

Civil Society



How inclusive are Indian companies?

AN INDEX NUDGES THE TOP 100 TO DO BETTER

At the Praxis office, members of the research team: Pragya Shah, Shireen Kurian, Dheeraj and Ekta Verma

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38 MILLION AFFECTED BY CONTAMINATED WATER IN INDIA

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cases of diarrhea

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cases of cholera

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cases of typhoid

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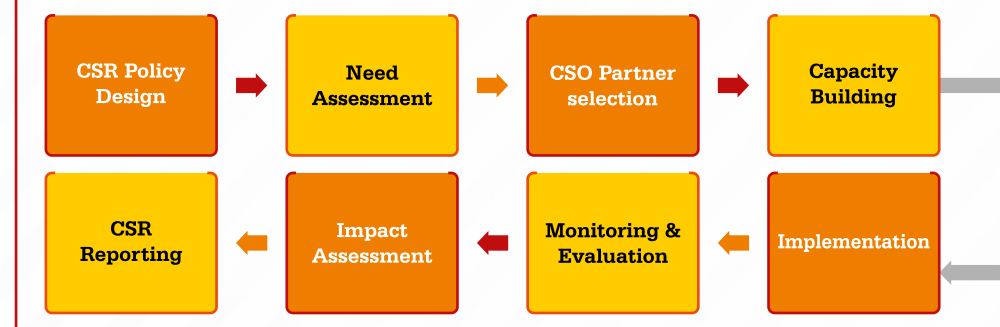


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FICCI SEDF, Federation House, 1 Tansen Marg, New Delhi – 110001
Tel: 011-23357243, 23753118 (D), 23738760-70 | Fax: +91-11-23320714, 23721504

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IN THE LIGHT

SAMITA RATHOR



LETTERS



Nature map

Thanks for the cover story, 'Delhi's greener past'. Living in a concrete jungle we often forget that our elders enjoyed a better quality of life with less pollution and fewer people crowding into cities. I agree with the authors that governments can plan the expansion of cities better by keeping their ecological culture in mind.

Shantha Sukumar

Bengaluru is a prime example of bad urban planning. The authors should consider designing a nature map of Bengaluru so that citizens can then recall how green and lovely our city used to be.

Daljit Singh

Engineer-ecologist

I have known Dhruvajyoti Ghosh since our Bengal Engineering College

days. We became good friends. My affection for him, over time, turned into admiration. He was a visionary and had a global perspective. He was passionate about his beliefs and very lucid and sincere in his thoughts and actions. Dhruvajyoti loved people and was always ready to help the helpless. With his passing away, not only have a large number of poor people living in and around Kolkata's wetlands lost their only true friend and mentor, civil society all over the world has lost a distinguished activist.

Shyamal Kumar Mitra

Questioning Aadhaar

While I appreciate the points you made in your story, 'Seven reasons to worry about Aadhaar', there are a few things that I'd like to point out.

Regarding your first point about biometrics not being an exact science, it is not as inexact as it is made out to be. Yes, there can be margins of error which is why 10 fingerprints and then an iris scan are done. Now, what do you think is the probability of two sets of 10 fingerprints and an iris scan matching? It is very, very low.

Let me correct a more minor point before I address the larger issue you raise in your second point. Databases are not directly accessed over http (or for that matter https). Databases have their own protocol. Typically a client (like a mobile app) accesses a public url which kicks off some code that accesses the database using a 'driver' software that the database provides. Yes, that url should only be available over https and if it is available over

http, someone in the middle can sniff the data that's being sent and received. That is a flaw but can be very easily fixed. It takes a few minutes to change from http to https.

Third, going by the examples of breaches (such as village businesses selling details of people), it looks like the controls around granting and revoking access and mapping types of access to types of data need to be strengthened. That is definitely pluggable but it does look like it was not given enough thought which is surprising considering this kind of access (RBAC — role-based access control) is taken for granted in corporates.

Finally, while you have done a good job of making a few points, the article is not as well researched as a technical article should be and because of that, it comes across as unnecessarily alarming. The points made do not in any way prove that the basic Aadhaar architecture is flawed from a security perspective. The article doesn't prove (or cite any example of) impersonation using biometrics. If that happens, I'd be as alarmed as you are.

Subhashish Dutta

Pancheshwar Dam

I read your cover story, 'Dam or Doom?' on the gigantic Pancheshwar Dam proposed to be built in Uttarakhand. I would like to thank Himanshu Thakkar for writing this article and sharing these insights. It is an eye-opening story. I have been researching this project for quite some time. Please write as much as possible about this issue to spread awareness.

Jayant Verma

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COVER STORY

Inclusion index for top 100

How much is the private sector doing for inclusive economic growth? An independent rating initiative provides an index based on what companies disclose about their policies and systems.

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Contact Civil Society at:
response@civilsocietyonline.com
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Publisher
Umesh Anand
Editor
Rita Anand

News Network
Shree Padre
Saibal Chatterjee
Jehangir Rashid
Sushela Nair
Kavita Charanji

Layout & Design
Virender Chauhan

Cartoonist
Samita Rathor

Write to Civil Society at:
A-16 (West Side), 1st Floor,
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Owning inclusion

VOLUNTARY disclosures often remain just that. So, when the top listed companies in India report on how they are fulfilling their social responsibilities it is important to take a close look at what they are saying. In those disclosures are not just the stories of what the companies claim they have done, but how their managements are wired for connecting with social realities.

Inclusion works when it is owned and expressed in the multiple ways in which a company goes about its business. It won't do to merely order companies to be inclusive. They should instead be encouraged to think inclusively and meet the expectations that society has of them.

The business responsibility reporting (BRR) initiative thus benefits greatly from the oversight provided by the India Responsible Business Index (IRBI), which rates companies based on what they are saying about themselves in reports submitted to the stock market regulator.

Corporate Responsibility Watch (CRW) and its associate organisations have done a service by giving managements a mirror in which they can see themselves. That this has been done without shaming managements makes the exercise particularly useful. The idea should be to nudge companies along because clobbering them just won't work.

Transformations come slowly and depend on many factors. You could say Indian companies are taking much too long. But there is no substitute for gentle persuasion. Managements that don't listen will finally have to wake up to the stark disparities that exist in India.

CRW has correctly tried to shift the focus from filing of mandatory reports to the National Voluntary Guidelines. The spirit of the guidelines is what must imbue decision-making in companies and manifest itself in their reporting. The findings from three years of the index aren't encouraging. Companies need to do much better. As drivers of economic growth, a huge responsibility rests with them not just to be inclusive in their own goals but to also contribute to structures that spell prosperity for all.

Voluntary organisations make a significant contribution to improving governance. They provide those last-mile connections that help people access benefits and services. We offer you in this issue a great example of this in the work of AHEAD Initiatives in West Bengal. Whether it is farming or education, AHEAD has helped panchayats and people to work together. AHEAD embodies the best of the civil society spirit whereby people from diverse backgrounds put their abilities together to solve the problems of development.

Anyone who lives in Delhi and the National Capital Region will worry about the way things have been going. There has been a sharp decline in the quality of life. Nothing seems to be working. AAP blames the BJP and vice versa. But how did Sheila Dikshit manage so adroitly for three terms? To find out what it takes to govern Delhi, we spoke to the graceful former chief minister now living in retirement in her home in Nizamuddin East. Her mantra is that power is all about adjustments, particularly as the chief minister of Delhi because of the special status of the capital. She showed what could be achieved despite the limitations of her office.

‘When you are in govt, you can’t afford to be defiant’

Sheila Dikshit on how she handled three terms as chief minister

Civil Society News
New Delhi

GOVERNANCE in Delhi over the past three years has come to resemble the traffic on the capital’s roads — slow-moving and stressful with frequent shouting matches. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the BJP have been at each other’s throats with the Congress doing its bit to keep tempers rising.

A low point was reached recently when Chief Secretary Anshu Prakash, the capital territory’s topmost bureaucrat and a mild-mannered man, was summoned to the chief minister’s house for a meeting at midnight.

Prakash says he was roughed up there by AAP legislators and AAP denies it. The police have been investigating Prakash’s complaint. But a meeting at midnight? How normal is that?

The entire problem seems to stem from the unique status Delhi has as the capital city. The state government’s powers are limited. Only a constitutional amendment can change that and it is unlikely to happen. Till then a balancing act is needed with a lot of accommodation on all sides.

Sheila Dikshit pulled it off well for three full terms as the Congress government’s chief minister. She too had a BJP-led NDA government at the centre for one of those three terms. But she managed effortlessly.

To find out what her mantra was we tracked her down in retirement in her elegant home at Nizamuddin East, a posh neighbourhood in Delhi. Excerpts from the interview:

There appears to be a logjam in Delhi between the administration and the ruling party, resulting in a breakdown in governance. You were Delhi’s chief minister for three consecutive terms. How do you see the present deadlock?

Delhi has a lot of advantages because it is the capital of India. Both the central government and the state government are interested in making Delhi a really world-class city. We had almost achieved that during our 15-year term.

But it is also a city which has a very complicated system of administration since the central government is located here and would like to have a say in everything. The central government also directly controls the police — which means law and order — and land without which you can’t do much work. So, every time you need a piece of land, say, to build a school, you have to approach the central government.



SHREY GUPTA

Sheila Dikshit: ‘You have limited land, limited powers and the responsibility of handling the capital of the country’

The face of the Delhi government is the chief minister. It was Sheila Dikshit in the past and today it is (Arvind) Kejriwal. But people don’t realise the Delhi government has nothing to do with law and order, that it is the central government’s responsibility. We took the entire flak for the Nirbhaya case. We were made responsible and punished for it.

We couldn’t say very much at that time because it was a Congress government at the Centre. There wasn’t any point in saying we had nothing to do with law and order. People expect the chief minister and the Delhi government to take care of whatever has gone wrong.

We worked in rather difficult circumstances. In Delhi, law and order was good. But with one case, the Nirbhaya case, it was all forgotten. One of the reasons we lost the elections was the Nirbhaya case.

Delhi is a complicated city. Its demographic profile is constantly evolving. People come in from all parts of the country, from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and the Northeast as well. It’s not like this population has been settled here for a long time. Mostly, more people move into the city rather than leave it.

So that is another challenge the Delhi government faces. You have limited land, limited powers, and

the responsibility of handling the capital of the country. You have the diplomatic corps living here. They are the ones who send photographs of Delhi all over the world and say this is what the capital of India is like. It isn’t an easy place to administer. You do have powers but they are very restricted.

During your three terms as chief minister there was no confrontation with either the bureaucracy or the central government. Is it really a structural issue?

You have to work within the structure because it is a constitutional structure. Now if the political party in power wants to go against this constitutional structure, then it is bound to face problems and development will take a backseat.

If you want to do things which you are neither supposed to nor expected to do and you don’t have a congenial relationship with the Government of India (GoI) then I am afraid it’s not going to work.

I remember, during my first term as chief minister, the Atal Behari Vajpayee government was ruling at the centre. Yet, at that time, we got in CNG, the Metro, we privatised power, we did so much. When you are in government you can’t afford to be defiant. You have to work within the

framework that you have.

How difficult was it for you, given the limitations you had, to work with the bureaucracy?

It wasn’t difficult at all. Please remember — you fight an election to get into government. Governance is in your hands. You are going to make policies. Who implements those policies? Not the elected government. It is the bureaucrat. If you are in conflict with the bureaucracy, how do you expect your policies to be implemented? You are only a decision-maker where policies are concerned. Implementation is carried out from the secretary to the clerk in the government.

During your 15 years in office did you get the feeling that you were in a structure where the bureaucracy actually reported to the centre? I mean, they could thumb their noses and say they could go above your head.

No, not at all. Say, the bureaucrats brought a particular file to me. It would then go to the

‘If you are in conflict with the bureaucracy, how do you expect your policies to be implemented? You are only a decision-maker where policies are concerned. Implementation is carried out from the secretary to the clerk.’

Lieutenant-Governor (LG) who is appointed by the central government and represents it. The central government does not look at our files every day. It is the LG who does that job.

Believe me, not once did [Vijai] Kapoor or anyone have any differences with us. I would have a weekly meeting with the LG and tell him, ‘This is what we want to do, can we go ahead?’ He would say yes or he would suggest we do it differently. I would take the LG into confidence. You can’t have a government in conflict with the bureaucracy and the central government because then how will you govern?

But there is a feeling that the central government has been much too tough on AAP and gone out of its way to make them miserable. Do you think it was tougher for you?

Look, they have made it tough. It is about how you deal with the situation. If you are supposed to sit on this chair you will have a particular posture. Then, if you want to sit on a straight chair your posture will be different. You have an LG who has been appointed by the Centre. He’s got his powers. He is chairman of the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) which plans Delhi. You have to work within the framework you have.

Are there things within this framework you would sincerely advise the country to change?

Yes, I think the police — perhaps not the security part — but at least law and order should come under the Delhi government. Where law and order

is concerned, people look to the Delhi government for redress. It should be done. We tried too but the central government did not agree. They felt that Delhi’s law and order is far too sensitive and important to be directed by the state government. The central government believes they understand the implications better. So much happens here which doesn’t in other cities like Mumbai and Kolkata.

Is there anything else?

Well, you cannot go beyond the Constitution. We did try to change some things. But then Vajpayee called an election so the changes fell off the map. But we worked efficiently. The Metro project was just lying in the boxes of the government. We came in then. We coordinated with the central government. So if a *jhuggi* dwelling had to be moved because it was standing in the route of the Metro, we moved it. We didn’t say we won’t do it. You have to understand the special nature of the Delhi government.

The other sticking point is the civic authorities. The quality of life in the city is determined by what is happening in the municipalities. Do you see any alternative to the present arrangement between the Delhi government and the municipalities?

See, we trifurcated the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) because we thought one commissioner for this large city with its huge population wasn’t good enough.

How is one commissioner going to handle everybody’s requirements? But I must say that the MCD and the Delhi government worked together. We gave them funds. The rest of their job is quite clearly laid out.

But this is the administrative set-up all over the country. The municipalities don’t do the best work. You don’t, as a government, have a political hold over them.

One punishment you can give them is to tell them you won’t give them money. How will they pay their employees then?

So would you say the relationship between the Delhi government and the municipality is no different from any other state and it’s really a question of collaboration?

Yes. See what happens in Mumbai. You have the Shiv Sena on one side and there is constant conflict. Where does conflict lead? You are meant to govern. You chose to go into an election because you want to govern.

You are still remembered as Delhi’s most successful and charismatic leader. What do you think was the reason you were defeated so badly?

I feel I wasn’t vigilant enough. I didn’t take Kejriwal seriously. I thought the citizens of Delhi would know that they can’t get free water and free electricity. I gave them that much intelligence. By the time I woke up, the elections were seven or eight days away. Many members of my party told me to promise free water and electricity. I refused. I said it’s not a promise you can keep. I mean, we are already the cheapest power distributing city in the country. You don’t want to pay for anything and then you want top-class services. Then there was the 2G scandal of the central government.

And the Commonwealth Games?

The Commonwealth Games were one of the most successful in the world. The Shunglu Committee was put up in too much haste. Has it found anything? Nothing at all. And nobody appreciated the hard work the municipality, the Delhi government and the central government put in to make the Commonwealth Games a wonderful event.

When they announced my name at the opening ceremony there was huge applause. I thought I am done for. I mean 100,000 people had worked for this. But the government panicked. Not even one of them was thanked. I felt very disturbed. The Commonwealth Games did a lot for Delhi. It was an opportunity for the city to grow up. We did so much and then scolded ourselves for doing the right thing!

Do you think the campaign against corruption was an exaggerated one? Why didn’t you and the Congress party do something to counter it at that point?

I think, frankly, the party did not give us the kind of support we needed. It wasn’t support only for us but for the party too. After all, the central government was also involved. The Commonwealth Games weren’t done just by Delhi but by India. I think the central government was a little shaken by the 2G scam. The success of the Games got drowned out. Then the Nirbhaya case happened at about the same time.

