

Civil Society



GOA'S GRITTY GRAM SABHAS

Coal hub is one of many flashpoints

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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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Goa shows the way

IT comes as happy news that gram sabhas in Goa have been succeeding in asserting themselves. In some instances, the issues have been strictly local such as an unwanted road or housing project. But a much bigger challenge has been posed to the expansion of Mormugao Port to make it a major coal hub.

The gram sabhas are the lowest tier of local self-government. Their efforts to make themselves heard come in the wake of the panchayats in the tier above them being largely excluded from the state-level development process. So, the views expressed in the gram sabhas have been of people exasperated at not being consulted.

There is much to be said for the public-spiritedness of Goans. The gram sabhas represent a groundswell of popular sentiment. But at the public hearings on the port's expansion, professionals with their homework done argued convincingly against the project and left the government's officials fumbling for answers.

As complicated a process as it might be, public debate and consultation should be in practice, and not just on paper, an integral part of the development process. The Goa example shows what needs to be done in an institutionalised way instead of forcing people to seize space that should rightfully belong to them.

We have in this issue an insightful interview with Dr Rajiv Kumar, the new Vice-Chairman of the Niti Aayog. Dr Kumar brings to the role a deep understanding of Indian realities. He points out that India is far too diverse for one size to fit all. "India is 29 different countries," he says expressively. The Niti Aayog under his watch will, therefore, be working closely with each state. To meet national development objectives at an overarching level, the goal will be to engender a spirit of competitive federalism with clear deliverables that will leave little room for mere populism. It will mean talking to everyone and Dr Kumar sees a clear role for the voluntary sector for arriving at a better understanding of grassroots issues and providing last-mile solutions.

The Delhi Metro Railway's decision to raise fares became the subject of a huge controversy with the Aam Aadmi Party taking to the streets and the Congress and BJP following suit. But this was just the second hike in nine years and what should the Delhi Metro do to meet rising costs and service debt if it can't raise its fares a little bit now and then? Should it be entirely subsidised? In which case where would the government find the money? The politicians didn't have an answer. We spoke to Vinayak Chatterjee, a practical and knowledgeable voice on infrastructure issues who emphasises the need for putting faith in a regulator who can find a balance between socio-economic concerns and financial realities. In a sense the Fare Fixation Committee of the Metro has already played that role. But the problem really goes much deeper because it requires politicians to put their faith in regulation and resist from whipping up public feelings.



COVER STORY

Goa's gritty gram sabhas

People living in Goa's villages oppose the government's plans to transport coal and develop rivers. They want a say in development and they want their gram sabhas to have more authority.

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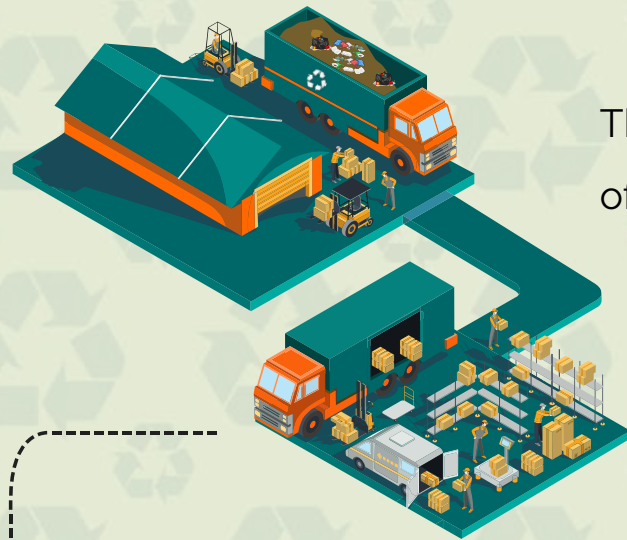
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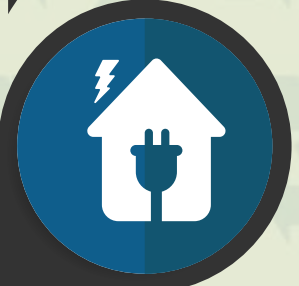
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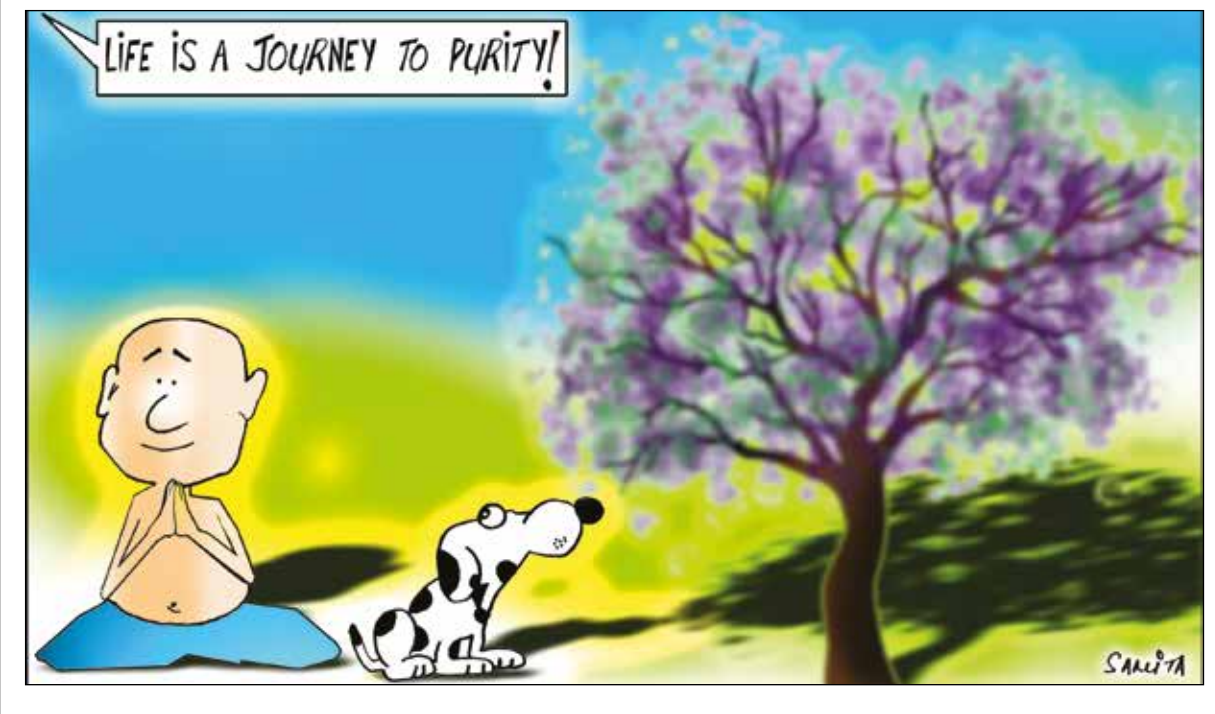
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IN THE LIGHT

SAMITA RATHOR



LETTERS

development and make products that don't harm the environment and people.

guidance to enable us to promote rooftop solar.

K. Mohankumaravel

Ritu Sehgal

Solar bounty

I read your interview with Simon Stolp of the World Bank. It's important to put aside funding for training rural youth to become solar entrepreneurs. They can then go to villages, set up a solar plant, maybe even a smart micro grid for villages. They can charge for their services. As batteries become more efficient this is the right business to get into.

D.K. Ramanathan

In Kerala, the Kudumbashree groups of women are the best choice for implementing solar projects and all government schemes.

G. Ramakrishnan

CSR methods

There are marked aberrations in the CSR agenda and a course correction is needed. Charity leaders have a geographic bias with corporations funding projects closer to their headquarters. Consequently, remote regions where development aid is acutely needed are being bypassed and deprived of this new social revolution.

Water wizard

I am very impressed by Laxman Singh's efforts, written about in your September-October issue. We must educate more people across the country on the need to harvest rainwater and encourage them to come up with inventions like the *chauka*.

Ajit Nair

Letters should be sent to response@civilsocietyonline.com



Smile works

Thanks for your cover story, 'What a Smile can do.' It is heartening to know there is an agency in Delhi that helps people who want to do their bit for society. The middle class is well-educated. A few of them would like to start small schools or a little socially oriented business. A helping hand, especially advice and capacity building, is what most people need. A larger ecosystem, like Smile, is a real friend for the underprivileged and well-meaning non-profits.

Shakti Poriyal

Smile Foundation is an excellent role model for Indian NGOs. Their methodology is pragmatic and compassionate. Companies too must be learning a lot by partnering with them - how to be more socially conscious, contribute to the country's

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'India is 29 countries. We will be working with each state'

Rajiv Kumar on what the Niti Aayog plans to do

Civil Society News
New Delhi

CLOSE TO THREE years after it came into existence, the Niti Aayog, whose mandate is to prepare a vision for the transformation of India, has had a change of guard with Dr Rajiv Kumar taking over as Vice-Chairman in September.

Dr Kumar is an economist and has vast experience in working for government, industry and think-tanks. His appointment is interesting because he replaces Dr Arvind Panagariya, who was brought from Columbia University specifically for the job but came in for sharp criticism for being too pro-industry and unfamiliar with Indian realities.

Groups like the Swadeshi Jagran Manch within the Sangh Parivar had made it clear to the Prime Minister that they didn't want Dr Panagariya in such a key role. (See *Civil Society* July 2017.)

Dr Kumar is an amiable man with a moderate manner. He is pro-reform, but attuned to domestic concerns. He seems better suited to striking a balance on development issues where cautious and inclusive reforms are likely to work better than extreme positions in carrying different sections of the economy along. He is keen to promote a federal approach to development and says the Niti Aayog will work with the states to meet their chosen goals.

With characteristic earnestness, Dr Kumar has plunged into his new role, meeting different interest groups and shaping long-term consensus. *Civil Society* spent time with him to understand Niti Aayog's roadmap on issues from malnutrition to agriculture to unemployment.

What is the mandate of the Niti Aayog? People are a little confused.

First, the Niti Aayog is not a successor to the Planning Commission. It takes nothing from its predecessor nor does it emulate it. Unfortunately, the principal function of the former Planning Commission had become devolution of non-tax resources — the so-called development grants to the states under 300-odd centrally sponsored schemes. That function had made it a donor of sorts and, therefore, overtaken all its other functions.

But after the 14th Finance Commission increased the tax devolution from 31 to 42 percent, that



Rajiv Kumar: 'We can honestly become a major instrument for change in governance'

function is simply gone. So the government wound up most of the schemes. Only 38 schemes are left. The chief ministers decide which ones they would like to have. There are 28 central schemes. The line ministries give the money for those.

There is no continuity here. It's a clean break.

Exactly how. What does the Niti Aayog plan to do?

The Niti Aayog encapsulates Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision which is born out of his long experience as chief minister — that the central government and state governments have to be equal partners in India's development. The Niti Aayog is an instrument for achieving that. The governing council of the Niti Aayog consists of all the chief

ministers and lieutenant-governors along with cabinet ministers and so on.

Our emphasis is on cooperative federalism and competitive federalism. We want to bring all the states on the same page by engaging with them on schemes and policies. We take their views and help in framing those schemes and policies. We do that very actively. Ideally, we would like to work with state governments to design state-specific development agendas. We know that one size does not fit all. India is 29 countries. Each is at a different stage of development. So, we would like to work with each state.

Therefore, we have sector verticals in the Niti Aayog. Each adviser is linked to some states. For example, my commitment is that in the first 100 days I will visit all state capitals to say that the Niti Aayog is your partner and we can help design a state-specific agenda for you. I have already visited four state capitals in the Northeast, Lucknow, Raipur, Jammu & Kashmir, Dehradun....

The idea behind competitive federalism, on the other hand, is to switch from competitive populism to competitive good governance. You do that by creating a sort of competition between states. A lot of work was done before I joined in creating composite indices across sectors. What are states doing in terms of access and quality of education? What are they doing to manage their district hospitals? Or

on water conservation?

We will create as many sectoral rankings as possible, apart from the ease of doing business which has been done. For the first time, you had all states on board across 98 variables and that was the input. Now we have done the perception survey which was carried out by the IDFC Institute. That's the big mandate.

The other mandate for the Niti Aayog is to act as a funnel for ideas from all stakeholders in the country.

To envision the future?

Yes, and also in finding solutions to our current problems. The Prime Minister has been emphatic

on this. He said: 'Look, I don't want to know what. I want to know how.' And that can only come from very granular instances.

We can only know the pain points by engaging with people. We have already held as many as 30 to 35 meetings with outside experts in each vertical. I have held seven big stakeholder meetings across think-tanks, scientific innovators, farmers, CEOs of manufacturing and services, labour unions and development partners or NGOs. We want to pick up ideas, filter and put them in the system.

But we aren't only keyboarding ideas. We are an action tank. We monitor implementation on outcome- and performance-based criteria. We help to implement wherever needed. We have a development monitoring and evaluation office which is acquiring the capability of real time monitoring of schemes and projects by putting them up on a portal that's accessible to everyone.

Everyone who is implementing a particular scheme can plug in and that's reviewed. We can inform the PM in real time on, say, how many villages have been electrified. He gets data on a daily basis.

We can honestly become a major instrument for change in governance. So I am thrilled with this role of the Niti Aayog. People tell me you lost the financials, so you lost power. No. The power of coming up with a hegemonic idea and turning around the public domain is much, much bigger.

There is GDP growth and there is inequality. We know that higher GDP does not address inequality. How do you make the Niti Aayog more inclusive?

To me the key is to improve the delivery of public services. And that happens through outcome-based monitoring and competitive good governance. The government has failed in its duty, so far, to ensure that growth is equitably distributed. For that to happen the share of public goods in the consumption basket of the poor has to increase, not only for the middle class. What has happened is that the elite completely abdicated their responsibilities. The government encouraged us in the past by finding private solutions to all public problems. That cannot be the basis of inclusive or sustainable growth.

So it's a kind of secession?

Yes. That's the only reason private security providers are the fastest growing industry in this country. The state is supposed to have a monopoly on violence to protect its citizens from illegal violence. That is the first fundamental basic principle of the government under any social contract, Rousseau downwards.

People tell me the PM promised maximum governance, minimum government and now you are increasing the size of the government. But the size of the government is very small, smaller than it should be in many places — policemen, nurses in public hospitals, teachers in public schools, why should schooling at primary and secondary level completely break down? It has broken down and been replaced by quota and ₹40,000 crore worth of tuition.

So that to me is key for inclusion. I really appreciate the PM's commitment to inclusion because he has seen this. Therefore, you got the Jan Dhan Yojana, insurance policies and so on.

The key is to improve delivery of public services,

plug the leaks and target beneficiaries. You have to make sure the state delivers and does not become a predatory state. You have to be a development state.

The predatory state devours its own, the soft state permits, connives and lives with systemic corruption and there is the development state which is East Asia — Korea, Japan, Taiwan, China. If we can get there 10 percent growth is very simply achievable, along with employment.

There is a huge lag?

But there are other specific policies I have suggested like replacing capital subsidies with labour subsidies. You keep giving capital subsidies for solar generation, for textile modernisation. Instead, make labour cheaper to help exports prosper. Inclusion will be born out of shifting policy goals from maximising growth to maximising employment.

How exactly does the Niti Aayog plan to increase employment?

All our exports, except for petroleum, are labour-intensive and employment-intensive — light

'To me the key to inclusion is to improve the delivery of public services. And that happens through outcome-based monitoring and competitive good governance. The government has failed in its duty, so far, to ensure that growth is equitably distributed.'

engineering, garments, leather, gems and jewellery, diamonds. So we need to reorient our policies towards exports and request the RBI to ensure the rupee isn't over-valued. I have set up a task force for expanding employment and exports.

Second, agricultural backwardness must be addressed. Forty-eight percent of our workforce is trapped there, producing 14 percent of the GDP. No, I am not going to throw people out of agriculture. Instead, I will modernise our agriculture, just as Mother Dairy has done. I will bring in economies of scale and involve farmers. I will produce value as Amul has done for agricultural production. I will maybe shift away from land-intensive crops to more labour-intensive and value-added crops whether it is horticulture, vegetables, fisheries or dairy and encourage processing to prevent 28 percent of agricultural produce from being wasted. We will help set up the entire logistic chain.

Third, there is huge employment potential in the services sector. India can become a hub for education and health for our neighbours, for Africa. We spend billions sending children abroad to study. It should be the reverse. But for that you need a revolution in improving teaching, curriculum and education.

Thirty-eight percent of children are stunted today. That's where states need to be more active and create the jobs that are required to address that and to help anaemic mothers.

Therefore, the Niti Aayog has come out, for the first time, I think, with a nutrition strategy for India. We will start ranking states on nourishment of children and we will monitor mother and child

health. Ranking, monitoring performance and outcome is better than trying to monitor inputs like how much money was spent. I don't want to know how many midwives or anganwadi workers were appointed but I would like to know what the state has done to improve malnutrition statistics. The employment potential in tackling health issues is incredible.

