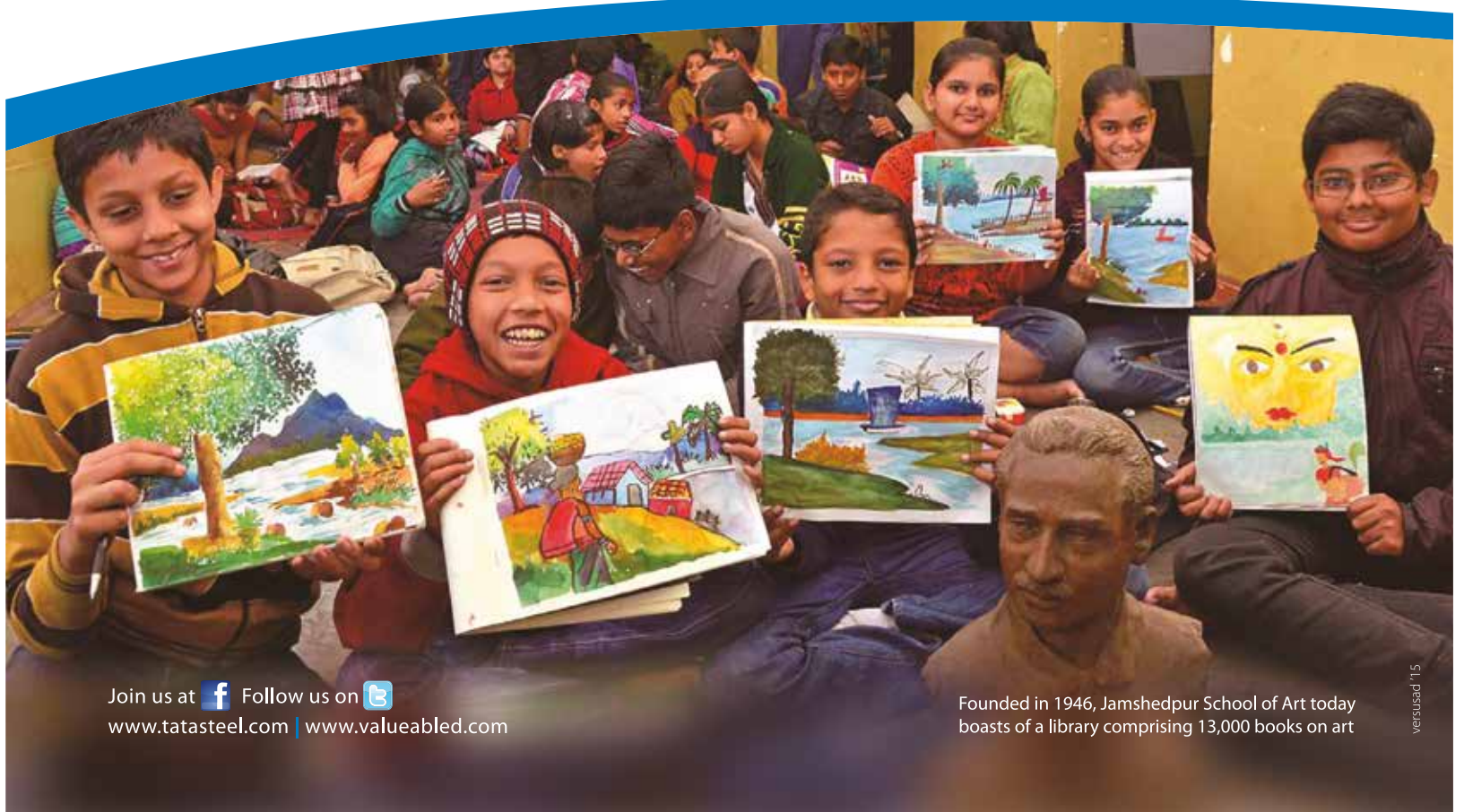


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