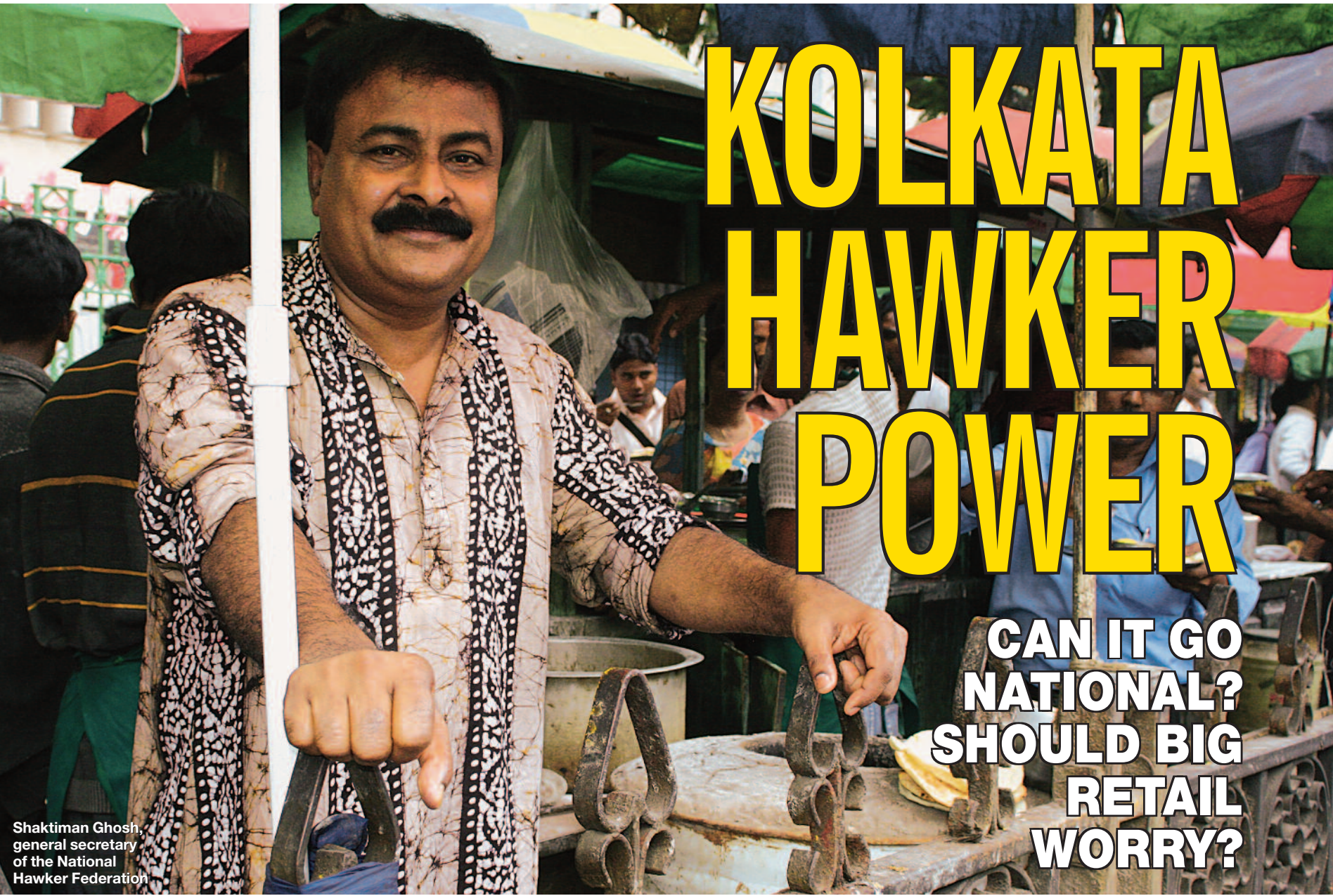


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KOLKATA HAWKER POWER

**CAN IT GO
NATIONAL?
SHOULD BIG
RETAIL
WORRY?**

Shaktiman Ghosh,
general secretary
of the National
Hawker Federation



NREGA TO GO HI-TECH IN BIHAR

Picture this: e-muster rolls, biometric smart cards and an efficient online system which creates an audit trail of all transactions.

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WHY FARMERS HATE VIDEOCON

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MAYAWATI GETS THE AAM AADMI

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SAIL, NEVELI ARE CSR STARS


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GREEN CURES FOR BABY AILMENTS

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IN CIVIL SOCIETY EVERYONE IS


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TAXMAN'S BURDEN

Arvind is an IT officer fighting for the citizen's right to information. Can he bring transparency to Delhi?


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MEET Mr ROOTS

Darshan Shankar revives health traditions, plans Ayurveda hospital in Bangalore


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From Masabrag Espresso to Kokaam vs Cola people find space to seek alternatives

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Activists JPC and the new politics

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GURGAON WANTS TO VOTE

...but in India's fastest growing city poll lists are not updated

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SHOWDOWN IN MANALI

A 192 MW hydro power project, with 45 government contractors to its name, runs into trouble but NGOs find a solution in impartial public hearings

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Senior HRD professionals have been working with NGOs. But can they get companies to think differently?

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1 WE HAVE DONE A YEAR. THANK YOU!


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DELHI'S STREET BANKERS

Thanks to children of up a bank to save, save and lead. Now, can they also go global?

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HIPPOCAMPUS

Umesh Mathur made the money in Infosys. Now he and wife Vinod help children discover books

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CLEAN WORLD CAR

CHETAN MAINI'S REVA STUNS EUROPE AND JAPAN

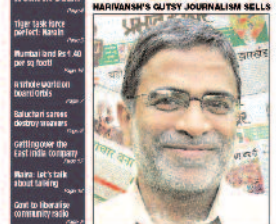
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TEACHING TEACHERS

DISCOVERY SHOWS HOW LEARNING CAN BE FUN


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Mr EDITOR

MARWANNA'S CUTSY JOURNALISM SELLS

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SAVING THE TIGER

WHO IS SAYING WHAT AND WHY ACROSS THE COUNTRY

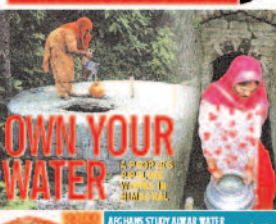
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PRIVATE SECTOR IN QUOTA FRIGHT

ANIL MAHA ON WHY INDUSTRY MUST LEAD

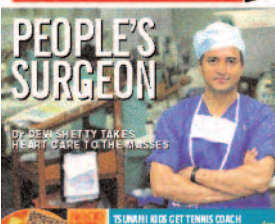
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OWN YOUR WATER

ARGHANS STUDY AIRBORN WATER

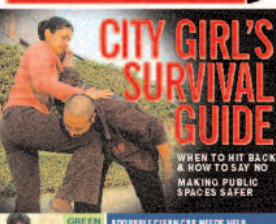
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PEOPLE'S SURGEON

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NAXAL REALITY

A citizen's report by Harivansh

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IMAGE BOOST FOR NGOS

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WHAT'S HIDDEN IN GOVT FILES?

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WATER GURU

THE GANDHIGIRI OF ANUPAM MISHRA

SOMEONE

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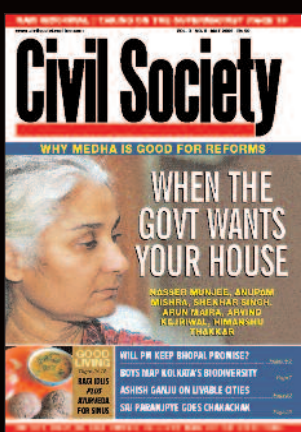
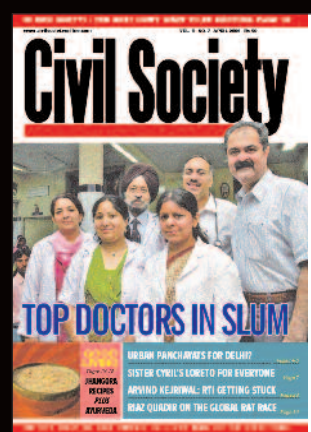
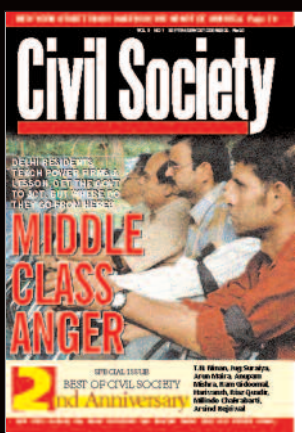
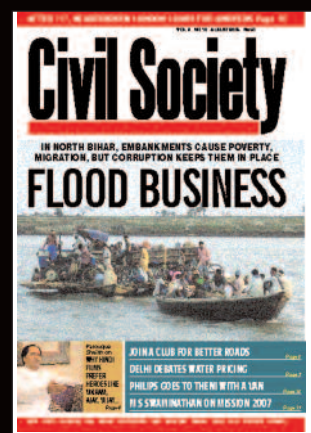
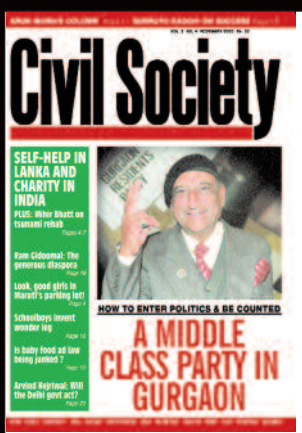
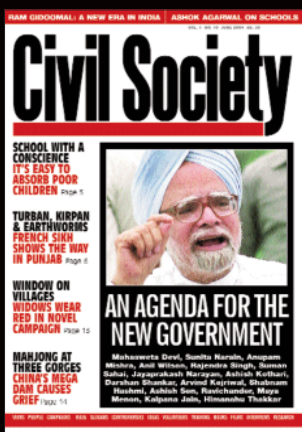
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IN THE LIGHT

by SAMITA RATHOR

**Timely cover**

The cover story on SEZs was very well researched and written. My congratulations to your team for bringing it out at the right time.

Yashashree Gurjar, Pune

Unemployment crisis

I read your cover story on Special Economic Zones (SEZs). Before reading the piece I was a little ambivalent about this policy because I thought that SEZs would help create jobs. But I now realise that the SEZs will take away more jobs than they will create. Such a policy will lead to social upheaval. It is political suicide for the ruling party.

Amita Ahuja, Chandigarh

Strengthen villages

Real reform should begin from the grassroots. We have tried the Nehruvian model of industrial growth. It spawned parasitic industrial development that led to pollution, displacement and inequality. Let's not go down that road by having SEZs. Instead, let's concentrate on rural infrastructure, agriculture, empowerment of village development councils and designing good education and public health systems. The SEZ Act should be scrapped.

Gobind Shinde, Pune

Replicate project

Your April cover story on the Janhit Foundation's project on organic farming in Meerut district was good. It indicates a local revolution in western UP. The project will be fruitful for farmers in that belt and hopefully others will replicate it too. I am sure Anil Rana, director of Janhit Foundation, will spread the good work.

Nitin Kaushal, Lucknow

Another initiative

Congratulations for the story on the Janhit Foundation. We, at the

LETTERS

Timbaktu Collective, are also carrying out organic farming with small and marginal farmers in dryland areas of Anantpur district in Andhra Pradesh. We, too, have adopted the PGS methodology for organic certification.

Thachinamurthy, Andhra Pradesh

Ancient wheelchairs

Indian wheelchairs are clunky and uncomfortable. Their design is ancient and probably harks back to the era of the Second World War. By now we should have designed a hi-tech wheelchair which has the qualities of a comfortable, caring companion. I wish Dr Pearlman all success and I hope Indian designers will learn from him.

Divya Mathur, Gurgaon

Identifying enterprise

I liked your story on social entrepreneur Sandip Bhatnagar. It shows what difference so-called ordinary people can make. The Smile Foundation has done wonderful work by identifying him and helping him realise his true potential.

Sushila Pande, Lucknow

Hotline for elderly

Thank you for bringing to public notice the service provided to the ailing elderly in Kolkata by the NGO Banchbo. Doctors must serve the public. The elderly in every city are facing the same problems of loneliness and lack of care. Banchbo should be replicated nationally.

Dr Y Mittal, Delhi

Rejuvenating schools

I would like to congratulate the Aga Khan Foundation for helping groups like the Bodh Shiksha Samiti in Rajasthan. I have travelled to some parts of the state. Most government schools are in a pathetic state. Hapless parents resort to putting some money together and sending their child—mostly the boy—to a teaching shop. It is heartening to read that the Samiti is working with government schools and urban schools in poorer localities. The government must empower the grassroots so that schools are taken care of by village level institutions in alliance with enlightened groups and foundations.

Arvind Rathore, Jaipur

New politics

Mayawati's victory shows that politics in India is changing rapidly. People are fed up. That is why they are keen to come together to deal with common problems rather than worry about caste and religion. People need *bijli-sadak-pani* (BSP). Villagers want development just like the middle class. The BJP refuses to give up its archaic philosophy of communalism. The egoistic Congress lives in its own world. If the established political parties don't read the writing on the wall they will be wiped out by Mayawati and similar regional formations. A very weak centre has implications for the nation.

George D'Souza, Mumbai

“ Here we have enterprising people who build small businesses by the dint of their own merit and you say they should give all that up and take some job in a retail chain. What kind of solution is that? ”

Shaktiman Ghosh

National Hawker Federation

“ The SEZ is the most unplanned form of development. Any land is identified by a developer and the government jumps up to hand it over. It does not bother to even look at who is using the land and whose life may depend on it. ”

Farmer

Wagholi Panchayat, near Pune

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Ranchi, Jamshedpur, Hazaribagh, Siliguri: Stalls and vendors.



COVER STORY

HAWKERS IN BATTLE MODE

As large retail chains open in towns and cities selling everything from vegetables to apparel, street hawkers rise up to defend their turf.

14

Cover photograph by LAKSHMAN ANAND

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Civil Society

Hawkers deserve a Singapore deal

WE can all see how popular shopping malls and retail chains are becoming in India. They are clean, well organised and inexpensive. They give us the sense that we are becoming a developed, more modern economy. The chains are also creating employment because so many more people are now needed to man those counters over long hours. Processing, packaging etc add yet more economic value.

But chain stores, with their huge volumes and economies of scale, also push out small players. The debate over neighbourhood stores having to close in other economies is well known. In India, it is being feared that once billions of dollars pour into organised retail and the experience of companies like Wal-Mart and Tesco is used to create national networks, the livelihoods of traditional Indian hawkers, vendors and traders is likely to be seriously affected.

The solution obviously is to let hawkers exist and find the mechanisms by which they can continue to serve cities without disrupting carriageways or causing garbage to pile up and so on.

Singapore, for instance, has kept its hawkers and helped them organise their businesses better. The government there has given them stalls that are accessible and close to demand. We should do the same. You can have a meal on the street in Singapore and the quality is really no different to what is available in a shopping mall.

In fact Lallan, one of the hawkers we were interviewing in Kolkata, suddenly said: "I want to do something big. I want to go to Singapore."

It is that spirit of the Indian hawker that we have tried to discover and showcase for our readers in this month's cover story.

Estimates by activists have it that there are about 10 million hawkers in Indian cities. If you add the rural areas and all kinds of vendors we are perhaps looking at a number close to 40 million. Critics of the UPA government's policy permitting big investments in retail say that it is putting the livelihoods of all these people in jeopardy without providing an alternative.

Hawkers are invariably refugees from the formal economy. They are either people who don't have an education or were once employed and retrenched. Some are educated but just haven't been able to find employment.

Nevertheless, they build their businesses with innovation and courage. They are entrepreneurs in the true sense of the word and the spirit they display should perhaps be celebrated as much as MBA degrees. They deal creatively with challenges of size and pricing. They are serious about preserving customer loyalty.

A national policy on urban street vendors recognises the contribution they make to the economy. It endorses their right to livelihood. The policy recommends that they be made a part of masterplans and not evicted at random.

Food hawkers account for some 70 per cent of the street stalls in Kolkata. It is perhaps so in other crowded cities as well. It doesn't take very long to figure out that the meals they serve can never be matched in terms of quality, speed or price by restaurants.

It is a good idea to help hawkers and show appreciation for their enterprise.

Publisher

Umesh Anand

Editor

Rita Anand

Editorial Team

Amit Sengupta
Riaz Quadir
Vidya Viswanathan
Rakesh Agarwal
Rina Mukherji
Shuktara Lal
Bidisha Srivastava

Contributors

Ram Gidoomal
Arun Maira
Milindo Chakrabarti

Consulting Education Editor

Abha Adams

Photographer

Lakshman Anand

Cartoonist

Samita Rathor

Layout Assistant

Virender Chauhan

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Write to Civil Society at:

E-2144 Palam Vihar, Gurgaon, Haryana 122017, Ph: 9811787772
civil_society@rediffmail.com

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Why farmers hate Videocon, Reliance, Mahindra...

Land has been vanishing from the records

Manshi Asher
Raigad

DISSATISFIED and angry people gathered yet again on May 16 at Wagholi, 20 km from Pune city, to chalk out a strategy on how to deal with the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) crisis that has hit their lives.

"This government actually does not have a plan. The SEZ is the most unplanned form of development. Any land is identified by a developer and the government jumps up to hand it over. It does not bother to even look at who is using the land and whose life may depend on it," said a farmer from Wagholi Panchayat.

On May 5, Ramdas Dabade, Zilla Parishad member from Wagholi went to the Haveli tehsil office of Pune district for some work and discovered that his *satbara* or the 7/12 legal title to his land was no longer in his name. The land on paper now belonged to the Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation (MIDC). Soon it was discovered that this change in status of his land was not an isolated case. More than 5,000 acres belonging to about 4,500 farmers in Kesnand, Bakori, Lonikand and Wagholi had been transferred to the MIDC.

Exactly one year ago, in May 2006, a public notice was issued saying that the proposed land would be taken over by the MIDC. The farmers have been consistently opposing this arbitrary decision but they were ignored.

Little did farmers know that without notices being issued to individual farmers their entire land would be actually transferred. They did not realise that there was a private company involved with a bigger plan than what they were aware of.

Videocon, the domestic private electronics company, had received an in-principle approval for a 1,000 hectare Multi Product Special Economic Zone in these four villages in the middle of last year. According to the MIDC, the SEZ will be a joint venture with the

MIDC having a share in the project.

The land is prime property being adjacent to the highway. Less than 20 km from the city, the area is already full of warehouses and crawling with real estate developers.

The land of the four villages, however, is entirely under agriculture through the year with sugar cane, wheat, jowar, bajra and vegetables like onions and cabbages being the main produce. Almost 3,000 acres is irrigated by the Mula-Mutha river with the help of lift irrigation schemes. Most cash crops are sold to Pune and Mumbai markets. With the city creeping into the area, farmers are already facing a scarcity of resources. Water for drinking is becoming scarce and ground water levels are depleting.

"All we want from the government is water, electricity and good rates for our crops. Then we can manage our own 'development'. They do not need to bother," said Smita Kolte from the area. In fact last month the District Collector invited the village leaders several times to discuss the package they will be offered in return for their land. When asked about the package, the sarpanch of Kesnand promptly said: "I don't know what the package contains and I do not want to know either. When I do not want to give my land then why should I bother?"

The meeting on May 16, where almost a 1,000 farmers were present, was attended by all local political leaders from across parties, including ex-MLA Gajanan Babar, and MLA Vilas Lande, from the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP). While all the politicians showed their solidarity with the decision of local people to fight the acquisition, there was a clear undercurrent of dissent as farmer leaders repeatedly spoke of not aligning with any political party on this issue.

"This is only about farmers. We do not trust any political party on this," said a Bharat Kisan

Sangh representative. There was a brief verbal tussle between Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) workers and farmers when some speakers accused NCP leaders Sharad Pawar and Ajit Pawar of being hand in glove with the company.

What stands exposed is the way MIDC is getting roped into SEZ projects as a partner essentially to acquire land because the companies are failing to do the job themselves. "The details of the MIDC - Videocon partnership are not clear. We have no

information from the MIDC whether it is an SEZ or not. We found out that an SEZ is on the cards through Videocon," revealed a farmer.

Meanwhile the Congress-led state government, despite making commitments about halting land acquisition for the Raigad Reliance SEZ, is still continuing its attempts. "Company agents are roaming the area to strike deals and the news is that the local administration is going to initiate action for acquisition soon," said Ulka Mahajan, an activist from the area and one of the conveners of NAPM (National Alliance of People's Movements).

On the rehabilitation package the stand of the farmers remains unchanged - they are unwilling to part with their land. Farmers' struggles against SEZs have come to the fore in other parts of Raigad, Rajgurunagar (Bharat Forge), Karla (Mahindra group) and Aurangabad (MIDC).

To reiterate opposition to the SEZ legislation and the developments related to land-grabbing a meeting was convened in Mumbai on May 5 under the leadership of Justice PB Sawant. Some of the organisations involved in the meeting included Lok Sashan Andolan, Mahamumbai Shetkari Sangarsh Samiti, Yuva Bharat, Adivasi Ekta Parishad, Bhoomi Sena, All India Kisan Mazdoor Sabha, Bahujan Vikas Aghadi, AIFTU, TUCI and Krantikari Mazur Vikas Sangathan. A resolution demanding scrapping of the SEZ Act 2005 was passed at the meeting.

Maharashtra stands in the number one position as far as the list of approved SEZ proposals go but has fallen behind in getting the projects notified. As on May 1, 13 of the 71 projects were notified by the Ministry of Commerce of which seven are IT projects involving smaller areas of land. The Multi Product SEZs have bigger land deals that are yet to be struck as farmers put up stiff resistance to the mindless destruction of their livelihoods.

The SEZ Hot Potato

Farmers did not realise that there was a private company involved with a bigger plan than what they were aware of. Videocon, the domestic private electronics company, had received an in-principle approval for a 1,000 hectare Multi Product SEZ in these four villages.

Delhi's Chipko movement

Severine Fumoux
New Delhi

TREES are the first casualty of the Commonwealth Games which will be held in Delhi in 2010. Roads, flyovers and buildings need to be made so trees are being hacked and killed. Not many shed a tear. It's the price of development most Delhiites say with a shrug.

Now an activist group has come together to fight for trees. Consisting of citizens, environmentalists and NGOs, the group calls itself *Trees for Delhi*.

"Delhi has become a city of land use," says Ravi Agarwal, director of Toxics Link and the architect of the campaign. "Here it is a matter of allocating land for trees. The problem is that land needs to have some commercial use and that leaves no room for the tree."

