

Civil Society

FROM KERALA TO KENYA...

OWN YOUR POWER



THE AMERICA WE WANT



VOICES FROM ACROSS INDIA WITH A MESSAGE FOR BARACK OBAMA

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Cover photograph: YAJNA

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Civil Society

READ US. WE READ YOU.

A new America?

EIGHT years of the Bush Administration have unleashed dislike for America. The overwhelming support for Barack Obama is clearly an attempt by Americans to set the record right.

The majority of people in India who responded to our question: "The America we want..." on Pages 6 and 7 found American arrogance repugnant. Two key issues which respondents wanted addressed were America's attitude to environment and human rights. There is also concern over the power that corporations wield over American policy and the lives of ordinary people.

Americans who voted for Obama seem to have done so for much the same reasons. They want a gentler America, more inclusive in its sensibilities and less in the control of corporate interests. They are not entirely happy with the policeman's role that America plays abroad.

It is obvious all of this won't change on the basis of one election. In fact, rescuing corporate America and not demolishing it will be one of the first tasks of the Obama Administration.

But the challenge will be to bring big and small onto the same page. In the context of the market this will mean greater regulation. With accountability and transparency will come the rights of the consumer and the small investor.

Our cover story on micro hydel projects makes the old point that small can be beautiful. Of course big power projects are needed. But in an age when the whole world realises the importance of renewable energy, our government has to be goaded to see its relevance.

The good a small hydel project can do, the way it can unleash the potential of a village's economy shouldn't be underestimated. Small can work with big. The big hydel project and the small should be part of the same vision in much the same way as greater use of renewable energy across the world is being designed.

It is interesting that the work done with hydel power in a small Kerala village could find takers in Kenya and Tanzania. It is more interesting that Anil who led the effort should have sought inspiration in manuals on turbine design written in the developed West and discovered his real mentor in Nepal. Local solutions can be global solutions.

By presiding over the world's most powerful democracy, Obama has the opportunity to really raise the bar for a safer and cleaner world.

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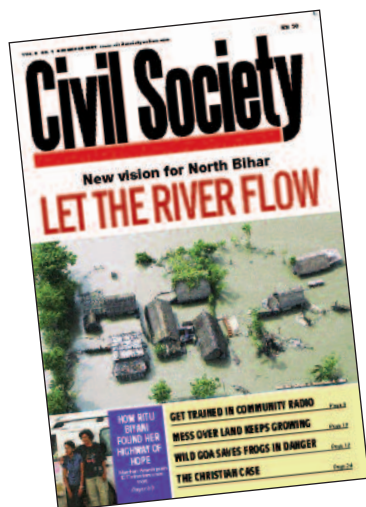
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IN THE LIGHT

by SAMITA RATHOR



LETTERS



Kosi dilemma

Kosi is an international river. All interventions must show utmost sensitivity so that we do not get a bad name. The onus is on the Union government to avoid a situation which makes our country the laughing stock for its mismanagement of rivers. A list of "what not to do in the Kosi basin" must be prepared before relying on the suggestions of retired and tired officials. Post-retirement enlightenment of engineers has more to do with their own rehabilitation and less with the welfare of the Kosi victims. The people of the Kosi basin are victims of development and the arrogance of governmental knowledge that is used to scare com-

mon people into silence and submission. By their declarations like "I know the facts", K L Rao, Kanwar Sen, K N Lal to Nilendu Sanyal all of them gave flood control solutions and the people of Kosi are victims of their solutions.

Gopal Krishna,
krishnagreen@gmail.com

Bihar should learn to live with floods and implement various methods at panchayat level with local participation under the leadership of the chief minister or under NREGA. Floods can be turned into a gift rather than a disaster. Floods or the changing course of the Kosi are not new for North Bihar but, yes, its effects as disaster are indeed new.

Prasad, oplprasad@gmail.com

The people of the flood affected areas should be involved in planning and finding a solution to the problem of Kosi floods

Dr Rihan Akhtar
rakhtar@indiatimes.com

Kosi tells us that we have done so much wrong in the way we have managed our environment.

Saxena B, saxx1234@rediffmail.com

Soul Value

Death is a most natural experience, not to be feared. It is a quick transition from the physical world to the astral plane, like walking through a door, leaving one room and entering another.

Knowing this, we should approach death as a sadhana.

Shastri, Shastriorg@gmail.com

I believe in death and pain before death, a fear of death, and all of that. But I don't think its fear of death as much as fear of being born again as something else - a lobster, a polar bear, a cockroach or spider, or another human being. Every living thing is saddled with the annoying will to live.

Tommy Joe, joet@bellsouth.net

I personally think that the only reason we avoid thinking about death is because nobody out there knows what happens after someone dies. Nobody has returned to tell us. It has been a mystery to all of us which we will know only when we die. I also think that it has to do with how good a human being you are and what good deeds you have done in this world. As a Muslim, I believe in the hereafter, a reward from Allah for all the good things you have done in the world. The life hereafter is much more beautiful than the world we live in but we live for today and never think about what tomorrow will bring us.

Mohsina Shakir, Palo Alto, CA

Evaluating govt

I found Milindo Chakrabarti's critique of the South Africa Public Service efforts very focussed and placed rightfully. The progress made in realising

the nine principles of governance is by no means small. It should be a banner flagged up for many developing countries especially in Africa to emulate! The measures, for example, to curb corruption, and the new style of Public Service Management (borrowing a leaf from the private sector), to cite just a few, can and should be the way to go if developing countries are to get out of the mud and mire. Lastly, I commend the South African government for not only dutifully conducting citizen satisfaction exercises, but also for the boldness shown in publicising the results. Bravo! Thanks Milindo.

Simon Kisira
simon_skw5@yahoo.co.uk

GM food

The government is hell bent on promoting genetically modified seeds (GM). There is absolutely no need to inflict such suspect technology on the Indian farmers. They know how to grow healthy, tasty food without chemicals. When companies take over the task of growing our food with GM and processing it, we will all die of obesity, diabetes, heart disease and cancer.

Gayathri

A CORRECTION

In the story, 'Wild Goa saves frogs', Aaron Periera was referred to in the copy as 'she'. Periera is male. We regret the mistake.

Editor

THE AMERICA WE WANT

Less for business, more for people

Voices from across India

Rita and Umesh Anand
New Delhi

WHAT are the expectations that Indians have of the United States of America? If America has voted for change by choosing Barack Obama as its President, what are the changes in American policy and attitudes that Indians would like to see?

When India is not being represented internationally by its government, it is invariably industry that is seen speaking for the country. Business leaders and mandarins of CII and FICCI troop off to present a certain point of view. Quite predictably, these people worry first and last about their bottom lines.

Political parties flog their own agendas. The Left will want to distance itself from America, the Congress will want to get closer, the BJP will hog space on the fence and so on. These positions change depending on who is in power and what the compulsions of government may be.

Academicians do offer an important window on India. But such perceptions move slowly, in a trickle. They don't capture the imagination. The media has a role to play. But the media is often tied to the Indian establishment apart from being cautiously subservient to its advertisers. Witness the uniformity of opinion on any issue ranging from nuclear power to public transport to land rights and GM.

Civil Society was launched five years ago to report on Indians who matter but go unnoticed. These are the Indians you won't see on TV talk shows and they don't have PR agencies to get their messages across.

In keeping with our mission, we decided to reach out to some of them to find out what they hope America will become under Barack Obama.

Quite obviously, those who expect Obama to change the world are being too enthusiastic. But if what America does affects the rest of us on the planet, what is it that we would like to see Americans do differently?

Indians would like to see a gentle, more caring, less arrogant America. They would like it to be less oriented towards corporate interests and more aligned to what people feel concerned about.

America needs to worry about its environmental record and participate more willingly in curbing global warming. It needs to stop the rampant dumping that its corporations indulge in.

We regard all these as being valid concerns. But that is hardly the point. The idea is to get a wider dialogue going.

Let America blossom

Anupam Mishra, *Gandhi Peace Foundation*

When Barack Obama enters the White House he will find that his predecessor has left behind enough cleaning up for him to do. There is Iraq and there is Afghanistan and there is an economy in deep trouble. If after all that he succeeds in making America more inclusive, he would have made a great contribution to the politics of the world. And if he helps American society blossom to include those additional colours amidst which India can find a place, we should be more than happy.

Stop policing

Ravi Chopra, *People's Science Institute*

Historically America has been recognised as providing leadership as a democratic nation. It should return to that role and stop being a policeman. It should ensure full social justice within America and outside America with alliances and friendship and not through war. It should promote equality and fraternity throughout the world.

The role of the Bush Administration as far as climate change is concerned was very regressive. America should recognise that it is the main contributor to greenhouse gas emissions and show leadership by demonstrating how it will curb its own emissions. Only then does it have the moral clout to tell the rest of the world to cut down its emissions. The Federal Emergency Management Authority has been weakened by the Bush Administration. We would expect Obama to pay special attention to that as an organisation which also interacts with the world. We would expect corporate America to show some responsibility in



curbing its emissions.

No toxic dumping

Ravi Agarwal, *Toxics Link*

Specifically I would like to see the US play a positive role and take its due in the climate change crisis, and cut greenhouse emissions.

The US is the largest global exporter of hazardous wastes like electronics and plastics to countries like India. The US has staunchly refused to follow global treaties like the Basel Convention. It is time the largest economy took responsibility for the residue of its consumption and did not dump it overseas.

The US needs to show that it respects 'people' and not only 'business.' It needs to restore people's confidence in its democracy and ensure that human rights are protected and not violated.

The US needs to be a leader in finding solutions to environmental problems around the globe and not play to very narrow interests.

Environment first

Harekrishna Debnath, *National Fishworkers' Forum*

Given his background and the fact that he has risen from among an oppressed minority to this position, we have a lot of expectations from Barack Obama. We especially expect him to take all decisions with due regard to the environment, keeping in mind the ordinary people who survive on environment-dependent livelihoods all over the world.

Be inclusive

Medha Patkar, *National Alliance of People's Movements*

We would like Americans to stop thinking their culture is superior and to respect the identity and sovereignty of other countries. They can demonstrate this by supporting one vote per member nation in the UN. They must achieve consent of local communities where development is being pursued. It should prove to be a country that indeed stands for liberty and justice and not neoliberal economics, implementing actions against



disparity and manifest or latent apartheid within.

More liberalism

Ananda Lal, *Professor of English literature*

What I admire most about America are her higher education and her music, both of which contributed hugely to the progress of 20th-century culture, but which most Americans themselves don't realise. I want to see an America that extends these contributions to the furthest. First, one that fully establishes in her larger society the liberal humanism and enlightened internationalism on her hundreds of campuses scattered like oases across the country. The nation must become like her universities, the product of the most advanced educational system in the world.

Get out of war mode

Ashok Chaudhury, *Forest People and Forest Workers*

The arrogance of the USA must end. Its war-based economy thriving on its giant military-industrial complex that promotes greed and unhindered consumption that is the root cause of the present economic crisis must yield to a welfare economy.

Only by changing this speculative economy and putting an end to American bossism can the isolation of Americans end. One very important change that we would like to see is a reduction in their unbridled consumption of fossil fuels. America must take its fair share of responsibility for global warming and stop trying to try to shift the blame on to India and China.

Respect people

Laxman Singh Negi, *Uttarakhand Jan Caravan Manch*

The IMF and World Bank promote many anti-people, mega hydro-electric projects in Uttarakhand, destroying peoples' lives and livelihoods, besides destroying forests and ecology. The US should rethink its support for these projects. The displacement of people should end. The new US Administration must understand that people are

saving ecology and forests. Their way of life and what they do traditionally should be honoured. Biodiversity must be respected and saved for only then will sustainable development be possible.

Think of the poor

Kamala Pant, *Uttarakhand Mahila Manch*

Barack Obama's commitment to reducing the gap between the rich and the poor is commendable and it should extend to America's global policies as well. People and communities should have autonomy and freedom to govern forests and US policies should encourage this and not promote the use of forests in the developing world to serve as carbon sinks to mitigate the negative fallout of the runaway consumption that the American economy has been promoting.

Lead the world

Harivansh, *Chief Editor, Prabhat Khabar*

Obama was successful in evoking great support and passion in young American voters - black and white - who propelled him to the presidency. Can he muster the same support and love for America across the world? Can America assume the world's moral leadership again? Can Obama become the true successor of Lincoln's legacy?

Change model

SA Azad, *People's Rights and Social Action Research*

America's development model is wrong. It should innovate a new development model which will become something for the world to aspire to. Barack Obama can change the American emphasis on corporate interests and instead provide the basic needs of people like health, education, work and housing.

Corporate accountability

Amita Joseph, *Business and Community Foundation*

Should governments such as the US bailout or pay

for corporate delinquency? Or promote corporate greed and plunder as seen in the Iraq war or irresponsible MNC behaviour and double standards in developing countries? Nine out of 10 business leaders think CSR will thrive under Obama, according to a recent survey. Critical aspects for Obama are to promote investment in renewable energy, a climate change mitigation strategy and pullout of Iraq where America had no business to be in the first place.

Dialogue is the key

Feisal Alkazi, *theatre director*

There is so much for India to learn from this although we are far ahead, and have had no problems with minorities assuming high political office. We have had a woman Prime Minister, Muslim and Harijan Presidents. The rhetoric that America is the most powerful, important place in the world needs to change. If we can dialogue together, without having first world, second world, third world perspectives, it will be of great benefit.

Forget the paranoia

Bharat and Vinita Mansata, *Earthcare Books*

America will need to shed the paranoia that led it to spend more on its military and armaments than the rest of the world combined! The enormous savings can then be channelled for more constructive work.

With just five per cent of the global population, the US consumes over 25 per cent of the earth's resources, contributing disproportionately to its environmental degradation and to global warming. Some deep soul-searching is thus called for to reclaim moral leadership of the world. If the rest of the planet followed the American way, we would need half a dozen earths!

Scrap the rule book

Dinesh Mohan, *IIT Professor*

Thousands around the world danced in the streets welcoming Barack Obama as President Elect of the United States of America. And, the Barack Obama website (www.barackobama.com) put up a banner headline "Thank you. Change can happen." This is what the dancers have pinned their hopes on. On one person. But a taxi driver in Philadelphia exclaimed: "Man he's cool! But wait till he goes in the White House. They gonna give him the rule book".

That's the issue. Will he show us he's not going by the rule book by not upping the stakes in Afghanistan? The people of Afghanistan have suffered far too much. They don't need more "honour killings" from the Americans.

Can he do away with the rule book? Yes he can.

Be participatory

Ashish Sen, *Voices*

Not many people are aware that Barack Obama has deep roots in community organisation. That is his biggest weapon. He cannot afford to forget these roots. For change to be effective and substantial, it needs to be participatory. Entire communities need to be brought together, and Obama needs to draw upon and actualise his past experience to count here.

For the full responses see civilsocietyonline.com

Van Gujjars take on officials

Rakesh Agrawal
Dehradun (Uttarakhand)

DAWN had just broken when forest officials of the Rajaji National Park broke into Jahoor Hasan's humble hut, deep in the forest.

"They beat up my wife and mother, kicked my two little children, looted and destroyed my home," says Jahoor Hasan, still shaking with anger. The children fled to the forest in fear and hid there for three whole days, hungry and thirsty.

Hasan is a member of the Van Gujjars, a nomadic tribe who traditionally rear cattle for a living. The Gujjars have for centuries lived in the Rajaji National Park (RNP), a vast expanse of some 200,000 acres of forest which includes the districts of Dehradun and Haridwar in Uttarakhand and district Saharanpur in Uttar Pradesh.

Why did forest officials with their deputy director, J Siddiqui, barge into Hasan's hut on the morning of 17 October? The officials want to evict the Van Gujjars from the Rajaji National Park. They claim forests are meant only for animals. The truth is nomads and tribes have lived there for centuries with the animals.

The forest officials were angry that Hasan had the gumption to go to the Nainital High Court and obtain a court order restraining the park's officials from evicting the Gujjars. It was Hasan who helped organise his community into the Van Gujjar Kalyan Samiti and file a case against the Rajaji National Park in the Nainital High Court.