Civil Society featured you as an activist CM in our magazine in its second issue. You saw NGOs and RWAs as partners in governance. Yet the social sector turned against you. Do you regret your interactions?

With all humility, I tried to do everything that I thought a democratic set-up ought to do, which meant getting people involved. Sometimes it was at the cost of upsetting our MLAs and MPs. They wondered, why does she go directly to the people? But it turned out to be a good decision. I think there was a sense of fatigue among people. Nobody spoke about bad work.

Your government was inclusive. Yet when it came to things like resettlement of evicted slums why was it difficult to carry it out in Delhi?

I have analysed this. You need space in the city. There are more people from UP and Bihar here than the original Delhiwallahs. I did think of making multistoried buildings for workers but it wasn’t feasible because the DDA would not allow it. ■



Trainers from AHEAD holding a meeting with families



A homestead garden with nutritious crops

AHEAD helps panchayats fill in the blanks

Subir Roy
Kolkata

THE countryside in Jalpaiguri and Alipurduar districts of North Bengal, nudging the Bhutan hills, as winter fades, is as pleasant, pretty and accessible as it can get. As the hard-topped road gives way to country tracks, the small car moves on two parallel grass strips, with the beaten path in between used by humans and of course that great hardy blessing of modern living, the motorbike.

Two other gifts of modern technology underline both the change taking place in the countryside and what country folk now take for granted. Electricity came a couple of years ago and the dish antenna popping out of an occasional tin roof bears testimony to the farm family's need for entertainment. The most recent addition is a little *pucca* toilet tucked into one corner of every courtyard. All these are in sharp contrast to the ancient farming technology — bullocks and plough — still being used.

Dulal Roy is a trainer in Salbari II gram panchayat of Dhupguri block in Jalpaiguri district and comes near the top of a pyramid. Under him is Sumitra Sarkar, who is an apprentice. (Apprentices are selected from women as that gives the programme better access to households.)

The two help 35 marginalised families make a dent in their poverty by connecting with various government schemes. Based on household survey data provided by AHEAD Initiatives, the families are chosen by the gram panchayat from the bottom 10 percent.

COMBATING HUNGER: AHEAD was set up in 2009 under Section 25 of the Companies Act to work with panchayati raj institutions as well as small rural NGOs. The acronym stands for

Addressing Hunger, Empowerment and Development.

Seeds and saplings from the gram panchayat are distributed to families to grow kitchen and nutritional gardens on their homestead land. They are helped to learn how to do vermicomposting and azolla cultivation.

Use of vermicompost is encouraged to avoid chemical fertilisers. Azolla, a fern that floats on water and is grown in shallow water tanks made out of plastic sheets, is a rich source of nutritional fodder for farm animals.

Seeds and saplings from the gram panchayat are distributed to families to grow kitchen and nutritional gardens on their homestead land. They also learn vermicomposting.

Families are also encouraged to grow “five fruits” (like papaya, *amla*, guava, pomegranate and lemon). This way, right at home, they have an affordable supply of all the fresh food and fodder that a rural family needs.

Beyond fruits and vegetables, families are also helped to rear small animals like chicken, ducks, goats and pigs. Dwijen Roy's homestead in Salbari I gram panchayat in Jalpaiguri district paints an idyllic rural picture with scooting poultry and bleating goats. Bimal and Bandani Bhagat in Madhya Khutumari village have made a success of rearing pigs. In their pens, these seem the most docile of creatures. Scared easily, all they seem to want to do is eat.

The novel part of the programme is introducing what is new in the region. The growing of capsicum and broccoli has caught on in a big way (they fetch a very good price in the market) and now there is a

demand for the introduction of mushrooms.

Plus, ‘activity groups’ grow different types of *dal* like *arhar* and *kalai* on panchayat or roadside land with seeds given to them by the panchayat, something they could not do earlier because land and seeds were not available. A double innovation is to have a couple of rows of *dal* cultivation as bio fencing or boundary markers for plots.

There is also an afforestation scheme called Briksha Patta under the rural employment guarantee scheme (MGNREGA). The idea is to have families look after nurseries of saplings and in

return get partial ownership of the saplings that survive. Under it, if 90 percent of saplings survive, the family gets Rs 10 per tree per month for three to five years, depending on the tree.

Through this a family is able to earn on average Rs 2,000 per month. Then (after maturity) when a tree is sold the family gets 75 percent of the proceeds and the gram panchayat 25 percent. But the minus point is that the success of the scheme has been varied.

The business model for the food and nutrition part of AHEAD's work runs something like this. The gram panchayat hands over seeds and saplings to the trainer, who through the apprentices passes them on to the targeted families. They are helped to grow them. A part of the seeds are returned by the apprentices to the gram panchayat and the rest is sold by the families and apprentices. They also get paid by the day for the training they receive (which they pass on to the families).

The apprentices and the families eat better and have more cash because of what they can sell. The gram panchayat pays the trainers at the semi-skilled rate under MGNREGA which is reimbursed by AHEAD.

Some gram panchayats are now paying the trainers ₹2,000 extra as they are found to be very useful. Payment to apprentices is also routed the same way, via the panchayat. There is no attempt to go beyond the panchayat while helping it.

CREATIVE LEARNING: Other than food and nutrition, the second major thrust area of AHEAD's agenda is education. The star at the quarterly meeting of senior schoolteachers and gram panchayat education officials of Kalchini block of Alipurduar district is Somnath Sarkar, head teacher, Bamandas Smriti Primary School in Mendabari gram panchayat. He is a winner of the national award for teachers in 2016 and receives a round of applause as he gets up to speak.

Bengali-speaking himself, the first point he makes is that at the earliest level children should be allowed to freely use their own language, in many cases a tribal one like Santhali. Later, a middle-aged teacher corroborates the point and recalls how she had to make do with the Bengali medium when she herself was a beginner. This will make children speak fluently, never mind the grammar, and thus quickly pick up the language.

He recalls that when AHEAD came to work with the gram panchayat initially teachers had some hesitation and the gram panchayat made it clear that there was no imposition. But over the years trust has grown as AHEAD has emphasised things like the need to get out of the classroom, the overarching aim being to make learning joyful. A later visit to Sarkar's school drives home the point. It is a noisy, happy school with the teachers making it a point to be accessible. Perhaps, most significantly,

the level of dropouts is low.

AHEAD, which began in Kalchini block of Alipurduar district in 2012, is seeking to help the public education set-up through handholding and helping shape the school curriculum and supplement it. The aim is to enable young people to have skills to earn a living in their area, to promote “contextually appropriate education” by looking at local endowments, in part with provision for after-school learning and vocational training.

It offers help through its specialised inputs, in particular audio-visual modules, skills and man hours. The audio-visual programme is a great hit and school attendance is better on the day it is on the school timetable. The gram panchayat took a lead in imparting local history and information on local industry and one of the most successful events was a visit by the children to a tea factory. Despite being in the heart of tea country with numerous tea gardens lining highways, this was the first exposure of many to how tea is actually made ready for the teapot.

By far the greatest achievement of AHEAD in the

working on to improve schooling outcomes through focus on areas like activity-based learning are contained in the National Curriculum Framework of 2005. But results obtained, exemplary in Kalchini, depend on the local resources available. AHEAD is pursuing the same agenda in Purulia district where a team was sent two years ago and recently a team has come from Purulia to Kalchini to see the progress being made there.

BEING A CATALYST: AHEAD Initiatives is a bit different from many other civil society organisations which see a gap in, say, an area like healthcare or schooling and do their bit to add to the supply in these areas. Instead of actually engaging in delivery, AHEAD seeks to be a catalyst which tries to help and support panchayati raj institutions do better in helping the rural marginalised live better lives. In this it also seeks the help of the various technical departments of the government.

Since 2009, AHEAD has remained focussed on panchayati raj institutions and local NGOs. AHEAD is headed by two 60-plus bearded gentlemen, Executive Chairman Abeer Chakravarty and Managing Director Rathnadeep De.

Highly articulate and informed with global and professional exposure, they have over time come to focus on building a local self-governance model which the voluntary sector can use to aid development at the grassroots. Chakravarty has been with Bates CHI, a part of the global advertising and public relations group, WPP. De, an alumnus of Imperial College, London, was earlier an adviser to the West Bengal government on rural decentralisation.

Chakravarty and De articulate the future along the following lines. “Through all that we do we are trying to devise what is replicable and scalable, evolve activity-based modules in education which try to bring together corporates and local government. Our dream is to have local NGOs who can promote PRI-corporate partnership so that local knowledge and corporate resources can be combined. Right now PRIs are somewhat alien to redefining the role of voluntary organisations.”

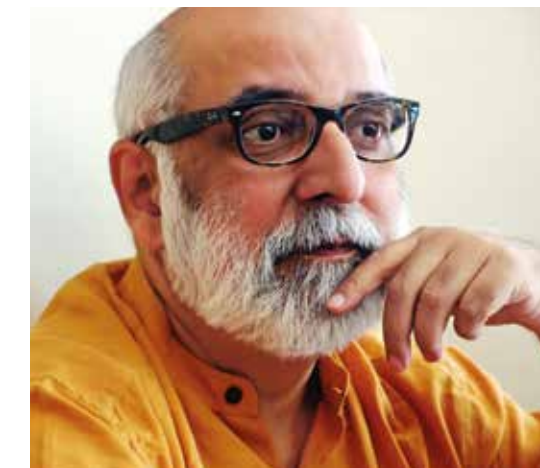
AHEAD works with 21 gram panchayats in three states in eastern India — mostly in West Bengal and also in Odisha and Jharkhand. It received initial support from organisations like British Petroleum, Rural Development Institute (now called LANDESA) and the Department of Science and Technology of the West Bengal government.

Most of the financial assistance on which it runs is contributed by iiINTERest, its Danish partner. This is a voluntary organisation which works for the betterment of the poor in developing countries by improving their livelihoods. Its chairman, Soren Jeppesen, a professor at the Copenhagen Business School, is a long-term friend and mentor.

AHEAD is able to work closely with officialdom because over the years the latter has found it useful. Rajesh Roy, executive assistant to Salbari II gram panchayat, frankly admits he was earlier “quite sceptical” about panchayat-civil society cooperation. But over time he has seen the cultivation of azolla, a new plant, become an “exemplary success”.

The same process has recurred as villagers have taken up the cultivation of other exotic vegetables

Continued on page 10



Abeer Chakravarty



Rathnadeep De

field of education is the Srijan Mela that was started in Kalchini block in Alipurduar district in 2016. Its star attraction is the stalls and presentations that the children put up, thus encouraging and capturing their creativity. The inspector of schools for the block, Rajat Ranjan Ghosh, affirms that the Srijan Mela has been adopted by Alipurduar district (the district magistrate loved his visit to the *mela*) with a “vengeance” and the district administration is trying to take it to other gram panchayats.

What AHEAD is trying to do in education is not something entirely novel. Most of the ideas that it is

Kisan Sabha's long road to Mumbai march

Amit Sengupta
New Delhi

WHEN nearly 50,000 farmers marched into Mumbai from the rural interiors of Maharashtra, they captured national and international attention for their demands of ownership of their traditional lands under the Forest Rights Act, higher minimum support prices for crops and waiving of loans.

The farmers arrived in the financial capital on 11 March, carrying red flags emblazoned with the symbol of the sickle and hammer. They had covered 180 km on foot from Nashik, rallying under the banner of the All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS).

There were traditional farmers and adivasis, many of whom marched almost without food or footwear because they were from among the poorest of the poor in the tribal areas of Palghar, Nandurbar, Thane, Nashik and Dhule in north Maharashtra.

"The long march was a collective effort of individuals, full-time workers and progressive grassroots and farmers' organisations led by the AIKS. So please don't highlight one individual only," said Vijoo Krishnan, joint secretary, AIKS, and former president of the Jawaharlal Nehru University Students Union (JNUSU) in Delhi. "It was the culmination of many mass struggles and a huge organisational effort for many months."

The AIKS traces its history to the freedom struggle. Founded in 1936, it was the peasant front of the undivided Communist Party of India (CPI) which was established in 1925. Mumbai was the nucleus of the communist movement at that time. The party's two biggest pillars of strength were Mumbai's working class and the cultural denizens of the city — the Indian Progressive Writers Federation with Munshi Premchand as its first president, and the Indian People's Theatre Association, which had legends like Sahir Ludhianvi, Kaifi Azmi, Salil Chaudhury, Balraj Sahni, Chetan Anand and Ritwik Ghatak as its members.

The sickle-and-hammer was the official logo of



Farmers marched 180 km from the rural interiors of Maharashtra into Mumbai

the famous Mehboob Studios in Mumbai.

The AIKS, along with the All-India Students Federation (AISF) and the All-India Trade Union Federation (AITUC), spread to Punjab, West Bengal, the Hindi heartland and Andhra Pradesh. Leftists say this is because Indian communists, heeding Lenin's advice, joined the Congress coalition led by Gandhi and Nehru. The communists penetrated the Congress Socialist Party and E.M.S. Namboodiripad became the president of the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee.

According to Krishnan, the AIKS is not directly affiliated to the CPI(M), despite the common

perception. "It is an independent formation with CPM members, but there are others too," he said. "In that sense, the CPM does not strictly have a peasants' front and it does not control the AIKS."

Although the AIKS comprises the poorest of the poor, including landless tribals, Dalits, OBCs, sharecroppers, small and middle farmers, it also includes big farmers. "We have a strong, united organisation," said Krishnan. "And we are not class-centric."

In Rajasthan, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh, AIKS has made local and national alliances with progressive groups

and grassroots movements, including the Narmada Bachao Andolan, Swaraj Abhiyan, National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM), among others. In the days to come, they plan to meld all these movements and widen their reach.

The AIKS has been consistently fighting for farmers' rights. Last year, it led a successful farmers' movement in Rajasthan with two specific demands: loan waiver and implementation of the Swaminathan Commission report. The movement

was led by former CPI(M) MP Hannan Mollah from West Bengal, and former MLA Amra Ram. Later, Ram went on to organise a huge three-day rally with farmers of western UP and Haryana, and invited former Tripura Chief Minister Manik Sarkar as chief guest.

LOGISTICS: The long march to Mumbai was a natural progression of the AIKS' agenda. How did it organise a march of this scale, and work out the logistics of feeding 50,000 farmers? All of them walked for four days in the blazing sun.

"We would march for long hours very early, much before dawn. Farmers and tribals would join in large groups during the course of the march. We had trucks carrying medicines and essential commodities. We would stop near a river. Neighbouring villagers would pour in with food, water and help. Basic food was cooked and collectively shared. Early morning, we would bathe in the river and continue the march," said Krishnan.

An activist who walked with the marchers said that after dark, while everyone rested, he thought that now he would get a good night's sleep under the open sky with a thin blanket. However, he was

woken up soon after midnight, to get ready to walk again. Indeed, the marchers were committed and resolute and eager to cover the long distance on foot.

They were also sure that they would *gherao* the assembly in Mumbai, and not return, come what may, unless they got an agreement "in writing".

Krishnan walked with the farmers for the first two days. He had to rush off to Odisha for a day, but was back for the final leg of the march as the farmers entered Mumbai on 11 March. That they preferred to walk an extra 25 km

at midnight to reach their destination, so that school students sitting for the board exams were not affected, touched the hearts of the citizens of Mumbai, and the rest of India.

According to Krishnan, several leaders and activists played a key role in organising and mobilising the people. Veteran CPI(M) MLA J.P.

Gavit played an extremely important role, along with Ajit Nawale, state secretary, AIKS, and Ashok Dhawale, president, AIKS, and others. "They had organised a massive 100,000-strong rally in Nashik in 2016, when we blocked the roads. Then, again, in Palghar, a 50,000-strong protest was organised by mostly tribals who came from deep interiors. Earlier, milk and vegetable supplies were blocked to Mumbai and other places by blockades. The Nashik to Mumbai march was the culmination of many such struggles," Krishnan said.

The AIKS is taking up two issues. First, to wean away farmers from mass suicides by forging a strong movement to secure their longstanding rights. Second, to fight communalism and hate politics.