"Trees have become an expendable commodity," agrees botanist Pradip Krishen, author of the best-selling book *Trees of Delhi*. He is a member along with activists and journalists. NGOs who have joined include Youth Reach. India's evergreen writer Khushwant Singh is also a supporter of the campaign.

Nobody thought of trees when the Commonwealth Games Village or the corridor for the High Capacity Bus Service (HCBS) were being planned. Trees could have been creatively included to enhance the landscape. Yet the consensus among unimaginative bureaucrats is that trees should make way for global infrastructure.

Imagine a world class city without leafy trees.

The campaign to save trees started when concerned citizens realised they had not been consulted on infrastructure projects which had gone quickly into implementation mode.

The tree campaigners say they wrote to the Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit. She responded but did not spell out any action plan to save trees.

Campaigners say according to the Delhi Tree Preservation Act if any individual cuts a tree without permission he or she will have to pay a fine of Rs 10,000. Yet contractors have been given permission to cut hundreds of trees. Thanks to the campaign, conservators of the forest department have now realised that they have control over giving approval for tree-cutting to contractors. When a tree is being cut, chances are high that a rare native species, out of the 252 found in Delhi, may become extinct.

There should be some justice system for trees also. The tree campaigners are trying to do exactly this. They want a reason why each condemned tree needs to be cut. So far, they have managed to strike a balance between development and preservation by colour coding each tree to avoid felling mistakes (red for cut and green for keep). They have been auditing the city's trees.

Trees for Delhi campaigners have organised workshops with transport planners who are interested in saving trees. This type of sensitisation will soon be extended to all the city planners.

The tree campaigners achieved one major success:



Tree campaigner Ravi Agarwal

There should be some justice system for trees also. The tree campaigners are trying to do exactly this. They want a reason why each condemned tree needs to be cut.

their action helped save 100 trees on the Delhi University campus. Academics unanimously signed a petition against sacrificing trees for a new rugby stadium. They said: "Rugby is not a major sport among our students and the old buildings of Vijay Nagar can be used for building a stadium."

The tree campaigners are deeply concerned about Sunder Nursery which has some 114 species, indigenous to the city. Around 1,000 trees are waiting on death row there.

So far, only plans for the Metro station on Race Course Road have been modified to spare 50 trees. There are, of course, compensatory afforestation and transplantation programmes. But campaigners

point out that transplanting 850 trees in a short time span seems overambitious.

Trees for Delhi campaigners have proposed city planners include trees. They want to monitor infrastructure development projects with planners. "Fairness, rationality and knowledge can bring back democratic practices and lead to a defensible vision of the city," says Agarwal.

If the city manages its traffic effectively and each citizen is actively responsible for the green cover of their community, a lot of trees can be spared.

To get citizens involved the campaigners are talking to Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs). Saplings are available for free from WWF-India and the forest department for schools, government agencies, corporates and individuals.

What is missing is a long-term coherent vision for the city's topography. "We need an agency responsible for choosing what will grow in Delhi without requiring much maintenance and in natural settings, like the southern and eastern Ridge," says Krishen. "So far, we can only create intermediate spaces for trees, off the road and in parks. We should grow native plant gardens for eco-restoration."

Till all that happens Delhi will only get hotter. Trees protect people from the searing sun. If Delhi's wealthy citizens don't protect trees, their other option is to bask in their sizzling concrete jungle.

More information can be found at www.treesfordelhi.com

NREGA going hi-tech in Bihar

Vidya Viswanathan
New Delhi

NGOs monitoring the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) have been complaining about fake job cards, muster rolls and payments. Now cutting-edge technology is coming to the employment guarantee scheme's rescue.

Picture this: e-muster rolls, biometric smart cards and an efficient online system which creates an audit trail of all transactions. The state which is taking the lead in making NREGA hi-tech is Bihar.

Shortly, Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's government is going to roll out a pilot programme in one panchayat in the Phulwari Sherif district of Bihar.

"We want to implement an e-muster system in one panchayat and learn from there. Group members will be identified using fingerprints through a hand-held device. Attendance will also be marked on the card using thumbprints and payments will be made on that basis. The card will also record the number of days worked. We can compare that with the 100 days that they are supposed to get from a central computer. Eventually all the blocks will be computerised. Cash transactions will be eliminated. A payment advice will be made to the bank or the nearest post office," says Anup Mukherji, commissioner and secretary, Rural Development, Government of Bihar.

If this plan of identifying 80 million citizens of Bihar is successful, the state government plans to extend it to other schemes like SGSY (Swarna Jayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana).

The e-muster system is going to be implemented by a joint venture between Beltron (Bihar Electronics) and IL&FS (Infrastructure Leasing and Financial Services).

The technology backing for the project comes from LL2C (Life Line to Communities), a non-profit entity started by Kris Gopalakrishnan, 53, who has returned from the US after quitting his previous assignment at Ispat Mexicana in North America. He had revived a closed plant there and was a director when he quit in 2000. Gopalakrishnan started a company called LL2B (Life Line to Business), a company that creates a paperless e-governance software. The company's software has been implemented in the district administration office of Pondicherry.

LL2C now makes software for biometric identification and creates a database. This then integrates with the e-administration software, an electronic workflow, which eliminates all physical file movements. The software can take all 10 fingerprints of a person and store it in the card, in a local device and a central database. The database also stores a citizen's personal details. The idea is that the biometric card can be used for payments if banks integrate it with their technology. Gopalakrishnan's software is open-source and works with the biometric recognition hardware built by many vendors. His business model is to give the software to the government along with the source code for a one-time payment that compensates for development effort, or alternatively, to give the software free and charge for implementation services.

"Transparency can eliminate all inefficiencies. There should be no cash transactions. You can create infrastructure where inexpensive handheld devices that can identify people and record payments or debit expenses are available all over the country. These devices in turn can transmit data to



A biometric device that can read fingerprints

a bank when hooked to a telephone line. All public payments should be made to unique identities which are captured in a central database," says Gopalakrishnan.

He also points out that payment is not the only leakage point. "NREGA is supposed to create assets for the village. But the same bund is shown as five different projects. If all the projects are collected from the gram sabha and identified in an open source GIS tool like Google Maps, it will eliminate this fraud," he says. His vision is ambitious but very real. His ideas are tested at the grassroots.

LL2C first started working on the biometric system when Gopalakrishnan was invited by a food-



Kris Gopalakrishnan

Picture this: e-muster rolls, biometric smart cards and an efficient online system which creates an audit trail of all transactions.

for-work programme organised by CEC (Centre for Environment Concerns) and REDS (Rural Employment Development Society) to do a field trial of the biometric system in Jakullatha Palli in Anantapur district in April 2006. They registered 100 citizens and created a database of the villagers. It had the name, family name, age, fingerprint and a photo. When payment had to be made, the fingerprint was read, compared with the card and then the payment was made.

"This was 80 per cent successful," says Gopalakrishnan. Many of the workers had a smudged thumb because they had worked with *chuna*. So they had to take a second fingerprint. Gopalakrishnan and the two NGOs used an optical biometric device manufactured by iPower Solutions of Chennai and the details were stored as binary characters in MySQL, an open source database. They soon realised that power supply was a big problem. But they discovered that the device could work with a battery. They tried to locate the nearest car battery and powered the device. A second trial was done in Mohammadabad village in Ahmedaguda mandal. This time they carried battery back-up and enlisted another 100 people.

Centre for World Solidarity (CWS), a Hyderabad-based funding agency came to know about these trials. They were running a flood relief programme and were funding several grassroots partners. One of the partners had paid only 15 people instead of a hundred but had submitted a paper report with several fingerprints. CWS wanted to see if this solution could be implemented with their partners.

So LL2C conducted a field trial for them in Gurrampetla in Khammam District.

"The tribals here did not even speak Telugu. They spoke a language called Koya. We had to call a gram sabha meeting to convince them about what we were doing. We identified Shankar, a Class 9 dropout who had gone to a town to learn computers. He translated what we wanted to do to the villagers and they readily agreed," says Gopalakrishnan. Here they recorded the details of

(Continued on next page)

Mayawati gets *aam aadmi* minus slogan

Hartosh Singh Bal
New Delhi

AS Mayawati assumes power in UP there is speculation on what these results actually mean. Much of it is emotive and tends to emphasise what most analysts would like to believe rather than what is supported by figures. Perhaps it makes sense to look at what this verdict is not.

The easiest phrase thrown at any election result is anti-incumbency. In this case, the analysis would say the UP electorate sick of Mulayam Singh Yadav's misgovernance had decisively voted against him, ensuring a comprehensive victory for Mayawati. Well, clearly, the victory was decisive. But this was not a vote against Mulayam Singh, all the way. In fact the Samajwadi Party's vote share went up marginally from 25.4 to 25.5 per cent, even though the seats won went down from 143 to 97. In other words the votes against Mulayam Singh coalesced around Mayawati, rather than being distributed among several parties. So, contrary to claims, the Samajwadi Party remains a considerable force in UP.

The second claim doing the rounds is that this election victory was the result of Mayawati stitching together a Dalit and upper caste combine. Figures provided by the Indian Express-CNN IBN-CSDS poll show that this is an exaggeration. While the poll was way off the final seat tally, it was quite accurate in terms of vote percentage and the data can be used to reflect certain trends. These show that while 17 per cent of Brahmins voted for her, as many as 34 per cent of non-Yadav and non-Kurmi landowning OBCs voted for the BSP as did 28 per cent of the lower OBCs. Clearly, the OBC votes were a factor in her victory.

Analysing these elections, Yogendra Yadav has put forward the thesis that Mayawati's is a coalition of the dispossessed. He has cited figures which show that in each caste segment those who are poor have voted in larger numbers for Mayawati rather than their better off caste counterparts. Again, while this



Mayawati, BSP leader

seems to be an accurate enough assessment, it does not offer an insight into why such a coalition came into being or why it coalesced around the BSP.

Agreed, it was not a vote for the kind of politics that middle class Delhi would prescribe, a politics that would cut across caste and tackle criminal and communal forces. The number of MLAs with criminal records in Mayawati's party is proof enough. More than 60 of her 206 MLAs face criminal charges, and of these 11 are ministers in this government. It is also true that most of her upper caste MLAs have rather impeccable RSS credentials.

A closer look at figures roots the process leading to the BSP's victory in the events that unfolded in UP over the past decade and a half. Mulayam Singh has

built up his party and his politics primarily around OBC support supplemented by Muslim votes. He has used the processes set in motion by the implementation of the Mandal Commission's recommendations to consolidate OBC votes. This has put him at loggerheads with the BSP, because the conflict between the Dalit and the well-to-do OBCs who form much of Mulayam Singh's support base is a reality in almost every UP village. The personal animosity between Mayawati and Mulayam Singh has added to the acrimony between the two parties.

Mayawati had already used this growing clout of Mulayam Singh's support base to reach out to the upper castes who felt even more threatened by the rise of the Yadavs. But while Mayawati's efforts among the Brahmins have been examined in great detail not enough attention has been paid to the rift in OBC ranks due to the selective implementation of the Mandal Commission recommendations. The advantage of reservations accrued to Mulayam Singh's core supporters, the Yadavs and the Kurmis. This is why Mulayam Singh opposed leaving out the creamy layer.

The continuing empowerment of these OBC castes saw other OBCs lose ground. This would explain why OBC votes went to Mayawati. The various castes that have been left out of the process of empowerment by the Mandal Commission's recommendations are demanding their share of the pie. In fact the non-Yadav, non-Kurmi OBC category seems to be the one segment where the rich-poor divide among BSP voters is narrow. While overall 41 per cent of the poor voted BSP and only 15 per cent of the rich did so, in the non-Yadav, non-Kurmi category, 34 per cent of the rich and 27 per cent of the poor voted for the BSP.

For Mayawati, the obvious thrust would be to implement policies that bring about a feeling of empowerment. This empowerment is not just related to economic benefit but to the relative security that the state can provide to communities that feel threatened by the growing clout of well-to-do OBCs.

This would explain why so many of the issues that figure in the *aam aadmi* debate in Delhi do not matter in UP. In fact, Mayawati chose to campaign without a manifesto. She preferred to emphasise that power now lay within the reach of the BSP. In ensuring that the non-SP voter believed this and consolidated behind her, lies her success.

If there is indeed combined opposition to Mulayam Singh's selective OBC politics, there could soon be political voices in UP demanding exclusion of the creamy layer from OBC reservations. The victory of Mayawati points to reservations being mooted on an economic basis.

(Continued from previous page)

the citizens who had earlier been cheated and then payments were made. This time they used a thermal biometric reading device from Precision Systems and recorded all 10 fingerprints.

"This is a foolproof system. It can clean up the administration," says Udayshankar, IT advisor for CWS. But CWS' own grassroots partners are reluctant to take up this technology. Their objection is that biometric cards give the impression that CWS does not trust them anymore even though they had worked with them for a long time.

These reactions don't faze Gopalakrishnan. He

pursues his mission doggedly with anyone who wants to make a difference. In Bihar, the technology is going to be further refined. The state government is going to use handheld devices from eFSL systems in Bangalore.

Eventually, Gopalakrishnan wants to build a system where the database contains all details about a citizen. This unique identification could be used for banking and all government programmes. But that would mean storing personal data about all citizens in one centrally accessible public location and in the card.

"In the US, where citizens are worried about privacy, it would be an issue. But in our country where cor-

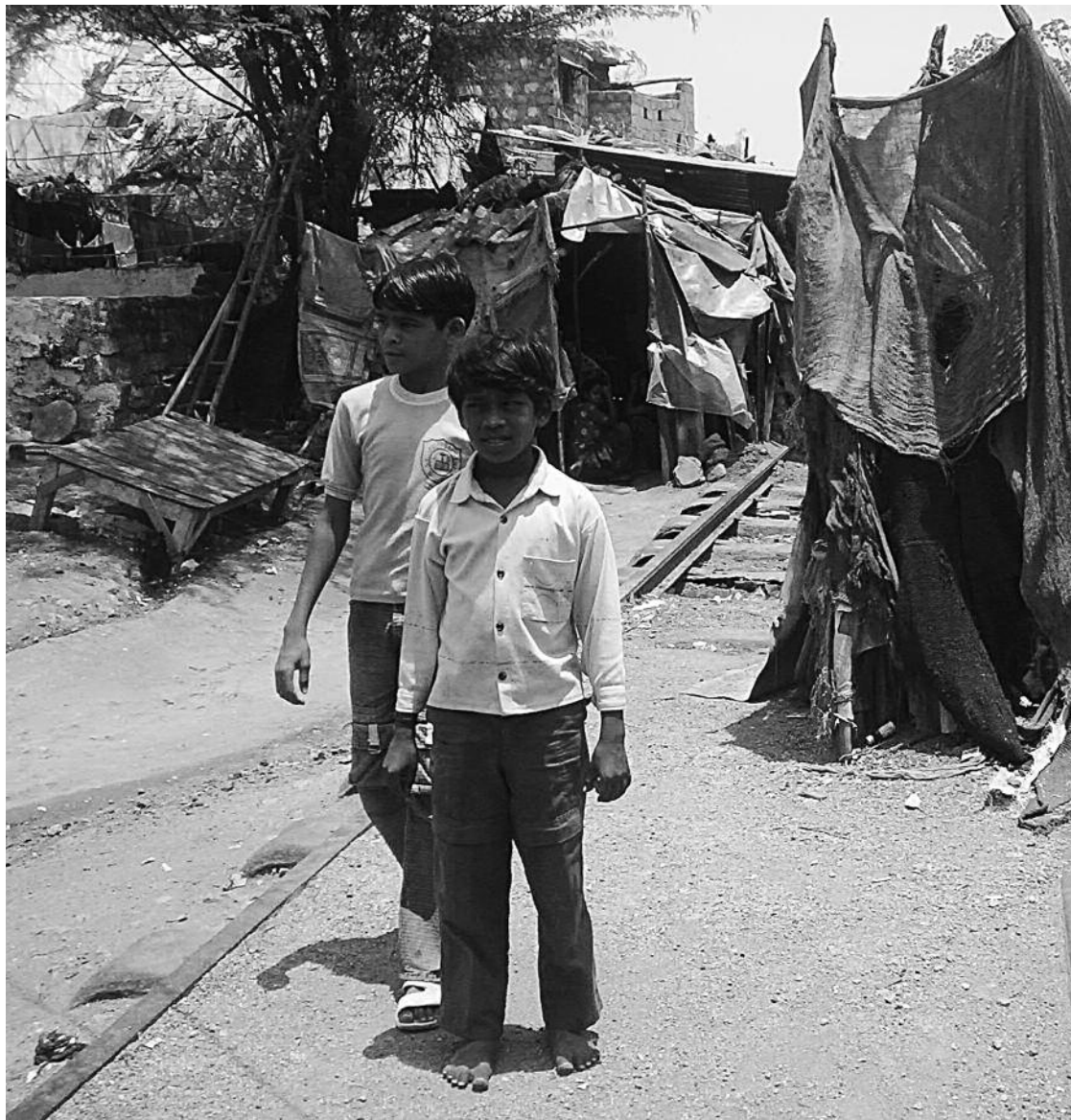
ruption and lack of transparency is an issue, this is the solution. In any case any electoral roll has data about a person's caste and other details," counters Gopalakrishnan. He also says that financial institutions like FINO (Financial Information and Networks Operation) and ICICI are interested in investing in creation of an infrastructure where banking can be done through biometric identification.

"Just biometric recognition is simple. We do need to create a network of stakeholders that can operate by using this identification method," agrees Roy Mathew, vice-president, Common Services Center, IL&FS. He also points out that several details like privacy have to be ironed out.

Inspiring the village teacher

Amit Sengupta
Hyderabad

AT the festering Rajiv Gandhi Nagar slum in Balanagar Mandal of Rangareddy district in Andhra Pradesh, a little government primary school with two-rooms is running its 'summer workshops'. It has 262 students from Class One to Class 5. The little ones in their worn-out clothes play ludo, snakes and ladder and games with songs and poetry. The children sit on the bare floor, laughing and learning. Every day they get a simple midday meal.



Rajiv Gandhi Nagar slum

Rajiv Gandhi Nagar is next to an open drain. Around 1,200 wage labourer families live here. If it wasn't for the school the children would have been sent out to work by their impoverished parents. Instead, the school's committed staff is putting an end to child labour.

The school has one government teacher, one additional teacher and two or three para teachers. Sujata, in her mid-20s, along with Padmarani, help the kids learn their 'playful notes'. Both are part-time teachers, working at abysmally low salaries. Sujata reportedly earns around Rs 1,500 and lives in the slum. Her husband is a labourer. She sends her two children to a local 'English medium school'. Her three-year-old daughter is attending the summer workshop.

"I am not here to pass my time. I want these children to go for higher education and change their lives. Why should they live in the slum all their lives? Even if I get a private school job at a higher salary, I will not leave these children and this school." Sujata's commitment is transparent. She sings a song which

she teaches the children as they run all over in this small school of hope: Break out of the bondage. Dream a new dream.

The dream has found a reason to celebrate with the arrival of a physics graduate from Nalgonda, Sudarshan, who joined as 'Community Organiser' last year. The school project is backed by the Aga Khan Foundation and Dr Reddy's Foundation (DRF)

Bearded Sudarshan loves these children. He sings beautifully. He teaches the kids sign-language and the 'Hyderabad Dance'. He starts with one melody and the kids follow him like a pied-piper. He takes out a

'helpers' in a country liquor shop were persuaded to leave their 'profession' and join the school; they were Mahesh, Mastan, Venkatesh and Shiva. "I used to get one or two rupees per day," said Mahesh, now studying in Class 4.

Sudarshan narrates the difficult experience: "Their parents refused, even when the children wanted to go to school. They would bring some money home, however paltry. It took months of cajoling and persuasion to bring the children here. But once they were in the school they refused to go back. Some of them are now studying in Class 7." No mean achievement this, in a 'rejected' government school of slum-dwellers, left to its fate, with a huge drop out rate at one time.

That is why, the pre-service or in-service teacher-training programmes came into critical perspective in the National Seminar on Teacher Development under the creative Programme for Enrichment of School Level Education (PESLE), organised by the Aga Khan Foundation in Hyderabad on May 4-5.

"What kind of training can help if you don't have the passion and the inner urge to work with the children of deprived communities?" said Sarath Babu, DRF director.

That was the hot debate in the national workshop where over 80 delegates participated.

Said Dayaram, chief programme officer with the Aga Khan Foundation, "The government system has to be improved, inclusive creative spaces created and the marginalised sections effectively involved. That is why this seminar is called teacher development and not teacher training."

One interesting example of what innovative teacher training can achieve is a new, four-year graduate teacher's course introduced in eight premier colleges of Delhi University which includes internships in government schools.

This new course has instilled amazing values among young, committed teachers. "I don't want to teach in a private school. I want to teach the poorest of the poor," says Baljeet Kaur, who did her B. EL.ED (Bachelor of Elementary Education) in Jesus and Mary College.

After the course, Baljeet 'chose' to join a Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) co-ed evening school, where she had to teach 55 students in Class 5, including adolescent boys most of them unable to read or write. "It was dark in the classroom and no one would listen to me. There was chaos, and I felt like crying. I was later told to write answers on the blackboard during their exams so that they could pass. This was depressing. All my idealism and creative-learning about teaching seemed to have vanished in a black-hole."

By the next year Baljeet had found her way with the students. Her 'pre-teacher training' skills became useful and she introduced theatre, poetry, music, drawing and play. The children, mostly from poor migrant families, started enjoying this great experiment with enlightenment. Even her headmaster approved. "Today, when a boy says, "I will come back to your class tomorrow', I feel so happy."

Her colleagues, Parul, Poonam, Niharika and Vineeta, who did their B.El.Ed. from Lady Sriram College in Delhi University and now teach elementary class students at The Heritage in Gurgaon, agree with Baljeet: "Half of our students will land up in the US after they grow up. So what's the point of teaching them? We all want to teach in government and MCD schools; but there are no jobs there." Despite this, all of them are introducing magical stuff for kids in their school: games, theatre, poetry, music, songs...

rally in the slum with the children propagating cleanliness, asking parents to send their children to school, campaigning against child labour, till recently rampant in the slum. The song goes like a revolutionary message: "My father is a bonded labour... but I want to study."

It was not easy. The school is just about a two-room structure, with children spilling into the lane outside. The DRF rents out two little rooms nearby to help out with classroom space. The rooms are dark despite the two windows in one room and sometimes children of different classes get mixed up. It's obvious that the government or its education officers rarely visit the place or help with infrastructure, funds, teacher-training or encouragement.

Indeed, had the Aga Khan Foundation and DRF not creatively intervened, this school of the have-nots hidden inside a huge slum would have declined and decayed.