The judges of the Nainital High Court have consistently upheld the Forest Rights Act of 2006 which acknowledges the rights of communities like the Gujjars to live in the forest.

On 17 June 2008, the court issued an order restraining officials of the Rajaji National Park from harassing the Van Gujjars. The park authorities ignored the order. The Gujjars appealed to the court again. On 29 September, the court passed another order. This time the Nainital High Court ordered the state government of Uttarakhand to implement the Forest Rights Act and establish forest rights committees as per the Act within 60 days.

But who is listening? The Nainital High Court and the Gujjars are both helpless. The problem is that though the Forest Rights Act passed by the Union government came into effect 11 months ago, the state government is yet to begin the process of notification.

A day after Hasan's home was destroyed officials barged into Rustam Gujjar's two huts and razed it to the ground. Like a victorious army they headed for Nurajamal Gujjar's hut and pulled that down too.

Nurajamal says SS Rasaily, the park's director, threatened him with false cases if he sought the help of 'outsiders'. Later, five cases were lodged by the park officials against five Gujjars.

"When I gave a copy of the court's order to Siddiqui, he threw it on my face," alleges Nurajamal.

According to Ashok Chaudhury, senior activist of



Van Gujjars sitting in protest

But who is listening? The Nainital High Court and the Gujjars are both helpless. The problem is that though the Forest Rights Act passed by the Union government came into effect 11 months ago, the state government is yet to begin the process of notification.

the National Forum of Forest People and Forest Workers (NFFPFW), this situation has been caused by the state government not notifying the Forest Rights Act.

"Most officials are involved in timber smuggling and illegal trade of wildlife. The presence of Van Gujjars in the park makes it difficult for them to carry on with such activities. They're bound to evict the Gujjars," he said.

The NFFPFW fights for the rights of forest dependent communities in India. The group met forest officials and tried to reason with them. It made no difference. On 31 October, Nurajamal says officials turned up at whatever remained of his dilapidated hut and pulled that down as well. Now his family is living out in the cold.

The forest officials allegedly claimed that the Supreme Court has passed orders against the Nainital High Court. NFFPFW saw through this blatant lie. Only the state government can approach the Supreme Court against the Nainital High Court and it had not done so. But since all appeals were falling on deaf ears, they finally decided to take to the streets.

On 3 November, NFFPFW galvanised around 3,000 forest-dependent people from Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir where the Gujjars have Scheduled Tribe status.

"We're here to express solidarity with our harassed Gujjar brothers," said Bashir Singh Khatana of the All India Nomadic Gujjar Association, Jammu.

The protestors first assembled at Gandhi Park in Dehradun and demanded that the state government immediately notify the Forest Rights Act.

"More than 65 per cent of land is under the forest department in the state. The majority of people, irrespective of caste, are dependent on forests for their livelihood. The government must immediately implement this Act," said Chaudhary.

"There are 169 villages of Taungiyas, Goths and Khattas. These people were brought here as slaves to harvest timber by the British. They're still living in the same settlements as refugees. We demand their settlements be recognised as revenue villages. This is possible if the Forest Rights Act is implemented," said Munnilal, regional convener, NFFPFW. Tarun Joshi of the Van Panchayat Adhikar Sangharsh Samiti, Bhowali, Nainital, demanded that forests be managed by communities.

The protestors then marched to the State Secretariat and demanded to see the Chief Secretary, Indu Kumar Pande. They waited and waited for nearly two hours. No officials came out to talk to them. Finally, the protestors lost patience and threatened to break police barricades and march into the building.

Eventually, Manisha Panwar, Principal Secretary, Department of Social Welfare, emerged. A memo of demands was handed over to her.

The demands included implementation of the Forest Rights Act, and declaration of 169 settlements as revenue villages. The memo asked for stern action against the Rajaji National Park officials, compensation to the Gujjar households whose homes were destroyed, rehabilitation of all Gujjars thrown out of the park and restoration of the autonomy of the Gujjar's Van Panchayat (forest council).

Manisha Panwar said she would issue an order to all District Magistrates to implement the Forest Rights Act within 60 days and establish Forest Rights Committees.

The delegation of protestors also met Principal Secretary, Forests, Anoop Badhavan. He ordered a departmental inquiry against SS Rasaily, the park's director, and J Siddiqui, deputy director. The inquiry is to be completed in 30 days.

The protestors are now hopeful that the Forest Rights Act will be implemented soon in the state. "The state government should realise that if it doesn't implement the Act and honour the orders of the Nainital High Court, it could lead to a constitutional crisis," warned Chaudhary.

Legal, constitutional and political compulsions may yet force Chief Minister KC Bhandari to implement the Act. Elections are looming in the horizon.



Ashok Chaudhury

LAKSHMAN ANAND

'CMZ is a political issue'

Civil Society News
New Delhi

ACTIVISTS of the National Fishworkers' Forum (NFF) have won verbal assurances from some important political leaders that a new draft law which would open the coast to industry and thereby threaten traditional fisher people will not be followed through.

The draft Coastal Management Zone (CMZ) notification, 2007, was to replace the older Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) rules of 1991.

The NFF, however, has succeeded in making the rights of fishing communities a political issue which can hardly be ignored at election time. It wants the older CRZ to stay and the proposed new legislation, the draft CMZ to be junked.

The NFF successfully conducted a march all along the coast, from Gujarat to Kolkata, spreading awareness about the CMZ and bringing together people to put up a fight. The march was called the Machhimar Adhikar Rashtriya Abhiyan (Campaign for the Rights of Fisher People).

The NFF came to Delhi to protest with a demonstration at Jantar Mantar, the capital's protest street. The leaders of the agitation met AK Antony, Union minister for defence, Sharad Pawar, Union minister for agriculture, Oscar Fernandes, Union minister for labour and employment came to Jantar Mantar himself. Verbally, most demands of the NFF have been conceded.

NFF has real fears on the proposed new draft CMZ, which removes an earlier restriction of 200 metres for development along the coast and instead throws it open to container terminals, special economic zones, tourist resorts and hazardous industries.

The CMZ is also silent on the traditional rights of fisher folk. It actually seeks to shift their villages further inland and does not assure them access to the sea.

At Jantar Mantar, as rousing speeches went on in the background, *Civil Society* spoke to **Harekrishna Debnath**, chairperson, NFF.

You led a long march through India's coastline. What was the response?

We marched for one month and 21 days. The response in fishing villages and hamlets was very enthusiastic. The new draft CMZ has created terror in the coastal zone. Fisher people don't know how long they can stay in their villages.

The draft CMZ dilutes all provisions for environment protection and for the customary rights of the fishing community. Anyone can come and set up any enterprise – captive ports, SEZs, even special fishing zones! Twenty-two kilometres of sea have been included as part of the coastal zone. Now any area of special economic interest along the coast can be denotified and used for investment. Many projects are waiting in the pipeline.

On our 8000 km of coast, we have 3,200 fishing villages with a population of 3.7 million families. Traditionally they have lived close to the sea, around 50 to 100 metres from the water. They want to see their boats berthed there. The fishing community has taken it as their historical right to live near the sea. They never thought of getting land titles. So they are the easiest and softest target to evict in

Photographs: LAKSHMAN ANAND



Harekrishna Debnath

DEMANDS

- **Withdraw draft Coastal Management Zone (CMZ) notification, 2007**
- **Implement Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) notification, 1991**
- **Stop privatisation of marine and inland water bodies**
- **Legislate for fish workers' preferential access and customary rights**
- **Fisheries legislation for EEZ**



- **Cancel all letters of permit to foreign vessels**
- **Stop import of fish**
- **Assistance for kerosene and diesel**
- **Benefits of ILO convention**
- **Enact Unorganised Workers' Social Security Bill**
- **Release of all Indian fishermen captured by Pakistan and Sri Lanka**
- **Waive debts of fisher people and farmers**

terms of law. But natural law is above all law. It is natural for them to live near the sea. All fishing communities have rejected the CMZ vehemently and demanded its withdrawal.

Have you moved legally to protect the historical rights of fisher people?

You mean approached the courts? No we have not because our experience in dealing with the courts has not always been pleasant. Moreover, this is an expensive affair. Fisher folk live hand to mouth and we can't afford this expense.

We succeeded in fighting a case in the Supreme Court related to the aquaculture industry's violation of the CRZ. The Supreme Court ordered demolition of those farms along the regulated zone and ordered them to pay compensation for violation of those zones.

All state governments were against the judgement. They came to a consensus which is so rare among political parties and agreed to enact new legislation, the Aquaculture Authority Act, which totally nullified the Supreme Court judgement. Industrial aquaculture is now allowed there with some ornamental restrictions. So that is our bitter experience that law also can be taken for granted.

Have you managed to get political support?

Initially not many were aware of the draft CMZ. But now after our campaign, four state governments have categorically rejected it. Goa said no, Tamil Nadu asked for further discussions with stakeholders, Kerala opposed it and Maharashtra came out against it. We have environment groups on our side. Along the coastal zone it is a big political issue.

What about the Union government.

The draft notification was issued on 1 May, the day we started our campaign. Then, 30 June was the deadline given for filing objections. After our campaign, the deadline was extended by two months. Even after that it remained a draft.

Elections are coming. Will that have an impact?

It will. We are making this an election issue. We ask every political party that wants our votes: what is your stand on the draft CMZ? See the way the government is going ahead with privatisation of the coast and of water bodies. In Kutch, Saurashtra, Mundapur, more than 7,000 fisher families have been displaced, mangroves vandalised and the fish catch has reduced. This is going to happen to other places.

They are not considering the employment of 10 million people. We bring about Rs 30,000 crore worth of fish to the market every year. Ours is a zero investment industry. The proposed CMZ will destroy not only employment but the resource base, income and nutrition of the people. Fish is the cheapest protein, cheaper than a packet of Uncle Chips. This point has reached political minds.

What about the present financial crisis. Doesn't that benefit you?

(Laughs). We used to say the fisherman is the king of the sea. Now this saying is going to be established. Only those who can produce can thrive. You can't eat cars and share market indices. Good sense will prevail finally. Those who produce, sustain us.

NAPM steps up anti-SEZ campaign

Civil Society News
Mumbai

THE National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM) has resolved to step up its opposition to Special Economic Zones (SEZs) across the country and to set up village level committees to insist on decentralisation of development decisions.

The NAPM will also issue a "Sawal Nama" or set of questions, to Members of Parliament seeking re-election and tell them that the votes they get will depend on the answers they give.

These and other decisions emerged from the general body meeting of the NAPM held in November at Tara, a small village near Panvel on the outskirts of Mumbai.

The meeting was attended by 250 people from 15 states at the Yusuf Meher Ali Centre. The centre is being run to propagate socialist ideology in the memory of the Yusuf Meher Ali who had coined the historic and revolutionary slogan of 'Quit India' against the British in 1942.

The NAPM meeting unanimously declared its opposition to the terror tactics being employed by parochial parties like the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) and its leader Raj Thackeray. The meeting was of the view that the MNS is being indirectly supported by the Congress-NCP Maharashtra government.

Medha Patkar updated the meeting on the actions being taken by the Mumbai unit, starting with the complaint filed by the NAPM with the Maharashtra State Human Rights Commission which had given an order against the inaction of the state government.

Speakers expressed their concern over the latest revelation of the role of Hindu fundamentalist organisations in carrying out hate attacks and bomb blasts in several parts of the country. A call was given



Medha Patkar at the meet

to oppose terror tactics as well as any move which would be a threat to the secular fabric and violation of the rights of the citizens of this country.

Speakers from the states of West Bengal and Kerala complained about the 'double standards' of the Left -ruled governments saying they are no different from other states when it comes to implementation of policies like SEZs, land acquisition and policies related to the retail sector.

The meeting ended with the following decisions:

- A People's Tribunal to be formed to do a socio-economic audit of SEZs across the country.
- Opposition to SEZs be expressed by forming Human Chains alongside National Highways.
- A 'Sawal Nama' (People's Questions) to be issued for Member Parliamentarians declaring that "unless you respond to these issues, we won't vote".
- 60th International Human Rights Day to be celebrated as "Workers Rights are Human Rights Day".
- The second phase of Kosi Navnirman to be started soon. NAPM gives a call to everyone to join the

PANKAJ GURAV

effort.

- Village level Committees to be formed to work for implementation of Art 243, and towards decentralised decision-making and planning.

- A National Enquiry Commission to be formed on the issues concerning the minority community.

- Condemnation of abuse of Shri SAR Geelani by members of ABVP.

The linkages between the past and the present were drawn philosophically by veteran socialist parliamentarian Surendra Mohan who lamented that he was part of the democratic struggle before Independence as well as post-Independence. He was joined in by G G Parikh who coordinates activities at the Yusuf Meher Ali Centre. He asked all those present to work towards developing and

supporting alternate lifestyles.

Sunanda Jayram, a farmer-leader from Karnataka, drew attention to the oppression faced by women in the form of female infanticide and denial of property rights. National Convenors, Anand Mazgaonkar and Ulka Mahajan recalled the 1990s when the NAPM started. The emergence of the NAPM coincided with liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation and the rise of communal forces.

Medha Patkar, National Convenor, said NAPM has always tried to support the struggles of its allies and has taken up social, economic and political causes at state, regional and national levels. NAPM's intervention into serious crises and calamities like the recent one in Bihar during the Kosi floods, has been in the wider perspective of human rights and civil liberties and decentralised development based on equity and self-reliance on the other, she said.

(Reported by Madhuri Variyath and Simpreet Singh)

Gorkha movement falling apart

Vivek S Ghatani.
Darjeeling

THE Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM) which claims to be young and Gandhian is becoming dictatorial and undemocratic. Recently, the GJM announced that Opposition parties would not be allowed to speak on the Gorkhaland movement and they will not be consulted either.

"Statements made by the Opposition recently will deviate people from the main cause," was Bimal Gurung, GJM chief's cryptic comment.

Since the past one year, GJM has been leading an agitation for a separate state named Gorkhaland which would be carved from West Bengal.

Gurung was worked up over Madan Tamang, President of the Akhil Bharatiya Gorkha League's comment. Tamang said in a recent statement that the GJM withdrew some of its agitation programmes after secretly meeting the home secretary of the West Bengal government at Tinchulay near Takda some 20 km from Darjeeling.

The GJM had suspended some agitations like their call for non-payment of electricity bills, the change of number plates from WB (West Bengal) to GL (Gorkhaland) and replacing the signboard of the Government of West Bengal offices to Government of Gorkhaland.

"The GJM announced relaxation after Gopalkrishna Gandhi, the Governor of West Bengal made a request in the wake of the second round of tripartite meetings in November," a GJM source said.

The GJM has now asked Tamang to prove his statement or withdraw from politics. The Students Wing of GJM is being roped in to *gherao* Tamang's house in Darjeeling. Tamang is now living under tight security provided by the West Bengal government. The students started a relay hunger strike to put pressure on Tamang to speak up.

But Tamang is adamant. "Why should I give proof to them?" he said defiantly. "I will provide proof when the time comes."

Tamang reportedly met representatives of the Human Rights Commission recently. He announced

that he would bring all political parties under one banner, a sort of coalition, to fight for Gorkhaland. Before the GJM era, Tamang had floated a political front called the Peoples' Democratic Front (PDF) to fight against Subhas Ghisingh's Gorkha National Liberation Front. Tamang was chairman of the PDF but currently it is defunct.

"A meeting of all the political parties is scheduled soon. Any political party which adopts a resolution for the demand for Gorkhaland will be welcomed. If the CPM also adopts this resolution we will welcome them also," said Tamang.

The GJM alleges Tamang is an agent of the West Bengal government especially after one CPM heavyweight announced that the state government would give full protection to any opposition leader being threatened in the hills.

The GJM said if Tamang fails to prove what he has said than the people could do anything. "He may face consequences similar to what Ghising faced. He was driven out from the hills. GJM will not be responsible then," Gurung warned.

YASIR IQBAL



Garbage dumped in Achan

Srinagar battles with garbage terror

Jehangir Rashid
Srinagar

RESIDENTS living near Achan-Eidgah, just a few kilometres from Srinagar's city centre, are battling a different enemy – big mounds of garbage.