It surprised Mumbaikars how disciplined and considerate the farmers were. Mumbai's residents, across the class spectrum, showered flower petals on them, *dabbawallahs* landed up with *pav bhaji* packets, locals lined the streets with water bottles and packets of biscuits, doctors rushed to bandage the weary and bleeding feet of women and men, while white-collar professionals went around neighbourhoods to collect slippers and sandals for them.

Almost all political parties, barring the BJP, came out in support of the farmers' march, including the Shiv Sena, part of the ruling alliance in Maharashtra, and the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena, led by Raj Thackeray. Aditya Thackeray, the Shiv Sena's young inheritor, was asked how come saffron had joined hands with red. "Their blood is red, like ours," he replied.

The march ended with the farmers extracting a promise from Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis that their demands would be met in the coming six months. The state government agreed to a farm loan waiver from 2001, implementation of the Forest Rights Act, 2006, including Community Forest Rights, sharing of water from 31 water projects and the river-linking projects with no displacement, and minimum support price for agricultural produce in line with the recommendations of the Swaminathan Commission.

But a much bigger gain from the march was that it succeeded in highlighting rural distress and striking a chord with the middle class and the wealthy. Also, it brought together farmers from different economic and social segments. ■



Vijoo Krishnan

Continued from page 9

like capsicum and broccoli which fetch a very good price. The panchayat trains the trainers, who in turn through the apprentices help the villagers learn how to cultivate the new items.

Dipankar Roy, the block development officer for Dhupguri block, is even more forthright. AHEAD, through a lot of brainstorming, has helped him "update" his information. In particular, the knowledge and technology for the cultivation of azolla, in an area where there is a shortage of green fodder, was very useful.

Roy admits that he himself tried to introduce azolla cultivation earlier when he was posted in the Darjeeling and Murshidabad districts, but didn't succeed. Now it is ubiquitous in 16 gram panchayats in Dhupguri. It is the same story with vermicomposting. Or take the simultaneous cultivation of bay leaf and lemon in tea gardens.

AHEAD has acted as a link between the gram panchayat and the beneficiary focusing on the absorption of a new idea which eventually leads to behavioural change. He has a phrase for the whole process: "living side by side, you do what you see others doing".

AHEAD feels that where it is successful, this is partly because there is continuity of commitment in gram panchayats. Take the case of Mendabari gram panchayat in Alipurduar district's Kalchini block where it started working when Abhijit Narjinari of the Congress was panchayat pradhan. He is still a panchayat member but today surrounded by Trinamool Congress members. But this does not affect his positive role. Bijoy Saiba, also a former pradhan and a current panchayat member, remains active and helpful. So is the present pradhan, Chandra Narjinari.

After the visit, two images abide. One is of *pucca*

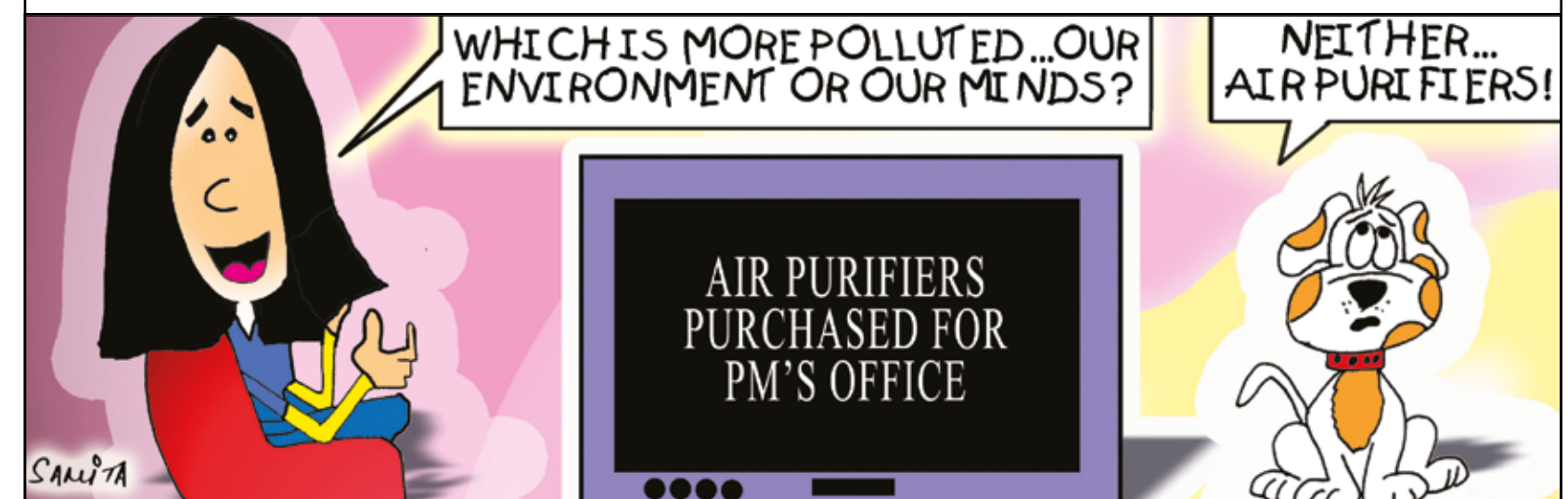
toilets everywhere, be it homesteads or schools. Sarkar, the prize-winning teacher, affirms that in his school the teachers and students clean the toilets. There is no designated cleaner for the toilets.

The other image is really a puzzle. Most of the people I meet to find out how the bottom 10 percent of the poor are being given a helping hand to emerge from poverty don't look as if they are the absolute poor, barring the odd middle-aged tribal woman.

One explanation for this is that the condition of the families AHEAD works with in North Bengal is different from those of the adivasis it works with in Purulia district of West Bengal and Simlipal and Mayurbhanj districts of Odisha. North Bengal showcases two successful areas — Dhupguri block in food, nutrition and livelihood security; and the entire Kalchini block in supporting and supplementing mainstream education with local content and also helping youth develop skills. ■

Samita's World

by SAMITA RATHOR



Goa does electric, biogas, ethanol bus trials

Derek Almeida
Panaji

WITH the exception of Vasco, which bears the brunt of coal dust pollution, the remaining cities in Goa have pollution levels that are below prescribed levels. But this has not stopped the Kadamba Transport Corporation (KTC), a public sector undertaking, from embarking on a journey to convert or replace its diesel engine buses with electric, biogas or ethanol ones.

The experiment started on 15 August last year when Sweden-based Scania was granted permission to operate biogas and ethanol buses on a trial basis. The reasoning was that since the Saligao garbage plant generates bio-gas from treatment of nearly 100 tonnes of garbage per day, it could be used as fuel for buses. The Saligao plant at present feeds the gas to two electric generators.

The trial, which ended on 15 February this year, was conducted at no cost to the KTC. "Scania provided the bus with a driver and support staff and we provided infrastructure as well as assigned routes for the test," said Derrick Pereira Neto, Managing Director of KTC. Revenue earned was collected by Scania which also had to procure the ethanol. In the case of the biogas bus, the arrangement was the same, with Scania procuring the fuel from Kolhapur.

While the KTC awaits the cost-benefit study of plying these two buses, another experiment is underway. On 15 February, Goldstone Infratech of Hyderabad which has a collaboration with BYD Auto Industry Company in China, began trial runs of an electric bus. The only difference between the two arrangements is that in the case of the electric bus, the revenue earned on trips goes to the KTC.

The trial run of the electric bus will end in July after which the KTC and the government will select the most suitable system, based on the feasibility studies done on all three buses.

Explaining the rationale for going electric, Neto said, "Goa is being over-exploited. Air pollution in itself is not a problem. But there is need to be vigilant about the environment. Clean transport is therefore an important statement. KTC was selected by the state government to go green."

But this is easier said than done. While going green is an ideal, the switchover will come at a considerable cost to KTC and the government.

Explaining the economics of going green, Neto said, "KTC cannot afford to buy green buses as they are five to six times more expensive than diesel vehicles. The only way around this problem is to hire buses and pay per km travelled." But even here the maths does not favour KTC.

Due to social services provided by the KTC, such as monthly passes, concessions to students and senior citizens, running of buses on non-profitable routes and providing its staff of 2,029 with Pay Commission salaries and benefits, KTC is always in the red and relies on handouts from the government.

At operation level, the picture is also alarming. KTC has projected an operating loss of ₹3.43 crore



An electric bus has been launched on an experimental basis



Chief Minister Manohar Parrikar at the launch of the electric bus service



Derrick Pereira Neto, Managing Director of KTC



Nikhil Desai, Director of Transport

The trial run of the electric bus will end in July after which the KTC and the government will select the most suitable system based on studies done on all three buses.

for the year 2016-17. It earned ₹55.90 per km and spent ₹57.04 per km.

Neto said that Himachal Pradesh has hired 20 electric buses at a cost of ₹87 per km. At this rate the operating expenditure of KTC, which has 546 large and mini buses, will nearly double and so will its losses.

"Second, for electric buses to be cost-effective, they have to have a daily run of at least 300 km, which is not possible in a small state like Goa where KTC buses travel a maximum of 200 km a day," explained Neto. The only way out is to bargain hard and bring down the rate per km to an acceptable level.

Even as KTC grapples with the pros and cons of going green, the Department of Transport (DoT) is laying the foundation for a green transport service. The biggest hurdle, though, is that in Goa the public bus transport system is divided between the private

and public sector with the former holding a larger share with around 1,500 buses.

Director of Transport Nikhil Desai is aware of the input costs of going green. "The drive will have to come from the government," he said, "there is a huge capital investment in electric buses and the private sector might not be able to afford it."

Despite this, the transport department is doing the groundwork for switching to electric vehicles. In January this year a notification exempting fully electric vehicles from payment of road tax, which is 12 percent of the invoice value, was issued.

The Goa Tourism Development Corporation (GTDC) has already floated a tender to set up around 500 electric bikes with charging stations. "The company which bags the tender will have to create the charging stations and we will provide space at GTDC hotels," said Desai. "The bikes will be able to travel a distance of 30 km per charge and will be used to explore city bylanes or for birdwatching trips."

The department is approaching its task with a modicum of caution. It plans to first get small operators like two-wheeler taxis and rickshaws to switch over and hopes to create a cascading effect on other modes.

Desai is aware that the biggest challenge is to create charging infrastructure. "This will have to be a multi-departmental effort involving the transport, PWD and tourism departments."

The transport director has already begun talks with Anurag Singh, senior manager, business development, National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC), which has shown interest in setting up charging infrastructure at its own cost.

"If Goa comes up with a plan to set up infrastructure for charging vehicles, we will provide all the support and guidance," said Singh.

NTPC is already in the process of working out a charging station plan for the cities of Jabalpur and Dehradun. "Plans for these two cities are yet to be finalised and we are in the process of evaluating the number of vehicles and chalking out the routes."

The offer by NTPC will save Goa huge infrastructure investments as the company is willing to bear the entire cost which it plans to recover through revenue for charging vehicles.

Desai is unfazed about the expense. "The high cost is because electric vehicle manufacture is a sunrise sector. You might recall that LED bulbs were prohibitively expensive when they first came into the market. Costs dropped drastically as consumption increased. The same economic principle will apply to e-vehicles," he says. ■

Open prisons are cheaper, better, says study



The Sanganer Open Prison

Amit Sengupta
New Delhi

RAJASTHAN'S open prisons may become the model for prison reforms in the rest of the country because they have been found to be humane, safer and inexpensive to maintain.

The successes in Rajasthan's open prisons have been highlighted in research done by Smita Chakraburty, a criminologist from Kolkata, now based in Jaipur. Her findings have found resonance in the Supreme Court.

India has only 60 open prisons, but an important proposal before the Union government is to have two open prisons in each of the 640 districts of the country.

The proposal is a long way from being adopted but it has the potential of transforming the way people who have not committed heinous crimes are incarcerated.

Chakraburty was asked to study the open prison system in Rajasthan and elsewhere in India and make recommendations. She interviewed 428 prisoners in 15 open prisons of Rajasthan.

In addition she looked at closed prisons and documented the experiences of prisoners in 58 prisons of Bihar.

Justice K.S. Jhaveri, executive chairman of the Rajasthan State Legal Services Authority and the second seniormost judge in the Rajasthan High Court, has endorsed her report submitted in November 2017. The report was released in the public domain on 20 November — National Law Day. The Chief Justice of Rajasthan launched the report and it has been forwarded to all DGs of prisons across the country.

Chakraburty has found that an open prison is 70 percent cheaper than a closed prison. For instance, the cost per prisoner in Jaipur Central Jail's closed prison is ₹7,094 per month. However, at the famously successful Sanganer Open Prison, near Jaipur, the cost per prisoner is only ₹500 per month. There are about 356 prisoners in the Sanganer Open Prison. Open prisons require only one staffer per 80 prisoners, unlike the huge staff and security apparatus in closed prisons.

Huge infrastructure is not needed for open prisons. Multi-storied residential areas can be built or two-room modest homes for families. In rural and forest areas, huts can be constructed by the prisoners as a collective effort and local craft, agriculture and small-scale cottage industries can become integral to the political economy of the open prisons.

Pregnant women, mothers, women who have been isolated by their families or communities, single women, and those with disability, can live productive, creative and healthy lives in a shared space in an open prison.

Explained Chakraburty: "In Rajasthan there is no specific open prison for men or women. They are gender neutral, all prisoners staying in open prisons stay with their families. They are more like prisoner colonies where both male and female prisoners live. Prisoners who are single can come to the open prison and marry and remarry. Sometimes, marriages are arranged by other inmates. I have come across several male prisoners getting married to non-prisoners after they come to stay in the open

prison. However, the female prisoners I met who had married after coming to open prisons were all married to other male prisoners. Women prisoners sometimes stay alone with either a distant relative taking care of them. Other prisoners also work as their functional family.

"Pregnant prisoners are allowed special parole for a long period of time. This is a good practice in Rajasthan. Prisoners bring up their children and the prison department helps them in getting admission in nearby government schools. There is a creche in the Sanganer Open Prison, but it's not well maintained. Interestingly, children from nearby areas also come inside the prison to study and play in the creche."

The Sanganer Open Prison, established in the 1960s, has been a success. Many convicted prisoners, including those charged with murder, have been given space here after years of good conduct in closed jails. People leave in the morning and are asked to report in the evening. There is only one official overseeing the prison. Families live in their homes and share collective spaces. They celebrate festivals and have community meetings. Many men work as security guards in the neighbourhood, proving that locals trust them.

Women work as domestic workers and get other jobs as well. Many of them sell vegetables in a market near the flyover close to the jail. There has not been a single case of a prisoner running away, or any prisoner breaking the law.

"Most prisoners are aware that they will be sent



Smita Chakraburty

back to the closed prison if they are found committing crimes," said Chakraburty. "Hence, such violations are almost zero."

So much so that often the DGs of prisons are trapped in a dilemma because some prisoners refuse to leave their "homes" after their terms are over. Indeed, Tihar Jail in Delhi has also started a successful open jail programme recently, with a very positive DG helping in running it.

Chakraburty said that undertrials, those who have not committed heinous crimes, or are not criminal gangsters, those who have got involved in accidental crimes, or petty thefts, and women and old people should all be accommodated in the open prison system.

Prisoners develop a sense of self-reliance when they stay here. They have to earn a living and support their families. It is a trust-based system where the onus of liberty is on the prisoner.

Chakraburty had many positive experiences while conducting her research. She recalls: "I was inspecting a prison in Bihar. It was after sundown, at about 9 pm. Thus, the prison authority had to lock up the prisoners and I was with them in their ward. I thought I would continue my interactions even after lock-up time. Hence, after I entered a ward, the prison authorities locked me in with the prisoners. I was in the lock-up in an overcrowded ward with 80 to 100 male inmates who surrounded me in order to speak to me. There was barely any space to stand. There was a sudden power cut inside the prison and it was pitch-dark for several minutes. For the first time in all these years of working closely with the prisoners, I felt vulnerable. If anyone misbehaved with me, I wouldn't be able to identify the individual. However, when the power returned, I noticed that all the prisoners had collected on another side of the ward — maintaining a distance from me. Later, a prisoner told me that since I had entered the prison without guards, they knew that I was inside the prison for the 'prisoners' welfare' and to hear them out. Thus, they felt that my security was their concern."