Tourism is a big employment generator. We get only seven million tourists. Paris receives 50 million and China 25 million. These are the steps we will take to generate employment. It's already happening and gathering pace.

Do you see a specific role for the voluntary sector?

I see a very active role for them. At a meeting we decided to change their nomenclature from non-government organisations — which has a negative connotation implying I am not government — to development partner organisations

We see a role for them in third party monitoring and certification as in the case of the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana. There are three levels

of certifying and the third was through civil society. They can be real partners in doing a people-centric regulatory framework and become a crucial part of our feedback mechanism. If the Niti Aayog is about monitoring performance and so on, we should be reaching out to them much more actively on a day-to-day basis.

But a large part of such work would be at state level. The Niti Aayog's role is more to nudge state governments to get there and that's not easy. There is a lack of trust within our society and that is our biggest Achilles' heel. If the government doesn't trust development partners, and industry doesn't trust government and neither trusts civil society organisations We have to get everyone to come on the same page of national interest.

There is concern about the state of primary health centres (PHCs), district hospitals and public health systems on the whole. What can the Niti Aayog do?

These are all state subjects. Our role is limited. But what we have done recently is to begin to create ranking for the performance of 736 district hospitals in the country. We are getting an expert to give us all 18-20 variables — process, patient treatment, finances, cleanliness and so on. All of that is being listed and weighted to come up with a composite index so we can rank those 736 district hospitals. It's the first big thing we will do. This can be extended to the PHC level by the states but we want to first set up a model. You can set up similar rankings for water supply, drinking water, coverage and so on.

Continued on page 8

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There has been a tendency to opt for privatisation of public health facilities and hand over, say, PHCs to private players. In a sense the Niti Aayog sets a tone, an agenda. Do you think public health care needs to be with the private sector?

Are you interested in the outcome or the modalities? My point is, you have to define your outcomes well. Supposing your outcome is that 20 procedures or diseases of the entire population will be taken care of free of cost. That's your outcome. You achieve it whichever way you like. If you don't, then you should be criticised. You will be ranked.

Now, if one state decides to achieve this through a well-operated public health system like Kerala, God bless them, but if another state decides its public health system is so dilapidated that it wants to revive it with a private sector partner like, say, Apollo, then that is the state's decision. The state can set targets and outcomes.

One size won't fit all. You will not get 99 percent

'There is no way of doubling farmers' income by MSPs. You have to improve productivity, reduce wastage, use technology.'

literacy in Bihar which you will get in Kerala that has higher civic consciousness. Why create rigid ideologies and stands? Hold them accountable for outcomes.

How does the government plan to double the income of farmers?

By changing agriculture to a modern science and technology-based agriculture which captures the entire value chain for the benefit of the farmer's income and de-risks the farmer from the vagaries of his very small land holdings. I am setting up 10 pilot projects and we will show how to double farmers' income. Give me 18 months. There is no way of doubling farmers' income by MSPs. You have to improve productivity, reduce wastage, use technology.

It's the same methodology Mother Dairy used. There is a 10-fold increase in the incomes of their dairy farmers.

On the RUTF (Ready-to-Use Therapeutic Food) controversy, what is the Niti Aayog's stand?

We have not succumbed at all. We have, in fact, made sure all objections were taken on board. We worked with Dr Vinod Paul, a very conscientious doctor from AIIMS. Rest assured it will not happen. But there is the other extreme. If there are 10 percent cases of absolutely acute malnutrition of kids who might not survive, please don't insist on giving them barley and millets. If RUTF can help them at that stage, then don't prevent us from giving it to them. Monitor it. Don't make it the norm. As for hot mid-day meals, that will continue and will, in fact, be improved. ■

Pioneer of the exotic Kerala litchi

Shree Padre
Kasaragod

KURUVILLA Joseph Tharappel is a Litchi Ratna award winner. But he isn't from Bihar, land of the luscious litchi. Kuruvilla is from Wayanad in Kerala. None other than the ICAR's National Research Centre for Litchi in Muzaffarpur in Bihar gave him this award recently.

What's equally astonishing is that while farmers in Bihar get ₹30-40 per kg for litchi, Kuruvilla pockets a cool ₹450 per kg for his litchi. In recent years, fruit traders from Bihar have even been asking him to supply them with off-season litchi! "How many tonnes can you provide, is their question. When I tell them we are located far away, they say, leave the transport issue to us," says Kuruvilla.

Kuruvilla's family has been into traditional farming for generations. He and his three brothers have plantations in Kottayam, Malappuram and Wayanad. Apart from traditional cash crops like spices, rubber and coffee, they grow three exotic fruits — mangosteen, rambutan and litchi.

Kuruvilla's plantations are situated in the hill ranges of Wayanad, around 3,000 metres above sea level. He has been growing about five tonnes of these three exotic fruits. He says his 'great blessing' is that all three fruits in Wayanad reach harvesting stage during the off-season.

"The high ranges in South India have great potential to grow litchi, mangosteen and rambutan during the off-season. With careful planning such a strategy can certainly improve farmers' income," says Kuruvilla. He is disappointed that "unfortunately, more farmers aren't utilising this opportunity." Litchi needs an elevation of 2,500 m or higher, he says.

In Bihar, India's main litchi cultivation state, the fruit is harvested from May to June. But in Wayanad, the season is December to January. "When we harvest litchi, it isn't available anywhere in the world except in small quantities in Madagascar and Africa," points out Kuruvilla.

How does the litchi grown in the hill ranges during the off-season taste? "According to scientists of the National Research Centre for Litchi, the quality of our off-season litchi is on a

par with or slightly better than the normal season litchi," says Kuruvilla.

PRICE AND PROFIT: Kuruvilla has 10 fruiting trees of litchi, mostly of the Shahi variety. Two trees are 35 to 40 years old. The rest are around 10 years old. The tree yield is based on age, climatic conditions and maintenance. On an average, the older trees yield 400-600 kg individually and the younger ones around 100-200 kg each.

Litchi and rambutan are non-climacteric fruits. This means that they stop ripening after harvesting. So, the fruit needs to be ripened on the tree for best taste and quality like sweetness, juice and less acidity.

The difference in price of the other two fruits, mangosteen and rambutan, during season and in the off-season, is startling. The average price for mangosteen harvested during season is ₹120. But Kuruvilla gets ₹450 for selling his fruit off-season. Rambutan fetches him ₹300 per kg whereas its price during season is only half that.

But then just making these fruits available during the off-season won't bring high returns to

the farmer. "I strive hard to maintain quality and I market the fruits carefully," clarifies Kuruvilla. In fact, over the years, he has built a name for himself in the fruit trade. It is quality that fetches him a premium price.

In north India the litchi farmer would probably spend ₹20 per kg on his litchi trees. Kuruvilla spends ₹100 per kg, excluding post-harvesting costs. During the season, all his family members join him to sort and pack litchis, a really laborious and time-

bound operation. In north India, farmers usually lease their trees to contractors.

Kuruvilla's disadvantage is terrain. He finds it difficult to transport fruit to markets from Wayanad, especially to Mumbai and Chennai. It is here that Kuruvilla's son, Joseph K. Tharappel, steps in. He works in Bengaluru and is interested in farming.

From Wayanad, boxes of litchi are sent in a vehicle to Bengaluru twice a week. The driver travels at night with a cargo of 200 to 300 kg of fruit and reaches Bengaluru by 4 am. Joseph collects the boxes, supplies the fruit to four or five malls and sends the rest to Mumbai and



Kuruvilla's family gets involved in grading and packaging litchi fruit during the harvesting season

Chennai in deluxe buses.

"Never take the end customer for granted. When they pay you a premium price, you are morally bound to give them premium quality fruits," emphasises Kuruvilla.

BATS AND BIRDS: To prevent bats, parrots and other birds like the bulbul from eating litchis, the tree has to be covered by a net. Netting litchi trees is expensive. Kuruvilla's older trees are massive. Covering such trees with nets is time-consuming and labour-intensive. An approximately 40-kg fishing net is required to cover one such tree.

The younger trees are regularly pruned so they are easier to net. Due to the high yield from the older trees, Kuruvilla doesn't regulate their growth. On an average, the labour cost for a kg of litchi comes close to ₹100, which includes netting, harvesting and marketing. This doesn't include the cost of the net.

Labour costs for netting trees come to ₹10,000 each for his two biggest trees. Arecanut poles have been installed along with a 60-foot central post at considerable expense. In place of arecanut poles that don't last for more than two seasons, Kuruvilla has now installed permanent galvanised iron pipes to hold up the nets.

Since litchi is a non-climacteric and perishable fruit, it has to reach markets soon after harvesting. "Marketing is quite difficult but I have built a marketing channel. I try and do doorstep deliveries to ensure speed and quality. For orders above 200 kg, the fruits are sent to the buyer in our

own vehicle. I'm also in touch with a few fruit dealers. On an average, last year I got ₹450 per kg from Bengaluru, Coimbatore, Kochi and Mumbai."

Mangosteen fetches almost the same price as litchi. "Compared to litchi it is a tension-free crop," he says. Unlike litchi, mangosteen ripens even after harvesting so it can be plucked before it turns purple or reaches complete maturity. This is an advantage since the fruit, which isn't fully ripe, can be saved from birds, bats and squirrels. Mangosteen trees don't need to be netted.

Mangosteen is harvested on a daily basis in small quantities. It is either plucked by hand or by a harvester, reducing damage. The shelf life of a fully ripe mangosteen fruit is around three weeks. So the farmer can hold the fruit till he finds a good market. The season for harvesting mangosteen is from June to July.

WAR ON RATS: Rats and squirrels also pose a threat to fruits like rambutan. Kuruvilla has deep knowledge of rat behaviour. "If a generation of rats knows the taste of a new food, then they attack that food." So his strategy is to prevent one generation of rats from getting into the habit of eating rambutan and cocoa. "Rats imitate the food habits of fellow rats. If you kill one generation of rats, it will take time for the next peer group to figure out what food is available. We try to control rats before the harvesting season by using traps or poison."

He claims that he doesn't allow a single

mangosteen to get damaged or wasted. Mangosteen is plucked carefully only during the early morning hours either by hand or a harvester. The fruits are then immersed in cold water to reduce harvest heat or 'pre-cooled'. They are then washed, dried, sorted and stored in a cool dry place. Before packing, each mangosteen is wiped again and packed into plastic trays like egg trays and then parcelled into cardboard boxes of about 20 kg each.

GREAT SCOPE: Kuruvilla hopes that other farmers too raise their income by growing off-season fruits. He has been using all kinds of forums to promote the idea for years. "There is good potential to grow these fruits in the off-season in Wayanad, Kodagu, the Nilgiris, Munnar, and a few areas in Idukki like Thekkady, Vandamedu and Yercaud," he emphasises. But the response has been lukewarm.

Of late, a few litchi orchards are coming up in Wayanad but not enough to attract wholesalers or big buyers. If availability increases, an auction centre under a fruit society is possible.

"There might be a small dip in the profit margin of exotic fruits but it will reduce the stress and strain of self-marketing and sales. According to my study, there is huge demand for off-season fruits, so there is absolutely no need to worry about demand." He dreams of a day when an auction centre for off-season exotic fruits will come up in Wayanad. ■

Contact - Kuruvilla Joseph: 094462 57363

First Organic World Congress

Bharat Dogra
New Delhi

FOR the first time the Organic World Congress was held in India over 9-11 November in Greater Noida. The event was organised ironically at the peak of the air pollution crisis in the National Capital Region. But that did not prevent delegates from over 110 countries from attending. Activists and farmers associated with organic farming and seed conservation came from many parts of India. State governments also sent their representatives.

The congress was organised by the Organic Farmers' Association of India with the Union Agriculture Ministry. Radha Mohan Singh, the Union Minister for Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, said in his inaugural address that organic farming is needed for human health and for soil health and the government is committed to promoting it.

Prem Singh, a farmer from Nahi Kalan village of Dehradun district who had come with the Save the Seeds Movement group, said that while he benefited from meeting many like-minded people he was unhappy at not being allowed to sell any organic products.

Mahendra Sharma, a farmer, had come from Mandi district of Himachal Pradesh with a group associated with BhoomiKa a recent initiative that integrates small farmer livelihoods with the organic farming movement. Anshuman Das, a coordinator of this effort, said a central concern of the initiative is that in the drive to market organic products, the livelihoods of smallholder cultivators weren't getting due weightage.

In fact, some farmers and small farmer representatives felt that the Organic World Congress could have reached out and actively encouraged the participation of small farmers. The choice of venue and format appeared to be somewhat out of tune with the needs and orientation of small farmers.

However, one place which was truly useful for small farmers was the small space for traditional seed protection and conservation. Here, representatives dedicated to seed protection could exhibit their work and interact with visitors, exchange ideas and seeds as well.

Dr Anupam Paul is a senior scientist employed by the government of West Bengal. Several farmers and activists were keen to know from him the efforts being made by the West Bengal government in Nadia to protect and spread many traditional rice varieties including aromatic rice varieties.

Dr Paul said that while he is a very firm believer in organic farming and protection of traditional seeds, what distresses him sometimes is that the forces of big profit are trying to control even this noble work. "They simply buy what we protect with great care to sell it at a big profit margin," he rued.

Overall, the Organic World Congress is being seen as an important step forward for the organic farming movement in India, but it could have been better organised. ■

'Let a regulator be free to decide Metro fares'

AJIT KRISHNA



Vinayak Chatterjee: 'There is no science to determine an exact fare'

Civil Society News
New Delhi

WHEN the Delhi Metro Railway Corporation (DMRC) decided in May to raise fares to meet rising costs, it was faced with an outcry by politicians who said the hike was an unfair burden on commuters.

The first salvo was fired by the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) with Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal asking that the Delhi Metro should be handed over to the AAP government which could run it without fare increases. Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia said he saw a conspiracy to favour private taxi operators.

Not to be left behind, the Congress also jumped into the fray, organising protests and promising a bigger campaign. The state unit of the BJP too joined in the criticism of the DMRC's decision.

The fare hike was only the second in the history of the Delhi Metro and came after nine years. It was decided after due diligence in the Fare Fixation Committee and cleared by the DMRC board. Interestingly, the Delhi government has its own representatives on the board.

Finally, to assuage the politicians, it was decided that the hike would be sent back to the Fare Fixation Committee for review.

But a bigger question remained: How should the Metro's finances be managed? In our search for an answer and to make some sense of the whole controversy, which will affect Metro Railway projects in other cities, *Civil Society* spoke to Vinayak Chatterjee, Chairman of Feedback Ventures and one of India's most knowledgeable and public-spirited entrepreneurs on knotty infrastructure issues.

As someone who has been an insider to infrastructure debates in the country, how do you see the raising of fares on the Delhi Metro Railway?

There are two extreme positions and as with most things the truth lies somewhere in between.

One view is that urban utilities like transportation, water and to some extent electricity should be heavily subsidised by the government. The other extreme view is that infrastructure cannot be built in modern times without the concept of user-pay charges. The era of freebies is over.

My own view is that it is not easy in the case of the Delhi Metro to provide direct subsidies because there is no geographical anchorage. There is a large floating population and they use the Metro. In such a case the government should take a call and have a regulator who can balance the need for service delivery, affordability and financial return.

For precisely this reason, infrastructure projects all over the world have independent regulators. It is also why the Delhi Metro has a committee to determine fares. This Fare Fixation Committee must stand outside the system and take a balanced view. Like the electricity regulators it should set a fare for the Metro based on a comparison of fares of other modes and say that the government must subsidise the fare to the extent necessary.

Fare increases are needed to take care of inflation, input costs, increases in salaries and so on.

You have looked at the Delhi Metro. Do you think its fare increase is justified?

To be honest, I haven't done a deep enough dive to give you a straight arithmetical answer to the question of where exactly the pendulum is striking between servicing capital and cost recovery.

But this fare increase comes after almost nine years of no fare increase. I refuse to believe that Delhi Metro employees have not got salary increases, that inflation has not been at 5 percent...so to say that fares should not be increased after nine years is a non-starter. Fares have to be increased. But has the quantum been right is the question.

I would like to believe that the people who have suggested the fare hike have done so after a lot of stakeholder consultations. I would believe that the members of the Fare Fixation Committee have applied their minds to the fact that the fare increase comes after almost nine years, that the Metro has started making losses, that there are demands for increasing services on existing lines and in opening new lines. A fare increase is justified. Whether it is exactly what it should be is for the people who have looked closely at the economics to say.

So, what is needed is professional, independent regulation to get it right?