Earlier, most children were either working or destroying themselves. Four children working as



Women play an active role in governance (above); Seventy per cent of the tea plantation has forest (left); Rajah Banerjee (below)



Makaibari's wonderful tea forest

Anjali Pathak
Kurseong

WHAT does an enchanting forest have to do with a cup of exquisite tea? Visit the Makaibari tea estate in Kurseong on the way to Darjeeling and find out. Giant bamboos, Himalayan oaks, ferns and orchids envelope the estate. Over 70 per cent of this amazing tea plantation is covered by dense forest, a feat accomplished by dedicated local self-governance and an enlightened tea garden management. Out of 1,574 acres at Makaibari, 1,100 are forest and the remainder is under tea cultivation.

Seven villages with a population of 1,731 are spread over the Makaibari terrain. Around 636 adults are fulltime employees at the Makaibari tea estate. Rajah Banerjee, the owner of the estate, understands the need to preserve the forest in order to maintain the productivity of the tea garden and protect water resources. Seven Himalayan springs flow through Makaibari.

He inspired local villagers, who were also his employees, to help Makaibari flourish. Rajah knew that the forest belonged neither to the government nor the proprietor, but to the people who lived in surrounding villages. They were the beneficiaries of the forest and their love for it had to be nurtured.

Each village has a panchayat called '*samaj*' by the villagers who are mostly Nepalese.

In 1994 the General Body Meeting (GMB) was instituted by the Makaibari tea estate to regulate the activity of the *samaj* and take up developmental work. The GMB has its own corpus. The money came from premiums received under the Fair Trade Labelling Organisation (FTLO) from tea sales in Europe and the US. This fund and the GMB came into existence in 1994 when Makaibari joined the FTLO.

Every village has an elected representative in the GMB. The villagers take their problems to the *samaj* and the elected representative takes it to the GMB. Women have played a very active role in local self-governance. Jamuni Devi, a supervisor at Makaibari, heads the GMB at present. The GMB

usually meets every six weeks.

The Makaibari forest, which attracts botanists, zoologists and tourists, thrives because of this local self-governance. To protect the forest against intruders and poachers, 18 fulltime community rangers patrol the forest area. Project Leopard was initiated 40 years ago and over time the population of leopards has increased from two to 11. The community rangers meet every Monday and report animal sightings as well as changes they have observed over the past week.

Kurseong means "Land of the White Orchid", and the villagers sell forest orchids as potted plants to tourists. Bamboo is used for making baskets and some village artists bring beautiful abstract figures to life from discarded tea bushes. Young villagers act as tourist guides for birdwatchers.

A forest nursery has been set up to prepare saplings for afforestation of denuded patches. Villagers are also encouraged to plant 50 saplings of indigenous trees in their backyards. The management usually buys the saplings from the villagers and men are deputed to plant on bare patches for some money. Remuneration is perhaps the secret behind the success of Makaibari's afforestation programme.

Similarly, when villagers started making compost heaps after the introduction of bio-dynamic methods in 1990, the management bought the compost from them for use in the tea gardens. Some villagers use the compost to grow fresh fruits and vegetables, which supplemented their income. It was apparent that the success of local self-initiative was based on the healthy respect which the Makaibari tea estate management showed for the villagers.

In Makaibari, vegetation is a six-tiered system. It's forest has leguminous permanent shade trees (albizzias), temporary leguminous shade trees (crotonaria, indigofera, African medolia), indigenous fruit trees, big grasses such as citronella, napier grass and Guatemala grass, tea bushes, and weeds, creepers and ground vegetation.

Some of these plants were deliberately introduced, some imported from abroad. This form of integrated forest management is usually termed permaculture

which is supposed to have four tiers. But with its six tiers, Makaibari has surpassed this model.

About three hundred species of birds are found in the Makaibari forest. The villagers live in harmony with the birds and animals of the forest.

The GMB has helped set up bio-gas plants as a source of domestic fuel. Initially, 20 bio-gas plants were set up by the garden management. New ones are being set up by the villagers with funds received from the GMB.

The GMB also provides interest-free loans to the villagers and helps with marriages and unforeseen medical expenses. Eleven girls have been trained in primary health care at the Kurseong Civil Hospital. Computer training is being imparted to 78 children by two full-time teachers. There are three crèches for workers' children till the age of two. A government-aided primary school from nursery to Class 4 has 150 students.

In 2005, it was decided that to accommodate the constant flow of visitors to Makaibari some villagers would open up their homes to them as paying guests. The 13 families who initiated the homestay programme formed a group called Hum Terah. The villagers took the decision to install western style toilets in their homes to facilitate the homestays. As many as 75 such toilets were installed in four months. The raw materials were provided by the GMB and the fitting was done by skilled masons. Each toilet cost about Rs 5,000-6,000. Hygiene improved dramatically. At present 21 families are offering home-stays at Rs 800 per day for a couple, all meals included.

All seven villages have electricity which has been made possible through funds provided by the GMB. Each village has a dish antenna. Almost every home has a TV set. Micro-enterprises are flourishing in Makaibari with several villagers selling milk, eggs and vegetables in the Kurseong market and to visitors. Some have even set up tea and refreshment stalls in Makaibari. All this exudes a feeling of participation and belonging.

Those wishing to visit the Makaibari forest and tea gardens may contact Rajah Banerjee at 09733004577, or send an e-mail to slg_rajah@sancharnet.in

School gets a herbal garden

Civil Society News
Muzaffarnagar

SD Public School in dusty Muzaffarnagar has shown it can do better than the biggest schools in the country in teaching its students to care for the environment.

It already has a unique Eco-Club. Now a Herbal Resource Centre will help the children of SD Public



Students of SD Public School (left) and the greenhouse where herbs will be grown

Organic Agriculture with the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO).

"The Herbal Resource Centre will provide new livelihood options to rural youth through vocational courses. The five Medicinal and Aromatic Plants (MAPs) which have been included under this international project are Ashwagandha, Sarpagandha, Stevia, Safed Musli and Ghrith Kumari (Aloe Vera)," said Anil Rana, director of Janhit.



understand organic farming and since they come from rural households chances are that they will take this learning back to their family fields.

The school is a part of the Meerut-based Janhit Foundation's efforts to solve problems of pollution and pesticide overuse in western Uttar Pradesh. (See *Civil Society cover Organic Uprising, April 2007*).

The Herbal Resource Centre, set up by Janhit, will help save the bio-diversity of this region currently steeped in pollution, mono-culture and bad farming practices. It will provide new livelihood opportunities. Children will become change agents.

The Herbal Resource Centre was recently inaugurated by Ajay Rastogi, the National Coordinator of

Janhit will be showing children how to plant seeds and saplings and use compost, bio-fertilizers and bio-pesticides. It will impart knowledge on soil nutrients and herbal crop management.

"This is the first Herbal Resource Centre in a school in the biggest state of the country. It will help in giving knowledge to students about the botanical names of the herbs, their medicinal properties, value-addition and marketing," said Shiv Kumar, the coordinator of this innovative project. "These herbs would be grown organically since it is the need of the hour for this region which is witnessing excessive use of pesticides and chemicals in agriculture practices".

The Herbal Resource Centre has a greenhouse, bio-fertiliser and vermi-compost pits along with organic manure units. It includes NADEP, a compost invented by Janhit's agricultural scientists. The students have started learning the importance of cow dung, cow urine and bio-mass, particularly weeds.

Thanking the Janhit Foundation for selecting SD Public School for this innovative project, the principal of the school, Chanchal Saxena, said, "I assure the gathering that not only the volunteers of the Eco-Club but the teachers and myself will leave no stone unturned to replicate this project in other schools."

She said the school also had a rain water harvesting system on its campus. The school's system had prompted the use of rain water harvesting in one of the newly constructed buildings of Nai Mandi Thana located in the heart of the town.

Shashikant Sharma, the secretary of the Eco-Club, is excited that principals and teachers of other schools have begun contacting him to provide them saplings, training and demonstrations.

The majority of students of this school come from rural areas. The environmental concerns they learn here will get translated into further action on their family farms. This region of UP has a serious problem with monoculture practices in farming. There is an over emphasis on sugarcane and wheat.

Pradeep Kumar of Janhit Foundation said: "Recent studies conducted by the Janhit Foundation show that Muzaffarnagar receives an overdose of deadly pesticides." Janhit wants to make farms more sustainable by helping them go organic and move away from Green Revolution styles of farming.

Janhit Foundation wants to create sustainable livelihood opportunities. Herbal crops are one of the most profitable and environmental friendly agribusinesses. Through the school the message of organic farming will spread. Herbal farming, done organically, will enhance the incomes of farmers.

Untouched testimonies

Civil Society News
New Delhi

CHIEF Minister Mayawati might be celebrating Dalit empowerment and social engineering in Uttar Pradesh (UP) after the resounding mandate her party won in the state's recent elections but in large parts of rural India, including UP, Dalits are still treated as untouchables. They are denied access to common water facilities and services. They are also denied the right to passage, made to sit outside government offices, given different tumblers for tea or drinking water and made to sit in separate spaces in cinema halls.

Dalits are socially boycotted in many villages, including in Punjab, if they ask for official wages or an end to bonded labour. They are even stopped from using village land in the outskirts for defecation; waste is dumped outside their homes, and they suffer routine mental, physical, sexual and even custodial violence.

These shocking revelations were part of the testimonies at the 'Indian People's Tribunal on Untouchability' held in Delhi on May 12 and 13.

The tribunal was organised by the National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights and the Human

Rights Law Network, with inputs from several activists and organisations in India. Dalit crusader Bant Singh from Mansa, Punjab, who lost his hands and one leg in a revenge attack by upper caste men after he fought relentlessly against the criminals who raped her daughter, also participated.

In one such incident, reported from Chakwara Panchayat in Jaipur district, in 2001, Dalits could use only their community ghats which hardly had any water. The Ganesh Ghat, made only for members of the upper caste, had deep water. On December 14, 2001, Babulal Bairwa, a Dalit, took a bath in the Ganesh Ghat. The upper castes punished Bairwa and his community with a fine of Rs 51,000. The police refused to act.

Later, human excreta was thrown into the Dalits' well five times in village Kansel under the Fagi police station in Rajasthan by members of the dominant caste to teach them a lesson. No police or administrative action was taken.

The Bairwa community organised a Sadbhavna Yatra of all communities seeking common sharing of water on public land. It was physically blocked by the upper castes who came armed. The police asked the Dalits to go back and stop the yatra.

In a recent ghastly case which happened on

December 20, 2006, and has been recorded in the case briefs of the tribunal, in Chhanbilla village, district Sagar in Madhya Pradesh, a Dalit, Phoolchand Ahirwar, was brutally attacked. Ahirwar, who lived in a landless Dalit hamlet of 100 families, had to face the wrath of the landed Yadavs (400 families), because a few Dalits hired some land in the vicinity of Beela Dam under the MP Irrigation Department for cultivation. The Dalits have to depend on the Yadavs for their basic livelihood. But the act of trying to do their own cultivation enraged the Yadavs. In retaliation, they cut off Phoolchand's ears and smashed him into pulp. He lost consciousness. When asked to take action against the individuals who attacked Phoolchand and who were identified, the police reportedly filed a case against Phoolchand.

In a case documented by Dalit Shtree Sakthi and Dalit Women's Access to Justice, Allampali Kalawathi, 37, of Kovvuru village, East Godavari district, Andhra Pradesh, a Dalit sarpanch, was not allowed to exercise her constitutional rights. Kalawathi is brave. She lodged a police complaint, but the case was not registered. Then she filed a writ petition in the high court. However, her case only proves, that despite constitutional and democratic conventions, it is difficult for Dalits to survive in a severely fragmented and caste-divided society, where they are still considered as untouchables.

Photos: LAKSHMAN ANAND



Artists, writers, singers, social activists, politicians and academics came together to protest against attacks on creative freedom

Canvassing for artistic freedom

Severine Fumoux
New Delhi

INDIA'S art community took to the streets once again to protest assaults on creative freedom. The protest was triggered by the sudden arrest on May 9 of Chandramohan Srilamantula, a student at Maharaja Sayajirao University, Baroda, for having exhibited art works that, according to the police, "hurt religious sentiments and pose a threat to public order".

The artists saw the arrest as a transgression on the right to individual expression. They also saw a pattern in such heavy handedness under the BJP government in Gujarat.

The works in question were a large cross depicting Christ with his penis hanging out and a nude woman with a baby attempting to push its way out of her vagina. The caption below read: 'Durga Mata'.

The paintings were part of an annual appraisal show at the Faculty of Fine Arts. The VHP barged in. Chandramohan was attacked by Niraj Jain, a local VHP leader. He was then arrested and imprisoned for refusing to take down his art works. SK Pannikar, the Dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts, was suspended for being supportive of his student and for organising another nude paintings exhibition the following day against the orders of the university authorities.

On May 14, artists, writers, politicians, social activists and actors protested across the country. In New Delhi, Sahmat led the protest outside Rabindra Bhawan with an "appeal to all secular parties, organ-

isations and individuals to raise their voice."

What are Chandramohan and Pannikar guilty of? Obscenity? Blasphemy? The court is trying to discern one from the other. "The police or the court cannot understand easily the psychology of colours or lines," said an editor of the Hindi daily *Jansatta*,



A protestor demanding Chandramohan's release

covering the protest.

"The question is how and from where to define transgression of rights when we talk of a secular democratic set up. The state needs to be more active in the debate. Also, this event is telling the vast silent majority to come out and support us" said Danish Husain, actor and poet who posted Sahmat letters on his blog: "Writers against Terrorism"

"The attack here is against the spirit of open-mindedness and inquiry that is at the heart of any university," said Ram Rahman, founding member of Sahmat. It was, they pointed out, a violation of basic human rights. The protesters stressed the dangers of moral policing for India's democracy.

Shubha Mudgal set the tone with her singing. Symbolically, Sahmat's first act was to distribute postcards designed by artists with stamps and addresses of BJP members for the public to send out. "We need to start being more hard-hitting with the fascists of this country, because fascism is rising, just the way it did in Italy," said Peter Nagy, director of the New Delhi-based art gallery, Nature Morte.

Among those present at the protest in Delhi were activist Arundhati Roy, artists Jatin Das and Anjolie Ela Menon, politician Sitaram Yechury of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), D Raja of the CPI, art critics, professors and many journalists who were exhorted to report the event extensively. Whether this protest will rally the media and the people to the cause of creative freedom remains to be seen.

Photos: LAKSHMAN ANAND



Anadi Saha and other food hawkers at their stalls on Chowringhee

HAWKERS

Beginning in Kolkata lines are being drawn to keep out big retail chains

Rita and Umesh Anand

Kolkata/New Delhi

LALLAN Nandy, 33, sells bedcovers and sheets on the pavement at Gariahat, in south Kolkata. But that is not the life that he thinks he deserves. He has dreams and wants to go to Singapore, where he believes he will get self-respect and make money. "I want to do something big," he says. "Time is running out."

Lallan is particularly worried that huge investments being pumped into retailing by Indian and international companies could wipe out 10 years of effort that he has put into building his small business. It would leave him nowhere because he does not have an education.

Retail chains would be able to source their products more widely and sell them cheap in inviting shop environments. The Indian retail market is said to be worth at least \$100 billion. It will take some time to eat into the pie, but with each chomp big businesses will change the ground rules of the retail game.

The focus of the chains is on urban areas because it is only possible to have organised retail in the cities and towns. This frightens hawkers. They see the setting up of stores as the first step in an official urban development strategy that will decree their removal from the streets.

A national policy on urban street vendors passed in 2004 recognises the hawkers' right to a livelihood and says they play an important role in the supply of affordable goods. The policy recommends they be included in the master plans of cities. It proposes finance, insurance, identity cards and social security for them.



Middle-class buyers check out bed covers in Gariahat in South Kolkata

IN BATTLE MODE

But the Congress-led UPA government's decision to allow big national and foreign investments in retail chains virtually annuls the policy and makes millions of hawkers insecure.

To keep out chain stores, hawkers like Lallan in Kolkata have turned to the Hawker Sangram Committee (HSC), which represents 42 unions. In 1996 the HSC thwarted the West Bengal government's Operation Sunshine to remove hawkers from the pavements of the city.

The question now is whether hawkers will be able to fend off the new threat to their businesses through a combination of confrontation and dialogue in much the same way Operation Sunshine was repelled?

The West Bengal experience is being shared across India in the hope of setting off a national upsurge. There are an estimated 40 million hawkers in the country with 10 million of them being in cities. In Kolkata there are some 270,000 hawkers, up considerably from the 150,000 at the time of Operation Sunshine.

In the 12 years since 1996, the hawkers have also put in place an all-India organisation. The National Hawker Federation, set up in 2001, has been very active recently and now has an office in Delhi (see *Civil Society May 2007*) so as to be able to lobby and influence policy.

The HSC is led by Shaktiman Ghosh, whose own union is the Kolkata Hawker Men's Union. Ghosh is also the general secretary of the national federation.

Ghosh believes that hawkers will be able to take on big retail chains. He foresees violence if the government does not go in for a policy corrective. Reports of attacks on Reliance establishments have already come in from Ranchi and Indore, where small traders have been feeling insecure.

But shopping malls and retail chains selling fruits and vegetables among other things are clearly here to stay. The middle class are happy with them. They also provide freewheeling employment in sales positions to young people – many of whom have degrees but no jobs and will gladly settle for standing behind a counter till they can sort out their lives.

For all their collapsing infrastructure, Indian cities want to look global. Chain stores with their smart interiors, air-conditioning and so on make the Indian consumer feel he/she has graduated.

So, taking on the retail chains won't be easy for

hawkers. They perhaps won't get the kind of public sympathy they got from the public in the face of Operation Sunshine.

LARGE INVESTMENTS

Large investment decisions are being made. In the next five years, \$22 billion could be rolled out. Bharti and Wal-Mart together will invest over \$2 billion. Wal-Mart hopes to be in 75 cities within the next year. Tesco is similarly in the race and so is Metro AG. HyperCity hopes to have 300 grocery stores up and running. Reliance is investing Rs 1,000 crore in technology alone for its stores. ITC is not content with stores and wants to be seen on the street with push carts.

Companies are getting into the retail sector at various points. For instance, they are in clothing and pharmaceuticals. But food and groceries account for three-fourths of all retailing. The implications of this run really deep. Cold chains, packaging, efficient selling and extensive purchase networks that go straight to the farmer will forever change ways of doing business in the retail sector.

The mandi as it is known today could well disappear. Fish, meat and vegetable markets will also go. Where will the hawker buy from? He can hardly be expected to match the sums companies will spend on advertising and branding. Since most hawkers have no education and know no other way of life, they see a dark cloud over their future.

Says Ghosh: "You cannot take the livelihoods of people away and just banish them from sight. Hawkers are creative, self-reliant people. They build their businesses with a lot of hard work in difficult conditions. Invariably, people with no other option, and for whom the State does nothing, become hawkers. They source their products cheap from small producers and sell at affordable prices to people in the lower and middle class."

"If companies like ITC, Reliance and Bharti think they can take away the livelihoods of people, we will resist them. There will be violence. If ITC wants to put vending carts on the streets we will destroy them."

Ghosh says Indian hawkers will also "shame" these companies internationally for destroying livelihoods and pushing people into poverty for

Shaktiman Ghosh foresees violence if the government does not go in for a policy corrective. Reports of attacks on Reliance establishments have already come in from Ranchi and Indore.

purely corporate gains. "Consumer groups the world over will condemn what these companies are trying to do here. They should realise that this is a modern, networked world. It isn't the India of the sixties and seventies when you could manipulate policy by just buying politicians. We will make these companies pay dearly by tarnishing their names and brands and exposing them."

Almost on cue International Hawkers' Day was celebrated in Kolkata on May 26. Citywide events were held and social activists from all over were being invited to a grand rally.

Asked to comment on the proposal that hawkers could be trained and given jobs by retail chains, Ghosh says it is no substitute for running their own small businesses. "What kind of justice is this that businesses built by hawkers with their sweat and toil should be taken over by companies and the hawkers be given some lowly paid jobs?"

Ghosh points out that the hawkers have little or no education, which means they aren't qualified for jobs. As entrepreneurs, however, they are creators of wealth and opportunity.

Jobs as compensation for their stalls isn't the answer, he insists.

Moreover, retail chains are known to favour uniformity. They will dictate what has to be grown and produced. Local crafts and skills invariably get lost in the search for homogeneity that big businesses wedded to volumes are known for.

The diversity and innovation that Ghosh emphasises is in evidence everywhere on Kolkata's streets. It can be found in the household items that are so popular with low-budget shoppers, in the bags and junk jewellery, in the menus of innumerable food stalls.

"See this design, it is from Gujarat," says Lallan, spreading out a bedcover. "The problem with cloth items from Gujarat is that they don't last. One wash or two and they are finished. I took the design, put it on good quality cloth and provided a better product."

"Hawkers are the rajas of duplicates," declares Lallan happily, pointing out how hawkers take a design from a shirt and put it on a bag or from a bag and put it on a canvas shoe.

Small producers like artisans, weavers, leather and metal workers would never find a market if it wasn't for enterprising guys like him.

"We keep them posted on changing styles and fashions," explains Lallan. "If they are short of cash, I can lend a little. If my business closes, so does theirs.

Singapore dreaming...

Photos: RITA ANAND



In Singapore, known for its no-nonsense administration, hawkers have been given a place in the city. Their stalls have infrastructure so that they can run their businesses where demand exists. A meal on the streets in Singapore is as good as one in a restaurant. But much cheaper.

That's why they join our rallies and protests."

Time has always been running out for Lallan. He was a boy when he lost his father. Then he would clean floors and wash cars in homes. He moved on from that to becoming a vendor on the streets, at first selling knick-knacks, then bags and children's garments. Now he specialises in bedcovers and sheets, likes to dabble in design and has teamed up with seven others to occupy substantial pavement space and have a big display. Lallan calls the shots and controls 50 per cent of the partnership. They have Rs 8 lakh of stock and employ 12 assistants. The daily expenses at their stall are Rs 4,000 and sales are Rs 15,000.

Abhijit Saha's story is very similar. He is 42, and has a stall for women's handbags and school satchels. He has two partners so that the stall has size and enough variety on display. Abhijit has a leadership role in the Gariahat Indira Hawkers' Union. Asked if he had ever tried doing a job, he laughs and says: "I have never had a job and I don't think anyone would ever give me a job."

Asked why he has chosen to sell handbags, he replies that it is because women just can't resist them. "A woman will buy one today and another tomorrow and sometimes three and four together. I've tried other things, but it is the bags that really sell."