She narrated another incident: "I was in the Jyetsar Open Prison in Sri Ganganagar district in Rajasthan. The prison was composed of small, makeshift mud-huts. There was no electricity. I was sitting in the middle of a field, under a tree, interviewing prisoners. After some time I realised that some prisoners were constantly standing behind me. I requested them to go away. But they refused to go. I didn't like the idea of people standing behind me and staring into my laptop. Later, a prisoner told me that if they had moved away I would not have had any shade from the sun. Hence, they stood behind me, providing me shade from the scorching Rajasthan summer sun!"

She said that inmates of closed prisons hardly get to meet their families. In most cases the family is destroyed if the prisoner is the sole earning member. Imprisonment of one individual has a huge social impact.

However, in an open prison prisoners get to live with their families. They feel less estranged from society and aspire to go back to living normal lives. ■



Inmates can live with their families and work outside the prison

APPOINTMENT



विकास प्रबंधन संस्थान
Development Management Institute

March 13, 2018

DIRECTOR, DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE (DMI)

Development Management Institute (DMI), Patna, invites applications for the position of Director. DMI was set up by Government of Bihar as an autonomous institute with the mission to "empower and usher in participatory governance and management of institutions, enterprises and resources for enhancing livelihoods and generating sustainable development". Since its inception in 2014, DMI has successfully emerged from its initial phase with excellent faculty, and teaching and research programs. DMI aspires to be among the top academic Institutes in India and Asia and make a meaningful impact on the development sector through its teaching and research activities.

The ideal candidate would have a mix of teaching, research and/or development experience. Prior experience of managing multiple stakeholders including faculty, students, recruiting organizations and the Government would be desirable. The Director is supported by an eminent autonomous Board, outstanding faculty and administration. The Director would have the opportunity to build a new Institution and have considerable freedom to shape it in line with the mission.

DMI offers a two-year full-time Post-Graduate Programme, accredited by AICTE, in Development Management (PDM) for Development Management Professionals. It also offers short duration programs for practising development professionals, policy makers and Government functionaries. Its faculty are also very active in research, case writing and studies for the development sector and the Government.

Applications with exhaustive biodata giving educational qualifications, and details of teaching, research and praxis, may be sent by April 15th to:
Chairman, Development Management Institute (DMI) Second Floor (11th Floor), Udyog Bhawan, East Gandhi Maidan, Patna, Bihar - 800004
and over email to: chairman@dm.ac.in and skumar@dm.ac.in
Shri Suman Kumar, Manager(Admin.)
The application format may be downloaded from DMI's website link, <https://www.dmi.ac.in/dir-rec/format.doc>

In Vadgam Mevani talks women's health

Tanushree Gangopadhyay
Ahmedabad

ON International Women's Day, Jignesh Mevani, Dalit leader and MLA, launched a 'Maasik Jode Mitrata' or 'Befriending Menstruation' campaign in Vadgam to eradicate the social discrimination girls and women face during their monthly menstrual cycle.

The campaign was launched in Mevani's

In Bharakhawada village on National Highway 8 near Palanpur, Sarpanch Majula Parmar led the campaign. She said her husband's liberal attitude made it possible for her to spread word about the campaign in her village.

Three hundred girls and women attended the initial meeting. Two sewing machines were given to the village. Kailas, a tailor, stitched the first sanitary pad. "Pads are easy to stitch," she said. "The cotton fabric was already cut to the right size. We merely

stitched it to the perfect shape. If we can buy this fabric easily from the market, stitching is not difficult. I can teach the other women."

Priyanka of the Vadgam Vikas Samiti said they were shocked to find out that girls and women used a synthetic cloth, generally used for dusting, during their menstrual cycle and, since there was no disposal system, left the cloth in the fields.

"After a lot of research we found eco-friendly cotton sanitary pads being manufactured in south India. We got 150 couriered. We never imagined such an overwhelming response from the girls and women. We were compelled to gift only one pad to each girl. Since the pad can be reused for a year, they can stitch it for themselves later."

A doctor from Palanpur Civil Hospital spoke to the women and explained that menstruation was a natural process which enabled women to give birth. "Since you give birth how can you be considered



Sanitary napkins being distributed to the women



Kailas, a tailor, demonstrates how sanitary pads can be stitched

constituency, Vadgam, by his organisation, the Rashtriya Dalit Adhikar Manch, in partnership with the Vadgam Vikas Samiti.

"The campaign is my tribute to the women who voted me to the Vidhan Sabha. Many of them observed *roza* and fasted to help me. I owe it to them as their elected representative," said Mevani, admired for his outspoken speeches.

"During the next five years I will ensure that every village school has separate toilets for girls," says the gender-sensitive MLA. "Far too many taboos are imposed on girls and women during their menstrual cycle and when they give birth. Our caste-ridden society considers them 'impure' and confines them to some corner of the home. They are compelled to use old or coarse fabrics, which could cause health problems."

He also underlined the importance of reproductive health programmes and those concerning women and girls. "We have started a dialogue on menstrual health. Getting resources to sustain the campaign won't be a problem. We will make this a regular project and spread it to other districts," says Mevani.

He was recently detained in Dahod, a tribal district, for protesting against the government's decision to hand over a government hospital to the private sector.



Jignesh Mevani

'We have started a dialogue on menstrual health. Getting resources for the campaign won't be a problem. We will make it a regular project and spread it,' says Mevani.

impure?" she said.

There were men present too which Bhavna Ramrakhiani of the Vadgam Vikas Samiti said was revolutionary. "We challenged patriarchy in this remote village and attempted to break taboos surrounding menstruation. Women shy away from drying their menstrual cloth in the sun and often leave it in dark unhygienic places."

The Rashtriya Dalit Adhikar Manch spent ₹40,000 for the pilot programme. The two sewing machines which were gifted to the village were bought for ₹7,000 each.

Ramrakhiani was confident that cotton fabric for the sanitary pads could be made easily available. Kanodar, an adjacent village, used to export cotton to Dhaka centuries ago, she said. There are several Vankar or weaver communities in the constituency and their profession could receive a fillip, thanks to demand for cloth to stitch sanitary pads.

Surprisingly, Mevani faced criticism from Romel Sutaria, a local activist who works with tribals. He accused Mevani of wanting to emulate the Hindi film Padman and ridiculed him. Mevani was taken aback by Sutaria's comments.

"This is most shocking from a comrade. He is the last person I expected criticism from," he remarked. But feminists and local women were all smiles and they backed him enthusiastically. ■

PICTURES BY SHREE PADRE



Govind Bhai from Rajasthan (second from left), in Kerala's Kasaragod district

Rajasthan's *ada bore* travels south

Shree Padre
Kasaragod

GOVIND Bhai of Nimas village in Nagore district of Rajasthan has a grassroots technology that is in demand in rural Maharashtra, Goa and Kerala. He is an expert in '*ada bore*', a method of digging bore wells horizontally instead of vertically.

In Kasaragod district of Kerala, people are intrigued by Govind Bhai's *ada bore* technology. The horizontal bore well, drilled with an electric motor, is new to Kerala. "This is like digging a *suranga*," many spectators remarked after seeing Govind Bhai's technique.

The *suranga* is a manmade horizontal cave for water (See *Civil Society* July 2016). For farmers of Padre village, the *ada bore* seemed a Godsend, a low-cost way of drilling a miniature *suranga* in a day or two.

Twenty-five years ago, Govind Bhai, who was born into a family of farmers, joined a team that was digging an open well for his family. The team had to dig 300 feet to finally strike ample water. But the very next year the water source began dwindling. Govind Bhai thought things through and decided to dig horizontally from inside the well.

He went to Sojat city and got local fabricators to design a mechanised drilling unit. Armed with this drilling apparatus, he dug his first horizontal bore well. He drilled more than 300 feet, and augmented the water source in a big way. Govind Bhai now found himself in demand locally. His

neighbours asked him to dig horizontal bore wells for them too and that became his main profession.

Horizontal bore wells are more sustainable than vertical ones because they tap water only from



The *ada bore* taps water only from shallow aquifers



Most horizontal wells are dug from inside open wells

shallow aquifers. Such bore wells can be recharged with rainwater every monsoon. Also, an ordinary pump can easily lift this water. Best of all, horizontal bore wells don't drastically shrink groundwater so they don't attract the wrath of neighbouring farmers.

Work took Govind Bhai and his team to Maharashtra. After a few years a doctor from Goa took Govind Bhai's team to his state. That was 17 years ago. Goa became Govind Bhai's second home. Every summer he travelled to Goa from his village in Rajasthan to carry out water works. Apart from *ada bore* drilling, his team specialised in open well digging, well concrete ring making and desilting of wells and earthen tanks.

Govind Bhai's assistants, who went with him 17 years ago, have all become successful entrepreneurs doing the same work. The horizontal bore well proved to be amazingly successful in Goa. Almost all horizontal wells in Goa are dug from inside open wells. Govind Bhai recalls the case of Madhu Marathe who got enough water in his *ada bore* well to instal a 5 hp pumpset for irrigation. Harshad Prabhu Desai, a farmer from Ponda, used to get water for only one hour in summer from his well. Four years ago he had got three *ada bore* wells dug. He can now run his 5 hp pump for 12 hours a day. But this technology can't help farmers who have heavily exploited their groundwater.

ADA BORE OVERTAKES SURANGA: In Kasaragod district of Kerala, farmers have taken to Govind Bhai's *ada bore* technology, which in Kannada is called *adda bore*. The reason is that the *suranga*, a very useful traditional technology, has of late become difficult for ordinary people to make.

The reason is that just a handful of *suranga* diggers are left. Since labour is expensive, the cost of getting a *suranga* dug has climbed sky-high.

Shrinivasa Bhat Angraje got three *ada bore* wells dug in a few weeks this February. One had to be abandoned after drilling because it entered a hollow area. Though drilling had to be halted because stones got in the way, all three *ada bore* wells have struck water. The water flows on its own due to gravity. No pump is required. "I am really satisfied," said Angraje.

Angraje is the third farmer who opted for an *ada bore* well. Umesh Saale got three *ada bore* wells dug and Shivaprakash Paleppady two. Both are happy. Needless to say, Govind Bhai was flooded with orders and had to bring in one more drilling team so that he could meet this rising demand.

The concept of drilling bore wells horizontally is not new to places on the Kerala-Karnataka border. For three decades, Muhammad, who rechristened himself '*adda bore* Muhammad', has been drilling horizontal tube wells manually. His team must have dug over 1,000 such '*adda bores*' with a satisfactory success rate. But his method has limitations. He is unable to drill for more than 50 feet. With labour becoming expensive, Muhammad finds it difficult to find helpers. In Govind Bhai's method the drilling is mechanised. He uses a 7.5 hp three-phase motor which can drill about 10

Continued on page 18

Tribals switch back to organic

Bharat Dogra
Ranchi

IN Rajnagar block of Saraikela Kharsawan district of Jharkhand, the Centre for World Solidarity (CWS) and Welthungerhilfe, an organisation fighting against hunger, are implementing a project to revive organic farming. The district is populated mainly by tribal communities, who according to official surveys have the highest rate of malnutrition in India.

The project is part of a bigger initiative called 'Safe foods — India for Eco-foods'.

"Until a few years ago we were all organic farmers practising traditional farming. Then, some of us got lured by chemical fertilisers. We thought this method would help us increase production quickly. Soon we got attracted to chemical pesticides as well. But most farmers regretted their decision," says Hemanti Hemram, a community leader with CWS.

Anand Mahto, local coordinator of the project, says, "Our training for organic farming practices finds a receptive audience since people

were already having second thoughts about their piecemeal adoption of chemical agriculture."

Why were they upset? "Very soon we started having health problems," says Saraswati Soren of Sursi village. "We realised that chemically grown food does not suit us at all. We felt very weak. We started suffering from indigestion, gastric and other problems which we never suffered from earlier. Some of us got quite ill. We then realised that what we might have gained in production we lost in terms of health and nutrition."

The switch to traditional organic farming has had other beneficial spin-offs. Lalita Kisho, an

enterprising farmer, found and re-introduced a cherished short-duration rice variety in the village. Villagers rediscovered their traditional diet. They realised that they could consume traditional varieties of rice even without pulses and vegetables. "Traditional rice is filling and healthier, unlike the rice we used to grow with commercial seeds and chemical fertilisers," said Kisho.

Fortunately, in these villages traditional seeds are



The women farmers of Sursi village

still available although work has to be done to ensure adequate access to these seeds for all farmers.

In Gondamara village, Pali Birali and Jayanti Soi relate a similar story of health deterioration after the advent of chemically grown crops. With great pride they say that recently a group of 13 farmers, including women, received the Participatory Guarantee System, a form of organic certification in which farmer-producer groups certify each other.

This opens up possibilities of improving income and livelihoods by returning to organic roots. As Mahto says, "In the course of our training we do not really feel we are saying anything new. We also learn

from tribal and traditional farming systems and try on this basis to correct the distortions which have been introduced rather thoughtlessly and indiscriminately."

Lakhiram Sardar, a farmer of Arjunvilla village, with his wife, Roibari, transformed his two-acre rocky land into a verdant field, fecund with crops. Earlier, he had tried his hand at chemical-intensive farming and felt disenchanted by its high costs and low quality of farm produce. He then shifted to his previous farm, considered a wasteland. He used organic manure from his cows, bullocks, goats, poultry and fallen leaves to create a rich topsoil which now yields a diversity of foods.

Sardar grows not just paddy but also legumes, vegetables, oilseeds and fruits including radish, tomatoes, chillies, amaranth, gram, mustard, potato, blackberries, lemons, guava, mango, oranges, berries, kundru, bitter gourd, beans, cauliflower and papaya. This year, his yield declined due to health problems in the family, but in a normal year he has been able to earn ₹150,000 from his small farm.

One reason for this is that his cultivation expenses are minimal. Apart from the payment he makes for electricity and to his workers, he has no other expenses. But water is scarce.

Marketing facilities are not good. Despite this, due to costs being very low, he is able to earn a reasonable income. If water availability increases and marketing facilities improve, his income can increase further.

Not all farmers can equal Sardar in his commitment and devotion to farming, but there were quite a few farmers, especially women, whom I met in the villages of Jharkhand who are very keen to put in a lot of time and hard work to improve farming. Recent efforts to promote organic farming can help tribal farmers return to their organic roots, improve nutrition, and increase their income. ■

Continued from page 17

metres per hour if the soil is loose.

Horizontal bore wells are drilled from inside open wells and earthen tanks too. The platform of the drilling unit is carefully mounted with the correct alignment. The drilling bit, which is four inches in diameter, is attached to the motor. It drills into the soil and two workers manually move the motor forward with the aid of a simple system. Water is pumped inside the drilling rod with another motor. This water mixes with drilled loose soil and comes out through the hole. This way, the drilled soil is taken out.

Once the rod enters the soil — each rod is a metre long — the motor is pulled back and another drilling rod fitted. The process is repeated until drilling reaches the required distance. Govind Bhai's team has the capability of drilling up to 100 metres.

But if a stone comes in the way, the bit can't drill. Kasaragod farmers are inserting perforated PVC pipes inside the *ada bore* to prevent soil from collapsing within the bore well in the long run and blocking the supply of water.

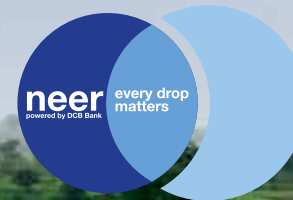
This semi-mechanised horizontal bore well drilling methodology is farmer-friendly technology. But it is still very crude. One of the biggest problems is that just one stone in the digging route is enough to block the whole effort. The team needs to be equipped with powerful drilling bits that can cut through at least some stones. Also, small technical problems creep in while digging, wasting the team's time and energy. These issues need to be fine-tuned.