Exactly. You need independent regulation which can provide a balanced view. A view will always be subjective. There is no science to determine an exact fare. Everything hinges on how independent is the independent regulator. This problem is not limited to the Delhi Metro. It is with every utility in the country, particularly with electricity. The political class, pardon me for saying so, has a half-life which is five years and in certain instances one and two years. The pendulum, therefore, tends to swing towards populism.

In electricity, there are many examples of successful regulation.

Yes. With stakeholder participation to determine tariffs and revenue.

So we aren't without a model. Would you say a similar regulator is needed for the Metro?

India has a decent record. Take the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), which takes care of the interests of small investors. There is also the Insurance Regulatory Development Authority

(IRDA), which I think has done an excellent job in regulating the insurance industry. The Reserve Bank of India regulates capital markets and interest rates. So the concept of independent regulation exists. The real question is whether the regulator is truly independent.

One needs to then go beyond a price fixation committee.

A regulator has many functions. In the Metro's case, there is the need for a technical regulator who clears issues of safety when a project is done and then ongoing safety. But you also need an economic regulator. In most transport sectors, we follow a

'Society has to ask whether the independent regulator is really independent. If he is, allow him over the years to make some errors of judgement.'

combination of a technical regulator versus a financial regulator. For airports, you have the Airport Economic Regulatory Authority. The technical regulation remains with the Director-General of Civil Aviation (DGCA).

In the case of the Metro, the technical aspects are still under the Indian Railways, which looks at operational issues, safety and so on. The fare hike comes from the Fare Fixation Committee, which in economic terms and the terms of this debate, is the right thing to do.

The question we always should ask ourselves is whether there has been regulatory capture. In the US there is always the fear of regulatory capture by the private sector. In India it is the reverse — regulatory capture by the political class.

Society has to ask whether the independent regulator is really independent. If he is, allow him over the years to make some errors of judgement. A little swing from what you desire — plus or minus 20 percent — is within the margin of error on issues of subjective judgement, like this one, on which there is no clear-cut answer.

In the case of an infrastructure project where there is an entrepreneur, there is the risk of gold plating project costs and unjustifiably raising tariffs. But in the case of the Delhi Metro this isn't a possibility, is it? It should be much simpler to fix fares.

It is because there is no suspicion. You start with the accounts and costs that were presented to you.

With the clear assumption that they were all in the public interest.

Yes. In the Delhi Metro case it is easier. But remember there is also the Hyderabad Metro, which is a PPP project. Going forward, the policy also mandates PPP in operations and maintenance. I'm not sure what has been thought of in Lucknow or Mumbai. I'm in favour of mandating a Fare Fixation Committee in all these projects to bring transparency.

In Delhi, it is interesting that the political class backed off because the DMRC board said its charter is to accept the decision of the Fare Fixation Committee. The political class accepted this. There have been protests and murmurs. But the concept has stood the test of conflict.

The Delhi Metro has cash but it also runs losses because of depreciation. Now this is being questioned. People want to know why it is raising fares when it has cash.

Depreciation is not a mere book entry. Depreciation is the insurance cover for the future. All systems degrade and if you don't have a depreciation fund and if you don't keep an eye on that, then what will happen is exactly what has happened to Indian Railways. You see accident after accident.

Railways at one time had a strong depreciation fund both for safety as well as renewal. The cash got completely used up and therefore you have a situation today when the entire system has become a safety hazard. Depreciation is the premium you pay to secure your future. If you want to give that up for the sake of populism, you are sacrificing the benefits of the service for future generations. ■

Samita's World

by SAMITA RATHOR



Hall of Fame in Bengaluru

THE Civil Society Hall of Fame travelled to Bengaluru this year for its customary recognition ceremony and the Everyone is Someone Concert, which were held on the Azim Premji University campus on October 30.

The five entrants to the Civil Society Hall of Fame 2017 were given their citations by veteran activist Aruna Roy, leader of the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan, and feted by a large audience of students, faculty members and other friends of *Civil Society* who had braved the weekday traffic on Hosur Road to be at Pixel Park.

As they do each year, Indian Ocean, the iconic band, performed brilliantly for the Everyone is Someone Concert, which is integral to the Civil Society Hall of Fame.

Over the years, *Civil Society* and Indian Ocean have come to share a special bond based on the values that the band and the magazine stand for.

On the breezy and slightly chilly evening in Bengaluru, Indian Ocean had the audience enthralled with many of the band's big hits and one new number in the making.

The entrants to the Civil Society Hall of Fame 2017 are Laxman Singh, Aziza Tyabji Hydari, Dr M.N.R. Venugopal, Ganesh Babu and Mohammed Gafur Chhipa. Their work in different fields was featured in the special anniversary issue of *Civil Society* and can also be tracked at www.civilsocietyonline.com.

When the Civil Society Hall of Fame was conceived eight years ago, the magazine reached out to the Azim Premji Foundation to be a partner in the idea of recognising and celebrating the work of individuals and groups who make India more inclusive and strengthen its democracy.

The partnership has delivered a unique celebration of true achievers from different walks of life. Till this year, the recognition ceremony and concert were held in Delhi. The shift to Bengaluru has brought new energy by way of the invaluable contribution made by students and staff of the Azim Premji University.

Rita Anand, Editor of *Civil Society*, welcomed the gathering and spoke of the importance of value-based journalism. Umesh Anand, Publisher, underlined the role small media plays in a democracy.

Anurag Behar, Vice-Chancellor of the Azim Premji University, stressed that the media had a role in bringing about social change and hoped that students of the university would consider being part of the media. Such involvement would take them beyond being just inquisitive and critical, he said. "In the absence of effective action, critical thinking will prove useless," he said.

Aruna Roy said the media could make an important contribution to democracy by identifying and propagating action at the grassroots that plays an important role in development. She also highlighted the importance of continuing traditions like the Civil Society Hall of Fame, saying they are needed to instil good faith in these times of scepticism. ■

(With inputs by Biren Kumar Oram and Cheryl Clare Joseph.)



Anurag Behar, Umesh Anand, Rita Anand, Aruna Roy, Mohammed Gafur Chhipa, Aziza Tyabji Hydari, Laxman Singh, Dr M. N.R. Venugopal and Dr Ganesh Babu



Anurag Behar



Aruna Roy



Laxman Singh receives his citation from Aruna Roy



Mohammed Gafur Chhipa



Dr Ganesh Babu



Aruna Roy with Aziza Tyabji Hydari



Dr M.N.R. Venugopal



Indian Ocean's passionate music won hearts



The enthusiastic audience

Learning gaps get filled at friendly library

Kavita Charanji
New Delhi

IT'S a busy Sunday for volunteers of the Community Library Project. Arti Malik, a long-time volunteer and one of the trustees of the project, sits behind the librarian's desk as children patiently queue to return and borrow their favourite books.

Fourteen-year-old Khushi Yadav, a Class 9 student at the Sarvodaya Kanya Vidyalaya, has just read *Pratham Vishwakosh Antariksh*, an illustrated encyclopaedia in Hindi on the wonders of space. "I enjoy the library because I get to learn new things constantly," says Yadav, who has every intention of making it to the library's Honour Roll when she has read her 10th book.

Meanwhile, Komal Rajender, 14, a student from the same school, has just completed reading *Ridley ka Rahasya*. "I got so much information about Ridley turtles. It is fun coming here," she says.

This tiny free library of just three rooms at the Ramditti J.R. Narang Deepalaya Learning Centre in Panchsheel Vihar in Sheikh Sarai, brims with excited children from the neighbourhood. For the children it is a wonderland.

The library has 600 active members who range from four years in age to adults. They get access to 6,000 English and Hindi titles. The shelves at the library are replete with encyclopaedias, thesauruses, dictionaries as well as Tintin comics, the Harry Potter series in Hindi and the adventures of the Famous Five.

Picture books, particularly Indian stories, are a real favourite, says Mridula Koshy, author and co-founder of the Community Library Project that set up the library with well-known NGO Deepalaya in January 2015. Bilingual books by Pratham and Tulika Publishers seem to do particularly well. "Pratham and Tulika have really interesting books that make science easy in a non-pedantic way," says Koshy who emphasises that the library has numerous co-founders apart from her and her partner, Michael Creighton, a poet and teacher at the American Embassy School.

Older children and adolescents tend to gravitate to a section of the library that has a reading space and an adult section. Koshy picks up a well-thumbed *Menstrupedia*, a Hindi comic book for adolescent girls on the sensitive subject of menstruation. The book provides information about female bodies and demolishes many myths in India that surround menstruation. "Girls who are 13 or 14 are hungry for such information. This may be the fourth time we have acquired this book. Previous editions got worn out or lost," she says.

IDEA AND ACTION: The origins of the Community Library Project date back to 2008 when Koshy and Creighton were coming in once a week to the Deepalaya School to read to a small group of children. In 2010-11 the duo along with volunteers from the American Embassy School created a small library for Deepalaya with funds they had raised. Following the implementation of the Right to



Arti Malik, a volunteer and trustee, with Michael Creighton, co-founder of the library, in a typical session with children



Children engrossed in their books



Sandeep Kumar with one of his favourite books, 'Sona Ki Naak Badi Tez'

Education Act, Deepalaya metamorphosed into a learning centre in 2013. Slowly, the number of children coming to the library dwindled.

"In 2014 we realised the library was being wasted. All week it was empty and the two hours that we were coming in was the only use it had. Thousands of books were gathering dust so we spoke to

Deepalaya about the possibility of turning it into a community library. We invited volunteers to join us. Some of them took on the idea and were rethinking the space with us. So there were multiple co-founders," says Koshy. Deepalaya provides space and a staff member for Koshy and her team to run the library smoothly.

Panchsheel Vihar in Sheikh Sarai needed a library badly, says Dr Sangita Sen, principal of the Deepalaya Learning Centre. "It is home to garbage collectors and is commonly known as *kabari basti*. Creating awareness and providing education is particularly important here."

An inclusive library space for working class and

underprivileged children was the need of the hour. "We are trying to build a good library. We don't want a poor library for poor children. We are doing what libraries do anywhere in the world. One of our goals is to be a learning lab to figure how to run successful libraries for communities like this and other such communities," says Creighton.

ROLL OF HONOUR: The library does more than lend books. There are read-aloud sessions, building Hindi reading fluency sessions and headstart to reading sessions for four to six-year-olds. The library has an Honour Roll programme that celebrates reading milestones of young readers. Besides getting their name prominently displayed on library boards, avid readers get other rewards.

Reading 10 books fetches a reader a book and a packet of cookies. Forty books gets a reader a book, the 80-books reader gets to take home a book too. After 80 books, the reader can write a book report on the books they are reading, listing the main idea of the book, what they liked or disliked about the book and whether it reminded them of another one they had read. The books are discussed at the Book Report Clinic run by a volunteer. A child who has read 100 books wins loud applause during assembly and gets a school bag, books and eye-catching stationery.

Young Sandeep Kumar, a student of Class 4 at Nagar Nigam Prathamik Vidyalaya in Savitri Nagar, has joined the 100-book league. After a glowing introduction by Koshy, Kumar is handed his grand prize at assembly on Sunday. "I love to read Hindi books, particularly short stories and picture books like *Sona Ki Naak Badi Tez*. My school library has limited books. Besides, in the three or four years that I have been coming here, I am learning good things about being a better person," says Kumar.

Drama workshops, a book club, and a conversation exchange programme also draw in members. The 12-member Student Council creates confident young people who play an important role in running the library. Shivani Sharma, 14, and her sister, Simpy Sharma, 17, both students of Sarvodaya Kanya Vidyalaya, are confident leaders who help run circulation, catalogue and issue books, and also bring in more members from the community. "I enjoy reading mystery novels, particularly the Cam Jansen series about a girl with a very sharp memory. Mysteries involve more thinking," she says.

Creating thinking citizens counts for much for the Community Library Project team. This is something that schools don't do. "We would like people to understand that reading is for thinking. Government schools, particularly, are preparing people for their entry into the workforce. Nowhere is there support for critical thinking, analysis, knowledge and respect for the child," says Koshy.

SPREADING WINGS: As Creighton and Koshy see it, it is important that the community library in Sheikh Sarai becomes a blueprint for other such libraries. This is not wishful thinking. The Community Learning Project, now a trust, has assisted Deepalaya in setting up two libraries in

Sanjay Colony and Gol Kuan, both in Okhla. Along with Agrasar, an NGO, they opened a new library in Sikandarpur in Gurgaon in July this year which seems to have made inroads into the community. The librarian of the Gurgaon library is Sumit Parewa who started out as a library member at Sheikh Sarai, went on to be a member of the Student Council, then became a volunteer and eventually a staff member. Parewa says that the Gurgaon library has 200 members already.

Each library runs on an annual budget of ₹10 lakh, a good collection of books, many of them donations, and a team of dedicated volunteers. Serving 500 members then becomes viable, says Koshy.

There are other libraries that are looking at the Community Library Project as a model. In Banashankari in Bengaluru, a new library named Buguri is modelled on similar lines. Buguri was started by non-profit Hasirudala, a waste-pickers and waste workers' organisation in Bengaluru. Books have been donated to libraries in Himachal Pradesh and Manipur too.

At the Deepalaya Learning Centre — a collaboration between Narang Trust and Deepalaya — 36 volunteers

come in on different days to help. There's Shaoli Dutta Halder, a volunteer-trustee and a medical professional, who talks about the various activities organised at the library such as Head Start to Reading for four to six-year-olds in which the young ones listen to stories and engage in fun activities. "We have found that lots of children who have been read to early on are actually looking at books and even trying to analyse the pictures," she says.

Another long-time volunteer is documentary filmmaker Purnima Rao who works for a film production house called Pulse Media, and oversees the social media promotion of the Community Library Project. She also does regular read-aloud sessions. Volunteers, she emphasises, are given intensive training in methodologies. When volunteers read aloud, they have to provoke thinking at every stage, she says. "The most exciting thing about read alouds is that many students who have been listening to stories for two years or more have imbibed our strategies. So they are now reading aloud to younger children," says Rao.

Arti Malik, the volunteer-trustee who is a lawyer by training, has started a book club in the library for teens and adults. In the early stages of the book club, young people held discussions on *Sita*, a book by well-known writer Devdutt Pattanaik. Originally written in English, it was translated into Hindi. In the course of a month-long reading, many questions came up about the numerous known and unknown stories in the epic, the characters, and the short shrift given to Sita by Rama. The discussions culminated in a performance of *Aafat ki Pudia*, *Sita*, a play written, directed and produced by some of the book club members.

On the cards for the book club, says Malik, are readings and discussions on three short stories: Mahesweta Devi's *Draupadi*, Saadat Hasan Manto's *Toba Tek Singh* and Ismat Chughtai's *Lihaaf*. ■

There are read aloud sessions, building Hindi reading fluency sessions and headstart to reading sessions.

Tiger reserve regains glory

Swapna Majumdar
Patna

SITUATED along the Indo-Nepal border, the Valmiki Tiger Reserve in Bihar's West Champaran district was a haven for Maoists, the sand and timber mafia and poachers. In fact, everything thrived except the big cats for whom this 19th tiger reserve was set up in 1994.

It was a public interest litigation (PIL) filed in the Supreme Court in 2002 to save the tiger and its dwindling ecosystem that awakened the state government. Things began to change, albeit slowly. From eight Royal Bengal Tigers in 2010 to 31 adult tigers and nine cubs in 2017, the Valmiki Tiger Reserve has made a dramatic turnaround. Once known as the tiger reserve without tigers, it has finally laid to rest this infamous tag.

The tiger reserve's remarkable achievement has won it many accolades, including the 2017 prestigious Earth Hero award instituted by the Royal Bank of Scotland to recognise heroic efforts that conserve and protect wildlife and habitat. It lauds practices to improve grassland and habitat management, wildlife monitoring, ecotourism and effective wildlife crime control.

The reserve is home also to the leopard, sloth bear, hyena, hog deer, flying squirrel, vultures, Indian gharial, marsh crocodiles and gangetic dolphins. The Valmiki Tiger Reserve is spread over 901.07 square kilometres and accounts for 17.4 percent of the total geographical area of the district. Located in the eastern part of the Himalayan Terai forests in India, it is contiguous to Nepal's Chitwan National Park in the north and the Parsa Wildlife Reserve in the east. While this has made the tiger reserve unique, it has also heightened its vulnerability to cross-border wildlife crime.

It required commitment, courage and single-minded determination to overcome these difficult circumstances. Most important, scientific management was needed to bring the reserve back on track.

"The first priority was chalking out a sound plan to lure the tigers. This meant increasing their prey. To increase the herbivore population, we needed to improve the habitat. Besides removing weeds, the help of experts was taken to identify palatable grass and its strategic distribution. Once the grasslands were increased, the next step was to prevent loss of habitat due to the river bank erosion," said Dr D.K. Shukla, Director, Valmiki Tiger Reserve.