As we spend a couple of days hanging out with Abhijit, we find this to be very true. The customers are all middleclass women. The handbags they buy here could be Rs 100 or Rs 200 or as little as Rs 80. They are well crafted. And they invariably cost less than half of what the women would pay for them in big stores.

STREET FOOD REVOLUTION

The hawkers' ability to reinvent themselves and face new challenges is perhaps best seen in food stalls. Of the 270,000 hawkers in Kolkata, 143,000 are said to be food vendors.

Office-goers, students and shoppers turn to pavement food. The stalls offer a sumptuous variety: rolls, burgers, chow, curries, rotis, biryani, fired fish, kebabs, idlis, dosas.

In recognition of their role, the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) has said that food hawkers provide nutrition at the cheapest possible prices. On an average, you pay Rs 8 for 1,000 calories.

The food stalls, however, had come in for criticism for not being hygienic. The food was hot, but the plates weren't properly washed and the cooks were

Who is a hawker?

A national policy on urban street vendors was passed in 2004 by the Government of India's Ministry of Urban Development and Poverty alleviation. Here are some of its highlights. You can download the policy from our website: civilsocietyonline.com.

ROLE OF HAWKERS: Street vendors have a right to livelihood. It is the duty of the State to protect the rights of vendors. The policy seeks to ensure that the vendors find recognition for their contribution to society and that hawking be seen as a means of alleviating urban poverty. **Definition of hawker:** A person who offers goods or services for sale without having a permanent built up

structure but with a temporary static structure or mobile stall (or headload).

VENDING ZONES: Areas need to be defined where hawkers can sell their wares keeping in mind patterns of demand for their goods.

REGISTRATION: Town and ward vending committees should register hawkers for a nominal fee. They should be issued identity cards both for husband and wife.

SOCIAL SECURITY: Hawkers need access to credit and insurance. They should be encouraged to form self-help groups so as to access loans.

RELOCATION: Hawkers should be included in beautification plans and programmes. No hawkers should be evicted and relocated without adequate rehabilitation and only when the land is needed for an urgent public purpose.

Operation Sunshine and after

SINCE the early 1990s street hawkers and the Left Front government have fought bitter battles over the city's pavements. Operation Sunshine, of course, is the epic one. It started in Hathibagan in north Kolkata and then spread to Bowbazar and finally to Lake Market, south of the city.

"I prefer to call it Operation Sunset," says Shaktiman Ghosh, leader of the Hawker Sangram Committee and general secretary of the National Hawker Federation. "Eighteen of our hawkers committed suicide after being evicted from the pavement."

The pavement is to a hawker what a small field is to a farmer. It has its own economics. Take it away and the hawker is devastated.

Ghosh says in early 1996 the hawker unions were talking to the state government about regulating the sector. A plan was drawn up in which officials from WHO, FAO, the police commissioner and Mayor were involved. It was agreed there would be no eviction and hawkers would get identity cards. Seventy per cent of hawkers sell food and it was decided they would be trained by the All India Institute of Public Health and Hygiene.

Ghosh says all this was included in the Left Front's election propaganda. But when it returned to power, Suhas Chakravorty, transport minister, announced that if a single hawker was seen on Kolkata's pavement, he would resign. The media declared him a hero.

When push came to shove the HSC coordinated an elaborate resistance. Ghosh rallied hawkers together in pockets across Kolkata in a show of defiance against the authorities. "We were told to go back to UP and Bihar. We said we will not leave even a single inch of pavement," says Ghosh.

There is much folklore associated with the standoff. Hawkets with their wives and children camped at their stalls. They kept stocks of red chilly powder with them to throw in the eyes of police and municipal staff sent

to evict them.

The hawkers wanted to send home the message that they were fighting not merely for their stalls, but for the very survival of tens of thousands of families. They confronted Kolkata, always a caring city, with the social cost of arbitrarily cleaning up its streets. With numbers on their side, hawker unions jammed roads and brought the city to a halt, day after day. They also made it politically embarrassing for the Left Front government to act against them.

"The government said no eviction on November 23. Our hawkers on vigil went home to sleep. At midnight on November 24, party cadres attacked Hathibagan in north Kolkata destroying hawkers' stalls and goods. Then Bowbazar and Lake Market stalls were removed and goods taken away. Hawkets retaliated by taking to the streets, the police came to arrest me and the city went up in flames," says Ghosh, who has been arrested 23 times.

"From Mahatma Gandhi to Bhagat Singh, we use all tactics. We can break the law too," says the unfazed Ghosh. Political parties in the opposition, INTUC, even some politicians from the Left Front joined the protesting hawkers.

Finally, the government beat a retreat. In the 10 years since then the number of hawkers in Kolkata has in fact gone up from 150,000 to 275,000.

"In 1997, they came up with a law that made hawking a non-bailable offence. For dacoity you can get bail, but not for hawking? We protested against this Black Bill," says Ghosh.

Eviction drives against hawkers before the Pujas are especially hurtful and the HSC has always stood up against them.

Hawkers aren't short of ideas either. After one pitched battle for Gariahat's pavement, hawkers strung their salwar kameezes on trees all along the footpath in a show of defiance.

not clean in their person. The stalls were also the source of garbage, which would fester and further endanger the food that was being served.

When the government backtracked on helping hawkers with training, the unions decided to do it themselves. At the initiative of Ghosh and the HSC the food stalls have been cleaning up their act. The HSC claim is that at least 3,000 hawkers have taken training in better practices from the All India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health (AIIPH). What does the training involve?

Anadi Saha, who owns Saha Fast Food on Chowringhee, near the Park Street crossing, says that first of all the hawker's own health has to be good. No coughing, sneezing and so on. Fingernails should be cut and clean. The cooks have to wear aprons.

Next comes the washing of plates. Saha says all 54 hawkers on his stretch wash plates in hot water. They make sure that the plates aren't washed near drains. Outlets for waste water have to be constantly supervised so that they don't get blocked and overflow.

Leftovers are put in one bin. Four people are paid to sweep the pavement round the clock so that there is no litter.

Model food stall zones have been set up on Camac Street, Russel Street, Chowringhee Road and Elgin Road. These are primarily office areas. The zones were inaugurated by the West Bengal Minister for Health, Dr Suryakanta Mishra. Also present were Dr Salim Habayib of the World Health Organisation (WHO), Dr Daniel Gustafson of Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and Tushar Talukdar, an ex-police commissioner of Kolkata.

At Saha Fast Food, the menu is varied. You can get biryani and at least two other kinds of rice. Tandoori rotis are available as are several meat dishes.

Saha belongs to Ghosh's Kolkata Hawker Men's Union. He plays a leadership role on this stretch of Chowringhee, encouraging the stalls to follow the new norms rigorously.

The question now is whether this experiment in central Kolkata's business district can be replicated across the city. The HSC wants all the food hawkers



Office-goers grab a hot and safe meal

Model food stall zones have been set up on Camac Street, Russel Street, Chowringhee Road and Elgin Road. These are primarily office areas.

in Kolkata to be covered in the next five years. To achieve this it hopes to be able to set up a training centre where 6,000 hawkers can be initiated into better practices every year.

The HSC has received no support from the government for its idea. Costs of training have been borne by the hawkers. Sweepers to keep pavements clean are paid by them. The government has not given them any space or services. Anadi Saha looks longingly at a flyover across the road. If only the government would permit him and his colleagues to move there. Customers would have space to eat and their stalls would not drown in rain.

In the disaggregated way in which life on the street flows, no two hawkers are the same. Enforcing best practices is, therefore, not easy. So, plates don't always get washed in equally safe ways and there will be litter where there should be none. Drinking water may be covered, but will it be uniformly consumable?

Yet there is no doubt that street food rules. It is tasty and affordable.

Most importantly, it is always available. Since it is served hot it is invariably free of infection. Fresh food is preferable to stored food. Hawkets wind up their stalls at the end of the day and have no means of keeping provisions overnight.

At Saha's stall there is always a mixed crowd, which gets particularly thick at lunch time. But that is not all. Saha's mobile keeps ringing with orders coming in from nearby office buildings. These are regular customers.

"Our customers on this stretch have increased from 2,500 to 7,000 a day," he says. "Our profits are better." He employs eight people, including his daughter at Rs 2000. Saha takes home a net profit of Rs 10,000 a month.

The street food hawker provides a service that is primarily a necessity. Only quality will keep customers coming back.

Says Ghosh: "Kolkata has a population of about 14 million. In addition, about eight million people come into the city each day from neighbouring districts for work. Only street food can take care of their needs. You will never be able to build enough restaurants to feed so many people. We are asking for a



Garment and junk jewellery on the street are very popular. And below: Abhijit Saha in his bag stall at Gariahat



The food hawkers are now banding together in a cooperative that will sell edible oil and spices under the Hawk brand.

night food market along the lines of Lahore's famous Food Street."

The food hawkers are now banding together in a cooperative that will sell edible oil and spices and other ingredients to stalls under the Hawk brand. This will be a further step towards standardisation and improving quality.

GOING NATIONAL

After the failure of Operation Sunshine in 1996, when it became apparent to the West Bengal government that hawkers could not be wished away, an uneasy truce has prevailed.

Hawkers are allowed to use one-third of the pavement. Their stalls have to be temporary and dismantled at night.

But while the government has beaten a retreat, the hawkers have shown innovation and resilience. Their numbers have gone up by at least 100,000, if the HSC is to be believed.

Under Ghosh's leadership, the HSC has lobbied with academics and journalists in Bengal and across the country to bring into currency an alternative view of the contribution that hawkers make.

"The problem is government officials and political parties associate hawkers with dirt, pollution, traffic jams and accidents. Their prescription is to remove all hawkers. They don't see us as a dynamic urban economy. Take a look at south-east Asia. It is full of hawkers," says Ghosh.

There have been conferences and workshops, the most recent being in May in Kolkata which was widely attended. It drew high-profile activists and speakers like Vandana Shiva and Medha Patkar.

"After I met Medha Patkar I came to understand why evictions were taking place, about the World Bank and the mega cities project and the Jawaharlal Nehru Urban Renewal Mission. So we started demonstrating before the World Bank," says Ghosh.

The strategy of the Kolkata hawkers has been to bring themselves into the national mainstream and through the National Federation of Hawkers build bridges with people similarly employed in other cities. They have successfully identified themselves with the entire unorganised sector.

Ghosh was prominently present by Medha Patkar's side during the 10 days of Sangharsh 2007 in Delhi in April. In doing so he has made hawkers a part of the National Alliance of People's Movements.

READY FOR ANYTHING

On the streets of Kolkata, hawkers are ready for anything. Improvisation is their strength. Their wares, like bags and even jewellery, hang where they are stationed. Electricity connections are borrowed from nearby stores. They have mastered the art of putting out their stock in attractive dis-

plays and then packing it up at lightning speed. So, one evening when an early May thunderstorm breaks over Gariahat, stall hands swing into action and make sure goods are protected. It is much the same at Saha Fast Food during lunchtime the next day. A shower sends customers scurrying into nearby buildings. Saha tells us to cross the road and stand under the Park Street flyover. We don't take his advice and end up drenched, with our photographer just about managing to put his camera away safely.

Life on the street is tough and full of surprises. Running a business on the street and making money is even tougher. It is easy to see hawkers only as the urban poor battling for an income in the unorganised sector. But the fact is that they are much more than that and have the strategies and responses of accomplished businessmen.

Anadi Saha talks at length on the drawbacks of partnerships.

"Partnership businesses are full of problems. A disagreement and a bad partner can bring you down. In my view it is better to have a proprietorship or have a private limited company," he says, as we sit on stools on the Chowringhee pavement, with the roadside barber

joining the conversation in between shaves and haircuts.

Lallan at Gariahat is full of seasoned caution when talking about investment and sales figures. He is even more reticent when it comes to the profits his stall generates. But as our chit-chat moves along he tells us how he calls the shots with his seven partners. His Rs 8 lakh of stock comes in part from suppliers on credit. For the rest it is the money he and his partners have put in and what they raise from a bank when the need arises. The bank loan is possible because they have a godown where the goods are kept and pledged.

Hawkers are mostly positioned on pavements in front of shops. In Gariahat we are told how the two coexist. "We always have good relations," says Abhijit Saha. "In those times when the government was trying to evict us, we would shift our goods into the shops at short notice."

Since the hawkers sell at cheap prices, they attract customers in large numbers. This helps the shops as well.

In some parts of Kolkata, particularly Burrabazaar, it is said that the big shops own the hawkers' stalls as well. This gives them a pavement presence, which otherwise they would not get. It also allows them to offload their unsold goods at substantially lower prices.

Abhijit denies that this happens in Gariahat. Long visits to his stall certainly give the impression that he isn't a front for anyone, nor are a whole lot of his neighbours.

COLLEGE STREET TO EAST DELHI

Two small rooms on the third floor of a building in College Street go to make up the headquarters of the Hawker Sangram Committee. They also serve as the offices of the Kolkata Hawker Men's Union.

With the hawkers preparing for a nationwide agitation Shaktiman Ghosh has taken a small flat in Lakshmi Nagar in east Delhi for the office of the National Federation of Hawkers.

But it is from the modest location on College Street that the entire hawker movement has been run. The two rooms have anti-George Bush posters and a rash of stickers against the Asian Development Bank (ADB). A strong leftist view is in evidence, though the hawkers in West Bengal are pitted against the CPI(M)-led Left Front government.

One of the rooms has an air-conditioner and a computer. There are a few unstable chairs and long desks with drawers along the walls. There are some young employees who do office chores. We spend several hours over two days with Ghosh as he tells us his account of the hawkers' movement.

He is full of passion and speaks excitedly in the manner of a street campaigner. He recalls the days of Operation Sunshine with anecdotes of how the hawkers went from



Lallan (left) with Abhijit and a fellow hawker check out a story in *Civil Society*

'There will be violence because people are being pushed out'

The decision to allow the setting up of chain stores with mega investments in the retail sector has cast a shadow over the future of India's 40 million hawkers, who account for an estimated 65 per cent of the unorganised sector.

Shaktiman Ghosh is the general secretary of the National Federation of Hawkers and the moving force behind the Hawker Sangram Committee in Kolkata.

The national policy on street vendors passed in 2004 recognises the concerns that Ghosh has been raising. But recent investments in retail run into billions of dollars and change the rules of the game.

Ghosh says if retail chains are to be persisted with they should be subjected to a tax of 10 per cent along the lines of the luxury tax imposed on hotels. This together with an estimated 15 per cent more that they spend on overheads will serve as some kind of protection for hawkers.

He also feels that milk and vegetables, spinach in particular, should be reserved for small vendors who can sell them cheap and fresh.

Ghosh's big ticket demands however don't change:

- Implementation of the national policy on hawkers
- Scrapping of Indian and foreign corporate investment in retail
- Scrapping the urban renewal mission because it is against the unorganised sector. Private-public partnerships in areas like water supply only serve the elite, he says.
- Comprehensive social security in recognition of the fact that hawkers serve the country's economy.

Excerpts from several conversations with Ghosh in Delhi and Kolkata:

What are your demands now that the government has allowed retail chains to be set up and huge investments are pouring in?

The government should go by the national policy on urban street vendors, which says that they have a right to livelihood under the Constitution. The policy also calls for amendments of the Indian Police Act and the Indian Penal Code. It is necessary to include hawkers in master plans, give them identity cards, social security, insurance, access to credit. There is a need to help them upgrade and get organised so that they become an integral part of the urban landscape.

By bringing in big retail chains, the government must realise that it is playing with the livelihoods of millions of people who earn an honest living as hawkers. It has to confront this reality. People who become hawkers do so because they have no other option. The formal economy has failed to include

one day to the next as they braced for their eviction and successfully fended off the authorities.

It is this experience of a street battle fought hard and won that continues to fuel hawker camaraderie. One thing is for certain: Ghosh himself enjoys huge support and trust. As we pick our way across pavements later, everyone seems to know him. In the style of a campaigner he nurtures contact and feeds on the recognition.

So, what he tells us in the offices of the Hawker Sangram Committee is borne out on the streets as well. He is indisputably an influential leader of the hawkers.

Ghosh interestingly is not a hawker himself. He is what you can call a professional trade unionist. "My father paid just a few rupees for my school and college education. The rest was subsidised by the government. I am paying back society by taking up the cause of hawkers and helping them get justice," he says.

Ghosh's costs are met by the donations that the hawkers make to the Hawker Sangram Committee and the Kolkata Hawker Men's Union. The membership fee is Rs 10 and thereafter hawkers pay Rs 2 per day. Ghosh points to a chart on the wall that is used to track the donations on a daily basis. "You won't find a more transparent collection system," he says.

them. Now if chains sell sweat shirts for Rs 30 and companies like ITC want to put push carts on the streets, where will hawkers go? How will they earn. Moreover what about the innumerable enterprises that supply goods, vegetables etc to the hawkers? What will happen to them?

We are asking the government to have a policy on the unorganised sector as a whole and accept the contribution that it makes to the economy. We want a policy that is tailored to Indian realities and the vast number of poor people that we have in this country.

But the government does not seem to have addressed these realities. What do you see happening?

There will be violence on a large scale because the people who are being pushed out have nothing else to turn to.

All over the world there are chain stores and there are hawkers. Surely there is some way in which the two can coexist. Violence can't be a solution.

Indian conditions are different and the government's initiative on retail is misconceived. Big business is pushing out ordinary people and usurping their income. The fallout of this can only be social unrest.

There many big retail stores in Kolkata and no one is burning them down.

That is because the big networks are only beginning to fall into place. Once they start selling really cheap and livelihoods get affected, people will hit back. It is only natural.

So you don't see a role for a regulator or some such mechanism.

It won't work because the companies that get into retail have only two goals: to increase volumes and maximise profits. That means standardising products, buying them cheap and selling them cheap. Then there is branding and advertising and so on. Whatever you do, the hawker cannot withstand this onslaught. But yes we need price regulation.

What about the jobs that big stores generate? Surely hawkers can be trained and serve as staff in these stores.

What kind of solution is that? Here we have enterprising people who build small businesses by the dint of their own merit and you say they should give all that up and take some job in a retail chain. Many of them don't have an education. Many of them are in midlife. This is a complex problem with many sides to it. It has to be addressed by people in government, not by companies and their boards.

But can Ghosh do at a national level what he and his comrades have achieved in West Bengal?

Defeating the Left Front government's misguided Operation Sunshine involved mobilisation of hawkers in known terrain. It is possible to rally together thousands of hawkers in a congested city like Kolkata, especially when their very livelihoods are threatened. Doing the same thing across India may not be quite so easy.

The opponent this time is also not merely a state government, but big retailers with huge budgets. They are seeking to win over a market worth billions of dollars. Clearly the strategies that the hawkers adopt will have to be different.

"Small producers will join us since they are being killed with Chinese products. We are also looking for alliances with traders' cooperatives and enlightened citizens. We will give our votes to political parties who support us. Also, we are allying with FDI Watch to shame these companies internationally," says Ghosh.

In Kolkata, the hawkers have got critical support from people who buy their goods. They want them on the streets. Often they know their hawkers well. Do such bonds exist elsewhere?

For Ghosh, the challenge has just begun. But in keeping with the spirit on Kolkata's teaming streets, he has decided to just plunge in.



Shaktiman Ghosh at his office on College Street

Business

BEYOND PROFIT

Rethink money with us. What should the entrepreneur of the future be like? How can you get rich and still serve society? Do causes need bottom lines?

SAIL, Neyveli are CSR stars

But is it time to go beyond industry awards?

Civil Society News
New Delhi

THE Steel Authority of India (SAIL) and the Neyveli Lignite Corporation were surprise winners of the 2006 Business World-FICCI-SEDF awards for corporate social responsibility.

The awards were presented by the President of India at the FICCI auditorium on May 7. This is Indian's first CSR award and was instituted in 1999.

In this season of liberalisation, it is uncommon for public sector units to receive such recognition in competition against the private sector. But SAIL and Neyveli scored better than some 33 other companies that applied to be considered and seven that were shortlisted.

In an inexplicable twist to the event, the Vedanta-owned Hindustan Zinc issued a press release saying that it had won an award when it had really come at the bottom of the shortlist. What Hindustan Zinc had really got was a letter saying that it had been among the seven companies that had made it to the final round.

LAKSHMAN ANAND



The BCF team with Amita Joseph in the centre



SAIL Chairman SK Roongta (centre) receives the Corporate Citizen I award from the President, G Ojha, SAIL Director Personnel, in charge of CSR, is on the right

SAIL and Neyveli have created social infrastructure. They enjoy a lot of local support. SAIL, an old company, has made investments in technology. Both companies are modest and often don't even know their achievements

The roll of honour, for the record, went like this: Corporate Citizen I: SAIL; Corporate Citizen II: Neyveli Lignite Corporation; Corporate Citizen III: Tata Chemicals; Special Mention: Zensar Technologies.

In the first stage, all 33 applications were run past Grant Thornton, an accountancy firm, which on the basis of the numbers in the books of the companies, created the shortlist of seven names.

Then the Business Community Foundation (BCF) team took over. BCF is a small but spirited outfit led by Amita Joseph, an MBA and a lawyer in her own right till she shifted some years ago to social sector assignments.

BCF's responsibility was to check out the companies on the ground. What did the local community have to say about them? How did the managements bond with trade unions? What were their environmental practices like? How much social infrastructure have the business activities of the companies been able to generate?

BCF has the skills to do this. It is well equipped to serve as a bridge between social concerns and corporate performance. In addition to Joseph's professional background, Richa Tyagi, Director (Programmes), has an IIT degree. Vinod Iyengar, who is from the corporate sector and has expertise on environment, assisted them pro bono. All this adds up nicely to qualify BCF to talk to managements and get them to open up. BCF, one gets the impression, is tough, but not necessarily confrontational.

If Grant Thornton vetted the cold evidence on the applicants for the FICCI award, BCF took the pulse of the companies by talking to the managers, examining processes and seeing the impact the companies had on their hinterland. Claims always need to be checked out on the shop floor and around locations. It is one thing to talk of environmental measures as a part of managerial vision and quite another integrate them with daily practices.

Both SAIL and Neyveli scored high on local support. People felt they had ben-



Neyveli Lignite Corporation got Corporate Citizen II



Tata Chemicals was judged Corporate Citizen III

efited from the presence of the companies. Schools, health facilities and so on have come up. The entire town stood by Neyveli during a recent corporate takeover threat. Children of the managers and the workers go to the same school. At SAIL, union leaders sat with senior managers and board members.