"Horizontal drilling is required for road work, cable laying and so on. We have very expensive and efficient imported machines that carry out such work efficiently. Govind Bhai's technology is an

inexpensive *jugaad*. In Rajasthan we have a number of such machines that can drill horizontal and vertical bore wells," says Jagjeet Singh Narang, editor of *Boring Today*, a magazine published from Jaipur, "If our IITs and our engineering brains collaborate with these teams, improve their efficiency and do some trouble shooting, it would be far more useful for farmers. Instead of supporting truck-mounted rigs that cost a fortune, governments should support these tiny systems that offer livelihood options for poor families."

The *ada bore* can provide water for years if rainwater falling in its catchment area is harvested by making small trenches and pits. Drilling too many *ada bores* without recharging won't be a productive exercise. So while *ada bore* is an inexpensive technology, it has to be used judiciously. ■

Contact Govind Bhai at 94622 62305 / 95711 44524



DCB BANK



Water for Life.

Project Neer at Hirve village was started in Makhada 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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How inclusive are Indian companies?

An index nudges the top 100 to do better

Civil Society News
New Delhi

THE top 100 listed companies in India could do better by way of inclusion, according to an index of socially responsible policies in the corporate sector. Overall, the picture that emerges from the index is of a continuing distance between the interests of managements and shareholders on the one hand and communities and workers on the other.

Companies seem to conflate corporate social responsibility (CSR) with inclusion when it is the latter which should be integral to their business processes so that they can spread the benefits of economic growth.

The India Responsible Business Index (IRBI) is in its third year and is the result of a collaborative effort by Corporate Responsibility Watch, Oxfam India, Change Alliance, Praxis Institute for Participatory Practices and Partners in Change.

The index is based on data drawn from public disclosures made by 100 companies, beginning with Business Responsibility Reporting (BRR), which is meant to reflect compliance with the National Voluntary Guidelines (NVG) framed in 2011 by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs on the social, environmental and economic responsibilities of businesses.

The NVG have nine principles of social inclusion. The IRBI measures five of them: non-discrimination in the workplace, respecting employee dignity and human rights, community development, inclusiveness in the supply chain and community as stakeholders.

BRR was made mandatory by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) for the top 100 and now 500 companies based on market capitalisation. Additionally, companies are required to spend two percent of profits on corporate social responsibility (CSR).

The IRBI captures what companies are telling society about themselves. Apart from BRR, research has been done into annual reports, websites and policy pronouncements. An effort has also been made to elicit responses from managements.

In addition to the top 100 companies this year the researchers have also looked at the data of a subset of 23 companies, which are no longer in the top 100, for the sake of making comparisons over three years. Also, two of the 100 companies, Vedanta and Cairn, merged — technically making the number 99.

The purpose of the index is not to condemn or shame companies but instead to help them see themselves as the agents of change and development they can be.

The private sector's success is important for economic growth. But in an economy where disparities are stark and complex and slow to narrow, it is important to be formally committed to spreading prosperity.

To remain socially relevant, companies need their managements to be inclusive in their thinking and processes. It was to this end that the NVG were framed.



The index is a collaborative effort. Members of the research team at the Praxis

office in Delhi: Shireen Kurian, Pragya Shah, Dheeraj, Sowmya Bharadwaj and Ekta Verma

While BRR and the two-percent rule are mandatory, it is the NVG that embody the spirit of inclusivity. The index seeks to put the focus on voluntary guidelines so that managements go beyond what is mandatory and are encouraged to be innovative in their quest to be accountable not just to shareholders but to society at large.

Public disclosures serve the purpose of building confidence in the private sector's commitment to equity and nation-building. It is important for companies to be regarded as being connected to social realities and not driven by profits alone.

The need to make disclosures has prompted companies to think afresh about their policies and practices, be it on discrimination in the workplace or connecting with communities or curbing pollution.

"Business and human rights is now the buzzword in companies," says Dheeraj, senior programme officer at Praxis and one of the lead researchers, citing an example. "In some company reports you will find human rights mentioned upfront which is a big change. Three years ago, we never saw any such mention."

However, it is clear much remains to be done. Tom Thomas, convener of Corporate Responsibility Watch (CRW), writes in the preface to the index: "After three years of IRBI analysis, we see very little perceptible change. Banks are still not reporting on supply chain and community as a stakeholder is still not in the DNA of companies. It is also disappointing to note that high disclosure is only in

The need to make disclosures has prompted companies to think afresh about their policies and practices, be it on discrimination in the workplace or connecting with communities or curbing pollution.

areas that are legally mandated, defeating the very purpose of voluntary disclosure. Unfortunately, there is seemingly little effort from businesses, the ministry, SEBI or the government to make a difference."

1 NON-DISCRIMINATION IN THE WORKPLACE

Companies are expected to have a policy on non-discrimination in place. A policy enables a company to recruit people who have faced discrimination. The index finds out if companies use the terms non-discrimination and equal opportunities while hiring and promoting employees and if board members too

are selected on this basis. The index also assesses if companies have systems to ensure that there is non-discrimination and diversity in the workplace.

More than 50 companies reported that they had identified women, Scheduled Castes (SC), persons with disabilities and religious minorities as vulnerable groups. Ninety-six companies disclosed the number of women in their workforce. But only 18 companies mentioned Scheduled Tribes. Thirty-two companies mentioned sexual minorities.

"When we started, we didn't think that companies would write openly about caste-related dimensions as part of their policy," says Dheeraj. "After all, affirmative action is not mandated. Three companies have started disclosing. Tata Steel is clearly making public the SC/ST percentage in its workforce. Also, Bajaj Finance and Godrej are disclosing the number of SC/ST people they hire."

More companies now have anti-sexual harassment policies in place and disclose whether cases were filed and action taken. "One reason is that this law is mandatory," says Anusha, programme manager, communications, with Praxis. Only four companies didn't have systems in place.

But the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act doesn't seem to have made a dent on recruitment. Only 19 companies had a policy to hire people with disabilities. And 24 companies didn't disclose their commitment to non-discrimination in their recruitment process.

2 EMPLOYEE DIGNITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The index looks at company policies on freedom of association, wages, worker rights, workplaces and labour issues, including child labour and safety training.

There hasn't been much change since the last report. While majority of the companies — 68 and 52 respectively — recognise association of employees and collective bargaining only 16 companies disclose systems and mechanisms that show commitment to it. They kept very few records of how many people were part of those unions. None extended the right of association to contract workers or temporary employees.

In fact, contract workers don't seem to figure in most company's calculations. Bigger companies in the mining, power, oil and gas sectors did not even report the number of contract workers they hired.

Only six companies, including Bajaj Auto, HDFC Finance and BPCL, said they extend social benefits to contract workers. Bajaj Auto has a Charter of Fair and Responsible Workplace Guidelines for Contract Labour. HDFC ensures minimum wages and social security benefits to its contract employees.

Only 24 companies — six less than in the 2016 report — explicitly stated their commitment to ensuring minimum wages. Six companies stated they were committed to providing fair living wages.

"We first see if they recognise fair living wages as something they want to incorporate in their wage calculation system and what are the criteria they are using. Hindustan Unilever is disclosing this in a detailed way. They incorporate cost of health, education and housing into their wage structure," explain Dheeraj and Anusha. Emami too claimed it provided fair living wages.

While 91 companies reported that they were committed to health and worker safety, 40 companies still need to disclose systems to assess this. Most companies have knowledge systems to prevent child labour but systems to assess worker rights and labour issues were abysmal with 90 companies not disclosing systems for assessing both.

"That is the scene with permanent workers. With contractual labour it is worse," says Dheeraj. "Labour as a constituency has weakened." Neither employment policies nor social benefits are extended to them. The report recommends a law on contract labour.

3 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The NVG recognise the positive role companies can play in improving the lives of marginalised communities.

The index assesses CSR policies and strategies of companies, and whether these are shaped in partnership with communities and reflect their needs. On the whole, companies do well. Companies identifying marginalised groups for projects rose from 81 in 2016 to 86 in 2017.

"In community development, companies are willing to commit more and have more robust policies in place. They are very open to disclosing activities they are doing and the sectors they are working on. In this area, they have been consistently scoring well. But their assessment systems, both needs assessment and impact assessment are still weak," explains Dheeraj. Eighty-four companies

failed to assess the needs and aspirations of the community before planning their CSR projects.

Companies are still mostly unwilling to work in backward, remote areas. Eighty-one companies didn't disclose identification of backward regions as an important aspect for CSR projects. "Only 16 companies have this as part of their policy. CSR expenditure is largely concentrated in industrialised states. So, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu will have more expenditure. But in terms of actual practice we have not gone into that," said Dheeraj.

4 INCLUSIVITY IN SUPPLY CHAIN

Companies have a responsibility to ensure that their supply chains comply with the NVG. After all, nearly 92 percent of workers are employed in the informal sector, to which most companies outsource work.

Fifty-seven companies, seven more than the last report, recognised the importance of giving priority to local suppliers but only 15 have systems to do this, three less than last year.

A big concern is that 34 companies have not disclosed whether they extend their child labour policy to their supplier chain. Likewise, only 49 companies, down from 54 in 2016, extended their human rights policy to the supply chain. Also, just 22 companies, instead of 24 in 2016, extended their employment policies to the supply chain.

Only four companies disclosed assessing issues relating to workers' rights in the supply chain. Just six companies have systems to assess the capacity needs of local suppliers, vendors and other stakeholders.

Banks say they don't have a supply chain. They think supply chain only refers to manufacturing units. "In supply chain we do have some positive movements because of UK's Modern Slavery Act," says Dheeraj. "Around 26 companies who operate in the UK have put their Modern Slavery Statement mostly on their UK websites, affirming that they are committed to upholding human rights principles across the supply chain and that they will have assessment systems in place. That is influencing Indian operations. Although right now we don't see direct attribution to Indian supply chains, that debate has started."

5 COMMUNITY AS BUSINESS STAKEHOLDERS

With large tracts of land being acquired for infrastructure and other industrial projects, it is important to assess whether companies have policies to include communities as stakeholders in their projects, whether they respect the principle of prior informed consent, resettle and rehabilitate project-affected people, provide local employment and judiciously use natural resources.

Companies are doing badly on this score and there hasn't been much improvement over the past three years.

Fifty-four companies recognised the need for impact assessments but only nine mentioned public hearings or informing communities about project impacts. Only three companies — Godrej, HUL, Vedanta — recognised the principle of free, prior informed consent.

More than 95 companies do not recognise their responsibility to provide better or similar living conditions and services to project-affected people and prior commitment through discussions for land acquisition and displacement.

Seventy companies, eight more than 2016, acknowledge judicious use of local resources and 44 provided systems to do this.

Companies also don't recognise and create knowledge systems that promote sensitivity to local concerns, culture or environment. Less than 15 percent of companies disclosed commitment to local culture.

ANALYSIS

Companies across sectors scored well in community development and non-discrimination in the workplace. While companies don't generally fare well in relation to supply chain, the FMCG sector performed well. In respecting employee dignity and human rights, finance, IT, telecom, media and publishing scored the least. The finance sector and the metals and mining sector score the least in supply chain. The pharma sector lags in non-discrimination in employment.

"FMCG does well in supply chain. Again, it's a comfort zone. You talk about procurement, retail and so on. Finance is an area to be looked at with more scrutiny because they fund industrial and infrastructure projects," says Dheeraj.

"If they don't have due diligence systems in place they can't push other companies to act on community as stakeholder. Finance companies would have

the most influence, more than other stakeholders. In supply chain, they are the weakest in community as stakeholder. They should start acting in this area."

Also, as in previous years PSUs disclosed more commitment to the five elements of the IRBI. The private sector did marginally better in community development and supply chain outreach.

GETTING TO COMPANIES

It hasn't been easy for researchers to get the information they want from companies or interact with them.

They first peruse information that the company has placed in the public domain — annual reports, BRR and policy documents on company websites. This data, along with a list of 115 queries, is sent to the company for validation. The company can also add to the data.

"It's a mixed response. There were occasions when we were asked what authority we had to assess the companies. There are four companies who gave detailed responses to each question — Axis Bank, Bharat Electronics, Godrej and Mahindra & Mahindra," says Dheeraj.

For the past two reports, 30 percent of the companies responded. "Around 3 to 5 percent gave detailed responses. The general opinion is that this is a pretty good

response rate. For the first report, we had a detailed interaction with Vedanta and Cairn. This time 10 to 15 companies assured us they would send data but they didn't," says Dheeraj.

Companies acknowledge data on the phone but resist answering on email because they don't want to formalise the interaction.

Mostly it is sustainability heads in companies whom researchers reach out to. This isn't easy because sustainability heads think the IRBI is about CSR alone.

"But we are talking about core business. In the Indian narrative, CSR has become only about the 2 percent spend. We often need to explain ourselves," says Dheeraj.

Also, reporting systems are sometimes outsourced by companies to certification agencies and all of them give assurances for sustainability reports.

"Many sustainability heads haven't looked at their own BRRs so their own interaction with their systems is weak. Even within companies there are gaps in how they are integrating their reporting with their own systems," says Dheeraj.

It is possible that there are companies which have good systems and practices but don't do a good job of documenting them and placing them in the public domain. There could also be companies which have robust policies which are well articulated but poorly implemented.

CRW is a network of 14 organisations and independent consultants who track corporate behaviour. The IRBI serves the important purpose of keeping the narrative on responsible business alive from one year to the next. Voluntary disclosure works best when there is regulatory oversight. It is also necessary to have civil society scrutiny so that companies get feedback and feel the need to do better. ■

WHAT THE INDEX MEASURES...

In-principle acceptance of NVG principles associated with five elements of the index

Policy of commitment of companies in evolving policies and disclosing them in the public domain

Mechanism of companies for implementing the policies

Knowledge of companies in the public domain of how policies are functional through assessments and evaluations

...AND WHAT IT DOESN'T

Whether companies actually adhere to or comply with policies is beyond the scope of the index

Information sources other than from company in public domain that a company might have shared with a third party

Validation of the information provided by companies on their websites. Information has been accepted at face value and not validated



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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Banana man goes digital

How C.V. Srinidhi built a business from nowhere

Shree Padre
Kasaragod

FOUR years ago, 23-year-old C.V. Srinidhi, a computer science graduate, decided to try his hand at natural farming. His family had an acre lying unused. His first attempt was a total disaster. But he summoned courage and tried again.

Three seasons later Srinidhi is a consummate farmer, a digital agriculture guru much in demand on WhatsApp groups. What's more, he has mastered a skill that very few farmers possess — of marketing his products, adding value and diversifying his product portfolio.

“There is growing insecurity and disappointment among IT professionals. I don't have any figures, but the number of IT guys entering farming is increasing,” he says.

In 2013, Srinidhi knew nothing about farming and he wasn't interested either. He was working in the office of the district collector of Chamarajnagar, a very backward district in Karnataka, in 2013.

That very year a friend gifted him a book by Subhash Palekar, doyen of natural farming. Srinidhi read it reluctantly. He had some misgivings about such methods and wanted to speak to Palekar. His friend advised him instead to read the book more carefully.

Srinidhi read it again thoroughly. His doubts began to clear. He then read more books by Palekar, and got inspired enough to decide that he wanted to practise natural farming. The first crop he tried to grow was pumpkin. His efforts yielded just four pumpkins.

Srinidhi didn't give up. He picked up more information. He decided to plant the *elakki* variety of table bananas and took another two acres on lease. This time his harvest turned out to be “not bad”, he says.

But Srinidhi's happiness was short-lived. When he went to sell his bananas he was offered a miserable price. Each bunch of bananas weighed between five to 10 kg. The shopkeeper would arbitrarily grade bunches below 10 kg as ‘second class’ bananas and pay only ₹5 per kg. The price offered even for ‘first class’ bananas was just ₹10. But the shopkeeper sold those bananas to consumers for ₹30 per kg. While trying to sell his bananas, a few bunches rotted. This caused Srinidhi considerable anguish and he thought he must find a solution.