This proved to be a more difficult task. While the

Gandak river is its lifeline, erosion of the river bank was leading to massive land loss. According to estimates, there was a loss of almost 1,073 hectares over a period of time of critical habitat of the tiger and other animals.

Engagement with the state irrigation department was necessary to stop further erosion. It took many months of meetings and interactions to persuade



From eight Royal Bengal Tigers in 2010 to 31 adult tigers and nine cubs in 2017, the Valmiki Tiger Reserve has made a dramatic turnaround.

the department to embank the Gandak through river training. The process finally began some months ago and the tiger reserve's officials said the initial anti-erosion work has boosted habitat.

However, this engagement strategy had to be changed to address the big problem of animals being mowed down by speeding trains running through the reserve. While wildlife officials did not want to lock horns with the railways, when nothing else worked, they had no option but to petition the Patna High Court to intervene.

"The six-km Bagha-Chitauni rail route passes through the core area of the south-western side of the reserve. We were keeping a scientific record of data related to track casualties. It showed that 77 animals had been killed due to speeding trains during the past 14 years. More recently, a tigress was found dead on the tracks in 2015. So, unless something was done quickly, animals, including tigers, would continue to be run over," stated Amit Kumar, Deputy Director of the reserve.

In 2016 the court directed that the speed limit for trains operating in this stretch be reduced to 60 kmph in the daytime and 35 kmph at night. This was a big victory for the tiger reserve and its conservation partners, the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) and World Wildlife Fund-India. The Indian Railways has also agreed to construct two girder bridges (underpass for wildlife movement) in this stretch to facilitate the safe passage of animals.

The personal interest of Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar has led to the scrapping of the metre gauge rail route in the eastern part of the reserve. The reserve has been able to get National Highway 28B which passed through it realigned and also prevent the building of the proposed Indo-Nepal border road that would have cut through it. Moreover, no new roads or widening of existing



Tharu women were trained in ecofriendly livelihoods

roads are now allowed in the reserve.

Motivating the community to take ownership of conservation has been the cornerstone of reducing man-animal conflict in the 26 revenue villages inside the reserve dominated by the Tharu tribe. Besides creating new eco development committees, enrolling 500 youths from the community as patrolling squads, anti-poaching squads and tiger trackers have helped to bring them on board. They receive a monthly salary of ₹6,500, uniforms, walkie-talkie handsets and even sleeping bags. About 20 women have been trained to motivate other women not to cut trees for firewood. These women also receive uniforms and equal emoluments. Other Tharu women have been given ecologically appropriate livelihood training in association with WTI to reduce their dependence on the habitat.

The tiger reserve's investment in inviting master craftsmen from Tripura to make bamboo huts and other attractions has also paid off. Its ecotourism activities attracted a record number of 35,000 tourists this year and raked in ₹40 lakh.

Various challenges still exist, including manpower shortages. The present permanent staff strength of the reserve is 20 whereas at least 200 are needed. Nevertheless, the recent discovery of the crab-eating mongoose, yellow-throated marten and Himalayan serow through camera trapping surveys indicates the Valmiki Tiger Reserve is on the right path. ■



DCB BANK

Water for Life.

Project Neer at Hirve village was started in Mokhada block, Palghar district of Maharashtra which faced the issue of acute water shortage – resulting in seasonal cultivation and low-income levels, which forced the villagers to migrate in search of employment.

To help solve this problem, here's what we did with our implementation partners and contribution from local communities.

The project set up a water pump along with 1,700 metres of pipelines and also developed drip irrigation grid farming through solar-powered lift irrigation system. This forced the untouched waters from the valley up into the hills, and provided water for daily consumption as well as farming.

The implementation has been a success. Farmers gained access to almost 90,000 litres of water and were able to extend their cultivation cycle from a single Kharif crop to cultivating Rabi crop too. The word spread; farmers from across the river approached Project Hirve, hoping to benefit from it. Together, we covered and cultivated more than 100 acres of land.

The project has had a positive impact on over 400 lives across 9 villages. In addition to extending cultivation cycles, increasing the income levels and reducing migration, access to water has also improved hygiene levels and reduced drudgery.

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Goa's gritty gram sabhas

On coal hub, rivers and a lot more people ask for a say in development

Derek Almeida
Panaji

WHEN the state government in Goa drew up plans to make the Mormugao Port a hub for importing coal and transporting it to steel factories in Karnataka, it ran into opposition it had never really expected. At the public hearings on the proposal, doctors, lawyers and scientists tore into officials with information and questions for which they had no real answers.

The high-decibel public hearings made headlines. But far from the spotlight, ordinary, less-articulate Goan villagers in gram sabha meetings had already expressed their opposition to the coal hub plan. Transportation of coal had caused serious environmental problems for them, with fine coal dust settling on their homes and fields. Making Mormugao a major hub was going to worsen the situation for them and they weren't going to stand for it.

Similarly, the decision of the Union government to develop seven rivers in the state, including the Zuari and Mandovi, has been opposed. The government's plan is to develop inland waterways and build jetties to enable coastal shipping and boost tourism. But people see this as an infringement on their traditional rights.

It is such opposition that has perhaps prompted the Chief Minister, Manohar Parrikar, to clear the air. He has declared that the coal hub can only be expanded if pollution control measures are first put in place. He has also clarified that development of rivers remains in the control of the state government.

Gram sabhas in Goa have come to be the barometer of people's anger against development decisions that affect the quality of their lives and endanger their traditional livelihoods. Like the coal hub at Mormugao, the government's plans are invariably drawn up without taking the people into confidence. Public hearings come later in the process and are almost an afterthought. The gram sabhas are asking for a say in major development decisions because, like coal dust, they finally impact life in the villages.

The gram sabha or village assembly is the lowest tier of rural democratic institutions, coming after the panchayat. They are only empowered to deal with minor, local requirements. But with the powers of the panchayat being encroached on by the state government, it is through the gram sabha that people are expressing dissent.

In Chandor village, once the capital of the Kadamba dynasty, villagers are pitted against the government with the panchayat caught in between. The bone of contention is a state highway slated for widening, a move vociferously opposed by the people who are convinced this will convert their village into a corridor for heavy vehicles including trucks laden with iron ore and coal. The highway literally cuts the village in two and runs through populated areas. The flow of vehicles would not only bring in pollution, but also disturb the *susegao* (laidback) way of life that Chandor is used to.

Parallel governance is how Soter D'Souza, who has been a panch of the Socorro panchayat and is at present a member of the Centre for Panchayati Raj at Peaceful Society, an NGO with strong connections to villages in the interiors, describes the overbearing nature of government departments which have usurped the powers of these grassroots institutions. "The powers of the



Protesters with placards

panchayat have been usurped by the state government. Powers which should have been transferred to the panchayat are now vested in government departments," says D'Souza.

The panchayati raj system seeks to make each village broadly responsible for its own affairs. In 1994, Goa's Panchayat Raj Act came into effect and a Directorate of Panchayats was set up. Thereafter, the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution envisaged greater local self-government and devolution of powers.

In Goa, self-governance has traditional roots in an ancient community system that was known as *gaunkari* and later re-christened by the Portuguese as *comunidade*. Under this system there was community ownership of land. Buying and selling of land were banned and the only uses authorised by the commune were agriculture, horticulture, fisheries and animal husbandry.

The *comunidade* system of village governance was taken over by Goa's 191 panchayats. The assertiveness of the gram sabhas and their readiness to oppose powerful business and political quarters perhaps echoes the tradition of community-based decision-making that once existed.

VILLAGE PLANS ERODED

In Carmona, a village in Salcete, South Goa, residents are fighting a 10-year-old battle to prevent a building major from constructing a 250-apartment gated complex. This entire battle hinges on one simple regulation which specifies the road width for projects with an area of over 20,000 sq m. So intense is the fight that several sarpanches have fallen by the wayside and every attempt by the government and the Town and Country Planning Department to surreptitiously clear the project has been thwarted by the people through the institution of the gram sabha.

The panchayat has the right to issue construction licences, but it cannot refuse to do so if all laws and bylaws are adhered to by the builder. This has reduced panchayats to rubber stamps of the government. Sarpanches say villages have been stripped of the authority to make a village development plan. "The village makes a development plan but the same is not reflected in the regional plan. This results in confusion at the local level," explained D'Souza.

In Candolim village, which forms part of the world-famous beach belt adjoining Calangute, residents committed to preserving the green cover have



Police were called in to calm tempers at a gram sabha of Bandora panchayat. People protested against the construction of a sewage treatment plant at Undir in the village

Gram sabhas in Goa have come to be the barometer of people's anger against development decisions that they believe affect the quality of their lives and endanger their traditional livelihoods.

mounted a significant legal challenge to a move by the government to completely divest the village of planning rights. In 2015, the government included the villages of Candolim and Calangute in the North Goa Planning and Development Authority (NGPDA), a move which effectively superimposes city-based rules, regulations and increased FARs for development and strips the panchayat of all powers to plan or review.

The NGPDA is controlled by the local MLA, and in December 2016 an outline development plan (ODP) was designed. When a panchayat area is brought under a PDA the regional plan, which is more stringent in protecting green cover and slopes, becomes inoperable.

A public interest petition filed in the High Court by Damiao Teles, Roshan Mathias and eight others, all from the village of Candolim, has challenged the outline development plan adopted by the NGPDA and seeks to restore the powers of the panchayat and district-level committees over the planning process.

Pranay Kamat, advocate for the petitioners, said, "The power to make development plans is vested in the panchayat, municipalities and district committees under the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution and this automatically makes the Town and Country Planning Act inoperative."

The petition seeks to uphold Article 243(G) of the Constitution which clearly states that "the state legislature, may, by law, endow the panchayats with power and authority to enable them to function as institutions of self-government and such law may contain provisions for the devolution of powers and responsibilities upon panchayats ... with respect to preparation of plans for economic development and social justice."

"What the NGPDA is doing is patently illegal," said Kamat.

Explaining the reasons for challenging the ODP, Teles said, "We are not

satisfied with the ODP. Eco-sensitive zones, slopes, paddy fields and natural cover have been shown as a settlement zone. Besides, the NGPDA is seeking to construct a 25-metre-wide major district road through paddy fields and mangroves.

"When the village was brought under the NGPDA, the Candolim panchayat had objected. Now that the panchayat has shifted allegiance to the local MLA it has reversed its stance," explained Teles.

The ODP was placed in the public domain for suggestions and objections, but no one knows if those have been incorporated. "Permissions for construction are being given even though the ODP has not been approved or notified," alleged Teles.

A similar petition was filed by the Calangute panchayat when Joseph Sequeira was sarpanch. However, the June elections changed the political equation in favour of the local MLA and the petition is likely to be withdrawn.

MONEY AND CLOUT

It is often said that elections are a measure of democracy and this holds true in Goa as well. When 186 panchayats went to the polls on June 12 this year the voter turnout was 80.33 percent, a show of confidence in the panchayati raj system. But in the background, MLAs were at work to get people of their choice elected in every panchayat, even though panchayat polls are on a non-party basis.

As the Chandor, Candolim and Carmona examples show, MLAs and the government want to have complete control over the development process and the only way to do so is by having a firm grip on panchayats so that they can then be used to manipulate the gram sabhas, which are more outspoken and rebellious.

"Panchayats in Goa do not have any powers and the government wants to

suppress us and they have suppressed us," lamented Sequeira, who was first elected a panch of the Calangute panchayat in 1988 and has been sarpanch several times.

"If the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution had to be implemented in true spirit then agriculture, electricity, water resources and more would have been transferred to the panchayat. This has not happened."

The panchayat has some powers like the authority to issue licences, certificates and no-objection certificates for water, electricity, roads and so on. But it has limited financial powers and has to approach the government for nearly every local infrastructure project.

"Even if the panchayat wants to purchase material for street lights it has to seek permission from the Directorate of Panchayats although street lights are part of the village's annual budget. In the case of construction of roads, we have to send the files to the block development officer (BDO) who sends them to the public works department. The BDO has the power to clear projects up to ₹5 lakh," says Sequeira.

Some panchayats do earn money and they can spend it on small infrastructure projects. But for anything more ambitious they have to approach the government.

The coastal panchayat of Calangute is one of the richest with an annual budget of around ₹8 crore. Its beach is world-famous and the huge number of tourist-related enterprises generate the high revenues that it receives. Its main source of revenue is house tax and commercial licence fee which is charged on rooms let out to tourists, which is ₹2,600 per year for each hotel room and ₹900 for homestays.

The panchayat spends the revenue earned on widening of roads, construction of culverts, footpaths, electricity poles and lines. "We have drafted a scheme to pay poor people ₹200 per month which has benefitted 480 persons. We are also giving disabled persons ₹500 per month and in cases of those suffering from cancer we immediately release ₹25,000 for check-ups. The panchayat also helps people who have suffered from natural calamities," says Sequeira.

Despite having a huge budget, Sequeira admitted that even the Calangute panchayat is dependent on the government for certain projects. He said: "If the panchayat plans to undertake a big project like construction of a playground, football stadium or market complex, it has to send the proposal to the state government because the panchayat does not have the money."

Some time ago the panchayat had made a budget provision of ₹4 crore to purchase a two-bedroom flat in Parel, Mumbai, as lodging for locals undergoing medical treatment in the metropolis. "The proposal was shot down by the government," lamented Sequeira.

Smaller panchayats have limited resources but can't raise revenue even if the opportunity exists. Bandora, which is located in the interior yet fairly well-developed taluka of Ponda, is one such panchayat.

The panchayat has a population of around 11,500 and is home to two state ministers. It also has three major Hindu Mutts — Nagesh Maharudra, Mahalaxmi, Ramanath Devasthan and the Sanathan Saunsta ashram. The village has major educational institutions — National Institute of Technology, Goa Engineering College and pharmacy and B.Ed colleges. All the mutts have huge halls which are leased for weddings and cultural programmes for between ₹25,000 and ₹30,000. Unfortunately, none of these institutions pay house tax and the panchayat is deprived of a huge source of revenue.

Even here, people have succeeded in effectively using the gram sabha to raise their voice against projects perceived as detrimental. Ramchandra Naik, a three-term elected representative and the present sarpanch of Bandora, said, "People in Ward 6 are opposing a 15-MLD sewage treatment plant. A resolution has been passed and licence issued, but the objections continue." The Rs 44-crore plant is expected to treat waste water from residential areas of the village and a part of Ponda city.

However, Naik isn't particularly enamoured of the notion of an independent panchayat. He says panchayats don't have the expertise to carry out larger projects. Of course, the balance sheet of the panchayat does not quite make it easy for him to take decisions on his own. "No work will be done if the panchayat is opposed to the government," he explained. "All the work is undertaken by the government as we do not have technically qualified persons to prepare estimates and drawings and the panchayat is just like an agency to complete the paper work."

Bandora receives around ₹8 lakh through taxes, ₹6 lakh from fees (market, construction licences, certificates) and another ₹3 lakh as extraordinary receipts. But the bulk of the money, which is ₹28 lakh, comes from the government through various grants and the 14th Finance Commission.

"The electricity department has started replacing street lights with LED fixtures under a central scheme, but 30 percent of the work is yet to be completed," said Naik. "However, replacing and repairing these lights is a financial headache because we do not have the money to undertake this work."

The panchayat has a cattle pound but it cannot afford to hire a labourer to tend to animals or provide food if stray cows are impounded.

Like most parts of the state, garbage is an issue and the panchayat spends on door-to-door collection. "We have hired a three-wheeler and two labourers to collect dry waste free of cost to residents. We even provide plastic bags," explained Naik. "A vehicle has been provided by the

minister to transport dry waste to the treatment plant at Saligao."

Closer to Calangute is the village of Reis Magos. It is located on the northern bank of the Mandovi river and is linked to Panaji by a 10-minute ferry ride which is free for commuters and two-wheelers. With a tax base of approximately ₹68 lakh, this panchayat should have been financially more independent than Bandora but is not, thanks to a legal system which put it firmly in the grip of the government.

"We cannot spend more than ₹5,000 without the sanction of the government," says sarpanch Shailendra Parulekar. "We require clearances from the BDO or the rural development agency for all projects." He is also of the opinion that work would not get done in the village without the concurrence of the government.

But despite these constraints it has spent ₹1.08 crore on extension of street lights, construction of roads and other public works. In 2016-17 it received grants of ₹26 lakh from the government, all of which went on administration cost with the bulk going towards staff salaries.

"We are focused on garbage collection and disposal and last year we levied a tax for the purpose," said Parulekar, who is a third-term elected representative. "The panchayat collects wet and dry garbage from households. The segregated garbage is sent to the Saligao treatment plant."

Gram sabhas held by the panchayat tend to be less vociferous than in the south, but this does not stop villagers from putting their foot down when it matters. "We wanted to give permission for erection of a mobile tower as we thought it would bring more revenue but people opposed it," said Parulekar.