This is not to say that there aren't problems. Neyveli's mining has had an impact on ground water, but that has more to do with the local geology than the company's lack of concern. In fact, Neyveli is credited with good mining practice. It does continuous reclamation, as is the international norm, when other Indian mining companies just blast and extract and worry about reclamation later.

SAIL's mines are located in wildlife dominant areas. Its mining activities have affected an elephant corridor. It hasn't been able to address the problem. But then on the other hand it has done much for afforestation.

An old company, SAIL is nowhere near being state of the art. But in the past 10 years it has made significant investments in technology. It has improved its energy efficiency. BCF found that SAIL was often too modest. The management didn't hard-sell shopfloor advancements like many private sector companies often do. New technologies have meant environmental gains at SAIL.

What is the significance of the FICCI award?

Amita Joseph says it is "peer recognition." Translated that means being known in industry circles for cutting edge work. BCF's involvement is meant to lend credibility to the ratings because, though it is supported by companies that ask for its CSR advice, it is also recognised as an independent NGO.

BCF also invested considerable time in doing its homework on the companies in the running for the award. It spoke to other NGOs and asked for advice. This provides a wider credibility.

BCF itself has played this role for only the second year. The criteria for the award were set originally by Partners In Change in 1999.

The award's biggest shortcoming, however, stems from the fact that it is instituted by FICCI, which oversees the process and appoints the jury, to which BCF merely gives its recommendations. It surprises many knowledgeable observers that Vedanta-owned Hindustan Zinc should have made it to the last seven. It isn't a corporate entity known for great CSR, but it is well known to be eager to repair its image. Is there more here than the eye can see, is a question people will ask.

Chandra Bhushan of the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) points out awards given to companies by industry organisations are invariably lacking in wider acceptance. "They are regarded as the internal affair of industry and lack social acceptance," says Bhushan, who is respected as a judicious observer of corporate behaviour.

Bhushan also points out that such awards are invariably projected as going to the best

companies in India. The truth is that they are only the best among the companies that apply for

the award. The 33 companies that applied to FICCI are hardly a representative national sample.

Shankar Venkateswaran of the American India Foundation says that he too sees awards as excluding more than they include. But they nevertheless do succeed in showcasing best practices. Venkateswaran was at Partners In Change when the FICCI award was instituted and was responsible for defining the criteria for judging competing companies.

BCF says the FICCI award helps integrate responsible decisions with core business strategy and deepen social consciousness and partnership with stakeholders. Every small step in this direction is worth it. For BCF the challenge is how to become more assertive because this will not only raise the bar for competing companies, but improve the credibility of the FICCI award.

As an organisation, BCF works for AIDS awareness and opportunities for the differently abled, it helps provide volunteering opportunities and it undertakes studies for a professional fee. Perhaps it can help broaden the base for FICCI's initiative.

The Formula One ambulance

Vidya Viswanathan
New Delhi

DIAL 1298 from any phone in Mumbai and Ziqitza will track one of its nearest ambulances through the Global Positioning System (GPS) for you. A yellow air-conditioned ambulance with a broad green and yellow chequered band fitted with all emergency medical equipment will arrive and take you to any city hospital. If you are caught in traffic, you or the person who is ill will be taken care of by a trained doctor in the ambulance.

Ziqitza, an NGO, runs 24 such ambulances and in three years it plans to take the number to 70. Acumen Fund, the organisation which was started to fund social entrepreneurs, has invested in the project recently.

Ziqitza, which launched the ambulance service in April 2005, was started by five friends, who quit cushy corporate jobs. Shaffi Mather, who brought the four together for this project, was responsible for the roll-out of the Reliance Webworld outlets in his previous assignment. Mather and his friends have taken on Ziqitza as a three-year project during which they draw no salary and bear their own personal expenses. *Civil Society* caught up with Mather to talk about how they started Ziqitza.

How did the idea of this service occur? How do you know each other?

I was a regular management graduate from the University of Pittsburg. In 2002, my mom choked in her sleep in our house in Cochin. I drove my mother like crazy to the hospital in our car. Fortunately, she survived. Ravi Krishna, one of our group members, witnessed how timely intervention by an ambulance in New York saved his mother, who had collapsed due to septic shock. Ravi, Manish Sacheti, Naresh Jain and I were students in the US, and wanted to work in India. Shwetha, our fifth partner, worked with me in an organisation here. We decided to study the ambulance system, and each of us contributed Rs 10,000 for the study.

How did you study the system and what was the result?

We hired some college students in Mumbai. We looked at the details of the trips of individual ambulance drivers. We informally hung around the emergency arrival area in five private and five government hospitals to see how patients arrived. Ninety per cent of the ambulance revenues came from transporting dead bodies. Less than six per cent of the emergency arrivals came in a hospital ambulance. In private hospitals they came in their own car or in the neighbour's car. In the case of government hospitals, they came in a taxi or an auto. That is when we realised that the first Rs 1,000 or Rs 2,000 is not a problem for people to pay in urban India.

When did you launch the service? What were the hitches initially?

We decided that our service would be sustainable and world-class. Inability to pay would not be a barrier to access the service. We then worked backwards.

We invested Rs 20 lakh from our own money and launched our first ambulance designed according to the London Ambulance Service (LAS) standards in April 2004 while we were still working. The ambulance was designed by Ravi and a fabricator in Chennai. We told the medical fraternity and to our surprise we got no calls. We then realised that a kick-back system operates between the ambulance system and the medical fraternity. The telephone operator, receptionist, a floor superintendent and the senior ward boy are all gate keepers. A patient requests them and they pass on the request to an operator. We aggressively marketed ourselves after that to housing societies and doctors.

Pricing was our second problem. We said anyone who could afford would pay our rates. We found that even people who were going to posh hospitals like Leelavati, Jaslok or Breach Candy were not paying for the service. Either that or our drivers were pocketing the money. We launched our second ambulance in September 2004.



When did you all get into the project fulltime?

In September 2004, I went to London on a Chevening Fellowship. I took the ambulance service as my project and worked with LAS. I spent all my time there. They were shocked that Mumbai had no ambulance service. This was instrumental in us signing an MoU with them for training. They gave us all their software processes, protocols and training material at no cost. In fact, they even gave me their ambulance service plan, part of London's disaster management service. When I called Ravi, he told me, "when you get to Heathrow they are going to send you to Guantanamo Bay. Please don't tell them you know me," (laughs).

This support gave us confidence. We approached Arya Omnitalk, a wireless software company in Pune and got ambulance management software developed. In March 2005, I stepped out of Reliance. I had the support of the chairman to work on this project even while I worked there. We then raised Rs 1.8 crore from family and friends.

Are your prices profitable? Do you have any other revenue sources?

We have been cash flow positive from the first year. We now have 10 of our ambulances, while 12 in Mumbai belong to associates. Another 12 are in the process of fabrication and we are going to launch our service in Kerala next month.

We charge Rs 1,500 up to 20 km for the first hour if we drive somebody to a private hospital. We charge Rs 500 if we drive to a government hospital and for BPL (below poverty line) patients the service is free. About 22 to 32 per cent of patients do not pay in a month. But we cross subsidise. About 50 per cent of our revenues come from the user charges. Nearly 30 per cent comes from advertising, and the remaining 20 per cent from training. We have now started training in emergency healthcare and the courses are accredited by the American Heart Association (AHA). When we first

approached people for ads they asked us if we were running ambulances or formula one cars. We said 'Formula One ambulances'. Last year our primary advertiser were the Tatas in addition to SBI, Zee and Hindustan Petroleum. This year ICICI bank offered to pay more than the Tatas. We pay all our staff market salaries now.

In Kerala, we are going with a different model of raising funds. CII is helping us raise resources for 10 ambulances.

Do the Mumbai government and police recognise you?

When bird flu broke out we were stationed in Navapur for two weeks. They wanted ambulances with ventilators. We carried medicines to 32,000 families in the slums post the Mumbai floods. We rescued 29 people from two railway stations after the 7/11 serial blasts in Mumbai. Our own radio service supported us in providing medical duties.



Shaffi Mather

“We decided that our service would be sustainable and world-class. Inability to pay would not be a barrier to access the service.”

LAKSHMAN ANAND

Worldview

LATITUDE MATTERS

Everyone owns a shrinking planet. People count more than governments. Track change before it becomes news.

South Korea's new Indian heroes

Amit Sengupta

Gwangju (Republic of Korea)

INDIA is in the eyes of Gwangju this year. All over this beautiful and ancient city there are huge banners and posters and the national flag of South Korea fluttering in the breeze. In the midst of this display, there is one face which strikes a chord in India, that of Irom Sharmila, the stoic 'satyagrahi' from Manipur, on peaceful fast for seven years, protesting against the draconian Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), 1958.

Sharmila has been awarded the prestigious Gwangju Prize for Human Rights, 2007, by the May 18 Memorial Foundation, Gwangju, for her magnificent and incredible struggle in the troubled state of Manipur. She has become an icon of Gandhian democracy in Gwangju and South Korea, a staunch protestor of human rights violations and the tyranny of the state.

It's a double celebration for India. Another Indian has also been chosen for this prestigious prize: young Lenin Raghuvanshi who works with the poorest of the poor in Uttar Pradesh, especially in the districts of Benaras, Mirzapur and Sonbhadra.

The Gwangju Prize for Human Rights was established to celebrate the spirit of the May 18 Gwangju Uprising in 1980 by recognising individuals, groups and institutions in Korea and abroad that have contributed in promoting and advancing human rights, democracy and peace in their work. The prize includes \$ 50,000, a gold medal and an honorary certificate.

The prize is awarded "by the citizens of Gwangju in the spirit of solidarity and gratitude to those who have helped them in their struggle for democratisation and search for truth. It is hoped that through this award, the spirit of May 18 will be immortalised in the hearts and minds of humankind."

The 27th anniversary of the May 18 uprising in Gwangju City has drawn 135 delegates from the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Burma, Vietnam, East Timor, India and Bangladesh to this city's International Peace Forum. Political leaders, peace-makers, students, teachers, artists and celebrities from across South Korea have gathered here to remember the hundreds of martyrs who sacrificed their lives, gunned down by the military, to liberate South Korea and turn it into a democracy in the 1990s.

Irom's brother Shinghajeet arrived from Manipur to receive the award and read her message to the citation ceremony, while a flier documenting her life is being distributed all over the city.

The commemoration organised by the prestigious May 18 Memorial Foundation in Gwangju, is also a reminder that 'democracy is always under threat, from the military to the 'development dictatorship' of the cold blooded conglomerates of the market economy.'

"History is not complete. Democracy is not complete. Democracy has to be preserved and made better and better. There is always the fear that it will be

crushed or co-opted or manipulated. We have to be alert. The anniversary of the uprising and the prize commemoration is a reminder that the struggle for democracy and human rights must continue," said Professor Rhee Hong Gil, Chairman of the May 18 Memorial Foundation.

India is in the news. Everyone is watching India's future – will it also succumb to corporate dictatorship, sacrificing human rights and social justice at the altar of big money?

Irom Sharmila joins a global galaxy of great freedom fighters and legends of pro-democracy and human rights struggles in Asia: Aung San Su Kyi, the pro-democracy leader of Burma, still under house arrest by the military junta, Xanana Gusmao, president, East Timor, the Korean Association of Bereaved Families for Democracy, Wardah Hafidz, of the Urban Poor Consortium in Indonesia, Dandeniya Gamage Jayanthi of the Monument for the Disappeared, Sri Lanka, Malalai Joya of Afghanistan, Basil Fernando of Hongkong and Angkhana Neelaphijit of Thailand.

Lenin Raghuvanshi has been working for two decades against bonded labour and child labour. He has been fighting against starvation deaths, documenting

LAKSHMAN ANAND



Irom Sharmila on hunger strike at Jantar Mantar in Delhi

and taking up cases of human rights violations, and most crucially, campaigning in the villages of caste-divided UP on the need to break caste and communal barriers.

"We are working in the most remote interiors of UP to create unity and harmony between all sections of rural society: a kind of progressive synthesis which should impact the larger social and political structure of Indian democracy," said Lenin.

He is here with his wife Shruti who along with his comrades have been working for a 'different kind of politics' through their organisation Manavadhikar Jan Nigrani Samiti and People's Vigilance Committee on Human Rights. "I seldom come to Delhi, though we do join the struggles of the National

Alliance for People's Movement (NAPM) of which we are a part. I live from village to village. It has become difficult in UP because the mafia has come to dominate most areas. It is therefore more crucial to have a people's vigilance solidarity movement to protect the basic human rights of ordinary citizens, especially in remote villages."

Ironically, the Government of India has refused to respond to repeated pleas by the May 18 Foundation to allow Irom Sharmila to visit Gwangju to receive the award. "We have sent repeated official letters, which includes a representation from a committee comprising a government representative and a National Human Rights Commission member. We have sent letters to the Indian ministry of home affairs and external affairs, to allow her to visit. But there has been absolute silence. This is amazing. They should be proud of it, isn't it?" says Chris Kim, chief organiser of the May 18 Foundation.

Thankfully that has not spoiled the mood here. Springtime smiles spread all over like the lovely sunshine as people remember the brave martyrs whose memories are scattered across the city.

Brushing up on the Other 90%

Shuktara Lal
New York

THE exhibition, "Design for the Other 90%", at the Smithsonian is as problematic as it is enlightening. Organised by Cynthia E Smith, it features the work done by designers to serve the world's population afflicted with poverty and deprivation. But located as it is on plush lawns the gap between the haves and the have-nots could not be more stark and disturbing.

There are six sections – water, shelter, health, education, energy and transportation – each showcasing inexpensive and functional objects that can aid poverty-stricken societies.

The exhibition gives an opportunity to see the remarkable insight of designers who created these artifacts. We are able to walk around, and look inside village shelters that have been successfully propped up in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Grenada, the US and South Asia.

Built out of biodegradable laminated material, these structures provide victims of natural disasters with temporary emergency shelters that can last up to 18 months. In the US, they have been particularly effective in New Orleans, in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Other highlights of the exhibition include the StarSight, which offers solar-powered street lighting and Internet connectivity through a wireless set-up and the ceramic water filter (incorporated in India, Iraq, Mexico, Sri Lanka and Vietnam, among other countries) that relies on the filtration properties of ceramic, coupled with the anti-bacterial properties of colloidal silver which cuts down instances of diarrhoea.

Of the six sections, those devoted to energy and education are the most impressive. Apart from the StarSight, solar dishes constructed from bicycle parts and vanity mirrors, were on display. These dishes reduce cooking costs and, because they encourage communal preparation of meals, they reinstate a sense of community feeling in the hearts of the displaced rural migrants who use it.

In education the objective of one team of designers is to provide half the world's population with Internet access in the next 10 years by designing low-priced computers. Another goal is to create a "one laptop per child" environment, along with a portable microfilm library which would curtail problems issuing from the transportation and maintenance of books.

While much of the exhibition centres around the work done by designers to assist deprived populations in Africa and Asia, a few of the exhibits, such as the global village shelters, focus on cost-effective solutions for distressed communities within the US itself. One of the models offers a glimpse into the "Mad Housers", which was a project started by architecture students of Georgia Tech in 1987 to build shelters for the homeless in Atlanta. Similarly, another exhibit recreates a Day Labor Station that exemplifies temporary shelters erected by laborers and used by waiting day labourers for meetings, classes and sanitation purposes.

New Orleans forms the focal point of designs made to rehabilitate the poorer or displaced inhabitants of the US. The Katrina Furniture Project is one such enterprise. Workshops are organised in neighbourhoods in New Orleans where residents congregate to use the debris that arose from the hurricane to make church pews, tables and stools. They proceed to sell these articles, restoring pews that were destroyed in more than 90 churches by Hurricane Katrina. A group of students, alumni and instructors from the Art Center College of Design have given the Katrina Furniture Project the brand name of YouOrleans.

In a similar vein, "Project Locus" was spearheaded to reconstruct a backyard museum called the "House of Dance and Feathers" to commemorate the Big Nine Social Aid and Pleasure Club – the oldest such club in the Ninth Ward and among Mardi Gras Indian communities in the state – after the hurricane uprooted its original home. Project Locus aimed to re-instill a sense of history and identity in the devastated sections of New Orleans.

The most serious drawback of the exhibition is, ironically, its location at the

Smithsonian's Cooper-Hewitt, smack in the middle of New York's posh Upper East Side. To make matters worse, just a few feet away from the exhibition area is a line of tables and chairs with umbrellas mounted on the tables, beneath which are seated visitors to the museum.

There is something terribly disconcerting about walking through an exhibition that greets us with a huge placard that foregrounds the gravity of the fact that 90 per cent of the world's population struggles to exist, and, being aware that a section of the remaining 10 per cent is sitting a few yards away beneath umbrellas that shield them from the sun, or on sheets spread across the grass, talking on their cell phones and playing with their kids. It could very well have



The Katrina Furniture Project uses hurricane debris to make church pews, tables and stools. Workshops are organised in neighbourhoods of New Orleans.

been a glorious day at Central Park.

Adding to this irritating spectacle is the often banal nature of the exhibition's literature, which has been printed on a series of placards. A line on one of the placards reads: "Almost half the world's population, or 2.8 billion people, live on less than \$2 per day". The section representing transport includes the following observation: "While motorised vehicles are more efficient, they are too costly for the poorest communities". For the average American, this is, perhaps, very enlightening.

For the average Indian, this is self-evident, if not redundant.

It is here that the exhibition runs into problems. If it was operating under the notion that the average American truly is ignorant about the world that lies outside the US, its organisers should have paid more attention to its layout and been more sensitive to the politics inherent in where it was being shown. The organisers should have used the space provided by the lawn more efficiently, so as to draw in every individual entering its confines, because there is something not quite right about the involuntary juxtaposition between what the exhibition depicts and what the rest of the Smithsonian lawns display.

A second way in which these flaws could have been rectified would have been to concentrate more on designs conceptualised to benefit poor or distressed communities within the US. While there are models that address work done in this regard in the country, they tend to merge with the majority of objects in the exhibition that cater to populations elsewhere in the world. If the exhibition had drawn more on rehabilitative designs executed in the US, visitors could have, perhaps, felt a closer connection with what they saw, and could have extended this connection so as to understand the excruciating grievances faced by the vast majority of people across the world. However, in its present form, the exhibition – relegated as it is to one side of the lawn, and fostering an impression of the visitors being far removed from what they see – only serves to deepen the enormous gap that lies between the "Other 90%" and the visitors at the Smithsonian.

Sarkozy and the American dream

LETTER FROM EUROPE



Riaz Quadir in Versailles

the marginally less than half of France's population. The battle for the Gallic soul, so valiantly fought, between the avarice within one's own soul (lured on by the market forces), and the paradoxical but dwindling *noblesse oblige* of an *veuille* egalitarian tradition.

Equipped with the cutting-edge tools of consumer marketing and Business School savvy, the political scion of Corporate France sailed into victory as was predicted by one and all for a considerable period of time. It was probably the most momentous election in post-war Europe. Momentous, because Nicolas Sarkozy's rise to the highest seat of power in France, signal's the fall of the last bastion of resistance to the blitzkrieg of American style corporate globalisation.

The gradual erosion at the edges of the muddied banks will now jump into high gear and very soon a roaring deluge of free market 'solutions' will be flooding the nation that prides itself on more variety of cheese than days in a year, where *'bon gout'* or good taste is a national aspiration.

It isn't at all strange how human beings, once they have made a decision (always based on something profound and far more innate and pristine than what modern man calls 'reason') will readily develop a beautiful rationale to go with it.

Think Cartesian! Capitalism, based primarily on our greed, has over a long period of time, crafted a monumental body of logic and reason that has bulldozed away any argument that betrays the slightest signs of compassion and egalitarianism, or anything else that cannot stand the test of 'reason' or more importantly may stand in the way of profit-making.

'Nanny State' has become the coinage for those who refuse to give in to the ruthless nature of a Darwinian economics that pretends to pattern itself on nature's laws, evading the fact that when a volatile catalyst such as greed is added to the 'survival of the fittest', it produces, not an ecologically balanced live and let live universe but one of total domination by the fittest – more machiavellian than noble in its makeup. Every change that Sarkozy intends to implement will bring about such a society at the cost of all the French hold dear.

It was an April in Paris to remember. A glorious month, with more sunshine than has ever been seen in its history since weather records have been maintained. Perhaps it wasn't the effects of global warming, as many a curmudgeon were claiming, but a swansong to the demise of the Old France. In which case the blustery, cold and wet May that followed could well be seen as the winter of discontent for

Few among the post-industrial occidental philosophers understood the true value of 'working' less (work being defined as the time-based concept of production in a post-agrarian society). Bertrand Russel was in that august body. He saw true progress for mankind resulting not from excessive 'work' but from creative reflection, which is possible only in the stress-free state of leisure.

The French embodied this concept in their daily living giving rise to an unacceptable paradox for my American friends who believe that the French, who indulge in their excellent cuisine and *haute* culture to the exclusion of all else cannot possibly have the exceptional industrial productivity which always puts them among the top five, if not in the top three countries, every time. As in the world over, globalisation started an internal dialogue within the French society that brought all the dazzling glitter of the 'American dream' right to their doorstep, urging them to trade their long held traditions for a consumer

paradis.

Across the channel the left-wing labour leader of ten years called it quits, leaving behind a domestic legacy that continued the hard work of the right-wing Thatcher, putting the finishing touches to the American dream that not only puts the UK at the top of the global obesity chart (second only to the US) but also the personal debt chart.

For each pound a Briton has put on he owes many more to financial institutions. Over 4000 pounds sterling per capita. 'Progress' we have been told time and again, comes at a price.

Fortunately, some amongst us are questioning both the 'progress' and the price humanity is paying for such progress. *Der Grosse Ausverkauf* (The Big Sellout) a documentary by a German film maker, Florian Opitz, is a four-year-old work that traces the stories of the privatisation of the railways, energy, healthcare and other public services, and is being released in the US and Europe this week.

Will Sarkozy speed up the process that has caused havoc in the UK rails? France's EDF (Electricity) had already started the process a while ago, as had its railways. Does its logic look so much like a law of nature that the observers are left askance, muttering, "but what can we do?" Others have already bought into this rationale and Uncle Tom-like, extol its virtues and defend its weaknesses.

A bewildering replay - of a people willing to bet their lives on a system that promises them a free for all French Dream, where each, by dint of hard work will live a richer life... Whereas, in reality they will be stepping into a treadmill where, no matter how fast they run, they will barely be making ends meet; an occasional Machiavelli breaking through the ceiling to join the elite (money, not lineage, being the criteria of this club), while statistically the number of those without a safety net will rise dramatically. Why do we need to theorise when the most perfect and glaring example of a world gone awry lies in the American experience.