The Srinagar Municipal Corporation (SMC) has been dumping garbage here for years but till recently the situation did not assume alarming proportions.

Initially, only a portion of the city's garbage would find its way to Achan. The main dumping area was a place called Galander. Also, SMC officials would fill the land with soil to control the smell at Achan.

But dumping of garbage has been stopped at Galander. Now Srinagar's entire garbage is dumped at Achan alone. Also, SMC officials have not been consistent in covering the land with soil. It's been almost a year since the garbage dump was last filled with earth.

Residents near the dumping site are now up in arms against the government. They have put up vehement demands – either shift the dumping ground or shift residents to cleaner, more hygienic surroundings. They say their current environment is not conducive to healthy living and is affecting their fields and cultivation.

"We are facing health problems due to the garbage dump. But nobody is listening to our pleas. The situation has worsened ever since the SMC stopped filling the land with soil regularly," said Abdul Samad, a resident of Achan.

In the first half of October, residents got together and managed to stop the dumping of more garbage. But their collective strength could not stop garbage from being dumped here in truckloads, at the point of a gun.

"On the night of 17 and 18, October, precisely

around 2 am, the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) was deployed in large numbers after which more than a dozen Srinagar Municipal Corporation (SMC) trucks unloaded garbage at this site," said Ghulam Ahmad Dar, a resident of the area.

Since then SMC officials have regularly been dumping garbage at Achan. Angry residents quote an agreement the government signed with them some 18 months back. The then Mayor of SMC, Ghulam Mustafa Bhat, had agreed in principle that the city's garbage would not be dumped at Achan and a new site would be found.

"After we agitated for 11 days last year the government through the Mayor and in the presence of the Deputy Commissioner, Srinagar and Municipal Commissioner had signed the agreement," the residents allege.

The agreement clearly states the SMC would identify alternative dumping sites. "The SMC would temporarily dump garbage at Achan for a period of one year six months (from October 4, 2007 to October 9, 2008). However, if the Achan garbage dump is not closed by the due date, SMC would pay compensation to residents of nine villages for their agricultural and residential land and super structure. The SMC would also compensate for dislocation and loss of source of livelihood to resi-

dents and nine villages consisting of 55,000 persons," says the agreement.

Srinagar's Municipal Commissioner, Showkat Ali, is dismissive though. "The agreement is not a legal entity. The person who signed the agreement was not competent enough to do so. It is only the government that can decide on a new dumping site. This is the only dumping site earmarked by the master plan."

He blames the land mafia for fuelling the agitation. "They've purchased 1000-2000 *kanals* of land and they are behind this whole thing. Otherwise there is no foul smell as the garbage once dumped is land filled," he adds.

"In all states, once the garbage site is filled with soil it is covered with vegetation, grass and developed into a garden. We too have a similar plan. The residents have no approach road and to facilitate movement we are coming up with a bridge that would cost Rs 2 crores. We have to develop the site. A project that will cost Rs 22 crores has already been approved," the Municipal Commissioner elaborated.

Salman Sagar, the SMC's incumbent Mayor, also labels the agreement 'invalid'. "It has to be approved by the Cabinet. The former Mayor might have succumbed to the pressure but I won't. We have to dump garbage there till the government provides an alternative."

But residents say there is more than just smell at stake here. The dumping ground is a big area, measuring almost 516 *kanals*. Residents claim the adjoining area's soil quality has undergone a significant change due to the garbage. The agitation also turned violent at one point. Many people, including several women were injured in a scuffle with the Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) Police and CRPF while protesting the dumping of garbage.

N N Vohra, Governor of the state visited the area recently. He issued instructions to build an alternate approach road and a new bridge between Dr. Ali Jan Road and Achan. He also finalised an action plan for scientific solid waste management in the city.

Residents aren't impressed though. They say the bridge will not solve the problem if dumping continues. Abdul Samad who has been active in the fight against the government says officials have promised only one fourth of the city's garbage will be dumped at Achan with the rest going to four alternate sites. "But it is all verbal. They didn't honour a written agreement. What is the guarantee an oral version will be validated? They say the former Mayor was not competent enough to enter into an agreement. They might come up with excuses later," rues Samad.

Legal experts have put their weight behind the residents. Attorney Aijaz Ahmad says, "The government has deceived people. If the document was not to be honoured by the government, why did they sign it?"

This pessimism is supported by history. In 1981, J&K Governor Jagmohan Malhotra had laid Achan's foundation stone and declared it a satellite colony. "But after a couple of years it started being used as a dumping ground. The site occupies 516 *kanals* including 90 *kanals* of government land. The rest is the personal property of people. The government had no approach land so we donated them a *kanal* and two *marlas*. Later they fenced the land on three sides," say the disillusioned residents.

Residents near the dumping site are now up in arms against the government. They have put up their demands - either shift the dumping ground or shift residents to cleaner, more hygienic surroundings.

Wall newspaper rides on milk vans

Shreyasi Singh
New Delhi

ANUPAM Srivastava was primed for a mainstream editorial job in India's big media when he graduated in journalism from the prestigious Indian Institute of Mass Communication, (IIMC), New Delhi. Nobody, not even his family in Patna, Bihar, expected or even wanted him to come back home. But after finishing his course in 1990, Anupam maintained a close link with his home state, producing ads and other media products there with ICON Communications, the firm he set up.

It isn't snazzy, cutting-edge media production that distinguishes ICON Communications though. It is their brave foray into rural communications with Pratibadh, an innovative wall newspaper across 40,000 villages in Bihar, Punjab and Haryana with a readership of close to half a million people that is truly remarkable. Pratibadh is published fortnightly in two language editions – Hindi and Gurmukhi.

Anupam credits his alma mater with much of this success, in particular, Professor Rajeshwar Dayal, who taught him Communications Research at IIMC and encouraged him to introduce the concept of a wall newspaper in Bihar.

Anupam was deeply interested in development issues, and firmly believed in the tremendous ability of communications to bring about change and be a catalyst. He understood that the glaring lack of information was a huge obstacle in the way of rural advancement. The more organised media institutions could not reach this demographic effectively due to various commercial and logistical constraints.

In 1994, he sketched out a rough blueprint of a wall newspaper targeted at Bihar's rural population. A series of dummies were made and carefully pre-tested in select areas to finalise on the format that is still in use today. Many brainstorming sessions resulted in the name Pratibadh which in Hindi means committed.

To garner support for his idea, Anupam met the Collector of Patna, and surprised him by asking for infrastructural support, not government funds. He knew an efficient distribution system was key to Pratibadh's success. Several meetings with a wide range of government agencies and other organisations led him to the Patna Dairy Project.

With the Dairy Cooperative's support, Pratibadh was launched in October 1996 in 950 villages in four central Bihar districts with a population of 35,000. Milk vans would carry the double spreadsheets to the dairy collection centres, and the Milk Union Secretary would paste it on the wall for community consumption. The newspaper was tailor made to cater to the information needs of villages. It covered livestock health, animal feed, government schemes and other localised news. It was written simply in large fonts, and updated fortnightly.

Anupam could not have envisaged a better launching pad. "The dairy cooperative system is incredible. It works without fail and to a very, very large extent honestly. Milk vans visit 1,00,000 villages across the country twice a day to collect milk and take it to district chilling plants. They go through this routine 365 days a year with almost zero-defect. Even villages that are not on motorable roads are part of the system. Residents of such villages know the time the

milk van will cross the patch of road closest to the village, and they get to it. We were spot on in piggy backing on this infrastructure."

The wall newspaper built a loyal readership in Bihar, and Anupam replicated it in villages across West Bengal, Maharashtra and Uttaranchal. Pratibadh grew exponentially between 2000 and 2002 but couldn't manage the growth. In fact, they had to shut down the West Bengal, Maharashtra and Uttaranchal editions because they were running into

mechanism. This was a prototype of the interactive, two-way communication that is now a buzzword in our media. The milk vans would carry back letters from villagers resulting in direct contact with readers.

Anupam pushed the envelope further when in 2005 he put out ads in his newspaper asking for *Samvad Sutras* (Dialogue Weavers) or local villagers to work as reporters. Five hundred people across the five states responded. Anupam conducted workshops for his growing editorial team, and ICON has

Milk vans would carry the double spreadsheets to the dairy collection centres, and the Milk Union Secretary would paste it on the wall for community consumption. The newspaper was tailor made for the villages.



losses.

From the very beginning, Pratibadh was subscribed to by its readership. Individuals contribute as little as 20-50 paise each toward the cost of the paper. But this is crucial because it gives each one of them a sense of ownership. "Unless development is seen as an enterprise, it can never be successful," says Anupam. ICON Communications is not an NGO or a social organisation. Anupam says his firm has sustained their enterprise financially on subscriptions.

Pratibadh is now a beacon for rural communication campaigns. Last month, ICON Communications was given a Manthan award, annually held by the New Delhi-based Digital Empowerment Foundation, in their e-News category for using ICT (Information and Communication Technology) to enlighten the masses.

Over the last 12 years, Pratibadh has perfected using milk centres to reach rural audiences. ICON is now collaborating with SHGs, *mandi* boards, rural branches of banks, panchayats, ATMA projects and truck unions to scale up to their next milestone of 1,00,000 villages.

Also, the newspaper wove in a robust feedback

trained over 350 rural reporters in the last few years. Most of them are literate farmers and dairy people with an ambition to make a difference.

Anupam is confident this untapped pool of resources can be developed into a multi-tasking force of valuable rural marketers, rural researchers and rural communicators. Currently, he is using their skills to facilitate his new campaign, *Aao Baatein Karein* (Let's talk), a forum aimed at getting villagers to sit together and discuss issues that affect their lives. This platform, piloted in Bihar, hopes to help villagers understand new concepts like solar lamps and enable the implementation of innovative breeding or farming techniques on a larger scale.

Large corporations and venture capitalists firms have approached ICON Communications to help them tap the enormous rural market. But, Anupam wants to do the groundwork himself. "These channels of communications are a means to an end. We want to establish a network that corporate and development agencies can ride on and lead to development."

His mission is to employ two rural reporters each across 1,00,000 villages. "If I can help 2,00,000 people, I can sleep peacefully and die happily," he says.

Ramayana with a dice

Rina Mukherji
Kolkata

HAVE you ever played a traditional game with shells? Probably not. Most adults buy mechanised toys which whirr and purr for their little ones. Children too are misled into believing hi-tech toys and video games are cool. Yet it's hard to beat the simplicity and fun that eco-friendly traditional games provide.

Vineeta Siddhartha stumbled into the world of traditional games by chance. Writing on ancient culture and traditions for *The Hindu*, she suddenly woke up to this vast treasure. "The focus at that time was on games like chess, kabaddi, kho-kho and other popular games of Indian origin," she says. She noted the fun her two little sons aged seven and nine had while playing traditional games with her grandmother. This was what got her really, really interested.

The research she embarked on took her into a lost world of rural homes, tribal hamlets and the fading memory of the elderly. "Even if I came across some references to these games in libraries, I could not easily get to know the rules of the games. Initially, it meant talking to anyone and everyone, from the local milkman to the guy around the corner. Finally, I found out about these games from people in old age homes."

She soon realised there were no specific rules to be followed. "I was attending a function at the International Women's Association four years ago, when a lady approached me, offering details of a game. So, you see, collecting such knowledge can be an unusual experience, with most work requiring ground-level, path-breaking research."

It was the feedback she got from readers of *The Hindu* that prompted her to explore traditional games as a business idea. She calls her company, Kreed Games.

In 2000, she started with eight games, 50 pieces each. In 2002, the overwhelming response got her to expand to 21 games. Realising that most children and adults were unfamiliar with these old games, she started conducting workshops in schools to teach children the games. She did work-



Vineeta with her games



Children engrossed in a traditional board game

shops in 10 major schools, and then organised an inter-school competition. *The Hindu's* Newspaper in Education section came on board as a sponsor.

Since then, her company has grown exponentially and has a lot more games to offer. There are board games, card games and outdoor games. The outdoor games include gilli danda and goli (marbles). Most are indoor games, with the board variety dominating the range.

Vineeta has games like dahdi which is like knots and crosses but played with shells, chaupad, a South Indian version of ludo, Addu puli aatam which is similar to the wolf and goats game played in draughts. There is also parama pada sopanam which is like snakes and ladders, gilli, goli, paanchkone, akin to Solitaire, Ashtachama, a game which uses coins like ludo and many others.

Kreed Games has also invented games that can educate children in Indian classics like the Ramayana. The first two games in the Ramayana series use the ludo format to tell the story of the Ramayana. Coins and metal dice are used to play the game as done traditionally. The third in the series, the Battle of Lanka, is a card game. Sticking to matters traditional can pose their own unusual problems. When Kreed Games came up with the game of Five Stones using tamarind and kazhakoti seeds, careless storage by customers resulted in insects spoiling the kit. As a result, the game had to be discontinued. "When it was re-introduced, polished stones were given in place of the seeds," says T Sivagami, coordinator of Kreed Games.

Each of these games is high on strategy, since they are far more complicated than modern board or outdoor games. Whether it is chaturvimshati koshtaka, a battlefield game played in 24 squares or paanchkone which is akin to brainvita, capturing the opponent's coins is the ultimate objective. This means focusing and developing motor skills and a high degree of concentration to win.

"I hate to think that children would play these games to improve their mathematical skills," says Vineeta. "But the games certainly build on a child's inherent urge to count. The concentration and focus necessary does improve a child's mental skills."

Siddhartha and her team have deliberately kept prices low. Most games cost between Rs 65 and Rs 225. Only six games are priced between Rs 400 and Rs 600. "The idea was to reach as many as possible," explains Vineeta. She is particular about quality and safety. You don't find jagged edges or bad material in any of her game kits. Kreed Games uses eco-friendly material for all its toys and packaging.

The games have caught on in all the southern states and are slowly making inroads into Mumbai and Kolkata. Workshops and talk shows have raised awareness about the games. Kreed Games's participation in the Vividha Children's Fair has brought her company into prominence and ensured a ready market.

Contact: info@kreedgames.com. Website: www.kreedgames.com

Samita's World

by Samita Rathor





Pune's ancient trees

Photographs: RAKESH AGARWAL



A chopped tree left on the road

Talk and some action saves trees in Pune

Rakesh Agrawal
Pune

A housewife in Pune's Koregaon Park was most upset before Ganesh Chaturthi in September last year. Outside her home, trees were being cruelly pruned at the behest of the local councillor so that a huge Ganesh idol could proceed smoothly for emersion to the Mula, one of the city's four rivers.

She resolved to stop the pruning of trees. She called up her residents' welfare association, cultural clubs and the Pune Tree Watch (PTW), a citizens group started by the Kalpavriksh Environmental Action Group (KEAG). All three put their heads together. They talked to the councillor who agreed to stop pruning trees and to change the route of the idol's procession.

If you are in Pune and want to save a tree, Kalpavriksh's PTW is the best organisation to turn to. "Since our inception in July 2005 we have saved thousands of trees from being felled. We have been a strong support group for concerned citizens," says Tasneem Balasinorwala, a member of KEAG.

Urban movements rely on discussion, persuasion and giving practical alternatives to save trees. "We aim to monitor, act and protect trees that harbour a variety of life and provide citizens with ecological benefits," says Balasinorwala.

People get really emotional when trees they have lived with for years are put on death row. They are very thankful when those trees get saved. Shanta Bhushan, a housewife and an educator living in Model Colony, was very moved when she managed to save a big neem tree earmarked to be cut. "I

joined hands with PTW and convinced the authorities to bend the road a bit and save this tree which is an old friend," she says.

PTW carries out surveys of trees marked for the axe. It works on policy issues especially the Maharashtra (Urban Areas) Protection and Preservation of Trees Act, 1975, a law that regulates tree cutting. PTW also plants trees, talks to the media and interacts with officials.

In early 2007, several trees were to be cut for widening a road at Warje, an upcoming area. "After a lot of persuasion and discussion of alternatives, the authorities agreed to our plan. Only five trees were to be cut, about 42 trees transplanted and 124 planted. Plantation of new saplings will happen once construction of the road is complete," says Balasinorwala.