At a gram sabha held in early November, a resolution was passed to reduce congestion along the river bank road. "The road is a short-cut to the coastal villages of Candolim and Calangute and tourist traffic creates congestion. We have proposed a bypass, but it is yet to be taken up by the government," said Parulekar.

Another issue bothering the people and the panchayat is the presence of a cruise terminal at Betim in the village. "The panchayat does not earn any revenue from the jetty, but it adds to traffic congestion. The panchayat has passed a resolution to shift it." The final decision though, lies with the government, which has not shown any inclination to undertake these two pressing demands. Even though the panchayat has erected boards banning heavy vehicles, it does not have the wherewithal to stop them.



Shailendra Parulekar



Ramchandra Naik

'If the 73rd and 74th amendments had been implemented in true spirit then agriculture, electricity, water resources would have been transferred to the panchayat.'

'Grievances can be sent to the government'

Sandhya Kamat, Director of Panchayats, on various issues concerning panchayats in Goa.

GRAM SABHAS: According to the Goa Panchayat Act, gram sabhas are supposed to discuss issues related to the functions of the panchayat. Also, if public issues are to be raised, four days' notice has to be given and it is the panchayat body which is empowered to list the issues to be discussed. Issues like utilisation certificates, audits, selection of beneficiaries and development work should be the priority of the panchayat. Instead, gram sabhas discuss issues not pertaining to the panchayat. Recently, coal pollution and nationalisation of rivers, which are not within the purview of the panchayat, were taken up for discussion. These grievances can be submitted to the panchayat and thereafter routed to the MLA or the government.

E-GOVERNANCE: At present, 125 of 191 panchayats have facilities to issue digitised printouts of birth and death certificates, but the system is yet to go online. Some panchayats have net connectivity issues and staff is yet to be fully trained. We are in the process of collecting details of all panchayats so that we can formulate a plan to take tax payments, and issuance of licences, occupancy and residence certificates and other No Objection Certificates (NOCs) online. A few panchayats have websites and online payments but to my knowledge only four or five regularly update the websites.

GARBAGE: We are supporting the efforts of all panchayats in garbage collection and disposal with grants of ₹1 lakh each. This amount is not enough and we are planning to enhance it. We have created three categories of panchayats for distribution of funds for garbage disposal — those along the



Sandhya Kamat

coast which have to deal with enormous amounts of garbage created by the tourism sector and therefore need more support, those around the airport will get special treatment so as to reduce bird hits, and panchayats adjacent to municipalities which have to contend with rapid urbanisation will also get enhanced support. Those panchayats doing a good job will be given incentives.

RESERVATION OF WARDS: As far as reservation for women is concerned, the wards were fixed in 2012 and they will remain so for three terms. The rules on this count are clear. In the case of Scheduled Castes, the rules state that if a panchayat has an SC population exceeding 4.5 percent then the ward with the highest SC population is reserved. At present 16 panchayats fit in this category.

The problem arises with Scheduled Tribes and OBCs for whom the rules are vague. Since OBCs were not labelled in the 2011 census, reservation of seats for the 2017 polls was done on the basis of data collected from panchayat secretaries, BLOs and panchayat members. The problem with the panchayat elections is that they are held a few months after the Assembly polls and the code of conduct makes it difficult to undertake a scientific process for reservation of seats. Unfortunately, this is likely to be a problem every time, given the proximity of the dates of the two elections.

ROLE OF BDOs: The BDOs are the controlling authority for panchayats and I think that if they are given proper staff, panchayats can be run efficiently. It is true that panchayats are barred from undertaking any expenditure beyond ₹5,000 without permission from the BDO, but we are trying to enhance this limit. ■



Roshan Mathias and Damiao Teles

PROCESS AND DELAY

The panchayats at the village level and zilla panchayats at the district level should have been linked, but have deliberately been kept apart to enable the government to have greater control, say sarpanches.

Said D'Souza, "Ideally, all files from the panchayat should have gone to the zilla panchayat where an officer connected with the various government departments would deal with them. Today, the sarpanch is marching to the agriculture department, to the electricity department and all other departments. There is no need for this. Also, all money should have been routed through the zilla parishads and not the MLAs and MPs. This would ensure accountability and transparency."

Lamenting the reduced role of the panchayat, D'Souza said, "Most panchayats are in the grip of the MLA. You can call them an extended arm of the MLA.

What are the panchayats doing now? They are only pushing subsidies, schemes and issuing certificates. This is not self-government."

Given the manner in which panchayats have been emasculated by the government, it is not uncommon to see gram sabhas at variance with the panchayat and the government. Often, issues beyond the purview of the panchayat find resonance in gram sabhas.

Naik said, "The gram sabha should discuss development works in the village. Instead, people talk about larger projects which are outside the purview of the panchayat. People should suggest projects and we will take them forward. That is how it should work."

Drawing attention to biodiversity committees which were recently formed in around 170 of the 191 panchayats in the state, Soter asked, "Once the people's biodiversity register is prepared by the panels, will they be binding on all the departments? For instance, will the town and country planning department and the forest department check with the panchayat and these registers before issuing any development permission?"

"Today, government departments and panchayats are accountable for the same work and are therefore working at cross purposes. When it suits the government, it will point a finger at the panchayat and the panchayat will plead helplessness when it's convenient. So, this blame game continues."

Another issue that comes up for criticism once in five years is reservation of seats in panchayats for Other Backward Communities (OBCs) and Scheduled Tribes, which are manipulated by MLAs to ensure defeat of political enemies. Sequeira, whose ward was reserved for an OBC candidate, thereby spelling his defeat, lamented, "There are no rules or law governing reservation for OBCs. The groundwork is undertaken by the secretary and the block development officer, both of whom are controlled by the government. This exercise should be undertaken at least three months in advance. Instead, it is declared 10 to 15 days before the elections."

Bandora sarpanch Naik, who was also critical of the reservation system, said, "If a panch gets elected twice, it automatically makes the MLA uncomfortable."

But despite the drawbacks of the panchayati raj system, people continue to repose faith in it and fight for a greater say in what happens in their villages, sometimes even at the cost of upsetting the government in power. ■

‘CSR is more systematic now’

FICCI helps companies choose projects that matter

Civil Society News
New Delhi

It is three years since changes to the Companies Act made it obligatory for managements to go beyond philanthropy to invest two percent of their profits in the development goals of the country. With Clause 135 coming into the law, mere charity will no longer do. Social spending requires board-level attention and well-defined strategies to impact healthcare, education, skilling, sanitation and much else.

The Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) has for long helped its member companies in being socially relevant. But the changes in the law have come with various challenges.

To find out how companies are measuring up to the new expectations of them under Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), we spoke to Uma Seth and Nomenita Chetia, both FICCI old-timers.

At the FICCI Aditya Birla CSR Centre for Excellence, Seth and Chetia have been advising managements on choosing and implementing social projects. They have a deep understanding of the challenges companies face.



Uma Seth: 'It is better to go to one village and work there so that there is definite impact'

How has the two percent rule worked out for the companies you deal with?

Many of our member companies were already doing a lot by way of CSR and were spending more than two percent when the rule came in. There were also others who were not in that category and had to deal with issues of compliance. The first year was spent in trying to understand the rules — what comes under CSR and what doesn't. But having done that in the past year and a half, a lot of things have fallen into place. The boards and committees have been set up. We find that companies, irrespective of the size of their fund, want to do CSR in a structured fashion. They want to make a serious difference. So, a lot is being done behind the scenes in getting projects together and getting board approvals and so on. A lot of CSR work is linked to employee volunteering programmes and employees are themselves getting involved in CSR initiatives. So, we would say it is a positive trend, a good trend.

The shift has been from a freefalling mode to addressing the needs of specific areas. What are the challenges that companies face in making this shift?

As far as geographies are concerned, most companies have narrowed their focus to areas around their manufacturing facilities. The

‘Companies are realising that random training is a waste and it is more important to train people who can be absorbed. Companies are collaborating with ITIs to make people directly employable.’

challenges come in developing, designing and structuring projects. There are companies that want quick results. But we always advocate staying invested for a long period of time. For instance, when you are working with farmers, for any kind of turnaround a minimum of three years is required. It is also better to be focused and work in one area. There is little point in moving from toilets in one year to skilling in the next. Or with a small budget wanting to build toilets all over India — it will hardly have any impact. It is better to go to one village and work there so that there is definite impact.

Are companies becoming more systematic thanks to the new rules?

Yes. Now many things are spelt out. For instance, one or two events can't be considered CSR.

Foundations that companies partner with should have been in existence for three years and so on. You must have a committee for CSR and the senior management has to be involved.

So it is much more systematic.

CSR projects have become more structured and mainstream. It is no longer one person in the management coming up with ideas. The decisions are board decisions.

What are the areas that companies are choosing?

We had done a study which showed that a lot of work is being done in education, health and skill development. There are a lot of drinking water and sanitation projects. But if you look at Schedule 7, it covers everything including art, culture and conservation.

Are companies merely putting money into Swachh Bharat Abhiyan or areas where they sense that the government wants them to put money? Or are they looking on their own for areas in which they want to make an impact?

In the first year, many companies were putting funds into Swachh Bharat because it was a cause the government had taken up and it was also an important cause. But then it got diversified. Then skilling came and a lot of companies got into that.

Let's stick to sanitation. The frenzied building of toilets hasn't been matched by usage. Is that something you have looked at?

Every project of ours where toilets are being built, a behavioural change programme is given equal importance. Half the money that companies put in is spent on the behavioural change programme. If you are working with communities, it means setting up small focus groups. If you are working with schools, it involves having washroom committees. Building toilets is the easy part but it is important to create awareness.

Motivating communities is not exactly something companies excel in. You are counselling companies. How do you help them?

It is something that can't be done overnight. Swachh Bharat will take some time to reach the point where everybody's mindset will be not to defecate in the open. There are other issues also such as do we have enough solid waste management and do we have enough sewage treatment plants? As far as mindset change goes, it will take time even though the Swachh Bharat message has spread far and wide. In schools, working with the young, it is easier. The elderly take more time to adapt.

One can understand that. But how are companies overcoming this challenge? Many of them have been just going out there and building toilets.

Companies have realised the need to involve the community. They have learned the importance of being innovative. For instance, the creation of a revolving fund for financing the construction of toilets under which money is advanced to some members of the community who must return it before others can be funded. Companies also enlist the help of well-regarded NGOs to solve last-mile problems and create awareness. We tell our companies that it is a good idea to charge a fee, however small, to give the community a sense of involvement and ownership.

We visited a village where we found that five companies had invested in a single school. Someone had spent on water, someone on sanitation, someone on computers. Such things spoil the community, which tends to think that companies are there just to spend their two percent. We encourage companies to adopt strategies that promote local ownership and involvement.

What about skilling?

Some companies, I wouldn't say all, are trying to ensure that there is 100 percent employment at the end of a skill-training programme. They are designing their programmes in such a way and also asking the NGOs they work with to ensure that training leads to employment. These are the more evolved companies.



Nomenita Chetia

‘We had done a study which showed that a lot of work is being done in education, health and skill development. There are a lot of drinking water and sanitation projects.’



A toilet is inaugurated

This employment could be anywhere?

Anywhere. But there are also companies, the large ones particularly, which ensure that jobs are found in their dealerships. There is a trend towards customisation of training so that the training that is imparted meets the need of the company. Companies are realising that random training is a waste and it is more important to train people so that they can be absorbed. Companies are collaborating with Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) to make people directly employable.

ITIs haven't covered themselves in glory. Hardly anyone has a kind word to say about them.

But there are companies like Maruti, NTPC and the fertiliser companies which are working together with the ITIs to ensure 100 percent placement.

So those are the success stories that you are talking about...

Textiles too. Skill training is happening with employability. Especially with women, the focus being on hiring young girls. They are customising the kind of training for the stitching and so on they require.

Is the CSR professional emerging in companies?

Definitely. There is a growing demand for CSR professionals. Large companies may have their own foundations and their own network of CSR professionals. But then there are the mid-segment companies which are also mandated to spend two percent of profits and can't afford to employ a full-fledged team to do CSR. They are seeking professionals who have a social sector background and the education to work at the grassroots to get their programmes implemented. Many such companies outsource their CSR to us in FICCI. We identify the projects they should invest in and the local NGOs they can partner with. There are other foundations like ours to which such companies turn to in the absence of in-house teams.

Do you take up many such projects?

Our foundation was set up in 1995. We were doing a lot of Government of India projects, donor projects. But after Clause 135 came into existence, companies which are our members have been coming to us and asking us for advice on where and on what they should spend and help in designing and executing projects on the ground. ■

Farm with no soil

Derek Almeida
Panaji

AJAY Naik is a farmer in every sense of the word, but he is not the type who sweats it out in the hot sun with a pair of bullocks and a plough. Neither does he use a tractor because his farm is not spread over acres of land in the countryside. Instead, he uses a 90 sq m room in a building in Tivim Industrial Estate, a few kilometres from Mapusa in Goa, to grow exotic leafy vegetables.

Now, 90 sq m does not a farm make, but this is where hydroponics makes all the difference between success and failure.

The cultivating area of this room, which looks more like a laboratory than a farm, is increased to nearly 700 sq m by introducing seven levels. The place is bathed in white light from over 100 LED tubelights, which might not quite replicate the sun, but are good enough.

Does he get his hands dirty? In the world of hydroponics, which is a technology to grow plants without the use of soil, the answer is quite obvious.

As the name suggests, hydroponics uses water to supply nutrients to the roots of the plant without the use of soil. The process begins with the germination of the seed in cocopeat (coconut husk). It is then shifted to the growing area where the roots are continuously bathed in a mixture of water, nutrients and oxygen. A special pump is used to aerate the water with oxygen. It takes between 30 and 45 days to complete the process from seed to sale.

This little experiment in farming started in July 2016 when Letcetra Agritech Ltd was registered as a company in Goa by Naik and two of his cousins. By November it was operational and a year later it is producing enough leafy vegetables to support a staff of four.

“We can produce between 10 and 50 kg of vegetables per day, depending on the demand,” says Naik. “The output of the unit is controlled to meet demand and we have to plan 30 to 45 days in advance.” In traditional farming, an output of this level would require a one-acre farm.

Naik did not set out to be a farmer. After completing his pre-university studies in Karwar, Karnataka, he studied to be an IT engineer at Atria Institute of Technology, Bengaluru. His first job was at a Swiss firm called Immo Info Tech, which is based in Panaji. After completing five years in the sector, he decided to start his own company which developed mobile applications.

On why he made the switch to farming, he says, “A lot of people are exiting agriculture and innovation is taking a beating in the sector. India is densely populated and the country has already started importing food. I started surfing the net in search of better technologies to grow better food without pesticides and harmful chemicals.”

Naik eventually zeroed in on hydroponics because it seemed more relevant. “Since vegetables are quite cheap here, we cannot use sophisticated technology. We need systems that are cost-effective and profitable.”

At present, Letcetra grows three types of lettuce — oak leaf, romaine and lollo. It also produces parsley and cilantro. “We experimented with jalapeno, bell peppers and cherry tomatoes. The results were good. So we are planning to grow them on a large scale,” says Naik. Sadly, attempts to grow strawberries did not succeed but experimentation is still on.



Ajay Naik in his state-of-the-art farm which grows leafy plants and vegetables with no soil or land

The cultivating area of this room, which looks more like a laboratory than a farm, is increased to nearly 700 sq m by introducing seven levels.

The room-farm, which started out as an experiment to grow, sell and become economically viable, is a sea of white and green. The atmosphere is controlled by air-conditioners to mimic the cold climate required to grow exotic vegetables, which fetch better returns in the market.

Even while experimenting with hydroponics, Naik kept an eye on the market. And, one year later, the unit fetches ₹2-3 lakh per month, enough to sustain a staff of four members and keep the three partners happy.

The company has two personnel to monitor the room-farm and another two for marketing. It has taken a van on lease and is now looking to expand. Luck played its part when Naik was informed by officials in the agriculture department that a 1,000-sq-m plot with a poly-house was available for lease in Valpoi, in the interiors of Goa.

“Work has already started on the project and when it comes online in December, the company will be able to produce 100 kg of vegetables per day,” explains Naik. It will also double the income to ₹6 lakh a month.

Opening a second unit in Valpoi makes sense,

since the lease cost is on the lower side. Also, in Mapusa one has to bring down the temperature by almost five degrees, whereas in Valpoi it would be in the range of two degrees.

“In Valpoi we will not need to use air-conditioners or LED lights and the temperature will be controlled by use of fog fans,” explains Naik.

The downside here is that because the unit will employ the use of natural lighting, it will not be able to grow vegetables in layers as in the room-farm at Tivim. The irony of it is that the area under cultivation in the 100-sq-m room and the 1,000-sq-m poly-house will almost be the same.