Srinidhi realised that being a good farmer wasn't sufficient. The farmer's vulnerability is marketing. He began attending seminars on farming. During one such meeting, a mango farmer from Kolar explained how he was successfully selling his



Srinidhi in a high yielding drumstick crop field

mangoes by branding them ‘Kolar Gold’. Srinidhi was impressed by this idea.

Coincidentally, interesting feedback by Manju, one of the shopkeepers he sold his bananas to, provided him more food for thought. Manju told him, “All the bananas brought by other farmers ripen in two days. Your bunches take double that time. Because of this virtue, you can market your bananas yourself.”

This suggestion encouraged Srinidhi to sell his own bananas. After office he began attending Lions Club and Rotary Club meetings, yoga classes, church functions and so on. He would seek permission to interact with those attending for a few minutes.

“These bananas are unique. They are grown naturally. Taste a few. If you like them, do buy,” he would say gently. He would jot down orders, too.

He also packed his bananas attractively and carefully. Instead of putting them in a plastic bag, he would pack them in a box. This would prevent banana damage during transport. Srinidhi sold each banana box for ₹100. An additional advantage for the buyer was that he or she could store the bananas in the box. New boxes cost Srinidhi ₹20 each. Subsequently, he used recycled boxes priced at ₹4 each. Slowly, Srinidhi's banana boxes began selling.

He then remembered that he should brand his

produce. He chose the words CV: C stood for his native place, Chamarajnagar, and V for his father's name, Venkateshmurthy. On the label he wrote: “Direct from farmers to consumers.”

To publicise his bananas, after work, he would go around the city on his motorcycle with a couple of banana boxes. He would approach people, introduce himself and his bananas and ask if they would be interested in buying. A few boxes would be kept close at hand at a friend's place in case demand exceeded his expectations.

People would often ask him a whole lot of questions. Srinidhi would offer them a box of bananas free on condition that they would pay later. “There are instances of people buying two boxes after a long argument of 15 minutes,” recalls Srinidhi.

News of Srinidhi and his banana boxes began spreading in social media and in print media. This boosted demand. Soon, his bike became too small to carry so many boxes. He began to borrow an auto-rickshaw from a friend in the evenings to resolve this problem. He also began sending boxes of bananas by bus to consumers located some distance away. The buyer would pay transport charges.

Srinidhi realised it was important to study consumer preferences. Buyers told him that a three-kg box was more than enough for a family of three

or four people. Everyone wanted to eat ripe fruit. So Srinidhi began packing combs of bananas which would ripen at different times. This ensured two things: that all the bananas were not ripe at the same time and there were always bananas to eat.

A local voluntary organisation called Amruthabhoomi sent Srinidhi for a seminar in Bangkok. His experience in marketing was covered by the media and very well received.

Srinidhi's father had passed away 18 years earlier. His mother, Meenakshi, a source of inspiration to him, helps in packing the bananas and with other chores.

Although his 10-day trip to Bangkok slowed his marketing efforts for a while, Srinidhi says he managed to sell 60 percent of his crop directly to consumers and earned three times more than what he would have got by selling to shops. “I lost some bananas but I learnt very important lessons in marketing. So I didn't consider my losses as losses,” he says.

BANANA TO SUGARCANE: Srinidhi chose sugarcane as his next crop. There were some crucial reasons behind his decision. First, his land's black cotton soil was more suited for growing sugarcane than bananas. Besides, he was spending two to three months of the year marketing bananas and that was affecting his farming operations for the next banana crop.

“Anyway, I had learnt valuable lessons in marketing a perishable crop. So I thought I could confidently try my hand at selling a non-perishable crop,” he says.

At one of the workshops he periodically attended, Srinidhi listened carefully as a farmer related how he earned ₹8 lakh from an acre of his sugarcane crop by selling it as juice. Srinidhi decided to follow in this farmer's footsteps.

Srinidhi planted his sugarcane crop 12 feet apart instead of three feet, the normal distance. This way, his sugarcane got much more sunshine and that boosted its growth. In the area in between he raised short-duration crops like vegetables, turmeric, onion and potato. His potato crop failed but his onion crop succeeded.

The sugarcane did fine. But Srinidhi couldn't convert it into juice because a sophisticated juice making machine he had ordered from the Philippines got delayed in arriving.

He now had three options: he could convert sugarcane into jaggery powder, or make it into a mould or produce liquid jaggery.

After consulting a few farmers he experimented with all three forms, worked out the economics, the labour requirement, the ease of processing and so on. Finally, he opted for the mould version of jaggery.

His two acres yielded 30 tonnes of sugarcane which he converted into three tonnes of jaggery.

The price of jaggery in the local market is ₹30. Srinidhi's jaggery was chemical-free and made from naturally grown sugarcane, so he fixed a price of ₹100 per kg, three times the market rate.

“Traditional sugarcane farmers who use chemicals get 30 to 40 tonnes per acre. They sell it to jaggery-making units for ₹2,000-2,500 per tonne. So they earn about ₹80,000-100,000. My sugarcane field yields 15 tonnes per acre. I make 1.5 tonnes of jaggery myself and earn ₹150,000 per acre,” explains Srinidhi.

Another advantage for Srinidhi is that he doesn't

learn from Kadadi. But Srinidhi's marketing skills are entirely his own.

Srinidhi's uncle, who had a jaggery making unit, offered it to Srinidhi to learn how to make jaggery. Srinidhi experimented and learnt the process thoroughly. He realised that if he added a little peanut oil the jaggery retained its colour longer. No chemicals are used while processing.

He also prefers to sell locally, through social media, by word of mouth and by giving samples of his jaggery. Even small orders of one kg are home delivered. Larger orders are sent by lorry. He has made a database of all his customers and keeps in touch with them. He keeps a record of sales figures, documents production and issues bills. And he continues to work at the DC's office.

“Direct marketing is not a small challenge,” observes Srinidhi. Unfortunately, most farmers prefer to just sell rather than market their products.

“To be able to succeed in direct marketing your product should be qualitatively better in smell, colour, touch and taste. You have to convey this to your customer. Farmers don't know how to spot customers. Many of them can't explain why their product is better,” says Srinidhi.

Sales talk is important. “The seller should evaluate what the customer might be looking for. Should he explain that the product is natural, the processing method or its health benefits? Otherwise the customer will lose interest,” says Srinidhi. He suggests that the government start a community packing facility so that farmers' produce can be packed in an attractive, hygienic way.

His juice machine will arrive shortly and he plans to start his new venture by April from a shop in the city. He says he will buy sugarcane from select farmers till he gets his next crop.

Srinidhi explains why juice making is the most profitable option for the farmer. “If a farmer sells fresh sugarcane, he earns ₹2,000 -2,500 per tonne. If he converts it into jaggery himself, he will produce around 100 kg. If the jaggery is of high quality like my chemical-free jaggery, he can sell it for ₹100 a kg. This means he earns ₹10,000 from one tonne of sugarcane.”

“But juice is a better option. From one tonne of sugarcane, you can extract 600 litres of juice. If I sell a 250 ml cup for

₹10, I make ₹40 per litre. So I make a neat ₹4,000 from my one tonne of sugarcane,” he says, smiling.

Srinidhi says farming has given him a lot of pleasure. “I am looking for a day in the near future when I can be a full-time farmer. By that time, I would have better knowledge because I always evaluate myself and try to correct my mistakes. I would like to extend my farm to 10 acres and convert it to a model farm to inspire other farming enthusiasts. They can come here and learn,” says Srinidhi. ■

Contact Srinidhi: srinidhipes@gmail.com; WhatsApp: 97385 40990



After office hours, Srinidhi packs his bananas into boxes

Srinidhi has mastered a skill that very few farmers possess – of marketing his products, adding value and diversifying.



Srinidhi experimented selling bananas from a truck with Amruthabhoomi's help

have to hereafter replant sugarcane. Adoption of natural farming and the use of *jeevamruta* increases microbial activity and soil health. The dry leaves form mulch, prevent weed growth and increase moisture. This reduces labour costs. Srinidhi says sugarcane production will increase annually till a saturation point of 100-120 tonnes is achieved.

LEARNING CURVE: Chandrashekhara Kadadi, a staunch follower of Palekar from Bidar, is Srinidhi's guru in farming. Since Palekar can communicate only in Hindi and Marathi, farmers like Srinidhi

HCL grant goes to remote areas

PICTURES BY SHREY GUPTA



Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh with the winners of the HCL Grant

Kavita Charanji
Noida

THE three winners of the HCL Grant this year are the Eleutheros Christian Society (ECS), Keystone Foundation and Sightsavers India.

While the Eleutheros Christian Society won the grant for its work on health, Keystone was awarded in the environment category and Sightsavers India for innovative work in education.

The HCL Grant is given annually by the HCL Foundation, the CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) division of the IT company, HCL. The grant, of ₹5 crore, is awarded for a five-year project on health, environment and education. The HCL Foundation also helps to promote the work of the NGOs.

The grants were given away by Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh at a ceremony on the campus of HCL Technologies in Noida.

“The grant recognises NGOs who have been working in an impactful way in remote, unreached and underserved areas of rural India,” said Nidhi Pundhir, director, CSR, who heads HCL Foundation. “We look at issues that are yet to find a solution and projects which can be replicated and upscaled, where sustainability is ensured and due diligence is carried out.”

ECS was started by Chingmak Kejong, once a Baptist pastor in a small village church in Nagaland. Deeply disturbed by the HIV/AIDS, drug and alcohol pandemic among his congregation, he left the church to start the Tuensang-based ECS in 1993. His wife, Phutoli, joined him.

Initially, ECS focused on drug addiction and HIV/AIDS issues. But Kejong realised that the roots of the problem lay in poverty, lack of education, sanitation, lack of livelihood as well as political violence. He also realised that unless primary healthcare was made available it would be impossible to address the HIV/AIDS problem.

ECS therefore began to focus on education,

sanitation, livelihoods and health in remote villages in Tuensang, Mon, Longleng and Zunheboto districts of Nagaland. From the start ECS ensured community participation. “In rural India the only way you can change things is by involving the community,” says Kejong.

ECS got the community to interact with the government for a functioning Primary Health Centre (PHC).

Today ECS runs the only PHC in the country where the government, through the National Health Mission, provides funding and the community appoints its own doctors, nurses and staff.

By involving village councils, village health committees, women’s organisations and the Church, the incidence of HIV among injecting drug users and antenatal women has reduced dramatically. ECS has achieved 100 percent hospital delivery in all surrounding villages around the PHC. Immunisation has risen from 32 percent to 80 percent in 43 of the targeted villages. “The HCL grant will enable us to scale up our efforts to 72 villages,” says Kejong.

Keystone Foundation works with honey collectors, bee-keepers and indigenous communities living in and around the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve in the Western Ghats. Keystone’s agenda is conservation of this ecologically rich but fragile ecosystem as well as promoting enterprise and livelihoods among forest communities.

“We have developed an enterprise that adds value to produce in villages so that communities become custodians of that resource and households earn an income. We do the ecological monitoring of their produce,” says Roy.

The grant, he says, will help Keystone extend its

work to conservation of wetlands and water corridors for villagers and wildlife.

Sightsavers India works in eight states among the visually impaired to prevent avoidable blindness and provide education and livelihood opportunities to the visually impaired.

Sightsavers India won the award for promoting technology-driven education for the blind in government schools in five states. “The grant will enable us to saturate five districts in West Bengal, Bihar and Rajasthan so that more children with visual disability gain digital access,” said R.N. Mohanty, CEO of Sightsavers India.

Along with financial support, HCL Foundation brings out a compendium called *The Fifth Estate*. The book lists and profiles shortlisted and finalist NGOs. The aim is to get them greater visibility.

Pundhir herself spent 20 years in the development sector and has in-depth knowledge of child rights and child protection at state, national and global levels. She has trudged through slums in Delhi while developing reproductive health programmes for Deepalaya, worked in Rajasthan with Save the Children UK and rolled out child protection policies in 14 Asian countries for the SOS Children’s Villages International Asia office before moving on as global adviser on child protection for Plan International in UK.

She says this year the HCL Grant attracted around 3,500 applicants. Each application was scrutinised. A team of experts made field visits to assess projects on the ground of 49 NGOs across India. A thematic sub-jury then evaluated 30 NGOs. A high-powered jury assessed the nine finalists. “For selection we look at sustainability, replicability, financial viability and the credibility of the NGO,” says Pundhir.

The HCL Grant was introduced in 2015 for the education category. In the first year the grant was given to Going to School for its imaginative story-based teaching methodology. The model has been widely replicated in government schools across states like Bihar and Jharkhand.

In 2016, the ambit of the grant was expanded to include health and environment. Foundation for Ecological Security from Gujarat wrested the 2017 HCL grant for its work to empower local communities to conserve water, land, forests and wastelands. Child in Need Institute (CINI) from West Bengal was the winner of the grant in the health category. The NGO has now extended itself in the spheres of education and health protection.

MelJol from Maharashtra got the grant for its pioneering work in education. The NGO’s flagship programme, Aflatoun, gives underprivileged children a chance at social and financial literacy. The programme has been replicated in many states and over 116 countries around the world. ■



Nidhi Pundhir heads HCL Foundation

INSIGHTS

OPINION | ANALYSIS | RESEARCH | IDEAS

Why pre-school matters



BACK TO SCHOOL

DILEEP RANJEKAR

IT was 8.30 on a cold evening and, while walking past a reputed school in Bengaluru, I came across a long queue of young men and women. Out of curiosity I enquired from one of them and learnt that these were parents who had come to get the admission form from the school for enrolling their children in the pre-school run by the institution. There are reputed kindergarten schools in many metro cities where parents queue overnight to get admission forms.

Whenever I read about and see such queues, I am grateful to my times — neither my parents nor my wife and I had to go through this.

In fact, my personal case is bizarre. I refused to go to the Montessori school that my parents wanted me enrolled in. When I turned six, there was a valiant but futile attempt made to enrol me in Class 1 of a regular school. At seven, I was finally taken to the school forcibly and tied to the bench to prevent me from running away. When the teacher began telling me a very interesting story, I slowly stopped sobbing and began listening intently. The next morning, to the relief of my mother, I announced that I was willing to go to the school. The interesting thing was that, thanks to my home environment, I was able to read and write well before joining the school.

So what was my home environment? My sister and brother were five and nine years older than me, respectively. My father believed education was the most important aspect of his family’s future. My childhood home was fun, filled with activities. My mother would play the harmonium, take me to several cultural programmes and plays. Many festivals were celebrated in our home. One of the biggest was Ganesh Chaturthi. At that age, without understanding much, I was exposed to the singing of famous personalities like Bhimsen Joshi, Hirabai Badodekar and others. A flute, a mouth organ and xylophone were bought for me, which I used to play to the best of my ability — without any formal

training. The house was full of books, notebooks and painting material. I used to keenly look forward to the Sunday edition of the newspaper since it had a section for children’s stories and poems. In fact, I created my own book of select stories cut out of the Sunday newspaper.

Hobbies like making the Indian flag and making kites used to occupy a fair bit of time. And there were scores of children to play with in the neighbourhood. Life was truly enjoyable without any structured compulsion for learning anything particular. All this helped me achieve the first rank in all examinations until Class 5.

period, which prepares the child not only for the remainder of childhood but also for adulthood. Rich and positive psycho-social, emotional, cognitive and linguistic stimuli in the early years is critical for healthy growth. Research shows that exposure to early childhood education decreases student drop-out and augments learning in school in later years. Longitudinal observational studies in countries such as the US, Chile and others have found positive impact of early childhood education on educational achievement of students in schools.

It is therefore astonishing that we in India have taken more than 70 years to decide that pre-school



Government schools need to introduce pre-school facilities

Evidence from research across the world indicates that early childhood (0-6 years) is a critical period as it lays the foundation for lifelong learning and development.