Sometimes, a joint effort is needed. When a road was being made in Shastri Nagar, the contractor applied to cut 54 trees to build storm water drains. PTW, along with citizens, raised objections to the application. They pointed out that there was scope for design changes. PTW requested a joint site inspection with the PWD and the garden department. Prasad Latkar, a town planner and member of Srushti, an environmental action group, suggested that a looping method be used to make drains. This would save the trees.

After the inspection, the authorities decided that only four or five trees would be cut and the rest would be spared. They recommended a zigzag construction of the storm water drain, which has been accepted. Vandana Chavan, the ex-mayor and a member of the PTA, also played an active role as she stays in the area.

Occasionally PTW has had to save trees not once but twice over. In 2005, the group saved trees opposite the All India Radio (AIR) station. Once again the trees were threatened. Vinod and Shantha, members of PTW, visited the site and gave suggestions. After repeated efforts, they were assured that only those trees that cannot be saved are to go and the rest would be transplanted. "We suggested that new trees should be planted on the road divider to maintain green cover. This is a very busy junction and needs all the green cover it can get," says Vinod.

Convincing enlightened citizens is not very difficult. In Pune University a 50-year-old banyan tree was going to be cut to make way for an extension of the library.

The university could have avoided this by leaving a little space for the tree. The PTW decided to move although it was a bit late as work had started and a few branches and roots had been axed. "With our inputs, the architect made an alternative draft. We got people here to sign it and took it to the Vice-Chancellor's office. And, it worked," says Balasinorwala. The banyan tree is still there. It coexists with the library.

The Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) has a Tree Authority Committee consisting of concerned citizens, botanists, environmentalists and peoples' representatives. "I'm also there, but so are the politicians who generally don't understand the issue," says Balasinorwala.

But this platform gives people a voice as they can raise objections to any proposed tree-cutting seven days after the Pune Municipal Corporation puts up a public notice. The PTW makes site visits, discusses the issue and gives alternatives. Once when 25 trees were to be cut for widening a road, the PTW suggested a slight detour and the trees were saved.

People also inform the PTW if any old and big trees are going to be cut. Two citizens alerted the group when trees were slated to be axed on Alandi Road. A resident of Shivajinagar colony wrote to the PTW that four fully grown Ashok trees in front of a store were going to be cut.

Pune has a relatively pristine environment. The city's flora and fauna include more than 400 species of birds and 65 wild mammal species, among the highest in any Indian city. Pune also has over 380 tree species.

But when PTW has to take on a powerful lobby, it is not always successful. Like the construction of a new road on a forested hill called the Law College Hill. The area is an ecological hotspot. Construction of a 2.8 km road would ruin its environment and wildlife. But builders and some politicians backed the proposal and forced the authorities to begin making the road. PTW, on its part, organised environmentally conscious groups and individuals to object. But all their pleas, signatures and arguments are falling on deaf ears.

SEWA brings hope in Kabul

Aunohita Mojumdar
Kabul

JAMILLA is 38 years old and has 12 children. Eighteen years ago, her husband, a daily labourer, fell down while scaffolding a building. He was seriously injured so he couldn't support the family anymore. Jamilla spent all these dark years moving with her family from Kabul to Kunduz to Mazar-e-Sharif, seeking refuge, not just from conflict, but from poverty.

Jamilla earned some money selling *boloni*, the Afghan version of the stuffed *parantha*, to women who came to Kabul's only women's park, the Bagh-e-Zanana. It was here that she first heard of SEWA. (Self Employed Women's Association), India's largest union of women who run small businesses in the informal sector.

In the park, SEWA was training 1,000 destitute Afghan women to run businesses that were economically viable and culturally appropriate. Jamilla enrolled for the ecological regeneration course. "It's an opportunity to be independent and support my family better," she says.

The SEWA project, which will run for one year initially, has been financed by the Indian government at a cost of \$1.4 million. It is part of India's assistance programme for Afghanistan.

"The idea for the project germinated in India's desire to see the international community's talk about gender empowerment and mainstreaming translate into building the talents and skills of women," says India's ambassador to Afghanistan, Jayant Prasad. Announced during the 2005 visit of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh by his wife, Gurcharan Kaur, the project will train Afghan women in ecological regeneration, food processing and garment manufacture.

These vocations were selected after careful consideration. Afghanistan remains a deeply conservative society where the participation of women in the workforce and in public spaces is severely restricted. Infrastructure is absent. So is a robust market that could generate employment for women.

The trainees were chosen by Afghanistan's Ministry of Women's Affairs from names forwarded by local communities. The neediest women, including war widows and orphans have been chosen.

The stipend for the trainees was kept a secret to ensure that only those who really wanted to learn would come. SEWA trainers interviewed each aspiring trainee before making a final decision.

"Unlike many projects where the daily allowance is the attraction, these destitute women walk miles or spend their own money to reach the training site," said Megha Desai, SEWA's project coordinator.

SEWA first trained a group of 32 'master trainers' in India. By training local Afghan women as trainers, the Indian government hopes to replicate the project in future in different provinces. "We are reaching out to other NGOs for the first time so that they can take up the project," said Jayant Prasad.

"The significance of the SEWA project is that the women can work in their own homes," said Dr Hussn Banu Ghazanfar, Minister of Women's Affairs, the only woman in the Cabinet. "Plants, design work, food processing are skills that the women can use to set up businesses which do not require much money. They can do it on their own. We can help them also."



SEWA trainer with two Afghan women at the centre

One beneficiary is Anees Gul. Her husband suffered a bullet injury while working as a policeman during Najibullah's time. He is incapacitated. Anees's Afghan trainer is Wasima Meri, a master trainer. Wasima is better off than the women she teaches. A school teacher, she felt she could do better as a professional cook.

"When we keep fruits and vegetables at home, they go bad very soon. With the skills I learnt here I will be able to preserve things longer and make jams and juices which can be sold. Twice since the training, I made carrot juice the way I had learnt. My family could not believe it could taste so good," she says in a voice bursting with pride.

To understand local realities, SEWA, on the suggestion of the Indian embassy, carried out an intensive assessment of costing, finance and accounting for small businesses, cultural mores and educational standards. This contrasts with several well-intentioned programmes created on drawing boards in Western capitals which fail because ground realities don't match.

The skills SEWA selected are indigenous to Afghans but need upgrading, says Desai. Gardening is something most Afghans do if they have land and water. Drying and preserving foods is also a regular

household chore. The challenge was to upgrade skills so that the women could sell their products. SEWA intends to preserve traditional skills that could be lost.

"The idea is for women to learn skills and help other women. They will produce, not for the elite market, but for themselves and surpluses for their family and contiguous community. This will address the challenge of inter linkages to the market," says Jayant Prasad.

SEWA has talked to the Kabul Municipality and the Ministry of Agriculture to see if women training in ecological restoration can be employed in government owned nurseries, said Desai. The women will, in fact, be training on Bagh-e-Zanana's barren, dusty land.

For food processing, the challenge will be to reach the market. Most women who enrolled for the course were selling food at the park, which is a secure place but has limited opportunities for boosting incomes. "Now I hope I can set up a shop outside the park with my son," says Shad Jan, a mother of five children. "I can cook, he can sell and my daughters can help me."

Garment manufacture is of poor quality in Afghanistan. So a wholesale market in second hand clothes from Pakistan thrives. There is high use of synthetic clothes. To reverse this trend, Desai hopes to teach the women how to manufacture high quality clothes at low cost and thereby create a thriving, inexpensive clothes market for women.

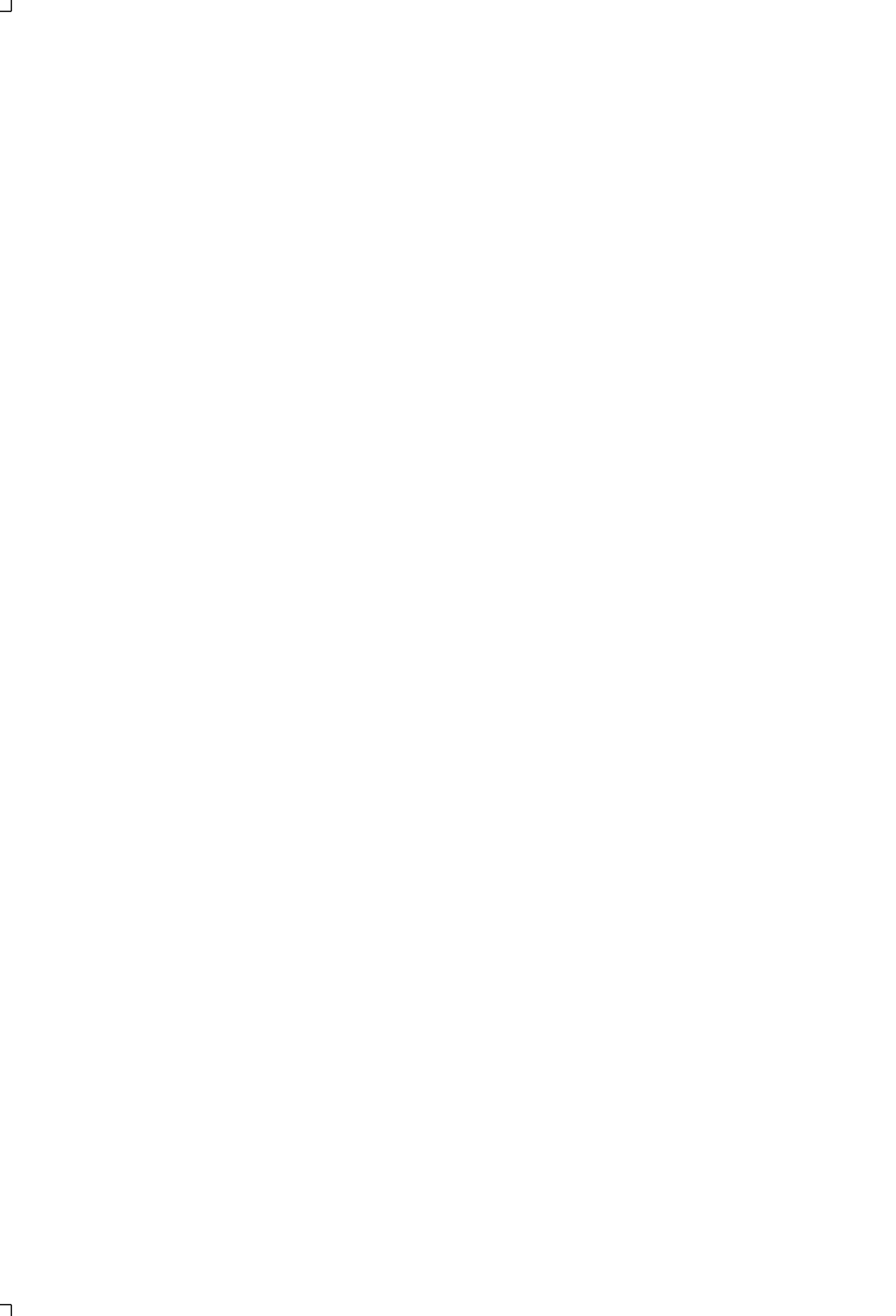
SEWA has imported 36 electronically operated sewing machines. After training, SEWA hopes to set up a community centre where the women can run their own garment units.

But it is tough. The garment trainees returned from India two months ago. But they could not continue their training because there was no electricity to power the machines. Kabul gets a few hours of electricity every day in summer. In winter, supply reduces to just two hours for four days. The women will have to rely on diesel fuelled generators if they want to use the better quality imported machines.

Working in Afghanistan has been a challenge for SEWA which is undertaking a project for the first time outside India. When Desai and her colleague went to the wholesale market to see what materials were available, they were the only women in a male market.

For Desai the reward is in seeing her work make a big difference to the women who share their stories with her every day. "Afghan women are smart and intelligent," she says. The dedication and courage of this SEWA team shows. Desai returned to Afghanistan a few days after the bomb blast which hit the Indian embassy. She shrugs and says, "We have always worked with the grassroots."

AUNUHITA MOJUMDAR





Villagers of Pathampara with Raju, the main operator of the hydel power plant, checking out controls

OWN YOUR POWER

From Kerala to Kenya, a local solution

Shree Padre
Kannur

THE sun had just slipped into the Arabian Sea. Yet darkness had not covered us. Here at Pathampara, a sleepy hamlet up in the Western Ghats in Kerala, lights flickered at various levels like stars in the sky. A row of kiosks looked especially bright because they stood together up in front and the street on which they were located had no lights.

Eleven years ago, Pathampara, a 90-minute drive from Kannur, made headlines when it stopped petitioning the government for electricity and instead began generating its own power from a very small facility using the flow of a local stream to run a turbine.

The excitement villagers felt over their achievement is palpable even today. "All that you see from here is our Janakeeya Current, (People's Electricity). We have taken it to the highest peak of this hill," Govindan PK, a farmer, proudly tells us.

Pathampara's achievement has been replicated in the Narmada Valley thanks to the interest shown by Medha Patkar and the Narmada Bachao Andolan, (Save the Narmada Agitation). Similar small projects have also been set up in the interiors of Tanzania and Kenya.

In power deficit India, can small hydel projects like Pathampara's meet one kind of demand: that of villages? Can they cut cost and time and provide the impetus for regenerating the rural economy by serving village-based industries?

Pathampara was intended to be an experiment by activists who wanted to demonstrate that eco-friendly power production is possible. But years later it is

seen as a serious model for clean, sustainable power from decentralised sources with low investment— provided of course the terrain is right and a reliable water source exists.

At a cost of Rs 2.5 lakhs, the 5 KW hydel project was commissioned in 1997. Originally 36 families were beneficiaries, each contributing Rs 6,000 and labour. Later another 29 households were put on the system, extending its reach to two kilometres from the power house.

Janakeeya Current has become well established. But some three years ago, the Kerala State Electricity Board (KSEB) finally caught up with Pathampara and began supplying it electricity. The village now has two systems to choose from: its own Janakeeya Current and the power that comes from the government grid.

It was the Pathampara Janakeeya Urja Committee that organised locals for this project. It now shoulders the responsibility of maintenance. An operator, who is paid a salary, is stationed at the power house to put the supply on for two hours in the morning and six hours after 5 pm. During festivals, the supply is continuous.

Each family is allowed to light five CFL bulbs and a television set. High voltage devices such as grinder-mixers are disallowed. Each family has to pay a monthly maintenance fee of Rs 75. A small additional fee is charged for running a television.

Power cuts and maintenance failures aren't known to these people. Voltage is always good. "I wonder how many other areas there would be in Kerala that don't have power cuts and breakdowns and don't have to run after KSEB staff to get problems fixed," says Shibu, ex-secretary of the committee.

Vijayan, the present secretary, points out: "In the past 12 years, we haven't increased the maintenance fee, except for extra levy of Rs 10 on the shops. On an

YAJNA



The Govindan family who live in Pathampara watch television



A team of African officials

average, we have spent around Rs 7,000 for maintenance every year. Recently, we carried out some repairs using Rs 55,000 given by a donor. We have a savings of Rs 10,000."

But there is an unavoidable annual problem. The flow in the stream on which the turbine depends dwindles in January. For four months from then the system draws power from a diesel engine. Maintenance charges for these months go up by Rs 25 from Rs 75 to Rs 100 per family.

Now that the Kerala government's supply has reached the village some 20 families have completely switched to it. Only 45 families are using the old arrangement that is most dependable and quite inexpensive. A few enjoy both.

Shibu recalls, "Our efforts to get electricity, date back to the early 1980s. We made several representations to KSEB, our MLA and MP. Officials of KSEB visited us many times, surveyed the area and even estimated the cost. But nothing happened."

It was at this juncture in 1997, a team of youngsters from the nearby town of Alakode visited Pathampara studied the locality in detail and made a proposal. The priest of the local church, Fr. Mathew Ashariparambil, convened a meeting. The villagers were told that if they could collect Rs 2.5 lakhs and put in the labour required, the whole village could be electrified.

The youngsters had been mobilised by the People's School of Energy (PSE). The work was completed in just two months – in time for Christmas Day. Till the lights came on, there was a lot of scepticism about whether such a local power supply system would work.