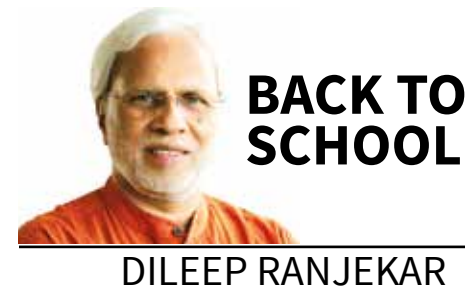
While the capital costs of building a commercially viable hydroponic system are high, so are the running costs. Electricity and nutrients take up a chunk of the expenditure and Naik and his team are working on developing their own nutrients.

Goa, despite the pressure on land resources, has not yet woken up to this idea. “The government does not offer any subsidy for hydroponic farming. The department considers this small-scale and all subsidies are aimed at traditional farming,” laments Naik. But once changes are made to the policy, engineer-farmers like him who see a future in controlled farming will move to the forefront of the agriculture sector. ■

INSIGHTS

OPINION | ANALYSIS | RESEARCH | IDEAS

Teaching for social change



BACK TO SCHOOL

DILEEP RANJEKAR

DURING my journey between Puroala and Uttarkashi, on the ever winding roads of Uttarakhand, my colleague asked questions about our approach to teacher capacity enhancement. One question that occupied more than half the time of our discussion was: “How would teaching maths or science or social sciences or language improve society — which is the final objective of education?” We concluded that it is not merely the teaching of these subjects but how they are taught, keeping in mind the purpose of teaching them and how they are integrated in our day-to-day life, that would contribute to education and society being better.

Today, when we speak to teachers, they often express the need to understand the modalities of teaching subjects better. They also want help in completing the syllabus for the year on time and for ensuring that most students pass the examinations with flying colours. The reputation of the school, and teachers, depends on how the students score in examinations. On the other hand, when you speak with some of the best educationists, they wonder about the relevance of subjects in overall education, given the essence, role and purpose of education described in the national policy documents. They also say that the real purpose of education is to help students realise their inner potential.

What is the reason for this dichotomy between those who know about the real import of education and those who practise it?

Let’s understand the broad essence and purpose of education as articulated by the National Policy of Education, 1986.

While describing the role of education in India, the policy explains that “education is fundamental to our all-round development — both material and

spiritual. Education refines sensitivities and perceptions that contribute to national cohesion, builds scientific temper (ability to think rationally and draw conclusions based on evidence and data) and independence of mind and spirit — thus furthering the goals of socialism, secularism and democracy enshrined in our Constitution. Education also develops personpower for different levels of economy contributing to the country’s self-reliance.”

The National Curriculum Framework further details several issues under various subjects classifying the aims of education under the following broader themes:

- Cognitive abilities — Thinking, acquiring specific understanding, creativity, innovativeness and higher-level reasoning.



- Acculturation — Sensitivity, empathy, respect for others.
- Constitutional values — Democracy, equity, equality, justice, humanity.
- Specific skills and vocations — Contributing to national economic and development agenda.

However, there is broad agreement that education today is excessively focussed on rote memorisation. It is almost entirely driven by examinations and scoring marks at any cost.

A study carried out by the Azim Premji Foundation, analysing the Class 10 board examination papers for 10 years, revealed that almost 80 percent of the questions focussed on the ability to retrieve knowledge through memory. There was some focus on application of knowledge

but practically no focus on other goals of education — such as creativity, reasoning, scientific temper, empathy, sensitivity and constitutional values. It is, therefore, little wonder that whatever gets tested gets transacted in the classroom.

The teachers and the education system have forgotten that subjects are mere vehicles to achieve the aims of education and not the core of education in themselves. If we accept that education has far-reaching influence on shaping society, it becomes clearer that we must focus on the real goals of education.

Unfortunately, none of the above is dealt with, while teaching subjects. Illustratively, the primary purpose of teaching language is developing abilities to think, express, conceptualise, interpret, communicate and effectively pass on knowledge to others with integrity. The purpose of teaching mathematics is to develop abilities such as logical thinking, reasoning, learning abstractions, structuration and generalisation based on certain principles. It also develops the ability to evolve multiple solutions to solve one problem. Science is all about forming hypotheses, observing, gathering evidence, and arriving at conclusions based on linking data from various experiments and sources. It is about making meaning of patterns in nature, in physics, chemistry and developing curiosity among people to find out more and more. It helps foster creativity, innovation and the ability to arrive at independent conclusions. Science also forces us to ask questions about things that we don’t know.

Social sciences, in addition to dealing with constitutional values and understanding how society is structured around us, also informs us about our past and present — providing some logic for developing our concept for the future. It has the power to bring our diversity to us, seeding the concept of pluralism to deal with the diversity successfully.

And then there is the issue of how the above subjects are presented to learners in an integrated manner. Life unfolds before us in a holistic manner and not as different subjects that we learn. When you teach science or maths or social sciences, you are also dealing with language. Maths is comprehensively used while dealing with concepts in science. Subjects like sports, physical education, art and crafts are meant to develop the abilities of

Continued on page 26

Working class on warpath

S.K. PANDE

A three-day historic joint trade union mass sit-in, called 'Mahapadav' of workers, was held near Jantar Mantar in New Delhi from November 9-11 to protest against the government's anti-worker policies.

It was enthusiastically attended by flag-waving, slogan-shouting workers from around the country. Many wore red caps or red *kurtas*, others carried banners in different languages. They included *beedi* workers, construction workers, domestic workers, street vendors, home-based workers and industrial workers. This was the first time that 10 central trade unions and independent industrial federations had jointly organised a *dharna* of such magnitude in the national capital. The crowd averaged 70,000 a day on all three days. The participation of women workers and young workers was remarkable. And there was some music and dance too.

The workers displayed extraordinary resolve to participate in the Mahapadav overcoming many difficulties. Delhi's description as a 'toxic gas chamber' with a situation of 'public health emergency' had created a scare, particularly among those coming from the southern states. The banning of demonstrations at Jantar Mantar by the National Green Tribunal also raised questions on whether the Mahapadav would be allowed at all. Many trains were running late. Thousands of workers who reached railway stations had to go back after finding that their trains were cancelled. Others waited for delayed trains. On each of the three days, thousands arrived at the venue just as the *dharna* was about to conclude. Yet, they all participated.

What had made so many come to the capital in such numbers? Conversations with the workers made it clear that the government's policies have hit the working class hard. Many were vocal about the destruction of their livelihoods by moves like *notebandi* and GST. *Beedi* workers from Telangana,

Madhya Pradesh and other states said 12-hour workdays yielded ₹50-90 per day and even that work was drying up because of GST on the *tendu* leaf. They gave a strong call for removal of GST from the sector. Women *zari* workers from Hyderabad testified that there was less work available to them for the past couple of years and GST has made the situation worse. Garment workers from Ghaziabad said demonetisation and GST have been a big blow to the trade and many workers are left jobless.

There were other demands too. Street vendors



Ten central trade unions and industrial federations jointly organised the mass sit-in

demanding licences to be able to work legally, complained of harassment and extraction by local authorities and cited non-implementation of the 2014 law legitimising their trade. A woman leader of construction workers from Haryana demanded that the ₹18,000 crore collected as social security cess from the construction industry be distributed to the workers by labour welfare boards. She said despite a PIL in the Supreme Court, workers were still not getting their due.

Government scheme workers like Asha and Anganwadi workers were extremely vocal about the fact that they are paid small honorariums, not a proper wage. Mid-day meal cooks from Nalanda in Bihar complained that the government appointed *thekedar* paid them a measly ₹1,250 a month. They also said since food has become more expensive the

children are getting less and cheaper quality food in schools. The trade unions' universal demand is for a national minimum wage of ₹18,000 per month.

An LIC worker protested against government moves to privatise the insurance sector, saying this would be detrimental for insurance workers and the country as well.

The Union government had done its best to stall the unprecedented protest. Attempts had been made to create confusion among the workers and their leadership. The Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh, close to the ruling party, did not participate. The government, which had ignored the 12-point charter of demands of the trade unions during the last two years, suddenly called a meeting on 3 November. It did not invite the pro-Congress INTUC. When the other unions refused to attend the meeting unless INTUC was invited, the government called another meeting but on the same day that three central trade unions were to depose before the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Labour in Mumbai. After further protest, the meeting was fixed for 7 November. But the government had nothing new to offer. The trade unions stuck to their programme, brushing aside all these moves to confuse, divide and disrupt their unity.

It should be noted that for several years demands for better wages and social security, for a universal PDS, for an end to contract work, for controlling price rise and for revoking various policies hostile to people's interests including moves to dilute labour laws, have been ignored by successive governments. Living standards have fallen, joblessness and job insecurity have increased, and the country's self-reliance is threatened. This Mahapadav was indeed a reflection of the participants' feelings!

The Mahapadav endorsed the 12-point charter of demands and ended with the decision to hold joint industry/sectoral strikes whenever the government makes moves towards privatisation. Common actions at district level and joint demonstrations and court arrest programmes will be held before the next Union Budget, the Mahapadav resolved. It is evident that the people's patience is running out. ■

S.K. Pande is President of the Delhi Union of Journalists.

their place in day-to-day life. Any knowledge that is not understood for its relevance to life becomes boring and meaningless to learn.

Thus, education can influence life and society only if subjects are taught after realising the real purpose of teaching. If we continue to deal with education the way it is being done today, we are in for a society that will be devoid of understanding of vital issues such as democracy, equity, justice, sensitivity, humanity, rational thinking and independence of mind. ■

Dileep Ranjekar is CEO of the Azim Premji Foundation

For a water surplus city



WATER WATCH

S. VISHWANATH

IT is November, there is a nip in the air and cloudy skies have enveloped the city. All that is water related appears forgotten. Bengaluru, like many other Indian cities, has a short memory. There is always a new crisis to focus on, forgetting the old. Yet, in May this year, when the monsoon had yet to arrive and the dam reservoirs on the Cauvery were at their lowest water level, there was a real fear that the city could run out of water.

Then in August the rains arrived and many parts of the city were engulfed in knee-deep water. The floods had arrived. Moving from shortage to abundance in a matter of days, the city seemed to stop bothering about either shortfall or surplus as the monsoon receded. But it is in these months, leading up to the next monsoon in June, that steps have to be taken to address the water crisis of the city.

First, a look at the positive factors for the city in terms of managing water. The Karnataka State Natural Disaster Monitoring Centre (www.ksndmc.org) and its network of 82 telemetric rain gauges across the city provide storm tracking and rainfall occurrence monitoring that probably no other city in India has. Slowly the forecast model for rainfall occurrence is being built. A flood prediction and occurrence model with vulnerable locations is being developed in conjunction with the Indian Institute of Science. This will be valuable input to make sure that the drainage infrastructure is in place to avoid flooding.

Bengaluru is located on a ridge between the basins of the Arkavathy and the Dakshina Pinakini, which drains into three major valleys. Unlike coastal cities, the drainage slope is steep and the natural water run-off is fast unless impeded by manmade construction such as roads and the blocking of natural valleys between the 'tanks' or artificial lakes through construction and debris dumping.

Rainfall in the city in a normal year is equivalent to around 3,000 million litres per day if averaged out over the entire year. In comparison, what is pumped into the city from the Cauvery 100 km away and 300 metres below is around 1,400 million litres per day.

A rainwater harvesting bye-law is already in place which makes it mandatory for all new buildings to collect or recharge the equivalent of 20 mm rainfall daily. If implemented across all buildings, this could have the effect of dampening run-off curves and flood events as well as supplementing the water requirements of the city through recharge of the shallow aquifer or through storage. The Sir M. Visvesvaraya Rainwater Harvesting Theme Park, created as an education and knowledge centre,

already provides a platform which can be extended to include flood management through rainwater harvesting.

NEED OF THE HOUR: The rehabilitation and rejuvenation of all the existing lakes in the city has been a longstanding demand of citizens. Not only the lakes but the interlinking channels connecting them, *rajakaluves*, need to be cleared of encroachments and designed not as concrete basins

well-digging community, the Mannu Vaddars, have helped build the tank system of the state and the city. They have also dug wells, cleaned them and deepened them as the need arose. Till the advent of bore-wells, the city had innumerable wells. Now the open wells are making a comeback. As recharge wells, they take in rainwater and storm-water and send it to the shallow aquifer. As fully recharged wells, they supply water for household use. In the heart of the city, at Cubbon Park, for example, seven



Slowly the forecast model for rainfall occurrence is being built. A flood prediction and occurrence model with vulnerable locations is being developed in conjunction with the Indian Institute of Science.

and drains but as ecological valleys and lakes which can foster bio-diversity and filter and clean water on the way. The separation of untreated sewage and the elimination of solid waste from the lakes and *rajakaluves* needs special focus. By designing each lake as an urban watershed which receives flood waters from its catchment and then releases it gradually into the ground and to the connecting valley, much of the objectives of a clean environment and water self-sufficiency can be achieved.

The expansion of the sewage network and of sewage treatment plants has to happen at a much faster pace than currently.

The Karnataka Lake Conservation and Development Authority (KLCDA) has been set up recently. Though it has strong legal powers, it is still to be fully equipped with enough human resource and financial powers to make the necessary impact.

The informal sector needs to be included in the city's water management plan too. The traditional

open wells have been rehabilitated and are now full of water, ready to supply the needs of the area. By encouraging well culture, not only can rainwater be harvested and the aquifers recharged, floods can be mitigated and livelihoods regenerated.

Similarly, fishermen play a large role in keeping our lakes free from water hyacinth and other floating weeds. A partnership with them will result in cleaner lakes as well as livelihoods for them and food for the many winged visitors to the city.

It is time to adopt an integrated approach to water management, harnessing the benefits of rain, lakes, wells and treated waste-water for the water security of the city. This will not only bring ecological and environmental benefits but also social benefits and help mitigate the threat posed by climate change. Institutions and citizens need to gear up for the challenge. ■

Daily data of rainfall and storm tracking is available at: https://www.ksndmc.org/Uploads/BBMP_DAILY_REPORT.pdf. Email: zenrainman@gmail.com

IT can forge ahead



HERE
& NOW

SUBIR ROY

THROUGH this year, both the leaders of the Indian information technology industry and their lobbying group Nasscom have strenuously denied reports of job losses in the industry. They have claimed that while hiring and firing will go on simultaneously, at the end of the day there will be a net addition to the total number of jobs in the industry, albeit at a far lower rate than in the past. The government and IT minister bought into this scenario, saying reports of job losses in this sector were “motivated”.

This is now set to change with the top six firms in India (TCS, Infosys, Wipro, Cognizant, HCL Technologies and Tech Mahindra) reporting a marginal fall in their total headcount in the first six months of the current financial year (2017-18). Though the fall is way less than one percent and the year may eventually end differently, the turning of the tide creates a sense of foreboding. Perhaps inevitably, the first trade union of IT staffers in Bengaluru has come into being.

What is the scenario ahead for the sector? First, it is critical to remember that having to employ fewer hands does not mean that the sector's high-performance days are over. The global ICT (Information and Communication Technology) space is undergoing a transformation in which many routine and repetitive functions like writing and testing code and maintaining enterprise applications are getting automated.

Simultaneously, huge new opportunities are being created with every kind of operation from running a company to delivering healthcare getting digitised. This is generating mountains of data that need to be analysed to yield insights for raising productivity. The problem with large Indian firms is that they specialised in offering armies of low-cost manpower to perform routine functions which are now rapidly getting automated.

This has left Indian leaders with the option to

acquire the new digital technology and offer clients innovative solutions to improve efficiencies. They can do this in two ways: mammoth retraining of staff and acquiring technology startups. Big-time retraining is already on. It is in pursuing the latter that problems can arise. Buying a technology startup is a bit of a gamble, particularly in determining the price.

Stakeholders must have faith in managements and leave them to their jobs, knowing that some decisions taken will turn out to be wrong in hindsight. Absolutely the last thing that the managements of large Indian companies need is the kind of fracas that N.R. Narayana Murthy and others created over the acquisition of Panaya, forcing Vishal Sikka, an indisputable technology



The IT sector will need to retrain its employees

New opportunities are being created with every kind of operation from running a company to delivering healthcare getting digitised. This is generating mountains of data that need to be analysed.

leader, out of Infosys.

There is also another route open for Indian IT leaders to take. The government is in mission mode to make the country digital and this offers an enormous new business opportunity involving work which is partially of the routine type. Here again, Infosys comes out with less than flying colours. It has traditionally ignored the Indian market and focused on the US. Additionally, it is in the limelight over complaints that its delivery of the GST network has been less than satisfactory. It is imperative for Indian IT firms to successfully execute low-margin domestic business so that their armies of employees with traditional skills have something to do.