Nicolas Sarkozy

'Nanny State' has become the coinage for those who refuse to give in to the ruthless nature of a Darwinian economics that pretends to pattern itself on nature's laws, evading the fact that when a volatile catalyst such as greed is added to the 'survival of the fittest', it produces, not an ecologically balanced live and let live universe but one of total domination by the fittest.

Perspectives

CATCHING TRENDS

Have an idea?
Perhaps a lost
cause? Tell your
story or just
express an
honest opinion
in these pages.

Bundelkhand's shocking poverty

BHARAT DOGRA

SEVERAL regions of India have been facing an agro-ecological and food security crisis in recent years. Villages have been fighting a battle for survival amid water shortages, adverse weather conditions, ruined crops and high indebtedness resulting in the distress sale of land.

A study in April of four blocks in Bundelkhand region of Uttar Pradesh by Action Aid brought to light certain alarming facts.

- Cutting and harvesting of the wheat crop, the most important source of livelihood for farm workers is being taken away with the introduction of combine harvester machines in several villages.
- Even in areas where the water-table is receding, highly water intensive crops such as mentha are being introduced, leading to further scarcity of water.
- Farmers are committing suicide on account of indebtedness.
- No relief has reached even those areas which have reported starvation deaths.

The study was part of the Hunger Monitor Project, and was conducted with the help of voluntary organisations such as Parmarth, Akhil Bhartiya Samaj Seva Sansthaan and Vidya Dham Samiti. The four blocks taken into consideration for the study were Madhogarh and Rampura (Jalaun district), Manikpur (Chitrakut district), and Naraini (Banda district). About 13 villages were visited to hold detailed discussions with people. Certain conclusions emerged from the study.

ADVERSE CHANGES IN WEATHER: Significant changes in weather patterns during the last four to five years have adversely affected farming. In comparison to the situation 25 to 30 years ago, there has been a sharp decrease in rainfall in recent times. Moreover, rain tends to be restricted to lesser number of days; cases of untimely rain have become common, causing more harm than good. The damage caused by hailstorms, frost and storms has increased; Jalaun witnessed a storm which blew away harvested wheat of several farmers. The administration should be prepared to cope with such emergency situations.

SHOCKING MALNUTRITION: Research on whether people were getting enough nutritionally balanced food (the right amount of grain, pulses, vegetables, milk and ghee) found that in Naraini and Manikpur blocks, only 5 per cent could access such food, while in Madhogarh and Rampura blocks the figure was just 10 to 15 per cent. The situation in some hamlets of Kol tribals and in Ragauli was appalling. Also, the availability of pulses, vegetables and milk has declined over time.

HUNGER IS A REALITY: Another cause of concern was that there were families who couldn't even afford one frugal meal, such as *roti-chatni* or *roti-namak* (dry chapati with salt, or a paste of salt-chilly-onion). In Madhogarh, Rampura and Manikpur blocks about 25 per cent of families suffer from hunger of this form, while in Naraini block the percentage of hungry people was even higher.

A THREAT TO THE VERY SURVIVAL OF VILLAGES: The high levels of debts, severe water-storages and heavy dependence on migration has threatened the

very survival of some villages.

Such a dismal scenario is in stark contrast to a couple of decades ago, when these very areas were the pride of farmers. How fast has the decline been? Factors such as the decline of traditional water sources, distorted government policies, and severing of community ties need to be explored.

STARVATION DEATHS AND FARMER SUICIDES: Five hunger deaths have been reported from the Harijan basti of Nahri village (Naraini block). People here were so fed up of government apathy that they had announced a threat of collective suicide last year. Government officials made a lot of promises but there has been no real relief except a payment of Rs 10,000 to the family of a hunger victim. From employment guarantee schemes to public distribution systems, everything is in shambles even in this village which has received a lot of attention lately due to several suicides.

GOVERNMENT SCHEMES BETRAY HOPES OF PEOPLE: There were high hopes from rural employment guarantee schemes not only to provide employment near home but also to speed up soil and water conservation work, cleaning and repair of village tanks and levelling of fields belonging to poor farmers. Not even a single household got 100 days work or unemployment allowance. Those who get work under this scheme, get it for only about 20 days. The wages of many workers have not been paid for many months. Some workers didn't get even their job cards as these remained with the village head or petty officials who made false entries and cornered funds.

KEEPING ALIVE HOPE: It is imperative that people begin to see some signs of hope. As it will take some time to frame new plans and schemes, a beginning should be made by better utilisation of existing schemes, particularly the rural employment guarantee scheme. This scheme should be used to restore traditional water sources, clean

and repair tanks and take up soil and water conservation work. Immediate steps need to be taken to provide drinking water to people and animals.

Farmers need more support for low-cost technologies based on local resources and more stable, wider range of livelihoods – including cottage industries. Some relief from the existing high debts will be necessary sooner or later, but it is equally important to ensure that indebtedness does not reoccur. Implementation of various government schemes has to improve significantly, and particular attention should be immediately given to ensuring that Antodya/BPL cards, old-age and widow pensions soon reach the truly needy people.

This was the first initiative under the Hunger Monitor Project of Action Aid. It is hoped that this timely study will help to prioritise the agro-ecological and food security crisis in Bundelkhand before the new government. Timely, well-documented warnings about hunger and overall food insecurity can play an important role in pressuring and motivating the authorities to initiate relief measures.

The Hunger Monitor Project hopes to take up more such efforts in other parts of the country. It will also highlight the constructive effort done by various organisations to check the deteriorating situation and provide relief to people.



Families can't afford a frugal meal of dry chapati-salt

RTI changing power equations

ARUNA ROY, JEAN DREZE, AND NIKHIL DEY

To make the decision-making process in India transparent, there have been quite a few campaigns and movements in recent years. Some noteworthy examples are:

- The peoples' planning campaign in Kerala
- The formation of budget analysis groups
- The detailed analysis of power sector policy and reforms by citizens groups in Karnataka and Maharashtra, etc.

Even more significant has been the creative use all such groups have made of democratic spaces outside the electoral process. Clearly, established political parties have failed, whereas small groups have succeeded in creating the nucleus of a genuine political alternative. This shows that ethical issues, raised by even a small group of committed people, can positively and fundamentally affect democratic discourse.

The right to information (RTI) movement has helped to democratise this process and to take it beyond the confines of long-established peoples' movements. There are individuals in every state like Shivaji Raut or Shailesh Gandhi in Maharashtra, who symbolise the RTI activist whose persevering enquiries on matters of public interest show how much a single individual can do to begin a process of questioning.

While the RTI Act helps many individuals sort out personal grievances, its larger potential lies in bringing about systemic change, which is only possible when a single question establishes its links with a collective and becomes part of a larger democratic process.

One example is that of water privatisation in Delhi. Madhu Bhaduri of Parivartan, applied for information related to water reforms being undertaken by the Delhi Jal Board. One initial question led to accessing copies of 4,000 pages of documents which exposed the role of the World Bank in blatantly pressurising the Delhi government to privatise the management of drinking water distribution. Eventually, under intense pressure from citizens groups, the Delhi government and the World Bank had to withdraw their plan.

Throughout India, the impact of the RTI campaign has gone far beyond its immediate context. The public hearings, the institutionalisation of RTI through social audit, exemplary action taken in certain cases, the fact that the right to information gives any citizen an opportunity to check the deeds and misdeeds of any authority by personally examining details – have had a dramatic effect on prevalent modes of brazen corruption.

The RTI has to link with an issue or a campaign. This recognition has been its strength and explains its integral relationship with other campaigns and movements providing creativity and strength. The women's movement in Rajasthan, for instance, used it to track the progress on cases of atrocities against women. They demanded that the women concerned be informed of the progress on their cases and the contents of various important medico-legal and forensic reports.

Civil liberties and human rights groups are using the principles of RTI to ensure transparency and accountability. Though it has now become almost impossible to deny people the right to information, in most cases, the information is not being provided in the manner or time frame that it should be. As questions get sharper the establishment is forced to part with information. As collective questions are being placed in the public domain, more citizens are seeing the RTI as a means of building public opinion to influence decision-making, and thereby make democratic structures more accountable.

Today, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) coupled with the RTI provides a unique opportunity for mobilisation of vast numbers of the rural poor. It offers political parties and social movements a chance to build campaigns for people's empowerment and rural reconstruction based on a pos-

itive agenda.

To a large extent corruption in the employment guarantee scheme can be identified and isolated by using the RTI law. The potential this offers can be seen in some of the mass social audits that have taken place in Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh with hundreds of people armed with copies of official records walking from one site to the next, to create an atmosphere where the entitlements of the NREGA reach those it was meant to.

An alliance of peoples' organisations, NGOs, political representatives, civil servants and workers can jointly perform audits to ensure that there is less corruption. This form of political mobilisation can force the administration to respond, awaken oppressed people to demand their rights, and strengthen democratic processes.

A large number of Indians face displacement because of several new econom-



Young people in Delhi protest against moves to weaken the right to information law

The public hearings, the institutionalisation of RTI through social audit, exemplary action taken in certain cases, the fact that the RTI gives any citizen an opportunity to check the deeds and misdeeds of any authority by personally examining details have had a dramatic effect on brazen corruption.

ic policies and the infringement of many economic rights. We must use mandatory provisions of disclosure of the RTI Act for the people to be informed before undertaking policies which would displace or affect them. As part of the democratic battle for rights the challenge will be to use the right to employment guarantee as a part of the right to work and eventually force the government to rethink and change the nature of its anti-poor economic policies.

The campaign for transparent governance in India has consciously forced the structures of government to respond or react. By law now, records have to be shown. If they are not, reasons will have to be stated, and decisions will have to be explained. Even the intention to keep certain information confidential has to be stated. It has forced those involved to accept that information has to be shared.

But it has gone beyond that to state that the collective responsibility of the citizen and ruler alike does not stop with one act, even the vote. The role of public debate and the right to question cuts at the roots of bureaucratic and feudal power. Forcing information sharing begins the process of shared decision-making, and consequently the sharing of power on a perpetual basis.

LAKSHMAN ANAND

Nandigram's farm economy

VANDANA SHIVA

NANDIGRAM, a little known corner of Bengal, near the mouth of the Ganges river suddenly entered the nation's consciousness in early 2007.

The fertile land of Nandigram had been identified as a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) for a chemical hub to be run by the Salim Group. The Salim group is named after its founder Liem Sior Liong, alias Sordono Salim. In 1965, when Suharto overthrew Saekarno, Salim emerged as a crony who helped build Suharto's \$16 billion assets. In the 80's and 90's during Indonesia's oil boom, Salim set up the Bank of Central Asia. He set up noodle, flour and bread businesses, Indomobil Sukses International to make cars, and Indo cement Tunggal Prakasa to make cement. Altogether, he held 500 companies in Indonesia. This is the group that was trying to grab the land of farmers in Nandigram.

Nandigram was chosen because it is next to Haldia, a major port.

Special Economic Zones are tax-free zones, where no law of the land applies – no environmental law, no labour law, and no Panchayati Raj law for local governance. SEZs were created in 2006 through the SEZ Act of 2005, which allowed the government to appropriate farmers' land and hand it over to corporations.

But the small peasants and landless agricultural workers of Nandigram stood up in revolt. They formed the Bhoomi Uched Pratirodh Samiti (association protesting against land grabbing) and refused to give up their land. In January 2007, the first violence against the movement took place. On March 14, 17 people were killed, while on April 29, another five lost their lives.

I was in Nandigram on April 28-29 to pay homage to the martyrs of Nandigram and to work with the farmers to give them Navdanya seeds for setting up seed banks and starting organic farming. The farmers of Nandigram had succeeded in driving out Salim's chemical hub. I felt it was appropriate that we work together to make Nandigram a chemical-free organic zone and the local communities were willing. All day we sat together and made plans while shootouts and bombing was taking place a few miles away. And during my visit to Nandigram I witnessed the practise of Earth Democracy in its most sophisticated form.

NANDIGRAM'S RICH FARMS

Nandigram is rich in soil, water and biodiversity, the real capital of communities. Each village has its ponds, making for water sovereignty. Each farm is a multi-functional production unit, producing *paan*, coconut, rice, bananas, papaya, drumstick and the richest diversity of vegetables I have seen or tasted. In fact, during our meeting, the village square blossomed into a farmer's market - with farmers selling four kinds of potatoes, eight kinds of bananas, *gur* (jaggery) made from date palm and palmyra palm.

The farmers' market like the one in Nandigram needs no oil, no Walmart, no Reliance, no middlemen. Farmers are traders,

sellers and the buyers, all rolled into one. The market is self-organised. The community organises itself for trade. There is no government license raj, and no corporate control. This is the real free market, the real economic democracy.

The rich biodiversity of Nandigram supports rich productivity. In conventional measurement, based on monocultures, industrial agriculture is presented as being more productive because inputs are not counted, nor is the destruction of biodiverse outputs and the soil, water and air. In a biodiversity assessment, the biodiversity dense small farms of Nandigram are much more productive than the most chemical and energy intensive industrial farms.

The lunch the community cooked for us was the most delicious food we have eaten – greens from the fields, *dum-aloo* made from indigenous potatoes, brinjal that melted in the mouth – and of course for the fish eaters, the inevitable fish curry of Bengali cuisine. All other meals we had in Kolkata, or on the way to Nandigram in fancy restaurants were costly but inedible.

Nandigram has a food richness that big cities have lost. These are not improv-



erished, destitute communities but proud and self-reliant ones. In fact, their self reliance was the ground of their resistance.

Nandigram is a post-oil economy. Cycles and cycle rickshaws are the main mode of transport. That is why when the government unleashed violence against the people of Nandigram, they dug up the roads so no police or government vehicle could enter. Their freedom from oil allowed them to defend their land freedom. Their thriving economy allowed them to have a living democracy. This is the practice of living economy, of Gandhi's "Swadesh".

GRAM SWARAJ

The living democracy in Nandigram allowed the communities to resist. Many farmers used to be members of CPM but in their resistance towards land-grabbing they transcended party lives. The Land Sovereignty Movement in Nandigram is totally self-organised. There has been an attempt to present the land conflict as party conflict.

However, it is a conflict between global capital and local peasants, and the peasants have got organised because defending land is not a new issue in Nandigram. Peasants of the region participated in the revolt against the East India Company in 1857.

Nandigram is a celebration of 150 years of India's first movement of independence from corporate rule with a new movement for freedom from corporate control. Nandigram was also the site of the Tebhaga Movement for land rights after the Great Bengal Famine. One can only enter Nandigram as a guest of the community -

with their consent and their clearance. There is a high level of self-organisation, with women and children, old and young all involved in keeping watch for unwanted outsiders. Real democracy and living democracy, Gandhi's "swaraj", is the capacity of self-organisation.

UNITY IN DIVERSITY

The real strength of the people of Nandigram is their living culture - an agrarian culture, the culture of the land. This culture is common to Hindus and Muslims. Nandigram is strong because this community has not been divided by communal forces. Hindus and Muslims practise their diverse faiths, but are part of one community. Even in the struggle against the SEZ they fought as one. Their identity with the land, their earth identity binds them together.

I have come away from Nandigram humbled and inspired. These are the elements of Earth Democracy we need to defend and protect.

From: *Countercurrents*

Nandigram is rich in soil, water and biodiversity, the real capital of communities. Each village has its ponds. Each farm is a multi-functional production unit, producing paan, coconut, rice, bananas, papaya, drumstick...

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Reviewer

THE FINE PRINT

Get behind the scenes. Books, films, theatre, street plays, posters, music, art shows. The one place to track creative people across the country.

Gender in all its hues

Manisha Sobhrajani
New Delhi

SHOWING off the elaborate work on 'her' saree and 'her' many bangles, eunuch Laxminarayan, who was born in a Hindu Brahmin family, said: "My name is Laxmi, and that is sufficient by way of introduction".

Gender barriers were transgressed with ease and flamboyance during a four-day international documentary film festival in New Delhi. Titled 'Identities and Spaces' the festival brought together a range of films that explored gender and sexuality in everyday lives.

The festival was organised by the Public Service Broadcasting Trust (PSBT) in association with the Prasaar Bharati Corporation, the MacArthur Foundation, UNESCO and India Habitat Centre (IHC). It was held from May 12-15, at the Habitat Centre's Stein auditorium.

While some of the films premiered at this festival, there were others which had been shown at international film festivals held in Sundance, Chicago, Berlin, Toronto, Outfest, etc. The entries came from all over the world including Pakistan, Israel, Zimbabwe, Turkey and New Zealand.

Inaugurating the festival, Planning Commission member Dr Sayeeda Hameed said: "I belong to that generation of people for whom Ismat Chughtai and Sadat Hasan Manto defined the concepts

of gender and sexuality. Through the films shown during this festival, I hope to be able to come to terms with a lot of questions I have about my own self."

The opening film, *A Body That Will Speak*, was film-maker Sukanya Sen's personal journey about being comfortable with her own body: an honest account of the many paths she traversed to feel good and confident about the way she was.

The second entry, *About the Body*, was from Israel. It was a touching account of the lives of four young women who were injured in terrorist attacks. The camera followed them for three months in a unique body workshop by dancer Ohad Naharin, and captured how the women were compelled to confront a new perception of their own selves and their femininity.

Another film, *Who Can Speak of Men?* was a surprisingly intimate account of middle-class Muslim women living in the Zakir Nagar area of New Delhi, who openly refuse to conform to feminine norms. The film takes us through the routines of their everyday lives and is an honest account of their daily struggles to be true to themselves and their sexual orientation.

During a panel discussion after the screening of this film, film-maker Ambarien Al Qadar, who belongs to the same area as the women she documents in her film, said: "The idea was to understand gender identities away from biological identities." Qadar also spoke to the families of two of the women in her film.

Being Male Being Koti, a film shot in Kolkata, explored the painful experience of growing up gender variant and not being able to understand, let alone explain, the difference. The film was able to portray the trauma of living in a world where 'there is no one quite like me'. Anindya Hazra, one of the *koti*s documented in the film said it was difficult to say whether "we challenge stereotyping or reinforce it?" Activist Jaya Sharma, reinforcing Hazra's opinion, said: "As a society, we have totally failed to address the issues of 'not being a boyish enough boy' or 'not being a girlish enough girl'."

Film-maker Kirsty MacDonald, whose film *Black And White*, an entry from New Zealand, deals with the issue of hermaphrodites, said: "You have to collaborate with the subjects of the film rather than treat them as someone whose

mysteries you have to unravel to the world and you sit away and make those observations."

While the first day of the four-day event dealt with issues that go beyond the neat boxes of gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, *koti*, and homosexual, day two looked at gruesome hate crimes against women. The first film screened on the second day was, *The Man Who Stole My Mother's Face*. It showed the deeply traumatic journey undertaken by the daughter of a woman who was raped. Although the attacker was identified, he was never charged. Film-maker Cathy Henkel took matters in her own hands and confronted her mother's attacker.

Every 29 seconds a woman is raped in South Africa. *Rape For*

Who I Am offered a moving insight into the lives of South African black lesbians who are raped because of their non-conformity to the gender they are born in. The women refuse to become victims and that makes life harder for them.

In a panel discussion 'Healing from Abuse', film-maker Priya Krishnaswamy said: "We have the notion that home is the safest place but that is not true at all." She said that child sexual abuse was present in far deeper segments of society than we were willing to accept.

Counsellor Seema Prakash, who works with victims of sexual abuse and who herself was a victim as a child, talked about dealing with other people's traumas in a profession like hers. She said: "You leave your own baggage behind when you come into a counseling session."

Day three saw an amazing entry from Pakistan. *Parlour* defined four faces, four masks and four short sketches of lives, loves and desires traced through visits to a beauty parlour. Film-maker Mehreen Jabbar explored themes of a 'different kind' in this documentary: themes that could not be expressed on mainstream television in Pakistan till some time ago.

Two films, *Bumbaiyaa* and *Between The Lines: India's Third Gender*, successfully attempted to follow and document lives of the *hijra* community in Mumbai. While the first film strives to gauge the sexual attitudes of the people

(Continued on next page)



A scene from the film *Between the Lines: India's Third Gender*

The tiger in focus

Amit Sengupta
New Delhi

IN 63 minutes filmmaker Krishnendu Bose encapsulates 30 years of a farce called ecological and tiger conservation in India with his film *Tiger: the death chronicles*.

After spending almost 14 months, travelling through eight states and several national parks and forests, Bose has produced a film that pushes the 'tiger vs man' debate beyond the genre of television and documentary cinema.

He has canned 70 hours of precious footage which come from being chased by tuskers and being at the distance of a whisker from a tiger. He has also investigated corruption and poaching. Bose stitches together diverse opinions from conservationists, tiger scientists and ordinary citizens.

The death chronicles is a call to the conscience of the nation and an activist-filmmaker's desperate appeal to save the tiger from the inevitability of apocalypse now. And despite Bose's activism, the cinematic content, camera, sound, images, narrative, editing, remains surprisingly untouched by didactic propaganda or clichés. This is a tribute to Bose's love for the wild and the magnificent tiger who is dying after being trapped, shot, killed, stripped, hacked and skinned. "The tiger crisis comes from absolutely low-grade governance by the state governments," says tiger conservationist Valmik Thapar in the film.

The fact is, as PK Sen, former director, Project Tiger, says, almost 30 per cent of areas under Project Tiger are not under the administrative control of the project so the poacher-criminal-forest mafia has a free run.

The film travels to decimated tiger hotspots like Sariska, Panna, Buxa to rediscover the genesis of the crisis. The reasons range from archaic protection methods, complicity of corrupt officials and forest guards to total insensitivity of the government. Shrinking forests and human-tiger conflicts have left the tiger with just a little of its original habitat. "It's not about sermonising. It's about providing the communities an opportunity to see for themselves what is conservation and what difference it makes," says Rajiv Bhartari, field director, Jim Corbett National Park.

Indeed, the film documents the success story of Corbett National Park and



Krishnendu Bose and a tiger slain most cruelly



proves how dedicated forest guards and officials can make a difference in preserving the growth of the tiger population. Another good example is the Kazhiranga National Park in Assam, where tigers, rhinos and wild elephants, along with a huge spectrum of different animal and bird species, have been protected from poachers.

Travelling through India's devastated forests, rivers, water bodies, hill ranges and indigenous bio-diversities, the film enters the mineral rich belts of western Orissa, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand, and resurrects the uncanny truth of a dark prophecy. For instance, bauxite in Orissa, has attracted Indian and multinational industries, which is bound to destroy pristine forests all over, including the magnificent ranges of the eastern ghats. The death chronicles examines the vicious spiral of globalisation and development and proves

that every mine dug for mineral resources is a knife stabbed into the heart of the tiger, the animal kingdom, and our entire natural and ecological heritage. In that sense, this is devastation in a full and relentless circle.