K. Anil Kumar, 41, an activist with PSE, says: "At one time we were asked about the fate of villagers' contributions if the project were to fail. I said we were ready to give a post-dated cheque as guarantee. Of course, no one asked for it."

"It was an offshoot of an environmental agitation", says Anil. In 1994-95, an atomic power plant was proposed at nearby Peringome in Kannur district. With the Chernobyl tragedy fresh in people's minds, the atomic plant ran into stiff opposition. After two years of protests, it was finally shelved. PSE was started at this time by a group of young engineers and environmentalists to produce eco-friendly energy using local natural resources.

At the same time, a section of the media and some politicians began accusing environmentalists of being anti-development. To counter this criticism, Anil and his group decided to provide an example of sustainable clean power and build the mini hydel project for Pathampara.

Son of a school teacher, Anil is a diploma holder in electrical engineering. He runs an electrical shop, Sigma Electicals, at Alakode. From this shop, he services emergency lamps and assembles LED headlights for rubber-tappers.

When Anil and his friends at PSE decided to set up a mini hydel project, they really did not know how to go about it.

The team started searching for information. *Hydronet*, a periodical from

London was a bit helpful. It carried case studies of hydel projects that looked possible in this region too. *Hydronet* led the way to publications of the Intermediate Technology Development Group (ITDG) in the UK. ITDG has done pioneering work in designing turbines. PSE came across the name of Akalman Nakarmi, a Nepalese engineer who bagged the prestigious Right to Livelihood Award in 1990.

In Nepal, except for the capital Kathmandu, all other areas weren't electrified till recently. "It was Nakarmi who brought light to rural areas through his turbines. His contribution to the field of hydel power production is outstanding," says Anil.

Once he came to know of Nakarmi, Anil couldn't wait to meet him. Quite incredibly, without an address or a phone number, and with just Rs 5,000 in their pocket, Anil and his friend, Sahadevan, turned up in Kathmandu.

They looked for a fortnight but couldn't locate Nakarmi. And then, just as they were about to return, they discovered that his workshop was virtually across the road from where they were staying.

Nakarmi, a public spirited person, not only taught them some of the things they needed to know, but also suggested that they go around Nepal and see the turbines working. This exposure gave Anil a clearer idea of what he needed to do in Kerala.

"I learnt a great deal from him. But for his advice, I wouldn't have made this



Anil Kumar with villagers of Pathampara



much progress", says Anil. Flashing an ITDG publication, *Micro Hydro Projects Designing*, edited by Adam Harvey, he says, "This is our Bible."

Pathampara's people's power project attracted visitors from far and near. An impressed Medha Patkar invited the team to Maharashtra to build a couple of systems for the poor Pawri adivasis. Since 1997, Anil and friends have built hydel projects with capacities ranging from 1KW capacity to 20 KW in more than a dozen remote villages.

Slowly, the saga of 'people's electricity' has spread to other countries as well. Anil worked in villages in Tanzania and Kenya too. "Except for the offshore projects, I have relied on my earnings from my shop," he says.

COMMUNITY PROJECTS: In fact, Anil and his friend Samuel Thomas had done a small project earlier. It was a 2 KW system where a pump is used as turbine (PAT). It is still functioning at Joseph Padavil's house in Ashan Kavala. Initially, these two friends had spent from their own pockets for the project. That was repaid later by Joseph in instalments. This success prompted them to take up a community project.

After Pathampara, the group concentrated on community systems. A 2 KW project in Eruvatty in the nearby Chapparapadav panchayat and a 6 KW one at Maloor, both in Kerala, followed. In 2002, they built a system for five adivasi families at Dhom Khedi (1KW) and another at Bilgaon in Maharashtra (20KW). Both these were sponsored by the Narmada Bachao Andolan and were at the request of Medha Patkar.

A hydel power project depends on suitable terrain. It is necessary for a good amount of water to flow from a height. A check-dam is constructed across the stream. Water thus stored is diverted through a channel. This water is made to flow down from top through pipes of a required diameter. Turbines are designed according to the flow of water and the height from which it descends.

There are other groups as well that take up small hydel projects. But their role is limited to installing the turbine and the rest of the system that goes with it. They do not organise locals, or guide the civil works. This is where PSE is different. At all the places where it has built hydel projects, it was not that PSE technicians simply took the components and fitted them inside a readymade powerhouse. They had to start from the scratch— feasibility study, right location for the check-dam and power house, people's participation, marking the water channel route, guidance in civil engineering, final fitting of pipes and installations.

At Ashan Kavala, Eruvatty and Pathampara, Anil worked with Samuel Thomas, a junior engineer with the government-owned Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd (BSNL). Samuel Thomas and Anil shouldered the responsibility of implementation which at times looked like a big risk. It was Samuel who designed the electronic load governor at Pathampara. "It was a dream project", recalls Samuel, "For two months, we didn't think about anything else. The community had finished its part of the

work in a week. The inauguration date was also fixed. But we had no clear idea about the crucial technical work. Oh, in those three days of wracking my brains and consulting others, I learnt more than what I learnt in four years of my engineering course."

Madhusoodhan CG, a civil engineer accompanied Anil at Dhom Khedi, Bilgaon and Maloor. Chandra Bose, another friend, has a key role in fabrication and installation. He is also responsible for repairs.

Sincerity of purpose drew Anil and his friends close to the adivasis in the Narmada Valley. They finally saw these 'engineer sahibs' as men who worked day and night to bring electricity into their lives. When Anil and Madhusoodhan left on a Narmada Bachao Andolan boat, they had tears in their eyes.

In fact, in villages like Dhom Khedi, they did not even have a room for themselves. There were five adivasi families who lived in huts. In one of the huts, a sari was tied across as a makeshift screen to give Anil and Madhusoodhan some privacy.

It was a place totally cut off from the outside world. The adivasis gave them four aluminium vessels for cooking. Vegetables weren't available. Adivasis took them to the nearby hills. A dozen leafy vegetables were pointed out. "Pluck these whenever you want and cook your food," they told the guests.

The nearest city was 110 km away. If a nut didn't match a bolt, one had to go that far to get a replacement. Bilgaon to Dadgaon was two hours in a jeep. Shahada, the nearest city, was four hours from Dadgaon. If one went in search of material it was only possible to return the next day.

The 20 KW project of Bilgaon took eight months to complete. Praveen Shivashankar, an NBA activist, who is employed in Bangalore now, had done a good job by staying with Madhusoodhan and Anil and organising local villagers for carrying out the necessary manual work throughout the project.

What is it like to stay for months together in remote areas? "In the earlier Indian

YAJNA



Anil Kumar

projects, including in Maharashtra, I had a friend all the time with me. Meeting new people, understanding their customs keeps one occupied. There are times when it can become monotonous, but then these are life-time experiences," says Anil.

Small hydel projects are done with the support of local people. So, it is important to know how to get people together within a short time. After all, deadlines have to be met.

"It is very easy to mingle with people", says Anil. Living among them builds bridges and creates understanding. "Our message invariably is that

we will help them help themselves. Of course it is important to show patience and explain everything."

AFRICA: RICH LANDS, POOR PEOPLE:

Sahyadri, a Bangalore-based company, run by Ramsubrammanian, Puneeth Singh and their colleagues, were entrusted by the United Nations International Development Organisation (UNIDO) with the task of installing 10 KW of hydel power in Tanzania. Puneeth asked Anil to be associated with the project because of his vast experience with community efforts and his ability to innovate in difficult situations. Ramsubrahmanyam and Anil worked together.

UNIDO also handed over to them the work of installing 10 units of 1 KW each at different locations in Kenya.

Both the Kenya and Tanzania assignments were full of challenges. It involved reaching interior areas without motorable roads. Construction materials had to be carried on the head for miles. Villagers had to be taught how to bind wires to steel rods and mix concrete. Often there was no mason, no proper tools and no mixing machine. In the absence of transport, bricks had to be made at the location site and similarly gravel had to be got by breaking rocks.

Language was another barrier. But with his close association with the villagers, Anil managed to pick up a working knowledge of Swahili in Tanzania. It helped him later in Kenya.

Alexander Varghese, UNIDO Representative for Kenya, says: "The Tanzania project was the first micro hydro power implementation of UNIDO in Sub-Saharan Africa. It was completed in six months. From the beginning of the project until it



Shops in Pathampara village at night

was implemented, Anil stayed with the community, a quality I found to be very admirable. He put up with the very poor living conditions of that village; made friends with community members who in turn appreciated his company and praised his level of dedication and commitment. In subsequent projects at Kenya, he was also able to train a number of Kenyan engineers in the installation of micro hydro turbines. Anil's good work has become one of the cornerstones of our project, Lighting up Kenya."

For his success with communities in Tanzania and Kenya, Anil no doubt drew heavily on his Indian experience. Working in remote villages, he learnt how to bond with local people and connect in human terms that far outweigh problems of language and custom. Invariably, gestures matter more than words.

Since drawing distribution lines is very expensive, in Kenya, UNIDO has come out with a novel deviation from our old distribution system. As part of their

'Lighting up Asia' programme, the power generated by 1 KW units is supplied to one or two community centres of the respective villages. Villagers are provided with LED lanterns, which they can charge at the community centres. A single charge can last as long as a week. Also, there are computers at the energy kiosks and villagers learn to use them. A big headache that Anil faced in Tanzania and Kenya was the non-availability of quality pipe fittings and spare parts. These materials aren't produced there. They are imported from elsewhere and middle-men take a huge cut. "A lot of time would be lost," says Anil, "because the pipes wouldn't fit and there would be leakages."

In Tanzania and Kenya, winning over the village chief was essential. "They would want to take credit for all the development that comes to the village. Once the chief took interest, the community followed. So, generally, within a week we were able to bring the local people on track."

Anil is deeply moved by the suffering and exploitation that he saw in Africa. "The conditions in those villages were similar to what would have existed in our most backward villages a century ago," he says.

The irony is that there is plant biodiversity and the topsoil is good. Unfortunately, in the absence of governance, there are no basic amenities. You will get Coca-Cola and bottled water, hybrid seeds and pesticides. But you can't find water to drink. People walk three to four kilometres to collect water from unpolluted sources.

"The poor have become poorer and the rich richer. Five years ago, one kilogramme of rice was available for the equivalent of Rs 10, now it's Rs 80. The situation in these countries is a forerunner of what will happen here in India after some years," says Anil.

"You can see the real ill-effects of globalisation in Africa. The government has no control over prices. Education is free only up to the seventh standard. Though there are government schools providing higher education they are hugely expensive. Vodafone is the monopoly mobile company that charges an equivalent of Rs 12 for a local call. Landlines are very rare. Even in public transport charges vary from day to day and person to person. Nobody is trying to focus on the path

of self-reliance or as to how they can make sustainable use of their rich natural resources and strengthen the rural and country economy."

WATER FOR DRINKING: Anil says that from Africa to India, wherever they have gone to set up a turbine, people have always first asked for water and then electricity. Only on Pathampara were they clear in their choice of electricity.

"In my 12 years experience so far, it was only the people of Pathampara who wanted electricity. Though the rest of them started enjoying the benefits of electricity after they got it, it was not their priority. Poor people, though they are surrounded by streams and forests, they are deprived of safe water. Their priority is to get clean water."

Samuel is not completely happy. "We were anticipating that now that water is more valuable for the communities since they produce power with it, there would be enthusiasm for a community based watershed project. But unfortunately, this

hasn't happened in any of our projects."

More and more enquiries are coming to PSE from neighbouring Karnataka and other areas for building small hydel projects. Recently Anil was asked to survey Kannur district and to identify suitable sites where such small projects could come up. "I was able to identify 88 locations in my home district alone," he says. The Kerala State Planning Commission has started seriously considering how these can be set up and has begun efforts to get funding.

According to Anil, "In the next phase, there are plans to survey the rest of the 13 districts in Kerala as well."

The problem that remains is what should be done in the summer months when the streams dry up. One way out is for KSEB to supply electricity from its own grid at this time. "To be really useful to the communities, linking micro hydel projects with the KSEB grid is very important when the streams dry up. For this, policy changes are necessary. Anyway, we can't ask people to use electricity during the rainy season, and in summer to switch to kerosene oil," says Anil.

Anil and his associates now have the capacity to assemble turbines here in local workshops. "Based on our experience, we have now kept a good stock of different types of turbine buckets to suit different needs. If not, we have to run to Gujarat to get the moulds done."

The group is not keen on requests for individual systems from far off places. "We would always prefer community systems." Looking back, Anil wonders whether the Pathampara project, if fitted with LED lights, could have managed with just 1 KW of power. "We would have planned for a lean period and could have run the small turbine round the year, even in summer, with available water. Anil's dream is to use PSE's experience in small, decentralised hydel production for strengthening the rural economy. He sees greater scope for using LEDs for the needs of the community and selling the power saved to agro process industries, albeit for six months a year.

What motivates men like Anil? It is the passion for what they do that takes them from one remote corner to another, from Alakode in Kerala to Kinko in Tanzania. "It's teamwork that keeps the spirit going," he says. His only regret is that he



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Kerala's queen of soaps

Shree Padre
Allepey (Kerala)

FOR the past five years, Sudharma Babu, 50, hasn't sold a single coconut as a coconut. Using organic farming methods on their one hectare plot in Kerala's Allepey district, she and her family get 1,200 coconuts a year from 160 trees. But the entire crop is turned into products.

You name it and Sudharma has it. There is coconut oil, traditional virgin coconut oil, natural soaps including gentle baby soap, vinegar, chutney powder, readymade mix for curries (theyal), sweets, chocolate, jam and jelly.

Believe it or not, Sudharma Babu's family micro-enterprise sells nothing less than 50,000 cakes of natural soap annually.

In Kerala, the popularity of natural or *desi* soaps is giving multinational soap companies a real headache. For instance, at the Gandhi Centre for Rural Development (GCRD) in Allepey, several thousand cakes of *desi* soap, sold under the brand name, Swadeshi, are snapped up every year.

To counter the competition, soap companies are making offers such as, 'four for the price of three.' Entrepreneurs like Sudharma can take credit for having given them so much competition.

IDEAS AND SKILLS: Apart from their own coconut trees, Sudharma's family looks after coconut gardens which belong to their relatives. These yield 6,000 coconuts which are also converted into products. The Babus are workaholics who intelligently market everything.

"I'm sorry I kept just one sample of each item to show you. Usually, I'm not left with any," explained Sudharma as we settled down to an interview.

"Agriculture is not a loss. We incur losses only if we sell our farm produce as it is. Farming becomes remunerative when we add value to the produce and market it." This is Sudharma's mantra and the lesson her family has learnt the hard way.

"We suffered a lot because of the coconut crisis which brought prices crashing. After selling a nut for Rs 3, what is the grower left with? We wondered why can't we make coconut oil. We made it. But after selling the oil we were not left with much. That made us explore other avenues," said Sudharma.

At that time Sudharma spotted a news item offering training in soap-making with coconut oil. She enrolled and trained in Palakkad. It wasn't of much use. But she did not give up. She attended another



Sudharma with her range of homemade products

training programme at the Gandhi Centre for Rural Development (GCRD) in Thiruvananthapuram. Apart from teaching soap-making, the centre provided kits and a commitment to buy back the soaps.

"Initially I found it difficult to make and sell the soaps. Finally, we started using this soap. I had a chronic skin problem that got cured. Hearing this, our neighbours got interested," says Sudharma.

Sudharma now polished her soap-making skills. She enrolled for further training in the Krishi Vijnan Kendra (KVK), Kayamkulam. She took soap-making so seriously that now she is a trainer.

Sudharma makes soaps with sandalwood, vetiver, pear, papaya, neem, turmeric and lime. She also makes the plain carbolic variety. "Interestingly, Sudharma doesn't stick to the methods we teach. She keeps experimenting. Take, for example, this papaya soap. It's her idea. She adds some papaya pulp. She has also invented a Kashyam soap that has decoctions of many natural herbs," says Jissy George, senior training associate at KVK.

A multinational company had been promoting baby soap with a coconut shell on its wrapper. But what they really used is mineral oil, a petroleum product. Sudharma overheard local women saying,

'our own coconut oil soap would be far healthier.' The very next week, Sudharma made baby soap from traditional virgin coconut oil, healthy and good for baby skin.