An idea as to how various Indian companies are faring can be gleaned from the fact that medium-sized Indian companies are turning in better numbers and earning better improvements in valuations than larger ones. This is because the medium-sized firms are more focussed in terms of both domain (client industry) knowledge and geographic spread. Plus, they do not have armies of employees to look after.

So what can be the appropriate future model for Indian IT companies? They need to be nimble, run a tighter ship and immerse themselves in new technologies like that of the web, artificial intelligence and internet. Here, a caveat needs mention. Not all large firms are alike. TCS, the largest Indian company, seems unaffected by the current headwinds.

Among the six large players referred to above, it has added (not reduced) its headcount. Another large firm, HSL Technologies, which traditionally follows the inorganic growth route, has added the most to its headcount. In contrast, Cognizant, with a US management style and hire and fire ethos, shed the largest number of jobs.

Those who have tracked Indian IT from its early days do not underestimate its ability to innovate in the face of challenges and come out on top. Dark days were seen ahead of Indian IT after the Y2K job was over and the world was hit by the bursting of tech bubbles and the shock of 9/11. Thereafter, global and Indian IT had to face the downturn created by the financial crisis of 2008. On both occasions, Indian IT has been able to meet the challenge and return to high growth. There is no reason why it will not overcome the latest downsides because it has the ability to respond quickly and innovatively.

At the time when global IT needed large supplies of skilled manpower at low cost, Indian IT innovated the distributed offshore development model and thrived. Now that technology is the need of the hour, it will also be developed

and acquired.

This positive view stems from the fact that the entrepreneurial spirit still drives the sector. The large number of startups in India and the funding they are securing bear testimony to this. India is still far behind Israel but moving in that direction. The larger and older firms have undergone a generational change which TCS has managed well but Infosys has not. Wipro, with its strong acquisition DNA, comes somewhere in between.

India is now a global leader in the use of biometric identification (Aadhaar) for direct benefit transfer and digital technology (Unified Payments Interface) to enable poor people with a simple feature phone to make and receive payments at very low cost. ■

LIVING

BOOKS | ECO-TOURISM | FILM | THEATRE | AYURVEDA

The grind of work

Machines is a powerful film on textile labour

Saibal Chatterjee
New Delhi

THERE isn't anything remotely Chaplinesque about Rahul Jain's debut film, *Machines*. But the astonishingly immersive feature-length documentary does recall crucial aspects of the Charlie Chaplin classic, *Modern Times*. *Machines* paints a distressing picture as Jain employs stark, and disconcertingly dark methods to convey the absurdity of the dehumanising drudgery foisted upon an industrial workforce with the aim of maximising productivity and profit.

Set in a gigantic textile mill in a highly industrialised part of Gujarat, *Machines* presents an intimate, observational, sobering portrait of unrelenting exploitation. It pieces together a story in which the manipulated men — their plaintive, stoic faces and voices are interspersed with the film's meticulously crafted, dexterously stylised images that are as poignant as they are hypnotic — are lulled by the sweat of their bodies and the fatigue in their bones into believing that this, and this alone, is their destiny. “I'm not being exploited. I've come here by choice,” says one of the migrant workers on the factory payrolls. “Poverty,” he says, “is harassment, there is no cure.” Aware of his lot, he is acutely aware that there is no escape.

“We have hands, so we have to work,” says another labourer. “Some use hands and feet, others use brains,” he adds after pulling a 220-kg vat of an industrial chemical with the aid of a stick with a hook attached to its end. Mere cogs in the wheel, these men have to keep going no matter what is demanded of them.

The payment is paltry and the shifts are long and exhausting, if not exactly back-breaking. “*Majboori* is a word that I heard frequently during the shoot. I don't know how to translate it into English,” the 26-year-old Delhi-born, US-educated filmmaker



Machines is set in a gigantic textile mill in a highly industrialised part of Gujarat



Rahul Jain, director of the film

told this writer after the film's India premiere at the MAMI Mumbai Film Festival in mid-October.

Jain trained to be an engineer but “did not like it one bit”. He felt the urge to use the medium of cinema to “depict my perception of the world with sharp fidelity”. He made *Machines*, he says, in response to the curiosity to know how people can work in such atrocious conditions.

Machines, which won an award at the Sundance Film Festival this year before travelling to numerous film festivals around the world, is a ‘political’ film

minus the agitprop dimensions usually associated with the genre. It provides an unflinching view of the bowels of a system that only takes but gives little by way of returns to those whose physical toil keep it running. “I am not making a statement nor am I looking to arrive at an answer,” says Jain. “I am only trying to be honest in the expression of my dismay.” *Machines* isn't, he adds, just a work of “political exposition”, but also a film with defined “aesthetic qualities”. The combination of the two makes Jain's film a truly remarkable cinematic experience.

The textile mill in which *Machines* is set — with its giant spindles, mechanised spinning wheels and conveyor belts that yield rolls of yarn, its barrels of chemicals and colours used to add designs to the cloth produced and the haze, moisture and heat that float around its innards — resembles a present-day purgatory for the poverty-stricken migrant labourers who work the machines in the sprawling factory. The men slog like beasts of burden for as long as 12 hours a day and get paid for only eight hours — a royal sum of ₹210 — because that is what the prevailing labour laws permit.

“There are 1,500 such factories in this area,” says Jain. “This one is the best among them. So you can imagine how abysmal the situation is.” It is so appalling that the adjective does not even begin to describe the plight of these men. In one scene, the camera is unblinkingly trained on one sleep-deprived young worker, probably in his teens, who

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keeps dozing off. He shakes himself out of his stupor once or twice, but he can barely keep his eyes open. It has clearly been a long day for a body crying out for a break. The very next scene, significantly, shows a hammer pounding a hard surface.

A teenage labourer says: "When I reach the gate, I feel like turning back. But turning back wouldn't be good... What I learn here as a child I'd never be able to learn as an adult." Another young worker points to the futility of protesting. "If two workers pull out, the factory won't stop," he says. Indeed. "When they get home for Diwali, their jobs are gone," says Jain.

Machines isn't only about what Jain points the



The mill with its huge machines, haze and heat resembles a present day purgatory

The most crucial point in the film involves the mill owner revealing, with surprising candour, what he feels about his workers.

camera at. A lot of what isn't seen on the screen — the agrarian crisis, rural distress and migration to the cities — is equally important to what the film is trying to articulate. An older worker, who has taken a loan to get here from 1,600 km away in order to earn enough to not only provide for his family but also to repay accumulated debts, confesses that he simply does not have a choice. He is caught in a vicious cycle. Yes, *majboori* is the word that best describes his pitiable state. Not that he is seeking any sympathy: he is the very man who would have us believe that he isn't being exploited and that he has come here entirely of his own volition.

Machines uses no voiceover, text inserts or musical score to underline these vignettes of utter joylessness. The camera is a quiet, unobtrusive observer, with the ambient sounds, especially

emanating in the form of a constant drone from the machines, providing the evocative aural background. "If seeing is believing, hearing is feeling," says Jain.

The most crucial point in the film involves the mill owner revealing, with surprising candour, what he feels about his workers. We see him seated in a room with a multi-camera surveillance system that allows him to keep an eye on every nook and cranny of his factory. His argument is grotesque, to say the least: workers with an empty stomach are more sincere and work harder, he argues. When they get extra money and their stomachs are full, complacency sets in and their commitment wavers.

YERCAUD AND ITS COLONIAL CHARMS

Susheela Nair
Yercaud

THE excitement began when we zigzagged through 20 hairpin bends on the winding mountain road to the charming hill station of Yercaud. The sweltering heat of smoke-belching chimneys and the brown plains of the textile and steel town of Salem gave way to coffee estates and towering silver oaks, perched precariously amidst the greenery of mountain slopes.

At 4,500 ft above sea level, in the Shevaroy hills of Salem district, Yercaud is not as flashy, expensive or crowded as its counterparts, Ooty and Kodaikanal. With its sedate pace, quaint charm and salubrious weather, it has earned the sobriquet of 'poor man's Ooty'.

Like many hill stations, the major attraction here is the lake which is the hub of all activities. The sparkling, placid water of the lake on the fringes of this hilly retreat herald a welcome. In local parlance *yeri-kadu* means lake-forest. If you want to indulge in touristy things, you can take a stroll around the lake or do a tandem tour in a pedal boat or hire a rowboat from the boathouse run by the Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation. If you are not inclined towards a boat ride, simply unwind by the water's edge, munch roasted peanuts and watch reflections and ripples in the lake.

The Shevaroyan temple, built in memory of the legendary tribal god, Shevaroyan, who lived, died

and was buried here, is claimed to be the highest point in Yercaud, though some believe it is Cauvery Peak. The modern façade leads to an old cave temple. The temple dons a festive look when tribals from surrounding villages congregate to take part in the annual festival. Just outside the temple we fortified ourselves with *attukaal* soup, a concoction of ginger, garlic, pepper and wild tubers.

Yercaud is cloaked in shady trees and ringed with walking trails leading to several vantage points with stunning views of the cliffs, grassy glades and the

SUSHEELA NAIR



Tipperary bungalow where the descendants of Charles Dickens lived



The lake and the boathouse

mountain range. These lookout points have their own peculiar charm and interest. From Pagoda Point or Pyramid Point, one can see the ruins of an old temple and the dramatic sunset in the Shevaroy hills. On a clear day, the Mettur Dam can be spotted in the distance from Pagoda Point, which derives its name from the peculiar way stones are arranged here for worship by tribes. It was once a Stone Age fortress shrine before the existing temple was built.

With its pleasant walks and panoramic views, there's something to discover here every day. The local guide will escort you to your favoured lookout points like Pagoda Point, Gent's Seat and Lady's Seat which have their own charm and interesting yarns. The Gent's Seat, with an outcrop of rocks, is situated adjacent to the TV tower. It provides a dizzying view of the hill ranges, plateaus and the plains below. The quaintly named Lady's Seat is so named because a British lady used to relax here after her morning walk. Viewed through the telescope mounted here, Salem town looms large with its mines, steel plant and glowing buildings. Tourists flock to the circular lookout here at night to have a stunning view of the glittering lights of Salem.

Like all hill stations, Yercaud has associations with the British. It was M.D. Cockburn (then Collector of Salem district) who introduced coffee to Yercaud from South Africa. He also built the Grange, an imposing castle-like building which was selected at the time of the Indian Mutiny of 1857 as a possible refuge for European settlers in the hills, in the event of a rising in Salem. But it is more famous as the summer retreat of Robert Clive, who frequently took a weekend break in Yercaud. Five generations of the descendants of Alfred Dickens (whose lineage connects with the legendary English writer, Charles Dickens) also lived in Yercaud. Prominent among them is Anna Patricia Dickens,

former BBC actress, who was born in the Tipperary estate bungalow. We strolled around leisurely in the coffee estate to savour a slice of plantation life.

We discovered that, like all hill stations, Yercaud is dotted with seminaries, novitiates and residential schools started by missionaries who found it a congenial place and escape from the scorching heat of the plains. Prominent among them are the Sacred Heart School for girls, started by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny in 1894, and the Montford School for boys, an architectural marvel. One can see schoolchildren in uniforms and blazers, who are an integral part of this hill station's scenery. Trinity Church, dating back a century, is a must on the tourist's itinerary.

When you get tired of the regular tourist circuit and long for a closer communion with nature, put on your trekking shoes and wander among the labyrinth of wooded pathways, coffee plantations, lush-green foliage and towering silver oaks leading to Kiliyur Falls, which tumbles from a height of 300 feet. The peaceful environs are an enchanting picnic spot. ■

FACT FILE

Getting there:

Air: The nearest airports are at Tiruchirappalli (169 km), Coimbatore (196 km).

Rail: The nearest railroad is Salem Junction (32 km).

Road: Bus services operate from Salem Junction and Salem Municipal Bus Stand to Yercaud. Local taxis can take you to various tourist attractions.

When to visit: Throughout the year.

What to buy: Yercaud is famed for its eucalyptus and citronella oils and honey. Other must-buys are jams, guava cheese, oranges and pears.

Where to stay: GRT Great trails (email: reservations@grtgreattrails.com); TGI Star Holidays (email: cmo@tgihotels.com).



The journey to Yercaud is through winding roads and hairpin bends

SUSHEELA NAIR

RANDOM SHELF HELP

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

Batting for ahimsa

By Anjana Basu

KAUSHIK Bandyopadhyay's provocatively titled book *Mahatma on the Pitch* brings together two factors that no one would have imagined had any real connect. Mahatma Gandhi, the icon of Indian history, and cricket, the iconic sport that India has made its own. In his foreword, Bandyopadhyay mentions a textbook for schools in Tripura that referred to Gandhi in the context of cricket and caused a flurry among government educational officials and those members of the public who were interested in the matter. Like the true academic that he is, Bandyopadhyay lays out his *modus operandi* — what his premise is and how he intends to prove it.

Readers expecting a quick cricketing connect to Mahatma Gandhi will find the opening pace slow. The boy nicknamed Monu by his mother did play cricket in school and was also rumoured to have wielded the willow once, though there is no hard evidence of the fact. Speculation also put him in college with Ranjitsinhji and it is thought that he acquired his interest in cricket through association with the Jam Sahib. Gandhi also apparently played a third umpire kind of role in matches between boys from his school at night. However, his career as a



Mahatma on the Pitch: Gandhi and Cricket by Kaushik Bandyopadhyay
Rupa
Rs 395

lawyer and subsequent travel to Durban showed no real evidence of interest in the game.

When Bandyopadhyay talks about cricket at the time, he mentions that Indian cricket as played in colonial times actually followed Gandhian principles from time to time — the best known Indian player outside the Princes' Teams and one who had a fan following in the country was a Dalit. He also points out that Ranji made an impact on cricket played in England and as a result struck a note for Indian superiority at a time when most of the English tended to be racist in their attitude.

Bandyopadhyay's main argument, however, is reserved for the issue of the Bombay Pentangular Tournament which was then one of the most eagerly anticipated tournaments with teams comprising different communities — Hindu, Muslim, Parsi and more. At a time when many Hindu leaders were being jailed the issue was raised by Hindus who asked Gandhi whether Hindu teams should have taken part in the tournament at such a crucial time. Gandhi, according to Bandyopadhyay, tackled the matter with a straight bat and answered 'no'. His reasons were slightly different from those of the Hindus who brought the matter to him — he felt that participating in a British sport while the Second World War was raging went against everything that the nationalists stood for and that the Pentangular

Tournament promoted communalism, something that could result in Hindu-Muslim riots.

Since the Bombay Pentangular was both popular and lucrative, Gandhi's comment aroused a great deal of criticism. Many people pointed out that the nature of sport was to unite communities and there never had been any communal violence in the history of the tournament. Gandhi deftly fielded the criticisms on many occasions but ultimately, Bandyopadhyay writes, the Pentangular had to be discontinued when Partition came about since communal passions were then running high, proving that the Mahatma in his far-sighted wisdom had had a point.

While the Pentangular issue is interesting for cricket enthusiasts and historians — Bandyopadhyay mentions both Ramchandra Guha and Boria Majumdar — those who expect to find a young Gandhi stepping out as an all-rounder in some forgotten cricketing field will be disappointed. Bandyopadhyay continues his speculations to today's IPL that, he feels, would have met with the Mahatma's approval since it converts conflict between countries into the friendly wars of sport. A Nelson Mandela-Mahatma Gandhi tournament exists in South Africa as a tribute to Gandhi's influence on Mandela rather than Babu's interest in the game. A true academic, Bandyopadhyay also peppers his slim volume with footnotes that may be of interest to Gandhi's followers. ■

Peace the only way

By Anjana Basu

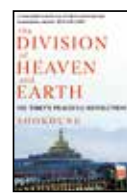
TIBET, that hidden land high in the mountains which everyone hopes to visit but very few dare to. A land which was annexed by Mao Zedong's forces in the 1950s and signed over by those who were the guardians of Tibet's spiritual ruler, the Dalai Lama, then a 15-year-old. The Dalai Lama was forced to abandon the Potala palace for India while Tibet was overrun and monasteries and their custodians destroyed.

This was a low in the history of Tibet. Where Tibetan warriors had once made the Chinese shiver in medieval times, now it was the iron fist of the Chinese in control, cutting off all hopes of escape or salvation. So wrote Tagya, the Tibetan writer who has taken Shokdung or 'clarion call' as his pen name. Because Tagya's voice was so lucid and penetrating, the Chinese banned *The Division of Heaven and Earth* when it was first published in Tibetan after 2008.

That year, 2008, was a violent year — there were uprisings in Tibet and thousands marched, demanding the return of the Dalai Lama. Shokdung watched the mayhem unfold from the State-run publishing firm where he worked and decided that he could no longer side with his employers. Journalists were expelled, there was a media blackout and while the Chinese attempted to win Shokdung over, the writer came to certain conclusions about the situation unfolding in Tibet.