Evidence from research across the world indicates that early childhood (0-6 years) is a critical period as it lays the foundation for lifelong learning and development. The first six years of a child’s life are also when maximum brain development occurs, resulting in rapid growth in all areas — physical, cognitive, language, social and emotional. Considerable learning takes place during this

education must become a necessary and integral part of our education value chain. A few months before the Right to Education (RTE) Bill was presented in Parliament, we had met the then education minister to present many valid issues that needed to be integrated in the RTE Act. One of the critical recommendations was that the Act must

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include early childhood education (ECE) and extend upto Class 12.

The ministry was in a hurry to get the Bill approved and it showed helplessness in including pre-schooling in the Act — since it was the Ministry of Women and Child Development that dealt with the ECE through *anganwadis* (Early Childhood Education Centres). It was heartening that the 65th Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) officially tabled the proposal to make ECE a part of RTE. Of course it will take some time for it to actually happen.

India has about 165 million children in the 0-6 years age group of which about 100 million (60%+) are in the 3-6 years age group (Census 2011). Out of the 100 million children in the age group of 3-6 years, about 38 million are provided pre-school education through about 1.4 million *anganwadis* (DISE 2014-15) covered through the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) programme of the Ministry of Women and Child Development. The ICDS includes delivery of an integrated package of services — supplementary nutrition, pre-school education, nutrition and health education, immunisation, health check-ups, and referral services through the *anganwadis*. Almost 27 million children are currently not covered by any pre-school education.

The quality of pre-school education in both government and private space is poor. This is the only part of education that is completely unregulated (though I am not much in favour of regulation), leading to non-standard, widely varying and exploitative pre-school education. Thousands of poor-quality ECE schools have mushroomed, especially in urban and semi-urban areas, charging hefty fees for poor-quality practices. Children of socio-economically disadvantaged parents are deprived of the necessary preparation and development when they enter the school, creating huge inequity with those who go through ECE, because, by the time they pass Class 10, they are required to run the race despite beginning much before the starting line. The implications of not providing high-quality pre-school education are acute. We end up making much more effort at a later stage by not helping the children develop linguistic, neuro-motor, sensory, emotional and social abilities during the appropriate developmental stage.

It is high time we made:

- ECE part of the Right to Education Act.
- The National Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) policy applicable across states in government and private institutions.
- Significant investment in radically improving the *anganwadi* system — infrastructure and learning resources; safety, health and nutrition; capacity building programmes for *anganwadi* teachers.

In the long run, we must make early ECE an integral part of school education and ensure that all ECE teachers are professionally qualified and treated on a par with other government schoolteachers.

When my colleague and I spent some time in the ECE schools in Finland, we wished we could be reborn and enrolled in those beautiful schools! ■

Dileep Ranjekar is CEO of the Azim Premji Foundation

Court verdict does little to make Cauvery sustainable



WATER WATCH

HIMANSHU THAKKAR

By all accounts the summer of 2018 is likely to bring to the fore an unprecedented water crisis along with disputes in a large number of states and river basins in India. Such conflicts aren't just inter-state or international but can be seen at different levels.

While the Vamsadhara, Mahadayi and Krishna water dispute tribunals are still hearing the parties concerned, the centre was recently forced to set up a tribunal on the Mahanadi water dispute. In the Narmada basin, elections have kept the simmering dispute somewhat quiet. Almost 13 years after signing an MoU to prepare a detailed project report for the Ken-Betwa River Link Project, and despite repeated assurances by Uma Bharti and now Nitin Gadkari, there is no agreement between the states to implement the scheme. In the Cauvery basin, the Supreme Court's 465-page judgment of 16 February, everyone hopes, will help resolve the dispute.

The judgment came in response to several appeals that were filed in the SC soon after the February 2007 award of the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal (CWDT). Leaving aside the question of why the SC took 11 years to decide, it's good to see that the verdict has not triggered any immediate protests. Let us look at this SC judgment in some detail.

| Will the judgment achieve sustainable water use in the Cauvery basin?

The judgment has increased water allocation to Karnataka by 14.75 TMC (thousand million cubic feet), compared to the stipulation of the CWDT award, and reduced Tamil Nadu's share by the same quantum. Karnataka's water release obligation has accordingly been reduced from 192 TMC per year (all flow figures are for a 50 percent dependable year) to 177.25 TMC and its monthly release obligations would also reduce proportionately compared to CWDT stipulations. The monthly release obligations in a distress year will be decided by the proposed Cauvery Management Board, but Karnataka is already opposing its constitution.

One reason Karnataka's share has been increased is an additional allocation of 4.75 TMC for Bengaluru, based on the justification that drinking water is top priority as per the National Water Policy (NWP). This reference to the NWP in the SC judgment is welcome, as it provides the policy some legal support. However, Karnataka is already providing additional water to Bengaluru from its own share, so was it necessary to bring in this issue here, particularly since two-thirds of Bengaluru is outside the Cauvery basin, as determined by the CWDT?

Moreover, it is well-known that Bengaluru's water

options are hugely under-utilised. For example, Bengaluru is not adequately harvesting rainwater. It is not protecting its local water bodies, including lakes and streams. The city is not adequately treating or recycling its waste water. Nor is Bengaluru doing much demand side management.

Couldn't the SC have pushed for better water management in Bengaluru rather than reward its miserable track record with more water? It's not a question of quantum (which may be minuscule and some water may be returning to Tamil Nadu through the Pinakini river) but in the process the SC has opened up the possibility of similar sub-optimal allocations in the name of higher priority use in other basins.

Could this additional allocation of Cauvery water, for an area outside the Cauvery basin, further complicate other inter-state water disputes with claims being made by areas outside a river basin in the name of higher priority?

The SC has said that Tamil Nadu has access to additional groundwater and at least 10 TMC of groundwater use can be accounted for in the state, something the CWDT has not taken into account. With this in mind, the SC has increased Karnataka's share by 10 TMC.

First, it is welcome that the SC has brought groundwater into its water use calculations. Groundwater is India's lifeline, since most water used in our irrigated areas, rural or urban, domestic sector or industries, is groundwater which essentially comes from recharge of surface water. There is dynamic equilibrium between surface water and groundwater. So, it wasn't correct for tribunals to ignore groundwater use in assessing water balance. However, the SC judgment accounts for the groundwater used only by Tamil Nadu in an adhoc manner. What is necessary is more comprehensive accounting for groundwater.

The NWP does not have the force of law. The SC judgment is a rare instance of the NWP being referred to in a judicial order. Hence, by implication, the NWP gets legal sanction. This precedent will have a number of implications, including use of the NWP in future petitions and more careful thinking behind the formulation of future NWPs. However, the judgment refers to NWP 1987 and 2002, and not NWP 2012, which is the current policy. Section 1.3(vi) of NWP 2012 lists priorities for water allocation which are somewhat different from what the SC has picked up from NWP 1987 (para 373) and 2002 (para 265). It is unclear if this is just a judicial slip or intentional and, if so, why.

The international principles the judgment refers to include the Helsinki Rules (1966), Berlin Rules (2004) and Campione Rules (2000), basically espousing equitable and not equal utilisation of shared water. It is surprising that the SC did not refer to the 1997 UN Convention on Non Navigational Use of Watercourses.

| Will the judgment achieve equitable water distribution during deficit years?

That, in fact, is the crux of the question. The SC has



JAGDISH KATKAR

The paltry and half-hearted allocation of 10 TMC for the Cauvery implies that neither the CWDT nor the SC saw the dispute from the river's perspective.

directed that the implementing mechanism for the CWDT award and SC verdict be set up in six weeks on the lines directed by the CWDT. This mechanism needs to function in an independent, transparent way and quickly achieve some credibility. For this, the SC will need to continue to play a role. It is the credible functioning of this mechanism that will decide if equitable water distribution will happen in deficit years. Hopefully, the mechanism will be set up soon and the SC will continue to ensure its credible functioning.

| Will the judgment improve the state of the Cauvery river?

The SC judgment has the potential to increase water use in both states. First, by endorsing the use of the 50 percent dependability criterion rather than the 75 percent used earlier. Second, water use is likely to be pushed up since in Tamil Nadu the SC has allowed it to use 10 TMC groundwater and in Karnataka the SC has allocated 14.75 TMC more water. This, in a basin where water demand is

already way above availability, as the SC notes (para 188). This could have been avoided if the judgment had included a rider — that these provisions should not lead to additional water use in both states.

Unfortunately, all the parties involved, including the states, the centre, the CWDT and the SC, see the river only as a water channel. The paltry and half-hearted allocation of 10 TMC for the Cauvery implies that neither the CWDT nor the SC saw the dispute from the river's perspective. They saw it merely as a water-sharing conflict.

The tribunals and judiciary need to start taking rivers more seriously. The sustainability of the river is central to resolving inter-state river disputes. The tribunals and the judiciary will also need to listen to others since the states and the centre have failed to represent the interests of the river.

| Will the judgment reduce water disputes?

The SC's verdict has established a number of precedents that will have larger implications for dealing with water disputes across the country in future. This judgment is possibly the first instance of the apex court not only admitting a Special Leave Petition (SLP) against a tribunal award, but also modifying a verdict of the tribunal set up under the Interstate Water Disputes Act of 1956. The Act, under Article 262 of the Constitution, debars any role of the courts, including the apex court, in considering any SLP against any tribunal award. This precedent opens up all tribunal awards to challenge in the apex court.

Since the tribunals and the judiciary, both in the immediate and short term, are not taking a comprehensive view while dealing with river water disputes, including river water, rainwater, groundwater, soil water, catchment, pollution, ecosystems and local water bodies, disputes are likely to increase. The changing climate is already complicating the situation. The SC Cauvery verdict has added further complications by suggesting (para 393) that "a digression from the confines of the concept of in-river basin would be justified". ■

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Civil Society

Sand mining is still a menace



**FINE
PRINT**

KANCHI KOHLI

THE mining of sand from riverbeds and beaches is now a globally recognised emergency. In February 2017, the *Guardian* carried a detailed story on how industrial sand mining is “causing wildlife to die, local trade to wither and bridges to collapse”. Urbanisation and the construction industry have played a huge role in upping the demand for sand and gravel, the article said. In coastal areas large truckloads of sand are regularly transported to extract atomic minerals, silica and other precious metals like zircon and gold. India is in the middle of this conundrum. The *Guardian's* article reports that the amount of sand used for construction annually has tripled since 2000. The media is replete with stories of ecological damage, ruinous social impact and deep-rooted corruption associated with the sand mafia. Challenging the impact or the illegalities in extracting sand has been highly risky for both government officials and conscious citizens.

THE REGULATORY MECHANISM: For the longest time riverbed and beach sand mining was an unregulated sector in the country. This extraction took place in small plots that did not require environmental approvals. Talk to local villagers and they often recall that such mining was manual and carried out during the night with little scrutiny. The attempt to bring this sector under environmental scrutiny started with the Supreme Court's judgment in 2012, which was then picked up and taken forward by the National Green Tribunal (NGT), a process that resulted in a crucial ruling in January 2014.

It was only after this that the Union Ministry of Environment was pushed into putting in place a detailed mechanism to assess, appraise and take decisions related to minor minerals. Since 2015, this column in *Civil Society* has attempted to analyse both the issue of riverbed and sand mining and the manner in which it is being regulated. In mid-2016, this column carried a detailed explanation on how riverbed and sand mining up to five hectares, listed as ‘B2’ category activities under the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) notification, was sought to be regulated post the NGT directions.

The environment ministry's January 2016 notification put in place a new structure that required each district in the country to have a District Level Environment Impact Assessment Authority (DEIAA). All individual leases up to five hectares need to seek permission from the DEIAA based on an assessment by a District Level Environment Appraisal Committee (DEAC). This mechanism is uniform as the assessments are done both at state and central level. Only in this case

there are to be no EIAs or a public hearing, as these are B2 projects.

FUNCTIONS AND OBSTACLES: Being a new and localised institution, there is very little public oversight of how the DEIAAs and DEACs are functioning. The environment ministry's website has a dedicated portal created to track applications and approvals where information is available. This ‘Live Statistics’ portal has a listing of 18 states where information is available. Each state has a few districts listed for which information is seemingly available. However, on 8 March, many of the links led to blanks. Little public information is available on the composition and functioning of DEIAAs and DEACs.



Commercial demand for sand is on an upward spiral. Regulation has been ineffective and several judicial orders are not being implemented.

What is available is information on the number of applications and approvals for these 18 states. It is unclear whether these are all B2 sand mining projects but it does give us a sense of the extent of operations that have come up before the district-level authorities. As per the available information, the number of projects submitted for environment clearance before DEIAAs is 13,017 across the 18 states. Out of these, 4,080 are under examination and 321 were returned due to shortcomings. The DEIAAs have reportedly recommended approval for 3,512 projects and granted approval to 2,691. Only 100 have been rejected. The rest are at various stages of approval, that is, they are being appraised by the district-level expert committees or recommended by them but pending final clearance from the DEIAA.

The above data is for “all proposals received on or after 28th June 2016”. Further digging through this data reveals that the largest number of approvals for minor mineral extraction is in Chhattisgarh, that is, 1,500 applications. Maharashtra follows with 654,

Kerala with 238, Uttar Pradesh with 152, Tamil Nadu with 62, Karnataka with 35 and Madhya Pradesh with 32. The other states have either no proposals or a negligible number received for appraisal.

This can only mean three things. First, there is no mining of minor minerals under five hectares in these states. Second, no applications have been received by the DEIAAs or the DEIAAs are non-functional, or, third, the state governments have not provided the information to the Union environment ministry, which will publicly disclose the status of how minor minerals are being regulated at district level.

A report on 26 February in the *Times of India* said that the NGT has “appointed court commissioners to verify allegations made in a plea regarding illegal

sand mining in the Jodhpur district of Rajasthan.” The district magistrate and police are to provide support to these commissioners. The environment ministry's district portal lists the number of DEIAA-level applications for Rajasthan as zero. Another report on 6 March in the *Hindustan Times* highlighted how Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh has finally ordered a probe into rampant illegal sand mining in the state. On the district portal, 16 applications have been received by DEIAAs in Punjab and six approved.

We have a long way to go before the massive scale of sand and riverbed mining can be controlled. Commercial demand is on an upward spiral. Regulation has been ineffective and several judicial orders are not being implemented. There is no guarantee that in such messy sand wars, an institution like the DEIAA will be able to assert itself. But then, are we as citizens attempting to engage with this dire problem? ■

The author is a researcher and writer; email: kanchikohli@gmail.com

LIVING

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Homeless in Chennai

To Let, a smartly crafted film, wins two awards

Saibal Chatterjee
Chennai

DESPITE having shot nine films over 10 years and a bit, including the 2007 Indian Panorama entry *Kallori*, Chennai-based cinematographer Chezhiyan Ra was barely known outside the state of Tamil Nadu. Between November and February, however, life has taken a new turn for him. His directorial debut, *To Let*, fetched him two major festival prizes in the span of four months.

Set in 2007, when the IT boom in Chennai sent house rents through the roof and put the less fortunate at a severe disadvantage, *To Let* is a hyper-realist observational drama about a film industry struggler looking for a home for himself and his young family in the city. The film crafts no pretty frames nor sugarcoats the plight of a protagonist compelled to resort to desperate measures to tide over his predicament.

Much of *To Let* has been inspired by Chezhiyan's own bitter experiences. “The film,” he says, “is semi-autobiographical. I went through a similar struggle not all that long ago. I know exactly how it feels when most decent housing units in the city are suddenly beyond your financial reach simply because you do not belong to one particular sector of the economy.”

Written, directed and lensed by Chezhiyan himself, the independent film won the top prize in the Indian language cinema competition section at the Kolkata International Film Festival in November. In February, it garnered another important award — the FIPRESCI (the International Federation of Film Critics) Prize at the 10th Bengaluru International Film Festival. The two trophies have established the first-time director as a talent to watch.

The prizes were richly deserved because *To Let* is a brutally honest, intensely human portrait of a family thrown into turmoil for no fault of its own. The film explores the ramifications of greed on ordinary people who lack the means to fight back. The protagonist of *To Let*, Ilango, an aspiring screenwriter and assistant director, lives in a



A still from *To Let*, a film about a desperate search for an affordable home in Chennai



Chezhiyan Ra, director

producer of *To Let*.