Another innovative product Sudharma makes is coconut milk chocolate. Sudharma replaced the dairy milk that goes into chocolate with coconut milk. The chocolate has been favourably received by local consumers.

But it is the soap-making that keeps her really busy. "Since I learnt soap-making, I haven't sat idle for a day," she says.

Her husband, daughter Meghana and son Hariprasad assist her. When more hands are required, Sudharma calls upon Self Help Groups (SHGs) in her neighborhood. Experienced soap-makers join her. She also outsources the work to other housewives supplying them raw materials and paying Re 1 per soap.

Since a litre of milk fetches just Rs 16, Sudharma converts the milk into buttermilk, chocolate, sweets and cheese. Sold as products, a litre of milk brings her Rs 30 to Rs 35 after deducting all expenses. Every month, she converts about 25 litres into these

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Toilet tycoon moves to Mumbai

LAKSHMAN ANAND

Civil Society News
New Delhi

If you have lived in Delhi or visited here, chances are that in years gone by you have been to some really spanking clean public toilets and wondered who the brain behind them was. Chances also are that you have been to those same toilets in recent times and been dismayed at how filthy and uncared for they have become.

Fuad Lokhandwala, operating through his exotically named company, Fumes International, was responsible for turning Delhi's public toilets into spotless and hygienic utilities which any global city could be proud of.

But nine years down the line, Lokhandwala has been pushed out by interests that believe they can make a quick buck where he had sought to build a sustainable business. The result is that Lokhandwala has thrown in the towel and moved to Mumbai where the municipal corporation has given him 100 toilets to manage. And Delhi, where his idea first made such a difference, is back to being a city where men unzip their trousers and urinate in full public view and women don't have conveniences they can visit with dignity.

The toilets that Lokhandwala used to manage in Delhi were in a class by themselves. They were well-staffed, frequently washed and had a friendly odour-free ambience. Women, for instance, found them easy to use and would spend time in them to pretty up and comb their hair.

So, at Khan Market, Yashwant Place or a whole lot of other locations Delhi became accustomed to toilets it had never known before. This was of course till the New Delhi Municipal Committee (NDMC) decided to change the rules and make it difficult for Lokhandwala to be in the running for managing the very toilets he had made so popular.

"I suddenly found that I wasn't qualified. The returns that were being sought on the toilets were not realistic. I couldn't guarantee something like Rs 1 crore a month. It was unrealistic. I therefore decided not to bid to manage them any more," says Lokhandwala.

"The municipal authorities in Delhi do not seem to



Fuad Lokhandwala in a toilet renovated by his company-

realise that providing public toilets is not a question of earning money for the city but providing a service to millions of people. What modernisation can you have in our cities if we do not have toilets?" he asks.

Though he is out of the reckoning, Lokhandwala runs the toilet at Lodi Gardens without taking any money from the NDMC. The toilet here has a fish tank and lots of plants.

He also continues to manage another 14 toilets in the National Capital Region (NCR) which do not fall under the New Delhi authority. So, you will find a perfectly good toilet in the parking lot of the domestic airport. But in Delhi proper, you will have no such luck.

Lokhandwala's toilet idea was all his own and based on his experience of living in other countries. World class cities need world class toilets, right? The challenge was in finding revenue streams to build a sustainable business around toilets.

Lokhandwala achieved this by creating a build, operate and transfer model. He would take over collapsing facilities, rebuild them at his own cost, run them to earn back his investment and then hand them back to the government.

The income from a toilet would come from the one and two rupees tickets that users would buy at the entrance and the charges for hoardings on the exter-

nal walls. A toilet would earn back the investment made in it in a year and a half.

As Lokhandwala took his idea around he found a robust supporter in Ram Jethmalani, who was then Union minister for urban development. "Ram really understood the importance of my idea and it was because of him that it went through," recalls Lokhandwala.

As the toilets in Delhi became successful, offers poured in. Among them was the interest expressed by the municipal corporation in Mumbai. Johnny Joseph, the municipal commissioner then and currently chief secretary of Maharashtra, stopped by. He was followed by a delegation led by the mayor on Mumbai.

Finally, Lokhandwala got the 100 toilets he is working on now in Mumbai. The toilet at the Victoria Terminus caters to some 30,000 people a day. It is a particularly large

facility which has cost Rs 50 lakhs to modernise.

Lokhandwala says he gets requests to manage toilets from Bangalore, Jaipur and whole lot of other cities across India because the model he first created in Delhi was seen to work so well.

"I would love to take on all these projects but I just don't have the organisation to do a good job across so many centres," he says. "It is not just a question of making money. Of course I want to make money. I want to make billions not just millions from giving the public clean toilets. But I also want to maintain standards. The two go together."

Lokhandwala feels a sense of dismay at having been pushed out of Delhi where he first showed how public toilets can be turned around. Like any true entrepreneur, he is offended at the disrespect shown to his idea. "When it was clear that they wanted to get me out, I the one who had done it all, I decided not to bid," he says.

So, what is the way forward in Indian cities so notorious for their filth and the ugly sight of people defecating and urinating in the open? Lokhandwala believes governments need to create the space in which entrepreneurs can be effective in providing supervision and management and turning dead-weight utilities into sustainable businesses.

Kerala's queen of soaps

Continued from page 21

products but only against advance orders.

The Babus have two jackfruit trees which yield around 200 fruits. Jackfruit products bring Sudharma an 85 per cent profit margin. Eight mango trees, banana trees and pineapple provide raw material for different products. Unripe mango is preserved with salt in summer and used to make pickle. Mango squash, jam, jelly, baby food from plantains and cashew fruit squash are some other products which are made.

INVENTIVE SELLING: Sudharma has her own mar-

keting strategies. Along the regular route she travels, many housewives place their orders. She delivers promptly. Bigger opportunities await her at fairs like the Krushi Mela, Onam Exhibition and the SHG Marketing Fair. Sudharma doesn't miss any of these. Lately, fairs are being held at the panchayat and block levels so that SHGs can sell their products. The state has some regular marketing centres too. Local stalls selling sweets and bakeries stock her products. The GCRD stall in Alleppey also helps.

Each product is test marketed in a small circle to gauge its popularity. "It is very difficult to carve out a market for a new product. Most buying decisions are prompted by TV these days. So, we have to carefully identify the needs of the customer first," she says.

Maintaining quality is very important. "I don't allow any of our products to be prepared without my supervision." Equally important is getting packaging and quantities right. For this she has to check out other products at fairs.

She always takes fewer products than she thinks will sell. "If there are some unmet demands, I take their orders with a promise to deliver at a central point in two or three days. Appreciation of my products spreads by word of mouth. If I dump 25 packets where only 15 can be sold, the unsold products pass on the wrong message to customers."

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Money grows on neem

PA Chaya
Raichur (Karnataka)

FOR many years the bus trundling down the road was the only saviour for the women of Muddana Guddi, a dusty village in Raichur district. The rain gods were wayward. But the bus would arrive every time and take the women to Goa or Maharashtra where their chances of finding work were brighter.

These impoverished women could not afford one square meal a day.

Drought struck their village year after year. But now the women are earning a few lakhs every year. Their money grows on trees -- neem trees.

Neem seeds are collected and crushed into 'cakes'. This year the Jhansi Rani Mahila Sangh, as the women call their group, earned Rs 5 lakhs. Chinnamma, their team leader has even come to Delhi to receive the United Nation's Development Programme (UNDP) 'Partners in Change' award in 2006.

Neem grows everywhere on this dry earth. It is locally called *Bayaluseeme*. Farmers plant it copiously around their fields as a sort of insurance. If they are in dire straits, they can sell the tree for Rs 5,000. A big tree would fetch as much as Rs 10,000.

People with no land and those with very little, always earned some money from neem. After the *rabi* season, in the hot summer months, they don't get any work. Women and children would collect neem seeds and sell them to middlemen for Rs 3 or Rs 4 a kg and earn around Rs 300 or Rs 400 every week.

Middlemen bought tonnes of neem seeds from Raichur to feed big industries in northern India. These companies extract neem oil, a product much sought after and highly prized as an organic pesticide. But the poor seed collectors always got a paltry amount. After oil is extracted, the remainder is converted into neem cakes which is also prized as a manure cum pesticide.

In 2001, Neju George, a social worker, and his friends from an NGO, Vimukthi, started the Jagruta Mahila Sanghatane to help the women here. "First we tried to organise the women and formed Self-Help Groups (SHGs). After this, we started looking for appropriate income generation activities," recalls Neju. "We wanted to use locally available natural resources. We found our answer in neem."

They formed the Jhansi Rani Mahila Sangha at Pothnal, near Muddana Guddi, with 14 women as members and decided to produce neem cake. But nobody knew how to go about doing this. Neju then contacted the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, to find out if any small machine was available to crush neem seeds. The answer was yes and that it cost Rs 5 lakhs.

The women of the newly formed Jhansi Rani Mahila Sangha earned only Rs 10 or Rs 20 per day. There was no way they could afford such a pricey machine. They thought hard and came up with an idea: What if we crushed the seeds with a tractor?

The experiment worked! The women are still crushing neem seeds with a tractor.

The 14 women divided themselves into seven teams of two members each. Every team goes to surrounding villages in search of neem seeds. Women and children who have already collected seeds, sell to these groups. All the seeds, collected and bought, are assembled at Pothnal.

The seeds are then cleaned and dried. Only good seeds are retained for crushing. Straining produces quality neem cake which is in powder form. Jhansi Rani Mahila Sangha markets this neem cake under the brand name, 'Chiguru'.

"Our enterprise angered a few middlemen. They offered us an additional 50 paise for a kilo of seeds. But the villagers are our friends and relatives. They said, no. We, too, increased the amount we pay to buy the seeds. Now those middlemen have vanished," says Chinnamma.

Working overtime the Jhansi Rani group produced seven tonnes of neem cake in a season. But no buyer came forward. Neju planned a simple advertising strategy. A three-wheeler with a banner went around nearby villages. The banner read: 'Don't use chemical fertilisers. It will spoil your land. To make the land fertile, use Chiguru neem cake'.

The traders selling chemical fertilisers got very



ple consignment was sent to the farmers. "It was very good. My crop was neither attacked by insect pests or the usual diseases," confirmed Shivanapur Ramesh, a leading organic farmer of Devanahalli, Bangalore, who grows mulberry and grapes.

This opened up a whole new opportunity for the group. Now the neem cake is sent to Hubli, Belgaum, Goa, Maharashtra and other areas. Every year, business gets better. In 2007, the Jhansi group made Rs 4 lakhs. This year it crossed Rs 5 lakhs.

The success of this unique venture is clearly visible. Women, who used to migrate, now live happily with their families through the year. From seed collection to sales, they shoulder all the work. Mariyamma, member of the group, has studied only up to Class Three. Yet she maintains all accounts and documents. After all the stock is sold, the profit is distributed equally to all members.

"Now our problems are solved. We are able to earn a good income here itself. Not only that, we are saving money for the future too," said Sushilamma, another member, proudly.

Initially, some villagers had scoffed at the women's venture. "My husband too objected to my working here. But when his burden of earning money decreased, his criticism turned into admiration. Now he is encouraging me to go ahead," said Huligemamma.

The Jhansi Rani Mahila Sangh is planning expansion in the near future. Top of the mind is to get a spacious area for seed storage and cake production. They intend to buy a machine for crushing the seeds. "A neem oil extraction unit is a priority," says Neju, hopefully.

The wayward rain gods aren't a threat to these brave and hardworking women anymore. Neither do they wait for the bus. Neem trees grown by villagers decades ago are their bread providers. And during hard times their husbands know they can count on their women.

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Jhansi Rani Mahila Sangh collecting crushed neem seeds

angry. The plan did not work.

The women and Neju waited for a few days with hope in their hearts. Sales would pick up, surely. But no such luck. Finally, they decided to approach local farmers with another plan. Their new sales pitch said: 'Take Chiguru manure now. Pay after the harvest.' Quintals of the product sold like magic. But alas, no one bothered to pay later!

Luckily, at this time, the state government of Karnataka drew up a policy on organic farming. It wanted to encourage more and more farmers to turn green. Suddenly, a big market opened for organic manure and bio pesticides. But a lot of neem products were adulterated or of inferior quality. So farmers were very cautious while buying.

A well known network of organic farmers called Sahaja Samrudha, based in Bangalore, was looking for quality products for its members. Neju George contacted G Krishna Prasad, director of Sahaja Samrudha, and suggested Jhansi Rani Mahila's product. A sam-

Insights

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Disturbing trends in NREGA

MILINDO CHAKRABARTI

DETAILED results of India's National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO), carried out between July 2006 and June 2007, are now out. Apart from providing an understanding of the changes in consumption patterns among Indians across different expenditure classes in the states, the survey throws light on the pattern of participation of the rural population in public works.

These findings are important. NSSO's national survey is the first since the inception of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) in 2005, the UPA government's flagship programme. Though the sample size is smaller than what is done every five years, the findings shed light on the functioning of the employment guarantee scheme.

The last such survey was taken up in 2004-05. The next one, with a larger sample size, is not due before 2009-10. For the time being, information revealed by the present survey can give us some broad ideas - maybe a little imprecise because of the smaller sample size - about the status of the employment guarantee scheme implemented with a lot of expectations and involving a considerable amount of the taxpayers' money.

By the survey's definition, 'public works' refer to activities sponsored by the government or local bodies that covered local area development as relief measures or as an outcome of the employment generation schemes. Schemes of work executed through contractors, even if they generated employment, were left out for obvious reasons. Each surveyed rural household was asked three questions:

- Whether he or she had sought work in public works, and if so was it given or refused.
- If such employment was offered, for how many days and the wages received.
- If any complaint was lodged in case of refusal of employment and the compensation received.

A similar survey was carried out in 2005-06 in 200 districts. It is interesting to compare the findings. The number of individuals getting work



increased from 45 to 54 per thousand. The extent of refusal also increased from 71 to 79 per thousand, implying the number of employment seekers from public works in the short span of one year, increased from 116 per thousand to 133 per thou-

REFUSAL RATIO ACROSS STATES

State	Male	Female	All
Andhra Pradesh	47.60	54.86	50.98
Assam	67.21	83.98	70.59
Bihar	82.01	94.61	86.30
Chhattisgarh	52.64	56.22	54.21
Gujarat	62.70	51.25	57.47
Haryana	83.72	97.38	89.80
Jharkhand	71.33	67.93	70.21
Karnataka	38.19	39.04	38.51
Kerala	69.97	71.90	70.93
MP	44.10	54.75	48.19
Maharashtra	56.46	56.55	56.50
Orissa	50.36	63.10	54.63
Punjab	89.74	63.53	85.18
Rajasthan	64.86	49.33	57.35
Tamil Nadu	57.61	57.61	57.60
Uttar Pradesh	51.03	70.47	54.56
West Bengal	50.61	53.67	51.24

sand.

The increase in the number of job seekers is much more among males than females. This increase is not perhaps expected to emerge as a general trend in the long term. One must not forget that during this period the Indian economy experienced a growth rate of over 9 per cent.

Expectedly, economic growth should have generated enough scope of employment generation in rural India so that the rural population would not have had to fall back on 'public works'. Employment generation through public works should ideally be seen as a temporary measure to bridge the gap between demand

for and supply of employment opportunities during periods of economic crisis.

Average wages increased by about 11 per cent. Increase in wages paid to male workers, as expected but undesirable, has been more than the increase in wages offered to female workers. Average annual employment opportunity for those who got jobs in public works increased from 17 days to 19 days - an increase by 11.76 per cent, even though far less than the minimum 100 days guaranteed by NREGA. It is, however, a matter of grave concern to note that employment opportunities for female job-seekers declined by more than 5 per cent during the same period.

To get back to results from the recent survey, it will be worthwhile to look into the variations across the states and consumption classes. I constructed a job refusal index that captures the percentage of job-seekers who did not get employment under public schemes in spite of expressing their willingness to be considered for some such opportunities.