That is, unless we can still save the Indian tiger, and find a creative balance between people, forest communities, nature and wildlife. Then, perhaps, we can still save the earth. Bose's camera makes this plea, with amazing understatement and passion, because, as he says, "In a fast developing country like India, with a billion people and a few thousand tigers, saving the tiger would be a critical challenge. I have done my job to the best of my capabilities; now it's you and the people, who have to join the struggle – to save the Indian tiger from inevitable elimination in the days to come."

(Continued from previous page)

and the relationship that Mumbai has with sex, in the second film, photographer Anita Khemka vividly captures and portrays the hidden *hijra* sub-culture, fascinating the audience with their ornate femininity and captivating the spiritual powers of the eunuchs. She openly discusses many intimate details of their lives such as their castration ceremonies, thoughts about sexuality, and overcoming economic dependence on begging and prostitution. Khemka deserves applause for being able to capture the real lives of hijras on reel. Both films showcase the life of Laxmi, who is now the president of an NGO, and has clearly emerged a winner in her battle to fight her natural gender identity and come to terms with her sexual orientation.

Another interesting film screened during the third day was *Laying Janaki To Rest*. The film explored the symbolic relationship of Sita with the image of women in India.

The final day began with the screening of *Mirror Mirror On The Wall: Who Am I After All?* The film traced the engagement of students of an all girls' school with their dilemmas about sexuality, along with their parents and teachers. The subject was beautifully shot and produced by film-makers Naina Kapur and Smita Bharti.

Two films which were shot in the backdrop of the Maharashtra government's controversial move to ban girls from dancing in beer bars in Mumbai – *Delhi-Mumbai-Delhi* and *Fight To Dance* – were also screened at the festival. Another interesting film – *Morality TV And Loving Jihad* – looked outside the frames that weave the frenetic tapestry of 'Breaking News' on India's many 24x7 news channels.

Tied Hands, an entry from Israel, deserves special mention, as it was a sensitive and complex narration of the relationship between a mother and her ailing son. The mother desperately looks for some marijuana to ease her son's pain. During this search, she uncovers some disturbing truths of her past life, facts she had been avoiding all along.

Naheed's Story, another interesting entry from Pakistan, documented by Beena Sarwar, records the struggle of Pakistan's finest kathak dancer to dance in Pakistan. The artiste is banned from national television and forced to leave Pakistan after General Zia-ul-Haq's coup of 1979. Naheed later returns home and is awarded for her art.

Directors Manak Matiyani and Kuber Sharma present portraits of their own mothers in *All About Our Mothers*. The film explores gender positions in their own families and looks at their family histories in the backdrop of larger developments in the women's movement. The film was applauded by the audience as there were resonances for every one. The fact is, as the film says, it is almost always women who care for the children and family most often at the cost of their professional lives. The two mothers honestly admit that their respective men have not been as involved with their families as they would have liked them to be.

Another film on mothers, *Goodbye Mother*, saw film-maker Joydeep Ghosh trace the changing patterns of motherhood through technology, gender power, psycho-social issues and the conflict between selfhood and motherhood. The film also questions a mother's 'unconditional' love for her child.

Speaking at a panel discussion on 'Subverting Boundaries', feminist Urvashi Butalia said: "Motherhood is a 'gendered' role. Hence it is never free of a context. Motherhood sometimes becomes the only identity women have, and they have to struggle really hard to get any other kind of identity." She questioned the notion of choice: most women did not have the freedom to do what they long to do.

The festival also saw an art installation 'We Never Ask for It', in partnership with the Blank Noise Project. Blank Noise is a public, participatory art project which seeks to challenge public spaces where women are subjected to sexual harassment. Through street interventions, Blank Noise proposes to build public dialogue around men and women and their relationship to their city.

This rich power-packed festival is over, but documentaries are available with Syncline Filmstore which is the sole distributor for all PSBT documentaries.

The power and passion of 1857

Severine Fumoux
New Delhi

THE uprising of 1857 symbolises the struggle of Indians against a common enemy, the British East India Company. It is India's First War of Independence. People transcended caste and religion to stave off the company and bring back the last Mughal Emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar.

The events of 1857 are as stirring as the freedom movement and have all the ingredients of a deeply moving story: passion, honour, courage, martyrdom and incipient nationalism.

In fact, history beckons India this year. Not only is it the 150th anniversary of 1857, India celebrates 60 years of independence and the 100th birth anniversary of revolutionary freedom fighter, Bhagat Singh.

Sahmat (Safdar Hashmi Memorial Trust), a coalition of artists, writers and musicians fighting for freedom of expression, social justice and cultural diversity has risen to the occasion with a series of cultural events titled, 'Making History our Own'.

Sahmat remounted its exhibition, 'Red, the Earth, 1857', with new additions and displayed it at the Press Club and at Khooni Darwaza in Delhi.

All the added panels are in red: red for the earth soaked in blood, red for passion, red for popular rebellion, and red for communism.

Celebrating 1857, fits in with Sahmat's ongoing fight against communalism which is a divisive, colonial and anti-national philosophy.

The factual information, compiled with extreme rigour by historians like Irfan Habib and Ravinder Kumar, has been coupled with images, facsimiles of prints, letters and paintings that bring a human touch.

For instance, the series, 'After 1857: the destruction of Delhi' displayed photographs of the city's desolation and loss with descriptions of citizens who were martyred by the British.

Another panel which touched the heart was about the looting of the Red Fort. There was a portrait of Bahadur Shah in the background. The golden splendour of his garb contrasted with his sad eyes. The most moving panel featured Rani Laxmibai of Jhansi and her letter to her neighbour-turned-enemy Rani Larai Dulaiya, asking for solidarity in the face of invasion.

Civil Society spoke to **Ram Rahman**, founding member of Sahmat and a professional photographer, about Sahmat's exhibition and its work.

What was the starting point of Sahmat?

It started in 1989 after Safdar Hashmi's murder. He was a man of many talents. He was a member of the Communist Party (Marxist) but surprisingly non-doctrinaire. The group was set up by artists, writers and actors in his memory. Our work was initially inspired by Safdar's work and ideals, but then we started responding to what was happening around us, and the communal issue became the largest problem for us. Over the last 15 years, we have really concentrated on confronting communal politics, particularly in the cultural field, through culture. All our work has been through the fine arts, music and dance and through intellectual engagement with historians, philosophers and even economists. It happens partly in an academic setting, partly on the street, partly using large performance events, but all our actions have an ideological basis.

What are some of the landmarks of the past 18 years?

First, there was the destruction of the Babri Masjid in 1992. Our idea of a modern secular democracy was undermined by this horrendous event. Immediately after the demolition we put together a Sufi-Bhakti poetry and music programme in Delhi. The idea was to use the content of our cultural traditions to signify the coming together of religions and the mixed cultures that India represents. It was for people to remember who we are and who we have always been at this terrible moment.

Later on, we decided to work on the city of Ayodhya itself, to illustrate the fact



Ram Rahman

“All our work has been through the fine arts, music, dance and through intellectual engagement with historians, philosophers and even economists.”

enemy. Witness the constant hammering of the unity of religions in the songs of the proclamations of 1857. As the BJP was trying to define India as a mono-religious country, it was important for us to show a piece of history through documents to people, so that they remember the power and emotional underpinnings behind the rebellion

Because this year is of anniversaries and centenaries celebrated on a big scale, we remounted the 1857 exhibition and we thought about throwing an idea at artists, called 'Making History our Own'. We asked artists to look at their own history as artists and individuals. The show is travelling around the country for artists to add their part. The first manifestation of this idea came in postcard form.

A lot of contemporary artists base their work on their personal history. Here the effort is collective with the hope of making a visual history of where contemporary art has been in the last 25 years.

What has been the impact of the group's work?

This is difficult. However, there is one instance where we might have had a direct impact during the last Lok Sabha elections, in an advertent way. We launched a debate about the BJP-backed rewriting of history textbooks in favour of a communal vision of history. Sahmat got engaged because, after all, an interpretation of history is part of culture. We published informational texts strengthened by a national convention of field experts. It is only after the elections when the BJP lost that we realised the impact of the public debate we had started. Everyone had become interested in the quality education debate. In any true democracy there should be public debate and freedom of expression. If you feel that somebody is doing something wrong, you should be able to address it without the fear of being arrested, harmed or put to death. Sahmat has kept alive that notion of debate on many levels.

that if you take any piece of India and undo its layers, no site, no city, no grouping has a mono-lineal or mono-cultural history. This was the first time we started working with historians for a different intellectual input. The idea was to present to the public, in a scale as massive as possible, a visual and textual history of the city to stress that in reality all religions have a claim to the mosque site.

That exhibition was attacked by the BJP in Ayodhya, seized and banned under the accusation of conspiracy against the state. Eight years later, we won the case in court and the ban was lifted. This experience has shaped us and honed our radars on issues of freedom of expression. After all, this group was formed as a result of the most violent form of censorship against a theatre performer: death.

As for the riots of Gujarat in 2002, we joined hands with Teesta Setalvad from Mumbai. We secretly brought 40 victims to Delhi for a public hearing, through BJP-controlled areas. Six of them met the President of India, which resulted in the first presidential statement on the riots. That was a very effective intervention as it brought the human aspect to the political centre of the country.

What are the ideas behind this current exhibition?

The 1857 exhibition evolved from the Ayodhya exhibition. We started looking at Indian modernism not just in its artistic aspects, but also in its political and economic roots. We looked at the history of the national movement keeping in mind an interesting artistic engagement on issues.

This exhibition was done 10 years ago when Hindutva and the BJP were rising. In 1997 no one remembered 1857. In our minds, 1857 is a completely unified uprising against British imperialism. All castes and religions rose against the common

Living

BODY & SOUL

Be different, look within. There is always more to life. Reach out to alternatives. Heritage, eco-tourism, green cures, traditional foods, buy from NGOs, spiritual talk, organic counter, where to donate, where to volunteer, web watch.

Home-stay in languid Kumbalangi

Susheela Nair
Kumbalangi

LOCATED in the backwaters of Kochi is Kumbalangi, an idyllic model tourist village in Kerala. Still untouched by hordes of tourists, this coastal hamlet takes pride in its lush paddy fields, mangrove forests and serene stretch of backwaters. Here the distant *vanchipattu* (boatman's song) echoes across the gentle hush of waves.

Wispy Chinese fishing nets cast a web across the shoreline.

You will be charmed by the simplicity of this friendly village of farmers, fishermen, toddy-tappers, coir spinners and boatmen. They will entertain you with their cuisine and folklore. Kumbalangi provides a fascinating glimpse into the livelihood of villagers and their age-old, magnificent culture.

Tourists can take a stroll in lush paddy fields, toil with the farmers and picnic at the mangroves. They can set sail on a boat cruise, or stay adrift in a *kettuvallom* (traditional rice boat used as houseboat) on the backwaters. Services of boatmen are available but you can also venture out alone on country boats. Kalagramam, an artist's village on four acres of land, displays traditional fishing equipment and handicrafts of the region.

The main occupation of the 30,000-odd people living here is fishing. Farming, crab-farming and coir-matting are the other livelihood options. Tourists can set out to sea with fishermen for some adventurous fishing at the break of dawn. Bait fishing near the mangroves is a popular tourist activity. A walk through the village will unravel different kinds of fishing such as throw-netting, fixed-netting and hooking. *Poomeen chaattam*, a group movement of fish in half circles, during high tide is another attraction.

As part of the eco-tourism concept, many houses in the village offer home-stays. Here, tourists live with the family, eat traditional food cooked by family members, use available amenities and see village life in its real, raw form. Visitors can book their stay directly with the home-stay operators or seek the assistance of the village council. With the focus being on home-stays, there are no plans to build hotels in Kumbalangi. The home-stay facilities will be improved so that the community stands to benefit from the project.

What is the secret of Kumbalangi's success? "It is a sustainable project that makes a difference. Not only does it preserve nature and the environment, it also pays homage to a rich culture and heritage. The holistic implementation of the initiative has delivered many benefits to villagers, including forms of income, better understanding of urban dwellers, economic value for activities, a better respect for the environment and improved water supply and sanitation facilities," says KV Thomas, former Kerala tourism minister, who was instrumental in initiating the project.

The project was started with the release of Rs 50 lakh to the state by the Ministry of Tourism. The improvements are palpable. Roads and canals have been strengthened, CFC lamps installed, and biogas plants put up for waste management. Kumbalangi is the first panchayat in the state to set up such a waste management system. A park has also been constructed for visitors.

Community participation is one of the salient features of the project. Initially, when big tourism majors were keen on constructing cottages and walkways, the panchayat members felt that it would disturb the village's rustic ambience and thwarted all their attempts. Hence, home-stay became their best choice. Tourism



This lovely model tourist village offers homestays

has also augmented employment prospects in the village. Though the fisherfolk went through turbulent times due to fluctuating prices and an unsteady market earlier, with tourists now there is assured business throughout the year.

The increase in home-stays generated several employment opportunities for women especially in food preparation and housekeeping, contrary to hotels and resorts which seek qualified personnel. The increased demand has also given poultry farming a fillip. The project has boosted incomes for boatmen who take tourists on boat cruises and also fishermen who demonstrate various fishing techniques to the tourists. The region's ecology has been revived through the implementation of traditional cropping patterns and planting of mangrove saplings. Pokkal farming, a crop pattern that alternates between rice and fish (each for six months in a year), was restarted.

The amazing array of mangrove cover used to be a haven of prawns, crabs, oysters and small fishes. The fish population subsequently fell with mangroves being drastically cut. The scheme to form a mangrove belt in the area got an impetus after an environmentalist came up with a project to plant mangrove saplings. The plants grow in marshy areas, off the backwaters. The benefit of mangrove restoration witnessed a three-fold increase in fish population, a fall in salinity level and an excellent habitat for birds.

Sustained efforts are being made to preserve the environment and ecosystem of Kumbalangi, the country's first eco-friendly village. Besides, the total ban of plastic and the restriction on building any new structures also attracts the interest of environment-concerned travellers. Current facilities will be improved further for the development of tourism. The project proposes to initiate work for better sanitary conditions, solid-waste disposal, development of walkways and boat jetties, improving the bridge connecting the island to the mainland, water-harvesting and boat cruising.

GREEN CURES

Ask Dr GG



My baby, who is four months old, suffers from nappy rash. It is the middle of summer and her rashes have become worse. I have tried several baby lotions and powders but they have not had much effect. The baby is uncomfortable and cranky. Please advice.

Suhasini Haldar, Kolkata

Get good jasmine and tulsi leaves. Dry both in the shade and make a fine powder. Mix this powder with pure coconut oil and apply it on the rashes. After half an hour wipe the mixture with a dry cloth or give the baby a body wash with water in which a few chips of neem bark and green neem leaves have been boiled. Whenever the baby is free and lying down, don't tie a nappy. Let the

baby get a lot of fresh air, especially on the arm pits, thighs, the inguinal region and behind the back. These are the other spots for rashes apart from the nappy area.

My nine-month baby suffers a lot from cold. I give him fruit juice every day. I try to protect him from air conditioning, cold water and cold baths. Please tell me what I should do to build my baby's immunity against colds.

Ruchira Iyer, Gurgaon

If you continue to give fruit juice out of proportion, that itself can produce cold. Stop all juice for two weeks and start with a little quantity of pomegranate and carrot juice only.

If you are applying oil on the baby's head before bath and giving him a bath everyday, stop that. Give head bath only twice a week and apply oil processed with few grains of pepper and a bit of dried ginger. After bath dry the head properly. For 14 days give him one teaspoon of Amruth (*Tinospora cordifolia*: Guddoochi in Hindi), stem juice mixed with two teaspoons of honey daily on an empty stomach. This will keep him free from cold.

My baby is only two-weeks old. My relatives are advising me to massage the baby regularly. Please advice me on which oil would be best for my baby's delicate skin in summer. Also, how many times a week should I massage the baby? Should I give the baby a bath straight after a massage or wait for some time?

Vidya Shanker, Gurgaon

The best oil for a baby in all seasons is coconut oil. It can be made more

useful for the skin by adding a little bit of Bala root paste (*Sida cordifolia*), and paste of the roots of *Ixora Coccinea* and bark of Kushta (*Saussurea lappa*). If you don't know how to make this oil at home do not experiment. Buy Sudhabala Thailam and Chembaruthyadi Oil from Arya Vaidya Pharmacy, mix them together and use. Give a very mild massage. Never apply pressure. Make sure that the baby is on a plain surface and not above the floor. Leave the baby after massage for sometime to play around while lying down, and then give a warm water bath. When you dry the baby, be very careful about drying the head, especially the central part of the skull, where the bones have a gap. Mostly traditionally trained women or older women give the baby an oil massage and bath.

My three-month-old baby is suffering from teething problems. She cries a lot, vomits from time to time and gets an upset stomach quickly. I know this is a passing phase but is there anything I can give to soothe her?

Madhu Ahuja, Delhi

These are a set of minor ailments described in Ayurveda under the head 'teething problems'. Even today we use the phrase to indicate the same meaning. If it is not very annoying please let it be, otherwise for the symptoms you have mentioned give grape water mixed with few grains of powdered cardamom occasionally. Make sure that the mother is healthy and breast milk is sufficient and not vitiated. However, it is good to give the mother a milk decoction made out of *Cyperus rotundus* (Nagar motha).

How to make Nagar motha decoction:

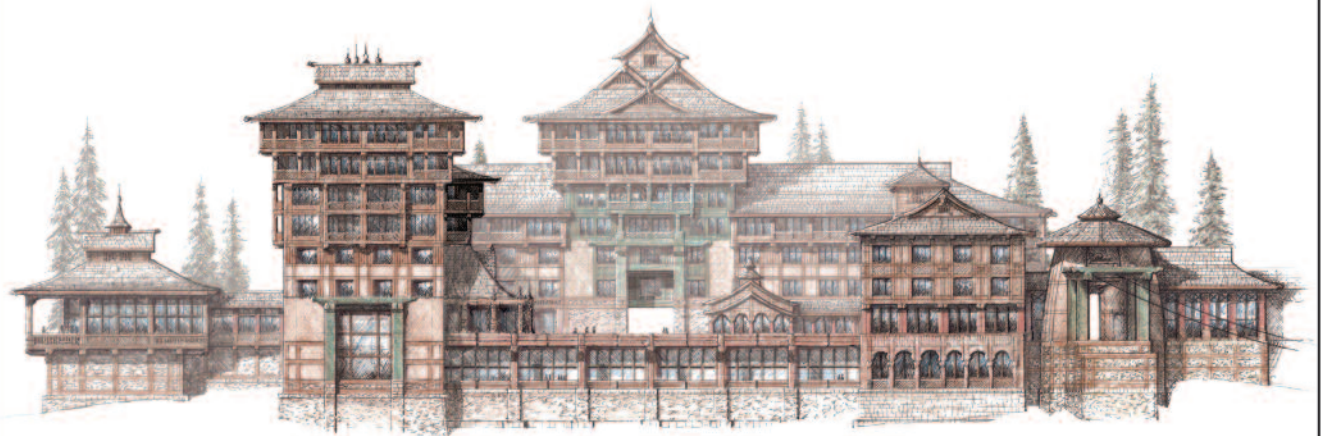
Take 60 gms of Nagar motha, 150 ml of milk, 300 ml of water. Peel out the Nagar motha; the hairy skin has to be removed, not the thick black one. Crush it slightly, put it in a cotton cloth, tie it and dip this into the milk and water and boil under a slow fire. Reduce the concoction to 150 ml. Filter it and take 75 ml in the morning before food and the remainder in the evening.

Every time my three-month-old baby has milk I hold her up so that she can burp. If she doesn't burp, she gets uncomfortable. She suffers from acidity quite often and then she starts to cry. Please tell me what I should give my baby for acidity.

Anita Ahuja, Lucknow

Patting the baby's back after each feed helps the baby burp. It can be better done when the baby is in a straight position and inclining on your shoulder. If you think that the baby has acidity, give her one piece of fresh turmeric ground into a paste and mixed with honey and some sweet lime juice to drink. This helps a lot.

Dr G G Gangadharan is a Joint Director at FRLHT, Bangalore. E-mail: vaidya.ganga@frlht.org



HIMALAYAN SKI VILLAGE

SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE TOURISM FOR THE 21st CENTURY

Keep your cool

Vijayalakshmi (Tannie) Baig
New Delhi

WHAT could be better in India's searing summer than a glass of icy sherbet?

Sherbets are wonderful, natural drinks made from summer fruits. Some of them even have medicinal qualities. The bhel fruit, for instance, is so revered that in Indian mythology its leaves are offered to Lord Shiva. Bhel is great for your digestion while phalsa (small purple berries) cool your body. Mango has always been called a 'fruit for the gods' so its sherbet is, naturally, a heavenly drink.

In days of yore, kings and commoners beat the heat by slaking their thirst with a range of cool drinks. In those days, snow was harvested like a crop. People risked their lives to collect snow from icy Himalayan peaks for sale in dusty plains.

From sherbet to ice cream was a natural progression. Nobody knows who invented ice cream, for sure. Some historians say it was China. The ice cream recipe travelled to Europe where King Nero became an aficionado. Some centuries later the recipe arrived in America where it became a sanctified American product with many avatars.

Sherbets were popular in India, China and the Arab world. Sold by street vendors, the drinks were called sharab by the Arabs and sorbet by the French.

While the sherbet recipe went to the west from the exotic east, we were sold the cola drink, minus its recipe, in the last century. Colas held sway for a long time. Lured by glitzy advertising and easy reach, aerated drinks replaced natural ones. But the evils of colas have come to light and natural drinks are making a comeback. If the mighty consumer makes the right choice, colas will die a natural death.

Instead of punishing our bodies with empty calories and chemicals, let's take a leaf from history. Not only are sherbets refreshing, they are also easy to make and

cost very little. You don't need to use any preservatives either.

Neither can this knowledge be patented. It's all in the public domain and you can use it as you like, share it as you want. Remember shakkar (ground jaggery) is better than sugar.

Here are some quick and easy recipes.

Lemon ginger sherbet

Ingredients

Lemon: 2 kg
Sugar: 2 kg
Ginger: ¼ kg
Water: 3 glasses
Milk: 2 tablespoons
Method: Extract juice from



the lemons and ginger. Ginger juice can be extracted with a juicer or you can finely grate the ginger and squeeze out the juice.