Ilango rides around the city on his rickety moped in search of an alternative dwelling after the landlady gives him a month's time to vacate her house. The turn of events sparks tension between him and his wife, Amudha, who is fond of growing flowering plants and only desires to be left alone. Their son, Siddharth, a boy who loves painting, plasters the walls of their one-bedroom house with his scribbles and paintings, blissfully oblivious of the crisis that has hit the family. The schoolboy is a bit like the carefree sparrow who flies into the house whenever it likes.

Ilango's undoing is the fact that he belongs to the movie industry and the house owners he approaches will have nothing to do with a man who does not have a steady income and is seen as a potential

troublemaker. So he seeks to pass himself off as an IT professional — with disastrous results.

“The situation was really desperate. It is highly ironic that in a state that has been ruled by film personalities for six decades, industry people have such a tough time getting homes on rent,” says Chezhiyan, echoing a line of dialogue delivered by a character in his film.

“As a witness to what was unfolding around me, I decided to record the situation without any compromises,” he says. *To Let* was guerrilla filmmaking at its most basic, shot on the sly with real people and at real locations without taking official permission. “I had to opt for obscure

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suburbs of Chennai because in the more crowded, happening parts of the city it would have been near impossible to film without hindrance.”

The fact that the film has no known faces in the cast helped. The lead actor, Santosh Sreeram, was Chezhiyan's camera assistant in five films. “He would stand before the camera when we needed to test the light,” recalls the director. “I decided to cast him in *To Let* because he was just right for the part.”

The sound and visual design of *To Let* is one of the film's most exceptional aspects. The manner in which Chezhiyan uses the limited spaces available to him suggests skill and enterprise of very high calibre. “Inside the house, we did not repeat a single angle,” says the cinematographer-director.

The manner in which Chezhiyan uses limited spaces suggests skill and enterprise of very high calibre.

Unlike the general run of Tamil films, *To Let* dispenses with a recorded background score, settling instead for a soundtrack made up entirely of songs emanating from transistors and television sets. “Chennai is a riot of sounds. I wanted to capture the urban cacophony so as to convey the spirit of the city. There was a time when no middle-class Chennai home could do without a radio playing the whole day. Today, it is television. But the sounds are constant,” says Chezhiyan.

The minimalistic approach to filmmaking evident in *To Let* is Chezhiyan's way of attempting a clean break from the dominant traditions of Tamil cinema. He is keenly aware of the exciting directions in which world cinema has been moving: Chezhiyan is the author of a series of books titled *Uлага Cinema* (World Cinema), in which he examines the dynamics and impulses of the world's greatest masters.

“Despite being around for over a century, the Tamil film industry has not seen a genuine alternative cinema movement,” says Chezhiyan. “But, given how things are panning out of late, I am hopeful that in the next two to three years a bunch of Tamil filmmakers will put our cinema on the global map. And that wouldn't be a day too soon.”

Personally, Chezhiyan has set himself two goals: finding a distributor for *To Let* and convincing a producer to back his next script, which is ready for filming. “There is renewed interest in *To Let* after the awards that it has bagged, but there is no clarity on how and when the film will be released for public consumption,” says the director.

For filmmakers like Chezhiyan, it obviously isn't easy finding takers in the commercial space. But as more filmmakers like him, notably Vetri Maaran (whose no-holds-barred *Visaranai* won a prize in Venice in 2015), Hari Viswanath (whose *Radiopetti* was a Busan winner the same year) and M. Manikandan (whose *Kakkaa Muttai* premiered in Toronto), add depth to the Tamil cinema landscape, the industry ecosystem could change for the better. At least that is the hope Chezhiyan nurtures. ■



The Presbyterian church now covered with foliage

Witness Ross Island's chequered history

Susheela Nair
Port Blair

FROM the Phoenix Boat Jetty in Port Blair, a boat ferried us to Ross Island, the erstwhile administrative capital of the British in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The island conjured up gory visions of the dreaded ‘Kalapani’ punishment meted out to convicts by the British in pre-Independence India. A penal settlement was established on Ross Island where political prisoners and freedom fighters were thrown into the same cells as hardcore criminals.

One could imagine the times when chained prisoners were compelled to perform hard menial labour. Some committed suicide due to the inhuman treatment meted out to them by the then superintendent. Escorting us around, our guide explained that convicts were left out in the open under the trees with the dark sea and sky for company. That's why the island was known as ‘Kalapani’ or black water.

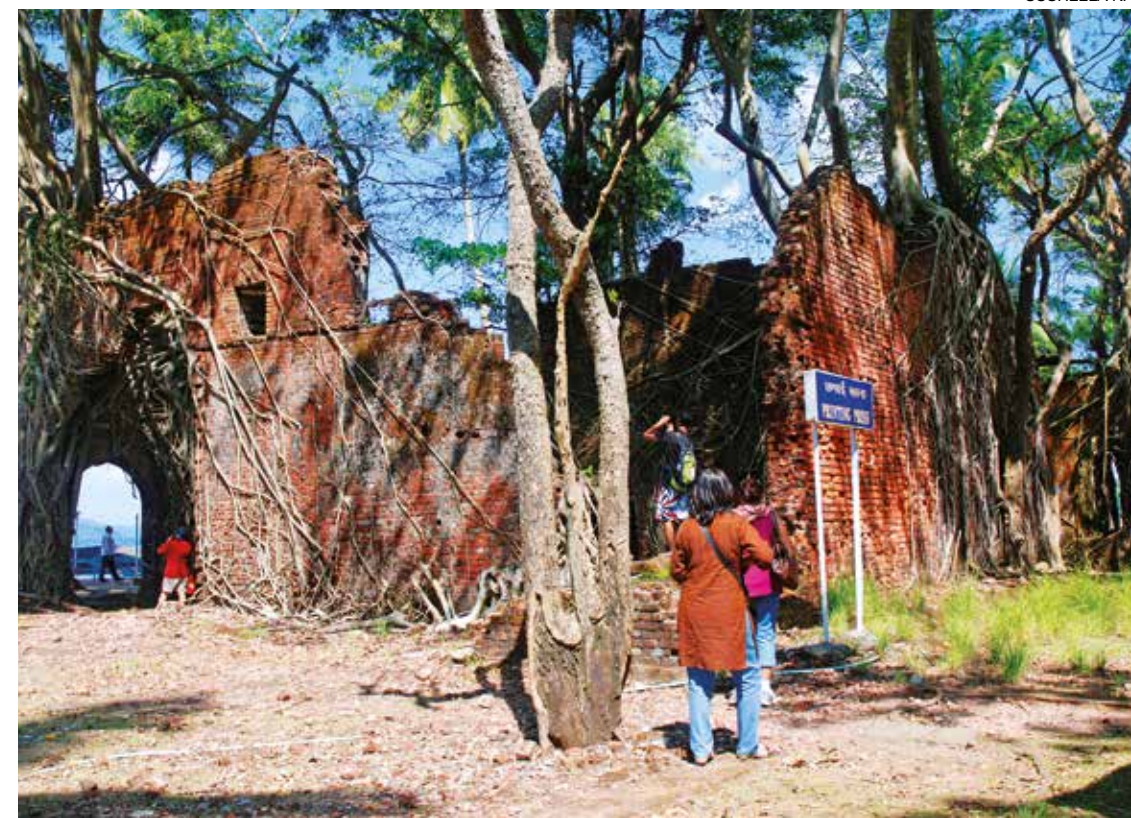
Ross Island has an illustrious history. It lost some of its prominence after the Cellular Jail came up in Port Blair but continued to be a centre of British power until the Japanese occupied it in 1942 during the Second World War. When the Japanese forces vacated Ross Island in 1945, it was reoccupied by the British and the penal settlement was abolished. The island suffered during the Japanese occupation and also the earthquake of 1942. It served as the capital of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands from 1858 until 1941, the year the Japanese occupied it and converted

it into a POW site. Subsequently, the Indian Navy took over the island. Currently, known for its gruesome history, it has landscaped paths across the island and most of its buildings are labelled.

Ross Island was once British India's sentinel in the Bay of Bengal, originally developed as the residence of the chief commissioner. It is named after Captain Daniel Ross who was the marine surveyor of the Indian Navy from 1825 to 1840. At the entrance, I saw concrete bunkers, a legacy of the Japanese. Crumbling buildings and a jumbled tropical forest are what greet visitors. I spotted *chital* and peacocks amidst the foliage and a few darted across our path. They were introduced to these islands almost a century ago by Sir Henry Farrington, a forester.

Roaming around the island turned out to be a voyage of discovery. I was transported into a strange world of ramshackle edifices overtaken by dense tropical foliage. It was difficult to spot a single undamaged structure on this 200-acre island. Every building supported a huge tree, the roots forming intricate patterns on the walls. The remnants of an opulent past can be seen in the ruins of the bazaar, stores, water treatment plant, secretariat, hospital, cemetery and other structures. A few small black boards with signs like ‘Printing Press’, ‘Barracks’, ‘Club’ indicated what the buildings had originally served as. Huge boilers were lying rusting in the spray of the sea, the roof of the laundry had fallen in and the walls of a shop run by an Indian were covered with the roots of untamed trees.

A coconut palm grove occupies the once fashionable tennis court, adjacent to the ‘Club’. I saw



The ruins of a printing press



The old bakery has been renovated

small black boards along the footpath indicating the long gone landmarks. I chanced upon a derelict building labelled ‘Club House’ and then a swimming pool area, now all covered with moss, weeds and undergrowth. You can distinctly make out the ballrooms and the swimming pools. The renovated ‘Bakery’ once used to offer loaves, buns, cakes, croissants and many other delicacies of those times.

Strolling around the island, I discovered that even in the early 19th century the British knew how to live life well. A winding path and steps led us to the old hospital and the barracks, the churches, residences, gardens, the officers' club and the non-commissioned officers' mess. I could see the last

vestiges of imperial grandeur in the Italian tiled courtyard within the dilapidated Chief Commissioner's Residence which was patterned on Windsor Castle. The British enjoyed a vibrant social life here with parties, dances, tennis matches, cricket and other activities. In its heyday, Ross Island was fondly called the Paris of the East. But British revelry ended on this island when it was hit by an earthquake in 1941. They then abandoned Ross Island as a residential hub and shifted to Port Blair.

The ruins of the church and the chief commissioner's house amidst overgrowing vines and aerial roots are among the most evocative of the ruins. South of the commissioner's house on a



A Japanese bunker on the periphery of Ross Island



Ross Island is managed by the Indian Navy

The British enjoyed a vibrant social life here with parties, dances, tennis matches and cricket. In its heyday, Ross Island was fondly called the Paris of the East.

hilltop stand the crumbling remains of an Anglican church, which has survived the onslaught of tropical creepers and vines. This Presbyterian church was built of stone and the windows had frames made of Burma teak. The glass panes behind the altar were made of beautifully etched stained glass from Italy. The quality of the wood was so superior that it survived the vagaries of the weather for over 100 years. A small structure, south of the church, was built to accommodate the parsonage. Some of the grave sites are still visible, haunted with memories.

The island is officially still under the jurisdiction of the Indian Navy. A small museum of the Navy, Smritika, has a good collection of old records and brings alive the past of this hoary island. The small museum by the cafeteria has interesting old photos. ■

FACT FILE

Getting there: Ross Island is open from dawn to dusk, except on Wednesdays. There are ferry services from Phoenix Bay. There is a sound and light show depicting the history of the island at 5:30 pm. The ticket is inclusive of the boat ride, entry fee to Ross Island and the show charges. Tickets are available at the Directorate of Tourism office.



**AYURVEDA
ADVISORY**
Dr SRIKANTH

Banish kidney stones

KIDNEY stones can develop in one or both kidneys and can affect people of any age. But the condition is most common among those between 30 and 50 years. It affects 10-12 percent of the population in industrialised countries. Each one of us has a five to 10 percent chance of developing this problem.

CAUSES: Stones can form if there is an imbalance in the way our body produces urine. This may be connected to the amount of fluid we consume and the presence of certain substances in our urine which could trigger stone formation. The aetiology of this disorder is multifactorial and is strongly related to dietary habits. Increased hypertension, diabetes and obesity which are all linked to nephrolithiasis also contribute to stone formation.

There are many causes of renal stones. They include: ● Anatomical (structural) abnormalities. ● Presence of excessive stone-forming substances in the urine. ● Absence of certain chemicals that prevent stones in the urine. ● Chronic/recurrent urinary tract infection.

Recurrence is quite common. About 50-70 percent of patients with a kidney stone will develop further stones over the next 10 years. It is therefore important to minimise the risk of further stone formation by following dietary advice.

PREVENTION: Consume plenty of fluids. Make sure you drink 2.5 to 3 litres every day of boiled and cooled water/coconut water/sugarcane juice/barley water/watermelon juice/lemon juice/pineapple juice. Drink evenly throughout the day. Drink even more if you live in a hot climate or do a lot of physical exercise. This will help to balance your fluid loss.

Drinks such as tea and coffee can count towards fluid intake, but water is the healthiest drink for kidney stone prevention. Do not drink large quantities of grapefruit juice, apple juice or cola drinks as this aids in the formation of kidney stones. Ideally, one must urinate around 2 to 2.5 litres of light-coloured urine every day. Dark urine implies concentrated urine which

indicates less fluid consumption or increased dehydration. Both are key causes of kidney stone formation.

A diet high in sodium, fats, meat and sugar as well as low in fibre, vegetable protein and unrefined carbohydrates increases the risk of kidney stone formation. Avoid foods that are rich in oxalate, which includes spinach, dark leafy vegetables and beans. Foods and drinks rich in oxalate include beetroot, nuts, chocolate, berries, spinach and tea. One should avoid/reduce animal protein consumption — cheese, egg yolk, fish and so on. Instead, consume more vegetable protein, found in avocados or peas.

One should reduce the amount of sodium (salt) in one's diet. Avoid adding extra salt while cooking or to cooked food. One should reduce intake of refined sugars, usually found in foods like cakes, sweets, biscuits, jam, honey and fizzy drinks. Avoid large doses of Vitamin C and excessive use of calcium-based antacids. Strictly avoid suppressing the urge to urinate.

Most kidney stones up to 5mm will usually pass out easily within a few days or a few weeks. To help this process, one must drink lots of fluid and follow the above dietary guidelines.

HOME REMEDIES: Plantain stem can be consumed either raw or cooked. About 5-10 ml of freshly extracted juice with about half a gramme of crushed cardamom seeds should be consumed on an empty stomach once daily for about a fortnight. Steamed/stir-fried small pieces of plantain stem can be eaten as a side dish. Horse gram or *kulthi* can be consumed as a powder or cooked into a soup and had daily or three times a week for about a month or two. Freshly extracted ash gourd juice, 30 ml twice daily, is helpful.

AYURVEDA REMEDIES: Some herbs have proven to be safe and highly effective in dissolving small stones, facilitating their expulsion, and in preventing further formation of stones.

Any of the following remedies may be used till the stone/s are expelled and continued as a preventive remedy to avoid recurrence: ● Gokshura & Punarnava (Himalaya) — two tablets, twice daily, is helpful in expelling smaller stones. ● Punarnavadi Kashaya or Brihatyadi Kashaya or Varunadi Kashaya (Arya Vaidya Pharmacy, Kottakkal) — two teaspoonsfuls, with six teaspoonfuls of boiled and cooled water should be taken twice daily for about a month. ● Cystone (Himalaya) / Calcury (Charak) / Neeri (AIMIL) — two tablets, three times daily can be taken.

For larger kidney stones consult a urologist. Depending on the size and location, he may recommend suitable procedures for their removal. ■

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

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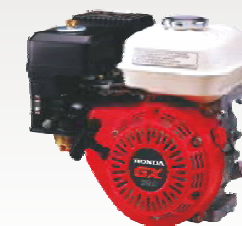


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