First, we look at the state-specific results. Refusal ratio is found to be the highest in Haryana followed by Bihar and Punjab. The refusal ratio is lowest in Karnataka. Expectedly, refusal ratios are generally higher for women, with exceptions in Gujarat, Jharkhand, Punjab and Rajasthan. The differential in refusal ratio against women is the highest in Uttar Pradesh. The highest differential in favour of women is observed in Punjab. One is not very sure

POTENTIAL EMPLOYMENT GENERATION

(Man days/year under a Situation of No Refusal across MPCE Classes)

MPCE Class	Male	Female	All
0-235	5.88	4.50	5.55
235-270	10.92	2.62	7.91
270-320	8.56	3.74	7.25
320-365	7.48	8.68	8.05
365-410	7.08	5.83	6.53
410-455	5.39	5.33	5.34
455-510	5.07	6.24	5.67
510-580	7.22	6.29	7.04
580-690	13.26	6.27	11.22
690-890	9.97	7.17	8.99
890-1155	9.85	10.72	10.17
1155+	9.24	7.16	8.22
All	8.45	6.33	7.70

scope of the scheme. By 2007 all districts have been brought under the ambit of NREGA. Therefore, the results of the survey, carried out nationally, may not capture the exact impact of NREGA in ensuring 100 days of employment to all willing rural inhabi-

tants aged 15 years or higher.

Still, it can capture at least the trend of achievements in guaranteeing employment for a sustained period. The survey records that on an average, rural folk were offered employment for 19 days in a year - a little higher at 20 days for male aspirants and 17 days for their female counterparts. At a state level perspective, the numbers varied from 56 days in Haryana to eight days in West Bengal. The highest incidence of female employment of 47 days was recorded in Gujarat. On a comparative perspective, average employment shows a generally increasing tendency as one moves up the MPCE classes.

We need to be careful at interpreting these findings. The average employment figures have been arrived at taking into account only those who managed to get employment. What if all those who sought employment were entertained? The second table captures the variations of potential annual employment generation across states and MPCE classes, given the expenditure that was made under different employment generation schemes in India. We also assume the wage rate to remain unchanged. The table shows the effectiveness of public works as a source of livelihood security, given the financial resources allocated for it, appears to be quite discouraging and disturbing.

though about the factors contributing to such high differentials on either side of the gender spectra.

We may now look into the pattern of Refusal Ratio across monthly per capita expenditure (MPCE) classes. Quite obviously, a lower MPCE indicates a lower purchasing power of the individual members of the household in question. By design of the poverty alleviation schemes like provision of employment opportunities in public works involving unskilled labour, the refusal ratios should have steadily increased with better off households if one is to follow the principles of Antyodaya.

However, that was not to be. We observe a mixed bag, with refusal ratio moving up and down as one moves up the MPCE ladder. Surprisingly, the refusal ratio is found to be significantly lower than the national average for job aspirants belonging to the highest MPCE class. Male-female differential in refusal rate also follows the general pattern of discrimination, barring that observed for the MPCE class of Rs 320 to Rs 365.

NREGA was instituted to offer guaranteed employment for a minimum of 100 days to all rural residents willing to accept such opportunities. It was instituted in three phases, with the first phase covering 200 districts initiated in 2005. In 2006, 130 more districts were included to expand the

New hope for Ganga ?

BHARAT DOGRA

WILL this new course clean up the Ganga, our most revered river? On November 4, the Union government declared the Ganga a 'national river' and set up a high-powered Ganga River Basin Authority to protect India's longest flowing river (2510 km) from pollution and degradation.

The proposed authority will be chaired by the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, and will have chief ministers of states, through which the river passes, as its members. Various agencies, currently working on different aspects of the river's protection, will come under the new entity.

The Prime Minister's office confessed in a note that such an authority has been overdue. "It was decided that there is a need to replace the current piecemeal efforts taken up in a fragmented manner in select cities with an integrated approach that sees the river as an ecological entity and addresses issues of quantity in terms of water flows, along with issues of quality," said the note.

After this announcement, several statements of new hope for the Ganga have been made. They bring back memories of similar optimism about 20 years ago when the Ganga Action Plan (GAP) was launched. However, the well-intentioned and widely publicised plan failed to protect the endangered river. This is a good time to evaluate what went wrong so that similar mistakes are not repeated.

Let's consider the situation in Varanasi as this holy city was a priority for reducing pollution. In fact, the GAP was inaugurated by the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi at a famous Varanasi ghat on the banks of the Ganga.

Dr GD Agrawal, a senior environmental engineer, understood within Phase 1 of the celebrated plan that it was not the miracle people had hoped for. "The works for diversion, conveyance, treatment

and disposal of the Varanasi sewage and sullage flowing to Gangaji, implemented under GAP-I at a substantial cost of around Rs 50 crores has not been a cause of satisfaction to anyone. Pilgrims and bathers find the sacred Ganga as polluted and as unaesthetic as earlier. Life is worse for the Nagar Nigam and the town's residents because of the back-up of sewage in the trunk sewer as a new gate blocks the old outfall. Residents of villages around Dinapur and Varuna confluences (like Kamauli) say virtual hell has been opened upon them by the bypassed, partially treated or 'treated' effluents."

Professor Virbhadra Mishra, chairperson of the Sankat Mochan Foundation (SMF) and a renowned civil engineer has been at the forefront of efforts to protect the Ganga. At a late stage of GAP, he reviewed the situation in Varanasi. He said: "The total sewage and industrial effluent of Varanasi are flowing into the river along the ghats. Garbage, dead bodies of animals and unclaimed human bodies, plastic bags, are thrown into the river where people take a holy dip.

In 1986, according to government estimates, about 147 million litres per day (MLD) of sewage and industrial waste generated in Varanasi flowed into the Ganga. Now over 200 MLD of wastewater is flowing into the river. Ganga's capacity to bear the aforesaid abuse is exhausted. She is sick in Varanasi."

"The river water at the end of the town is green and stinks. Methane bubbles come up to the surface. This is serious. The river along the ghats of Varanasi is used culturally, and its waters are taken for sipping, drinking and worship in temples."

Water samples, collected by the Sankat Mochan Foundation, from the river indicated the presence of faecal coliform bacteria in water, the root cause of

most water-borne diseases. The bacterial presence was excessive in the waters near Varanasi's popular bathing ghats.

Five sewage pumps were installed to intercept sewage flowing into the river from 30 point sources. According to Vir Bhadra Mishra, "Out of the 147 MLD of sewage generated in Varanasi, only 122 MLD was stopped from flowing into the Ganga and 102.9 MLD was treated in the STPs (Sewage Treatment Plants). However the STPs did not control faecal coliform bacteria."

"During power failure (which happens every day) and for five months of the flood season, sewage pumps did not work at all. The total sewage passed into the river from the city, every day. The so called treated effluents of the STPs were ruining the health of the villagers, their crops and groundwater."

It is clear from these reviews that even in a high-priority area, GAP failed in effective implementation. Not only was the wrong technology selected, but powerful vested interests were allowed to flourish around it. This resulted in a strong tendency to continue failed practices and refute mistakes. Also, groups genuinely dedicated to the protection of rivers were kept at a distance by vested interests.

Massive participation of people in protecting rivers has huge potential in India. If we tap this efficiently, it will be possible to achieve significant reductions in pollution levels at relatively lower costs.

But, to make this a reality, the common man needs to be involved from the beginning - from finding the solution and selecting the most appropriate technology. GAP's most glaring and costly blunder was to impose top-down, inappropriate technology and then expect people to get 'involved'.

Water storage is big loss

HIMANSHU THAKKAR

SINCE the last few years, advocacy for big water storage projects has become very shrill. There clearly seems to be a lobby with vested interests for such projects. The latest opportunity they see is in coping with climate change impacts. The Water Mission in the Government of India's National Action Plan on Climate Change released recently talks about the need for 'a special effort to increase storage capacity' and 'enhancing storage capacities in multipurpose hydro projects.'

The World Bank and Ministry of Water Resources have been pushing for enhanced water storage capacities through big projects, via the 2006 report on India's Water Future. The Ministry of Power has been trying to push for big storage based hydropower projects for some years now. The Planning Commission has been talking about this in its 2005 report on integrated water resources development, in the 11th Five Year Plan and more recently in its proposed integrated water resources policy.

The main justification put forward for such storages is that since most of India's annual water supply comes from the monsoon that lasts a few months, we need to store this water to make it available through the year. This sounds logical. However, there are many different options available for storages. Storages through micro (watershed development), small (tanks, lakes, wetlands) and even underground storages in groundwater aquifers are some options, but government agencies effectively push only for big storages.

It needs to be noted that water storages are useful only if they serve the ends for which they are created. It is a means to certain useful ends; it is not useful by itself. Let us look at a few parameters in this regard.

In spite of some lip service for minor projects as the small storage projects are called in government parlance, the government does not even have credible assessment of existing storage capacity available through small storages. The figure that the government has been using for several decades now is three billion cubic meters (BCM). This figure is a gross underestimate, considering that Maharashtra alone has a larger than three BCM capacity through small storages, according to Maharashtra government estimates. It is clear how non serious the government is about the options available for creating storage capacities.

A very big issue relevant here is: how are we using existing storage capacities that have been created through huge social, environmental and economic costs? First, we need to ensure that the storage capacity loss due to siltation is minimised. Today, precious little is happening on this on the ground. So old capacity equal to about two-thirds of the new storage capacity we are adding each year is getting silted up.

Secondly, 26 per cent of the live storage capacity monitored by the Central Water Commission does not get filled by the end of the monsoon each year on an average based on last 15 years' figures, majority of these years had average or above average monsoon. Moreover, if we subtract the water already stored in live storage capacities at the beginning of the monsoon—which actually reflects the unused water stored from the previous monsoon—the effective



LAKSHMAN ANAND

use of the storage capacities comes down by a further 14 per cent. What this means is that we are not putting to effective use at least 40 per cent of the monitored live storage capacity from big projects each year, based on the official figures for the last 15 years. We need to see how we can improve this performance.

Studies show that if there is good coordination across states at river basin level, storage capacities can be better utilised. Similarly, if there is proper planning in use of water stored at the end of the monsoon, before the next monsoon and also proper adherence to appropriate reservoir filling rules in a transparent manner, we can achieve improvement in use of existing storage capacities. Unfortunately, there is no attempt to study these trends; leave aside attempts to improve such performance. This again shows how non serious the government is about achieving the ends that the storages are meant for.

Now let us look at irrigation benefits from big irrigation projects, since this is the most dominant reason for building big storage projects. Ninety per cent of India's large dams are built for irrigation. Out of India's net irrigated area of around 57 million hectares, only about 14 million hectares (24 per cent) is irrigated by big irrigation projects. In fact, this share is declining in spite of spending thousands of crores each year. Our study shows that between 1991 to 1992 and between 2003 to 2004 (the latest year for which data is available from the Union government), India has spent close to Rs 100,000 crores (Rs 99,610 crores to be precise) on big

irrigation projects.

However, the net area irrigated by big irrigation projects has actually declined from about 17 million hectares at the beginning of this study period to about 14 million hectares and there is a clear downward trend line. It is clear that big irrigation projects are not delivering the promised benefits, and we should be going for other options, rather than spending more money on such projects.

Even the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) agrees that a lot of money gets spent on irrigation, without commensurate benefits. In its report of June 2008, 'Agriculture Growth in India since 1991', the Development Research Group of RBI concludes: "Here we find that expenditure on irrigation has not declined in the nineties. Clearly now the reasons for the slowing of an already low rate of expansion of irrigated area must be sought elsewhere. Researchers on irrigation and water usage speak of three deficiencies in the area of public provision of irrigation, namely deficiency at each of the levels of planning, implementation and management. We see this as a question of governance."

The Power Ministry also advocates storage based hydropower projects, but they have not done an assessment of the declining

performance of hydropower projects, or to see how much of the hydropower generated is providing peaking power. Moreover, 90 per cent of large dams do not have a hydropower component. It may be useful to make an assessment on how we can improve the performance of existing capacities and add the hydropower component where feasible, rather than hanker for new hydropower storage projects.

Even in basins where storage-based hydro capacities are available, due to dumping of silt into the river by the under construction hydropower projects in the upstream, the downstream capacities are getting silted up and the Power Ministry, the developers, the Water Resources Ministry or the Environment Ministry has shown no willingness to take effective action to stop such destruction of created storage capacities. This is happening in many basins, including, for example Sujlej (the Bhakra Dam is getting silted up here) and Bhagirathi (Tehri reservoir is getting silted) basins, to give just two examples.

In fact, if coping with climate change impacts is the concern, than decentralised local water storages and ensuring proper maintenance and use of the created storage capacities, along with massive programmes for groundwater recharge would be the best options. Indeed, there is absolutely no justification in hankering for more big storage projects, if the real needs of the people are to be addressed through the most inexpensive options.

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Unheard India in 2008

KANCHI KOHLI

THE capital city of Delhi is often the destination for people's movements against destructive development. At the administratively curtailed hub called Jantar Mantar in central Delhi, protestors organise sit-ins (*dharnas*), reach out to the national media and lobby politically to be heard. If one tries to reflect on all the protests that took place at Jantar Mantar in 2008, one would lose count.

On 6 May, the agitation was against the threats and impacts of genetically modified (GM) crops. This time it was a one-day protest. Activists, the media, farmers and their leaders, NGOs and representatives of political parties had gathered in big numbers. The controversy over Bt Cotton still remains unresolved with companies presenting a win-win scenario which is countered by opposing voices highlighting potential risks and already emerging impacts.

The question of corporate control over agriculture looms large in this debate. But the risks are growing with the GM agenda on the verge of entering the food chain through crops like Bt Brinjal. Cotton, as we all know, is a cash crop. Memorandums were drafted, submitted and media support successfully garnered. Farmers and farmer leaders from different states gathered at this famous spot to collectively raise their voices and send a strong anti-GM message to legislators and regulators in New Delhi.

Right next to this protest another struggle, ironically 24 years old, was taking place. One is referring to the overwhelming, resilient and untiring demands of the victims of the Bhopal Gas Tragedy of 1984, known worldwide as one of the world's worst industrial disasters.

Yet the Bhopalis had walked all the way from their city to the streets of New Delhi, for the second time, the first time being 2006. This time they were determined not to go back till their call was responded to fully by the Indian government and its custodians. They sat at Jantar Mantar in protest and then went on an indefinite fast from 29 March. They finally ended their *dharna* on 9 August when the Union government accepted their demand for setting up an Empowered Commission and promised legal action on the civil and criminal liabilities of Union Carbide and Dow Chemicals who were responsible for the tragedy. These were amongst several other demands of the Bhopal campaign which include medical rehabilitation, environmental clean-up and provision of clean drinking water. The Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, never met them during their four-month stay in Delhi, despite several attempts within and outside the gamut of law.

Before the GM protest reached Delhi, the perennial question of development induced displacement did. From 28 April to 30 April, a three-day *dharna*, yet again at Jantar Mantar, took place. The



introduction of mega projects like dams, industries, Special Economic Zones (SEZs), ports, the realities around people being removed from their homes have become issues which represent the dark side of India's economic ambition.

The last five to six years have seen instances and threats of evictions from rural and urban areas increase manifold. Aiding these have been the dilution of laws like the Environment Impact Assessment Notification and the introduction of new ones around Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and, of course, SEZs. The familiar participants of this *dharna* once again demanded a decentralised development planning process based on people centric development without compromising the environment they are dependant on.

We have just finished witnessing protests around the Chengara land struggle in Kerala. Protests took place in Delhi around the impacts of mining on the Dongaria Kondh tribals in Niyamgiri, Orissa. Fisherfolk all across the country organised themselves to challenge the Draft Coastal Management Zone notification issued by the Ministry of Environment and Forests which would put forth a management regime that will severely compromise the livelihoods of fisherfolk.

Why is it important to list these protests and many more? It is to stress on the commonality of what protestors are trying to convey. It is not just their lives but

also their freedoms that have been compromised. Farmers who are shouting anti-GM slogans were opposing its inroads into their traditional agricultural systems. It was once again their fellow women and men who in a different context and space demanded that their land not be acquired in the garb of national growth. Today, tribal communities and indigenous peoples living in harmony with extremely ecologically fragile areas have their homes and surroundings ready to be exploited! All this because the industrial growth of India needs to be matched with mining or power generation, no matter what the damage.