In a pan add the water and the sugar and give it one boil.

While it is boiling add 2 tablespoons of milk. This will clear the liquid and remove all the dirt which will collect on top for easy removal.

Add the lemon and ginger juice. Cool and bottle. The bottles must be sterilised and sunned before you add the prepared sherbet.

Keep the sherbet in the fridge and drink. You don't need to add any chemicals or preservatives. Makes around three bottles.

Bhel sherbet

Ingredients

Bhel: One
Sugar/Shakkar: 2 table-
spoons
Water: About 3 glasses
Orange: 20 gm

Method: Break the hard crust of the bhel. Scoop out its pulp with a spoon into a bowl. Then add sugar or organic shakkar and water. Strain the mixture through a soup strainer. Add ice and serve in a tall glass.

Chef's note: It is better to use organic shakkar than sugar.

Phalsa sherbet

Ingredients

Phalsa berries: 250 gms
Sugar/Shakkar: 2 table-
spoons, or according to
taste

Water: 2 glasses
Method: Put the phalsas in a bowl with the shakkar/sugar and mash the fruit well. After that, add water and strain the mashed pulp through a soup strainer to remove the seeds. Finally, add ice and serve

Mango sherbet

Ingredients

Raw mangoes: 1 kg
Sugar: 300 grams or to
taste
Water: 4 glasses
Asafoetida: 1 level table-
spoon
Cumin powder: 1 level
tablespoon
Mint leaves: 10-12

Black salt: ¼ teaspoon
Salt: 1 teaspoon or to
taste
Method: First, roast the raw mangoes on an open fire. Or you can boil the raw mangoes after lopping off the mouths. Retaining the mouths will give the sherbet a slightly bitter taste.

After you have roasted or boiled the mangoes, remove their skins. Then, add sugar and both the salts. Remove the seed and mash well. Add water and strain. Add cumin powder and mint leaves and serve with a slice of lemon on the side of the glass.

To prepare the powder, dry roast a few grains of asafoetida and one tablespoon of cumin till fragrant and then powder. Keep in an air tight container.

SHOPPING MALL

Literacy India, an NGO which works in Gurgaon and Delhi, is producing and marketing products made by rural women in Haryana and Delhi under the brand name Indha. Indha is a round base rural women place on their heads on which they balance many pots. Products like fashion accessories, block printed cloth, hand made paper, batik material, paintings, bags and purses are currently being produced. Indha products follow the latest global fashion trends and have attracted buyers in the US and Singapore. About 100 women in village Daulatabad in Gurgaon are part of Project Indha which is expanding rapidly due to its success.



◀ Cushion covers:
Rs 90-135

Hand made papers products: Rs 5-250



▶ Party bag ring
handle : Rs 350



▼ Mobile pouch: Rs 50



▲ Wine bottle cover:
Rs 80-100

To buy contact: Literacy India
J-1365 Palam Vihar, Gurgaon-122017, Haryana
For sales enquiries phone: Satya Prakash: 9311266837
E-mail: indraani@literacyindia.org, satya@literacyindia.org

SOUL VALUE

Revere all living beings

Samita Rathor
New Delhi

DRIVING down Siri Fort Road in Delhi one day, I came across a big black dog with a furry coat and a bright blue collar which looked expensive. Definitely not a *desi*, I thought. He looked like a lost or abandoned creature. His head hung low as though tired and with his large pink tongue and black fur he was easy to spot from a distance. The dog lifted his head mournfully and looked at me with big beady eyes. He wagged his tail, despite his frail state.

Mahatma Gandhi once said, "The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated". His ideals have now been reduced to theory. Animals are being hunted and destroyed. Kindness to animals, at best, is taught in a few schools.

I have always felt that the true test of a good person is how he or she treats not just humans, but animals and non-human life. Perhaps we are inclined to treat other people well because of ethical conditioning and human laws, or for fear of their anger. The same doesn't apply to animals, plants and rocks because these do not have the power to react or respond. So if we inculcate a habit to treat these well, it is a sign of a deep and profound sensitivity, love and compassion for all beings and for the entire cosmos. Ramana Maharshi said even stones have consciousness.

Kindness to animals and to all living things is one way of expressing true faith. Cruelty to animals is a sign of a weak and a selfish mind. A human being should show kindness to another living being. If that is lacking it is a clear reflection of his spirit and character. It is a sign of complete disintegration between the body, mind and soul, for the soul of every human is divine and a human soul devoid of compassion and kindness is in turmoil and far from peace. Not having respect for an animal implies a lack of respect of one's own self.

If we see animals suffering we must help them. Though we are permitted to use animals for labour, we are not allowed to overwork them.

Over the years, humans have demonstrated a respect for the welfare of animals. Such a concern has often had a religious basis or manifestation. Reverence toward animals has characterised human societies throughout the planet. Even today, there is deep within our psyches an unfathomable yet profound understanding that remembers our being part of nature and living alongside animals. Some scientists believe that humans instinctively yearn for a renewal of this kinship with nature and our fellow creatures.

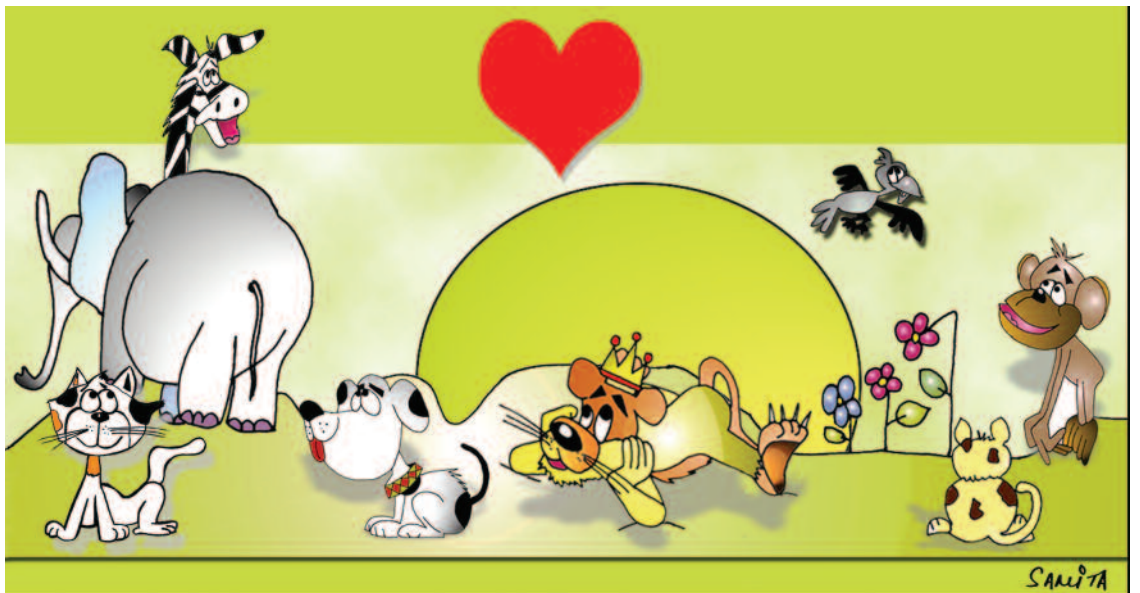
This 'eco-spirituality' is reflected in many of the teachings of the world's major religions, as well as in the spirituality of indigenous people, who have traditionally respected and even revered animals as integral parts of their communities and cultures.

Faith teaches that animals should be treated with kindness, a quality which must be acquired by anyone probing for divinity. In other words, spiritual development requires that we love and respect all

the mysteries of the universe.

While animals do not have man's potential for spiritual development or for conscious destruction, they do have senses – sometimes more acute than those of man, as for instance a dog's sense of hearing or a bird of prey's sight; they have emotions, such as love, fear, and often highly developed strong social bonds.

"It is not only their fellow human beings that the



our fellow-creatures, human or otherwise.

The need for mankind to change its attitude towards animals is expressed succinctly in the Bahai scriptures. "To blessed animals the utmost kindness must be shown, the more the better. Tenderness and loving kindness are basic principles of God's heavenly kingdom. We should carefully bear this in mind."

This power of investigation gives man control, to some degree, over nature. Certainly mankind has the capacity to build and the capacity to destroy. He can be kind and gentle or he can be cruel and selfish. Mankind therefore has a responsibility towards the rest of nature. Because animals do not have this capacity they do not have such responsibility. Man, therefore, has aspects to his life which the animal does not possess.

The animal is bereft of ideality; it is a captive of the world of nature and not in touch with what lies within and beyond nature; it is without spiritual susceptibilities, deprived of the attractions of consciousness, unconscious of God's world and incapable of deviating from the law of nature. Man is perceptive, has ideals and is capable of discovering

beloved of God must treat with mercy and compassion; they must be kind to every living creature. For in all physical respects, and where the animal spirit is concerned, the same feelings are shared by animal and man. If injured, a man can cry, he can ask for help and can be protected from his aggressor. But the hapless beast is mute, neither able to express its hurt nor take its case to someone. Therefore it is essential that we show the utmost consideration to animals, and that we be even kinder to them than to our fellowmen. Train your children to love animals. If an animal is sick, let them try to heal it, if it is hungry, let them feed it, if thirsty, let them quench its thirst, if weary, let them see that it rests."

If our children are brought up in this way, there will be an end to cruelty to animals.

Consider being kind to animals. It will make you feel better about yourself.

Life is life – whether in a cat, or dog or man. Sri Aurobindo said: There is no difference between a cat and a man. The idea of difference is a human conception for man's own advantage.

Samita Rathor is a cartoonist, writer and yoga practitioner.

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CAF

Readers who want to volunteer with or donate to the NGOs listed on these pages can get in touch with Charities Aid Foundation (CAF). Please fill up the form at the end of the list. All NGOs have been validated by CAF. So go ahead and choose your cause.

Salaam Baalak Trust

Focus: Support and shelter to street and working children.

Celebrating the spirit of survival among children, the name of the organisation itself sets out its mission: Salaam Baalak means 'Salute the Children'. Inspired by the lives of street children who played an important part in her internationally acclaimed film, Salaam Bombay, filmmaker Mira Nair established the Salaam Baalak Trust (SBT) in 1988. Dedicated to the care and protection of neglected street children, regardless of caste, colour, creed or religion, SBT provides for the development of street children through an enabling environment. In doing so, it helps the children regain their self-confidence and return to mainstream society and eventually contribute to its development.

Functioning throughout Central Delhi, Salaam Baalak Trust has a range of activities and programmes: **Shelter homes:** Shelter homes set up by SBT such as AASRA, Apna Ghar, Arushi and a Drop-in Shelter provide a convivial and supportive home-like environment for the street children.

Childline: This is India's first 24-hour free phone outreach service for children in need of emergency assistance. SBT is in charge of the Central zone of Delhi for this service.

SBT encourages its inmates to engage and participate in the performance of theatre, street plays and puppetry to help them express their emotions and to enable communication and foster teambuilding. SBT also makes available to its inmates various kinds of vocational training as well as income generation and saving schemes to make them economically self-reliant.

Funding is needed for: ARUSHI which is specially designed to address the needs of the girl child.

Rs 28,500 per child per annum will support boarding, lodging, school uniforms, clothing, healthcare, transportation, school fee, educational material and entertainment.

Parikrama

Location: Bangalore

Focus: Parikrama Humanity Foundation is a non-profit with a mission to unleash the potential of under served children in urban India. It provides them with equal opportunities and makes the children valuable contributing members of our society.

At Parikrama, the goal is very clear: the non-profit ensures that every child completes school and undertakes education and training to earn a living- be it special vocational training or higher college education. Parikrama works primarily in the field of education, providing education through centres of

learning. Parikrama runs four centres of learning in Bangalore and serves over 725 children.

Funding needed for: Sponsor a child/class: Parikrama Humanity Foundation runs four schools for street and slum children. We have about 730 children coming to our schools. To ensure that our children come to school regularly Parikrama provides them breakfast, lunch and a glass of protein mix in the evening. It also provides total healthcare and many interventions with the family like de addiction camps, micro funding and vocations skills training for family members. We have had 98 per cent attendance, less than 1 per cent drop out and 100 per cent attendance at parent-teacher meetings.

Sponsor one or more class of 30 children each: The cost of each child per annum is Rs 15,000 which includes education, nutrition, healthcare and community development. It requires Rs 4.5 lakhs to sponsor one class.

Bus for the school: Parikrama's four centres are located in four widely spread areas of Bangalore. To ensure that the children come regularly to school it needs to have them picked up from their homes and dropped back after school hours. Having its own school bus will help it to provide this service to the children thus ensuring that attendance is even greater.

We also need to transport our children across our four centres and to the suburbs of Bangalore to link our children to the outside world and provide them the opportunity for greater exposure and experience through field trips. **Approximate cost: Rs 8 lakhs**

Ananya Trust, Bangalore

Focus: Children and non-formal education

Ananya, established in 1998, is a charitable trust started due to the dearth of schools that provide relevant and meaningful education for underprivileged children in and around Bangalore city. Through Ananya Shikshana Kendra (ASK), it caters to the needs of children who are not admitted to other schools either due to social, physical or academic reasons. Comprising of learning centres, the children are within reach of study material arranged according to learning difficulties they might face. Currently we have 51 children on the rolls, five teaching staff and seven non-teaching staff.

Funding is needed for: Ananya requires computer peripherals, consumables, software and a computer teacher. Ananya is starting a programme to introduce computer

literacy as part of their curriculum. This will enable the children to become familiar with the world of computers, be eligible for further training in computers and join the IT-enabled profession. It will open up other career options for these children who will otherwise have no choice but to follow their parents' profession.

Volunteering Opportunities:

Mentoring students especially adolescents: If volunteers are Bangalore based they can spend weekends with the children mentoring them and acting as friends and guides. This will help to build a long-term association with the children, boost their self-confidence and instill a sense of belonging in them.

Training children in the use of computers: Employee volunteers can visit the school on weekends to teach children the creative use of computers in different areas of learning. Volunteers can enable them go beyond basic computer usage to discover the magical world of computers so that classroom learning becomes more interesting, (eg, using available software including graphics and even creating their own software.)

Action for Autism

Focus: Supporting the rights of people with autism and multiple disabilities.

Action for Autism works nationally. It has a range of activities and programmes:

- Diagnosis and assessment of children with autism.
- Education through a specialised school for children with autism called Open Door.
- Recognising the lack of trained professionals to teach children with autism and to cater to the increasing demand for its services, AFA started its own Teacher Training Programme, which has today become a one-year diploma in Special Education DSE-ASD under the Rehabilitation Council of India.
- Family and parent skill-building through counselling, early intervention, home management and mother & child programs as well as parent-support groups.
- Training of parents and professionals through training workshops.
- Resource provision through AFA's resource centre, the AFA journal, Autism Network and website.
- Advocacy and awareness.

Funding needed for:

Sponsoring children: Annual cost per child for the mother-child programme is Rs 5,500. This amount sponsors one child, annually. Cost of a professional therapist: Rs 5,000.

Animal India Trust

Focus: Medical care for the street and stray canine population of Delhi.

Animal India Trust was established in March 2002 to help improve the lives of street animals and to promote public awareness of rabies in New Delhi. Its focus is:

- To neuter and provide rabies and vaccination programs.
- Provide assistance to injured or sick animals found on the streets.
- Free medical treatment to pets of

economically disadvantaged people.

- Placement of orphaned street puppies in loving homes.

Funding needed for:

Sterilisation of stray dogs: Rs 800.00 per dog.

Anti-rabies vaccination of stray dogs: Rs 150 per dog.

Astha

Focus: Providing services to children/persons with disabilities and their families with special focus on communities.

Astha was started in 1993. The rights of individuals with disabilities have been at the core of Astha's belief and work ethics. Astha's aim is to:

- Maximise awareness about the issue.
- Increase the accessibility of people with disability in society.
- Integrate children with disability into the mainstream.

Funding needed for:

Sponsor a child with special needs.

It costs just Rs 12,000 per annum. This will cover physiotherapy, speech therapy, special educator, art and craft. Or sponsor an event:

One event costs Rs 5,000. This may be for annual picnic/festival celebrations/Sports Day.

Ritinjali

Focus: Education and community development.

Ritinjali was started in 1996 with the aim of working in the field of education and community development.

- Their aim is to provide holistic education towards nurturing empowered, responsible citizens who will be capable of providing not only for themselves but also contributing actively to their local communities through enterprise, self awareness and self induced social responsibility.

Funding needed for:

- Education for slum children: Annual cost per child : Rs.6,300 to support education material, one meal a day, entertainment and healthcare.

Tihar Jail, New Delhi

Ritinjali provides counselling, rehabilitation and legal representation services to juvenile inmates aged 16 to 21. You can volunteer for legal assistance, counseling and advocacy programs.

Ritinjali's Second Chance School, Mahipalpur, New Delhi

A school for youth who did not get the first chance. You can volunteer for youth mentoring, vocational training, placement, employment programs and entrepreneurship programs.

Sahara House

Focus: Support for the Chemical and Alcohol Dependent and HIV/AIDS Infected/Affected Individuals.

Sahara means support, and since 1978, Sahara House has been a refuge, spearheading the provision of effective treatment to drug users, alcoholics, the mentally challenged and those infected/affected by HIV/AIDS.

This residential care facility focuses on counselling with sessions covering detoxification, medical attention, physical education, self-development, financial and household management. **Other programme areas include:**

- Drug awareness and prevention

through its street theatre group.

- Income generation opportunities to its beneficiaries.
- A pre and post-kindergarten school in Sahara House for destitute and deprived children.

Funding needed for:

Drug Rehabilitation Programme:
Cost per client per month: Rs.4, 290 which will take care of drug de-addiction, food supplies, psycho-social support.

HIV/AIDS Treatment Care & Support Programme:

Cost per bed per day: Rs 475 which will take care of food, medicines, referral, diagnostic cost, medical support, supplies, linen etc.

Individual donors can give any amount they wish. The money can be used by the home to buy dry rations, medicines, computers and for a water cooler at the men's rehabilitation centre.

Vidyarambam Trust, Chennai

Focus: Education for underprivileged children.

Vidyarambam Trust, established in 2002, is a non-profit organisation with a mission to provide basic literacy to children in the age group 3-5 in the villages of Tamil Nadu. The main objectives of the organisation are:

- To provide primary education for underprivileged children irrespective of their caste, creed and religion.
- To run educational institutions, acquire and run existing educational institutions through any media and not for the purpose of profit.
- To provide for endowment lectures, fellowships or chairs in any educational institution to encourage, develop and promote study in any field of medical science.
- To establish and assist institutions for the purpose of imparting education of a general or technical nature like arts, science,

TRUE STORY

Little big hero

In 2000 Salaam Baalak Trust volunteers found eight-year-old Salim crying inconsolably on the streets of Delhi. He had been separated from his parents during a Muharram procession at Ajmeri Gate in North Delhi. It took Salaam Baalak Trust two years to find his parents but the repatriation was not quite successful. Salim's parents were surviving on the very fringes of subsistence and could not provide for him in any way. He, therefore, found his way back to Apna Ghar, a shelter home run by the Salaam Baalak Trust. It was soon apparent that Salim was somewhat different from other children in the shelter home. He was calm and

composed, diminutive yet determined. He could be fickle yet utterly fearless. A keen fan of Hindi films, little Salim's dreams came startlingly true when he was chosen from among thousands of boys by Ashwin Kumar to play the leading role in the film, The Little Terrorist. The film won international acclaim and bagged the Best Film Award at international film festivals in Montreal, Manhattan, Flanders and Tehran. It also went on to be nominated in several categories at the Oscars. Just 14- years-old, Salim has acted in 40 films and two television serials. A powerhouse of talent—he also loves to draw and paint— Salim firmly believes that his best is yet to come.

engineering, medical, sidha, ayurvedic, homeopathy, unani.

Funding needed for:

- Pre- primary education: This programme addresses the basic educational needs of economically underprivileged children in the age group of 3 to 5 years to enable them to get into mainstream schooling with ease. • The method of teaching has been evolved by experts in early child hood education adopting playway methods. The children enjoy learning and would never be averse to education thereafter.
- Remedial courses: The students studying from Class 2 to Class 6 do lack basic knowledge of language and skills of simple arithmetic. Such children are identified by conducting a pre-test. Simple ways are employed in a remedial course, the duration of which is four months, to develop the skill of rapid reading and basic arithmetic. • Evaluations

are made by a post-test and 90 percent of the students reach the desired level.

- Volunteering is very useful in conducting pre-tests and post-tests to gauge the skill levels of children enrolled in the remedial course.
- Volunteers are needed to conduct community surveys to find out areas where these programs will be required to be executed.

Naandi Foundation, Hyderabad

Focus: Eradication of poverty through public-private convergence.

Naandi Foundation, based in Hyderabad, has been impacting the lives of the marginalised through innovative social alliances and entrepreneurship and promoting thought leadership on development issues by building a critical mass of media, academia, polity, corporates, communities and individuals for

solving problems.

Location: Hyderabad

Funding needed for:

- Project Nanhi Kali: Only three out of every 10 girls that enrol in school in India complete Class 10. The rest drop out because their families cannot afford to keep them in school. This is the status of girl children in India. Sometimes it's the cost of a book or a pencil that leads to a girl child dropping out. And a girl out of school is more at risk of being exploited, overworked or married off early. Nanhi Kali is fighting to keep the girl child in school.

To begin a movement that assures every girl children her right to education and a life with dignity, Naandi Foundation together with the K C Mahindra Education Trust is jointly managing a project called Nanhi Kali. This is a special project that provides education and other material support to underprivileged girl children in government schools who are at the risk of dropping out from school.

The Nanhi Kali project supports the education of girl children through sponsorships. Naandi Foundation has already reached out to over 20,000 girls. The transformation process of girl child education has begun and now there is no looking back.

- Education: Assist Naandi's Education Activists who conduct academic support classes and academic performance assessments through monthly tests/evaluations at schools. This brings third party involvement in the assessment process.
- Girl children: Orient girls during special cluster meetings where tips on health and hygiene would be given by volunteers. Requirement here is for women volunteers. The volunteers would be provided training on the topics they would address during the health and hygiene meetings.

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Full information on CAF and other charity matters may be found on our - website: www.cafonline.org

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Do you believe in miracles?

We do.

It's not divine presence that we're talking about. It's about small everyday miracles that can transform the humblest lives for the better. A home, a road, drinking water, electricity, drainage, a sewing machine, healthcare, community service. We try to do our bit for the people who live and work around our area of operations and in the city of Jamshedpur. And every time we see a smile – we count it as a small miracle.

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