Now this vital book has been translated into English and the reasons for the ban are clear to the wider audience of historians and political students. Shokdung indicts China's Tibetan policy.

His theory was that the Tibetans lacked a strategic philosophy to combat the Chinese. Turning to the history of the region for a solution, he reasoned that Gandhian principles would be best suited to the Tibetan condition. He leaned towards the Buddha's teachings and to fighting violence with non-violence. Shokdung writes, as Buddhist commentators have always written, analytically, drawing on Tibetan tradition as he talks about the peaceful revolution which will enable the Tibetans to be self-reliant and combat the Chinese without calling on external help. He does, to be fair, also glance at Western philosophy before settling for *satyagraha*.



The Division of Heaven and Earth: On Tibet's Peaceful Revolution by Shokdung
Translated by Matthew Akester
Speaking Tiger
Rs 499

The question is whether Gandhian tactics would work against the Chinese. There is no real answer to this — though George Orwell once famously commented that while the British Empire could be amenable to non-violence, a communist state like the Soviet Union would never consider it. Orwell's theory can possibly be applied to Maoist China. Shokdung wrote that the British rulers of India had some vestiges of conscience — George V invited the

'naked *fakir*' to tea. The Dalai Lama, on the other hand, was forced to flee in disguise and the Chinese were alarmed enough by *The Division of Heaven and Earth* to throw Shokdung into jail for six months in 2010 because they regarded his work as an act of betrayal by someone who had previously gone along with them.

Currently, the Tibetan cause seems to be under wraps. World opinion, barring entertaining the Dalai Lama, has said little or nothing on the subject despite some 140 self-immolations by monks. Perhaps there are greater causes to tackle, perhaps not. Tibet remains isolated with a Chinese railway that travels up to Lhasa for the benefit of tourists.

Whether Gandhian philosophy has any merit can only be decided by history. However, his book controversial or otherwise, remains one of the most important to come out of Tibet at the current time. ■

The depths of despair

By Archana Ranjan

EVEN after 70 years of independence, the Green Revolution, and tonnes of grain rotting in government granaries, there are people dying of starvation in the country. *Dispossessed: Stories from India's Margins* takes a worm's eye view of what it means to be destitute and marginalised in India.

Coming as it does on the heels of the starvation death of an 11-year-old girl on 28 September in the tribal village of Karimati in Simdega district of Jharkhand, the book is all the more poignant since it serves as a stark reminder that ground realities don't always fulfil policy objectives.

Dispossessed is part of a study on destitution by the Centre of Equity Studies (CES) in New Delhi. Researchers travelled to meet some of the poorest and most marginalised communities in India, to hear their stories and understand their circumstances. The introduction has been written by well-known social activist Harsh Mander, who is director of CES.

The first part of the book, written by Ashwin Parulkar, is titled 'Born Busy Dying'. It is a sensitive study of starvation deaths in Bihar, Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh, which happen despite a National Food Security Act, and a host of sensible government schemes. The write-up is clinical, factual and talks about why marginalised communities reach such levels of desperation although there are many government schemes and laws ostensibly put in place to prevent precisely such situations. A passing reference is also made to the 'signs of progress' that some field surveys conducted by Jean Dreze and his team noticed. The essay is primarily a study of government responses to these starvation deaths.

However, when the author goes to Madhya Pradesh, he notices that after the death of a woman named Ramkali, the local anganwadi has improved enough to provide rice, *dal*, *rotis*, vegetables and *khichdi*, apart from a nutritional supplement. But, due to a variety of reasons, the anganwadi never gets its full share and is constrained to give children only half the required amount.

There are stories also of poor people with no access to healthcare, even when government health centres are within walking distance. The reason cited is lack of knowledge and of confidence. These stories speak of the double tragedy of being poor — not necessarily destitute — and being disabled. Coupled with the inefficiencies of the system and the all-pervasive corruption, these families do not have much to hope for.

The second part of the collection, titled "Engaging with Unequal India", is based on field work conducted in several places. The first of these, also written by Parulkar, is based in Jaipur, among Bengali Muslims, who live there and



Life on the city's pavements is harsh and debilitating

There are stories also of poor people with no access to healthcare, even when government health centres are within walking distance.

mainly beg for a living. There is the story of 17-year-old Pinky who stops eating after her husband leaves her and her newborn daughter. There is also Shukran, her grandmother-in-law, as well as the entire Bengali Muslim migrant community, living reasonably peaceful lives until they have to prove they are Bengali and not Bangladeshi.

Then there are stories of poor people living with disabilities in Rajasthan, frequenting the BMVSS (Bhagwan Mahavir Viklang Sahayata Samiti) for an artificial limb or a specially designed tricycle, or a tea kit with which to start a tea shop, narrated by Shikha Sethia. The disabled come from as far away as Bangladesh, and everyone is treated fairly. There are stories of the urban homeless living in the Yamuna Pushta area of New Delhi.

Anhad Imaan narrates the harsh irony of a life lived on the streets — the homeless who reach there, forced by severely debilitating circumstances, end up with physical and mental health because of the rough living there. Then there is the story, sensitively told by Amod Shah, of the 'unknown citizen', who seems to appear almost magically at a centre for the homeless where everything possible is done for him, but it all proves to be too little, too late.

The essay on the Abul Fazal residents, written by Annie Baxi, and how she feels kinship with the women there, is significant. It is a reminder that whoever we may be, howsoever 'privileged', we

are all bound and to a certain extent chained by social realities and boundaries. Interestingly, the housing discrimination faced by the residents of Abul Fazal takes backstage. The study underscores, in a very sensitive way, the essential sameness of the human condition.

Then there is a piece written by Saba Sharma, based in Chhattisgarh within the bustling, busy life of the residents in a leprosy *basti*. There is also the story of Panchami, perhaps autistic, with children in college and school, and a husband who has 'taken care' of her, as opposed to many who would have abandoned the totally dependent. Also, the stories of some poor disabled persons in good control of their circumstances, and some, like Meena, having been let down by their own families, resigned to living a life without hope.

Strangely, none of these stories, including the stories of disabled people narrated in the second part of the collection, are bleak — even the story of Meena, who is wronged by her own mother — because, at one level, these are stories of human frailties, whether of rural folk or the urban poor. The essays on the denotified tribe of the Lodhas, written by Sharma, as well as that on the Musahars by Parulkar show that though they have been lifted out of abject poverty, a lot more needs to be done.

The collection is a very emotional read. It's amazing to see the number of initiatives taken by successive governments, the comprehensive programmes drawn up and how they are all let down by ordinary citizens: the ration shopowner, the MGNREGA contractor and the like. ■



**AYURVEDA
ADVISORY**
Dr SRIKANTH

Calming stress injuries

I work for a BPO company based in Gurgaon, and I spend my entire working day staring at my computer screen. Of late, my right arm has been troubling me. Sometimes it feels numb and there is a tingling sensation especially on my hand and wrist. Please advise.

Rama Ramchandran

UNDERSTANDING RSI: If you're getting aches and pains — especially a prickly feeling (pins and needles) or loss of strength or sensation in a hand, arm or shoulder and your symptoms feel better when you're resting, then you could be a victim of Repetitive Stress Injuries (RSI).

This is a condition caused by placing too much stress on a joint, and it varies in type and severity. Mostly, RSI is linked to the stress of repetitive motions while using a computer or overuse injuries commonly seen in sportspeople. RSI may also occur in kids who are hooked to computer or video games, or because of the repetitive motions of their joints while playing musical instruments or sports like tennis and badminton.

RSI usually affects the neck, shoulder, elbow, wrist or hand or a combination of these areas, leading either to impairment or reduction in movement of the affected joint/s or giving rise to conditions like carpal tunnel syndrome, tendinitis, frozen shoulder and tennis elbow. RSI may be caused by overuse or strain of certain muscles/tendons, mostly due to short, cyclic, continuous and repetitive movements.

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome (CTS) is a medical condition occurring with pain, weakness, tingling sensation and other symptoms of discomfort in the hand. It is mainly caused due to the pressure on the median nerve in the wrist. • **Frozen shoulder** causes pain and stiffness in the shoulder. Over time, the shoulder becomes very hard to move. It most commonly affects people between the ages of 40 and 60, and occurs in women more often than men. • **Tennis elbow** is a painful condition that occurs when tendons in the elbow are overloaded, usually by repetitive motions of the wrist and arm. Despite its name, only a small group of people diagnosed with tennis elbow actually get it from playing tennis! Usually plumbers, painters, carpenters

and butchers are affected by this condition as an occupational hazard.

MANAGING RSI: You can help prevent RSI by taking preventive measures and redesigning your home / office computer environment, by making sure your computer, desk and chair are correctly set up at work.

When the symptoms are mild you can manage them at home: • Provide good rest to your affected joints in between activities • Stop any activity that causes numbness and pain • Soothe the joint/s with ice packs for 10-15 minutes every 2-3 hours • If pain is severe, painkillers may be taken for symptomatic relief • Wearing a wrist splint at night will be helpful in patients with CTS. But don't continue any of the above if the symptoms worsen.

There are also some natural remedies that you could try for symptomatic relief: A soothing massage using medicated oils daily and taking a relaxing warm water shower will usually help in relieving aches, pain and numbness. If it is not feasible daily, this routine should be followed at least twice a week.

Using either hot or cold compresses (such as a hot water bag or an ice pack), applied for just a few minutes to an inflamed joint, may help reduce swelling.

HERBAL/AYURVEDIC REMEDIES: Potent herbal oils like Mahanarayana taila/ Prasarini taila (of any well-known Ayurvedic pharmacy) may be used for local application on the affected part, followed by gentle massage for about 10-15 minutes twice daily and gentle movements of the affected joint/s for a couple of minutes — this will help to mitigate the effects of RSI. This can be followed by fomentation by pouring hot water on the affected joint/s or using a hot water pad/bag for local fomentation. Avoid vigorous massage.

If you find using oil a cumbersome process, you may opt for creams, ointments or liniments instead. Those preparations that contain potent anti-inflammatory herbs help reduce swelling and pain. Rumatil gel/liniment (Himalaya), Muscle & Joint rub (Himalaya), Myostaal (Solumiks) are effective.

MEDICATION: The combination of any of the following medicines will be useful in reducing symptoms: • Prasaranyadi Kashayam / Gandharvahastadi Kashayam/Maharasnadi Kashayam — 2 teaspoons with 6 teaspoons of boiled and cooled water, twice daily, before meals • Ksheerabala taila 101 avarti/Maharajaprasarani taila/Gandha Taila (any reputed Ayurveda manufacturer) — 10 drops, twice daily in warm water / milk, before meals (or Ksheerabala 101 capsules/Maharajaprasarani tailam capsules/Gandha tailam capsules — 2 capsules twice daily, before meals) • Rumatil forte tablets/Shallaki tablets (both from Himalaya) — 2 tablets, twice daily, after meals. ■

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

PRODUCTS

India's rice bowl

DANTEWADA district in Chhattisgarh is emerging as India's prime indigenous rice growing area. Around 6,000 varieties of rice have been mapped in Bastar region where Dantewada is located, and some have been conserved by tribal communities. There is red rice, brown rice, black rice, medicinal rice and aromatic rice. There are exotic varieties with names like Javaphul and Lokati Machi. Tribal farmers also grow a range of millets: kodo millet, finger millet and proso millet also called the Indian quinoa, which, it is said, grows on the dampness of morning dew.

The local administration is making efforts to promote Dantewada's rice and millets. Around 450 farmers, mostly women, practise organic farming in fields as small as one hectare. The administration has organised them into the Bhoongadi Organic Farmers' Producer Company Ltd. Farmers are marketing their rice under the state's organic rice brand name, Aadim.

Dantewada's rice and millet varieties were being sold at Dilli Haat's wonderful Women of India festival. Kumbati and Rinki, two girls from a village in the district, said this was the first time they were marketing their company's produce to urban consumers. The district



administration has printed a booklet explaining the virtues of Dantewada's rice and millets along with recipes. "This is our own method of farming and these rice and millets are our own food," emphasised Kumbati. Both girls have passed school and are proud to be farmers but would like additional work to supplement their income. ■

Contact: Bhoongadi Organic Farmers' Producer Co Ltd, Old Janpad Bhawan, Dantewada Chhattisgarh- 494449 Email: bhoongadi@gmail.com For orders: Akash Bdale: 09406489449

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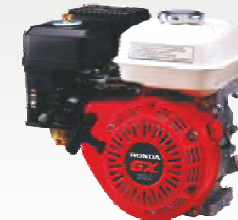


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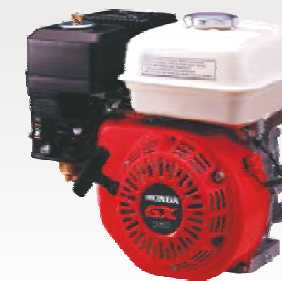


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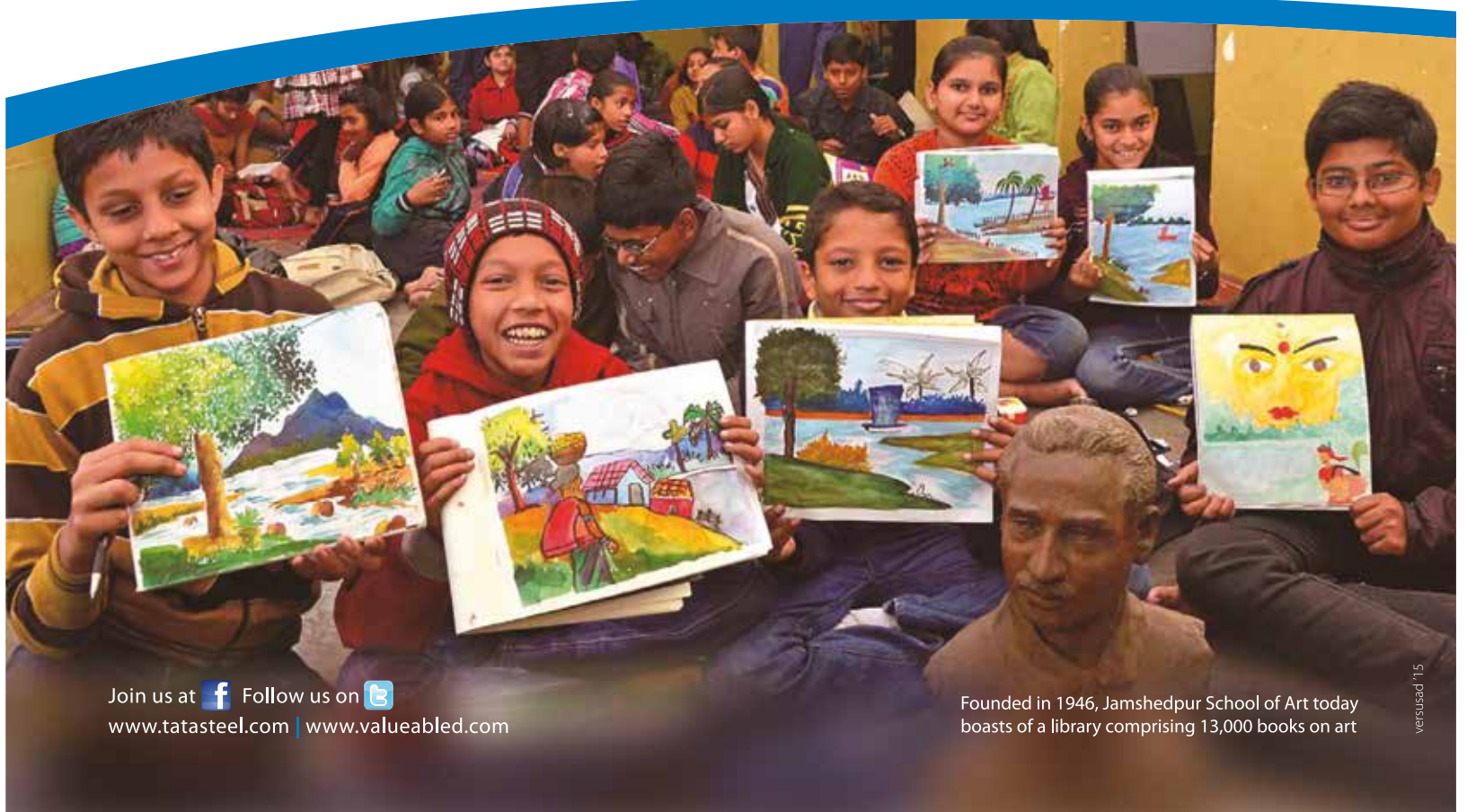


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Founded in 1946, Jamshedpur School of Art today boasts of a library comprising 13,000 books on art