Ironically, there runs a common thread in all instances where people have had to take to the streets. They want the government to understand that its 'growth' related priorities are coming with heavy and irreparable social and environmental costs. With newer lands and lives being replaced by industrial and infrastructure expansion, more and more people are bound to take to the streets.

One cannot help but question the sensibilities of our decision-makers. Either they are at such polarised ends that they don't see this deafening socio-political reality emerging or they believe that these are symptomatic of a path they have charted for the country's growth as a world superpower. Such sacrifices then become essential, both to exist and overlook, if we need to concentrate on the competitive world of commerce.

There is a deeper message in popular protests: "Yeh to bas angdai hai, aage aur ladai hai" (This is just the beginning, there is a long battle ahead). If the voices of protesting India continue to be unheard, ignored and built upon, the rebound is likely to be unparalleled, with pent up frustrations seeking to mobilise towards a new freedom struggle, this time directed at its own representatives.

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There runs a common thread in all instances where people took to the streets. They want the government to understand that its 'growth' related priorities are coming with irreparable social and environmental costs.

Living

□ Books

□ Eco-tourism

□ Film

□ Theatre

□ Ayurveda

Theatre for the homeless

Madhu Gurung
New Delhi

LOKESH Jain has been staging passionate plays for the homeless since the last five years. His most recent one, *Hume Naaz Hai*, (We are proud of...), celebrates the spirit of people who don't have a roof over their heads. The play is also a tribute to Jamghat, his motley theatre troupe of street children who live together and do theatre.

"We may close the windows of our air conditioned cars or hide behind shuttered doors ignoring the poor and the homeless. What we cannot ignore is that Delhi belongs to everyone," he says. "The homeless who live on streets, under flyovers are seen as mere numbers, people without faces, spirit or stories of their own. They never touch the collective conscience of the callous city. My endeavour is to jolt people out of their complacency and get them to think and feel. We are losing the space in our hearts for others and I wanted to capture this in my play."

Delhi has around 100,000 homeless people. Yet there are only 14 night shelters which can serve at best, 2,937 people. There are no night shelters for women or migrant families.

Lokesh's play was staged on the streets of Delhi, in plush India Habitat Centre and at Jawaharlal Nehru University's verdant campus. What makes *Hume Naaz Hai* powerful is the acting and the script-- the strong voices and body language of the actors.

Each character recounts how he or she ended up on the streets. Their stories are emotional, sad and alarming. One man loses his mind. There is the urchin who refuses to part with his earnings to a bully despite rape. There is Jamal who sells tea on the streets but comes from a wealthy, genteel Muslim family. There is also the story of two women, Sudhari and Gudri, from a forgotten tribe in Rajasthan who live on the pavement because they have lost their forests. Then there is young Azad born to a mentally disabled mother, who suffers sexual abuse by men.

"If we look at the homeless we know they represent India's composite culture. They are all victims of something they have left behind to migrate to the city," says Lokesh.

Despite years of deprivation,



Photographs: LAKSHMAN ANAND

Scene from Jamghat's recent play, *Hume Naaz Hai*.

each character retains the mannerisms and native flavour of the homes they left behind. Like Ganga Bai whose eyes are constantly searching the horizon as if looking for her family who got swept away in the Bihar floods. The sets are stark and unadorned.

The play also portrays how the homeless cope with life on the streets. They are denied access to public services and schemes and pay from their meager earnings for the use of a public toilet, to bathe and to eat. Lokesh's moving portrayal stays with you long after the last song fades.

Lokesh says five years ago when Action Aid, an international NGO, asked him to stage a play for Prince Charles, it changed his life forever. Along with his friend Amit, he spent weeks walking around Old Delhi's streets, befriending run away children, steeped in poverty and hooked on drugs. It was these children that Lokesh and Amit got together into an informal space called home. They named the group, Jamghat. The troupe performed for Prince Charles. Once he left, the children realised they did not want to go back to their old life on the streets. Jamghat became home for these children.

"Since childhood I have lived in Old Delhi, close to where

Shahjahanabad starts," says Lokesh, his bearded countenance doing little to disguise the intensity of his eyes. "I lived with my grandfather, Raj Kishor Jain. He would take me around Delhi and get talking to people on the streets, the *nagine wala* at Meena Bagh, the *malishwala*, the astrologer. He would spend hours at Golcha cinema talking to Urdu poets, writers of *Milap*, an Urdu newspaper. In their *mehfil* I would sit and many a time watch films like *Leader*, or those of Guru Dutt. It was at that time I knew I wanted to be an actor so that I could be a story teller."

A graduate of the National School of Drama, Lokesh says Ebrahim Alkazi, the guru of theatre, taught him his craft. From the legendary NK Sharma, he learnt the importance of emotions, secular culture and the depth of relationships.

"My theatre is based on my experiences. Every day when I go to get milk from the booth and drop my child to the bus stand I see so many homeless people. I know them individually and I know how difficult it is to survive. When I decided to write the play, I just wrote and tore up pages. Then what first emerged were songs on homelessness. I wrote over 40 songs. I lived every character's journey."

Hume Naaz Hai, he says, is being staged to provide justice for the homeless. "What is the use of beautifying the city if there is no space for the poor and if the city leaves them devoid of human dignity? Through my play I celebrate their spirit and their hope for a better future," explains Lokesh.



Lokesh Jain with his actors

Darjeeling toy train's new shine

Vivek S Ghatani
Darjeeling.

THE Darjeeling Himalayan Railway, popularly called the Toy Train, puffs and toots its way up the hills to Darjeeling town. The destination isn't important. It's the ride that matters.

Ever since the train was bestowed World Heritage status in 1999 by UNESCO, there has been no looking back. This cute little train has become an indispensable part of the tourist itinerary.

So Darjeeling Himalayan Railway (DHR) officials just can't stop lavishing their attention on the toy train. But love and money don't always match. The little train accumulates a big loss of more than a crore every year.

"The DHR is controlled by the Indian Railways. It is true that we are running at a loss but that has not stopped us developing this railway at any cost," says Subroto Nath, director of DHR.

The toy train, an engineering feat built by the British, has seen a lot of changes over the past few years. "Almost all the tracks along its 55 mile route from Siliguri to Darjeeling have been renewed. To give tourism a boost we have upgraded railway stations along the toy train's track like Sukna, Kurseong, Ghoom and Darjeeling," says Nath.

Museums have been set up at these railway stations to woo tourists. The museums depict the history of the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway ever since it started on July 4, 1881. "The museums have become a big attraction for both foreign and domestic tourists," says Nath.

Kiosks serving Darjeeling tea, another world famous brand, have been set up at every station. These are being run by local NGOs. Nath says the DHR is also promoting Gorkha food and culture to tourists. The Kurseong Railway Station at a height of 4864 ft has a *Gorkha Bansha Ghar* (kitchen) which serves Gorkha food and showcases the Gorkha dress, its instruments and many other artefacts. "This unique kiosk is run by a local NGO. We are also beautifying all other stations along the toy train's path," said Nath.

The DHR has started renovating the Tindharia workshop which was till recently on the verge of closure. The workshop is the only one along the DHR route where new engines are made and older ones repaired. After the renovation is complete, Nath said the DHR has plans to introduce more locomotives. The workshop would also be open for tourists so that they can see the engineering works.

"We felt that over the years most tourists come here for the toy train. That is why we plan to introduce new locomotives and renovate the steam engines. By next year we intend to introduce at least 10 new coaches," said Nath.

When the DHR started in 1881 it used to carry goods, mostly utensils for the tea gardens. Since there was no road link to Darjeeling, the British constructed train tracks. With roads coming up, the toy



DHR employees feed the train with coal.

train no longer carries any goods.

According to Nath, the number of tourists is likely to increase by 10 to 15 per cent every year. "We were able to earn around Rs 95 lakhs last year. Earlier, we just earned between Rs 35 to Rs 40 lakhs annually."

The DHR has also introduced a few specials. Foreign tourists and film makers can hire the toy train. "The special trains run from Siliguri to Ghayabari, Darjeeling to Ghoom and Darjeeling to Kurseong," Nath said.

The DHR has shifted its offices from Siliguri to Elysia building in Kurseong. This building is a historical one made by the British. It houses a museum and has models of a running toy train.



The Elysia building, head office of the toy train.

The DHR has plans to undertake a conservation management programme. "We will engage experienced consultants to prepare a route map of the DHR. We also want locals to participate because we believe that peoples' participation is required for further development of the DHR," Nath says.

The main problem that DHR faces is derailment. But no serious incident has happened so far. Nath says the carelessness of local people is partly to blame. "People living near the tracks have made drains along the tracks. Sometimes boulders slide down the hills causing damage to the tracks. Some tracks had not been renewed. However, we are constantly working to replace the older tracks with new ones. If you go by the record such derailments have become less in the past six or seven months," Nath explained.

The DHR tracks are two meter narrow gauge which makes them truly unique. Similar tracks can be found only in England.

Nath is a little sad about the lack of peoples' participation. They have not shown much enthusiasm in supporting their little smoky train.

"Apart from a few NGOs, locals do not support and advice us in further development. But their help and suggestions are of utmost importance for the train's future prospects," said Nath.

The DHR is indirectly helping locals. "The tourists who charter the toy train are spending at least 15 per cent on the local economy which is helpful for the tourism industry to flourish. And the staff of the DHR are very helpful," said Nath.

Photographs: VIVEK S. GHATANI



A QUICK SELECTION FROM THE MANY BOOKS THAT TURN UP FOR REVIEW

Random shelf help



FOR BETTER GOVERNANCE: EFFORTS DO MATTER

CUTS
Rs 200

Don't get frightened by this book's hideous cover and ghastly layout. Take a closer look.

This is a very interesting book on governance. It is rich in detail and sound on facts. The book has 32 case studies where intervention by NGOs, peoples' movements and the state has had an impact on governance. The book includes international examples also.

The case studies have been written mostly by those who fought for or implemented radical change. So we have Sunita Narain writing about the Centre for Science and Environment's (CSE) big fight to curb pollution in Delhi. Aruna Roy and Nikhil De write on the right to information movement, Rajender Singh on reviving traditional water bodies, the redoubtable Ela Bhat on SEWA and so on. Also read Raju Sharma's piece on Uttar Pradesh's brave Indian Administrative Service officers who exposed corruption in their ranks.

Mostly it is the Union government which has intervened in governance. States in the south have been more active than elsewhere. The Antyodaya scheme, employment guarantee scheme of Maharashtra, computerisation of land records in Karnataka and the Rajasthan government's, 'Prashasan Gaon ke Sang' which tried to solve the problems of villagers at their doorstep are about government efforts which yielded dividends.

Lessons learnt? Well, one lesson is that citizens and the state are very efficient in tackling issues of governance. Their intervention does much more for people than companies driven by profit.



THE VITAL DROP GITANJALI CHATURVEDI SAGE PUBLICATIONS RS 750

Written by a New Delhi-based development professional, *The Vital Drop* tells the story of the effort to eradicate polio in India.

The author, who worked extensively with the campaign, says the Global Polio Eradication Initiative is the largest public health initiative in the world and its success depended on India's ability to eliminate the disease. The book is of 304 pages. It chronicles the communication challenges faced and the efforts made by campaign partners to communicate effectively with India's large, diverse and segregated communities on the need to immunise their children. The book records the communications journey that was spearheaded by the Government of India in 2002, and deployed many innovative tactics, including a mass media campaign featuring the legendary Amitabh Bachchan. The book illustrates that communication is a "vital drop" for any public health campaign, not just a "soft science".



ANNALS AND ANTIQUITIES OF RAJASTHAN

James Tod
E Jaiwant Paul
Rs 350
Lotus/Roli

Many people have bought this famous history book. How many have read it? Lieutenant Colonel James Todd's voluminous books on Rajasthan's history lie

mostly abandoned on bookshelves. E Jaiwant Paul makes Todd's fat book more reader friendly by giving us a slimmer version. Todd's original style remains intact. Inaccuracies in the original work have been clarified. Paul has also brought us up to date by visiting some old places Todd mentions.

To recap: James Todd was a Scotsman who joined the East India Company and at the tender age of 24 became its agent to five states in Rajasthan: Mewar, Marwar, Jaisalmer, Kota and Bundi. Todd fell madly in love with Rajasthan and its people. He dedicated his life to studying its history, culture, geography and ethnicity. He laid his hands on all the documentation he could find. He then produced *Annals and Antiquities*, a deeply emotional book. It was first published in 1829. The book became iconic. Later British archaeologists and historians would borrow from Todd's style.

Todd also wrote at length about the customs and traditions of this era. So we come to know about how the people lived. For history lovers who would just like to read Todd, this is an excellent option. For those who like their history undiluted, dust the volumes on your shelf.



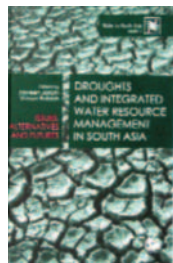
INDEPENDENCE TO GLOBALIZATION

Arabinda Ray
Anthem Press
Rs 350

In this book, Arabinda Ray, who has served as director in four leading Indian companies, traces the growth of Indian management since Independence through his long and varied experience as a senior manager. The focus is on the gradual emergence of professional management as

India readied itself for globalisation from post-colonial times in the 1950s and 1960s to the high noon of liberalisation now.

Calcutta, where Ray spent many of his working years, enjoys a special focus in this book. He goes into considerable detail to depict Calcutta's importance as a strategic urban centre of the British empire immediately before and after Independence. The author, now 77, rues Calcutta having lost its status as an important centre of economic activity, and points to the inability of the city's political and business leadership to anticipate and embrace change. The 220 page book is for management professionals, industry insiders and students.



DROUGHTS AND INTEGRATED WATER RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN SOUTH ASIA

Edited by Jasveen Jairath & Vishwa Ballabh
SAGE Publications
Rs 695

Devastating floods in Bihar and Bangladesh leave no doubt that our policy makers, environmentalists and government agencies need to undertake immediate, innovative and measured responses to stop the tragic destruction millions of South Asians are subjected to each year. This book is the second volume in the 10-part Water in South Asia series published by SAGE, New Delhi, in collaboration with SasiWATERS, the South Asia Consortium for Interdisciplinary Water Resources Studies. Editors and contributors critically evaluate the concept of drought, the way it is defined, its origin or derivation, and the purpose and interests it serves. Usefully divided into three major sections - themes, country overviews and case studies - this collection initiates a process of dialogue on a more comprehensive public policy for drought management. We all know it is much needed.



HOW TO MAKE AN INFILTRATION WELL

DVD
Grassroots Institute
Rs 500

Chronic water shortages in most river basins in the Himalayas has prompted Grassroots, an NGO working in Uttarakhand, to introduce an appropriate technology application in the form of infiltration wells, which promotes the concept of community managed drinking water systems. Based on the primary water resource of a village, this well acts as a protected intake structure for subterranean water capillaries. A hand-pump or submersible pump then enables the drawing of enhanced quantities of clean and safe drinking water.

This DVD documents the spread of this appropriate technology to over 300 hamlets in the central and western Himalayas with the idea of bringing the 'lessons' learnt to a wider set of stakeholders in mountain development. It also includes a Manual for Field Workers showing them how to locate potential sites, construct infiltration wells and install hand-pumps.

For those interested in this DVD, please get in touch with:

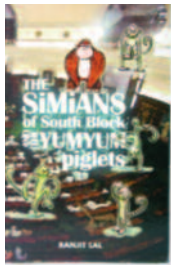
Anita Paul, Director (Community Initiatives)

Email: apaul@grassrootsindia.com

Phone: 05966-221516, 222298

Please send a cheque or draft of Rs. 500 to cover costs.

Ranjit's monkeys



THE SIMIANS OF SOUTH BLOCK AND THE YUMYUM PIGLETS

Ranjit Lal
India Ink/Roli Books
Rs 195

If anything interests Ranjit Lal more than writing about the animal world, it is humour. And when both interests come together you get a novel like "The Simians of South Block and the Yummy Piglets".

Ranjit is no ordinary wordsmith. He has been doing articles and books for the past three decades, in the process creating an identity for himself as a funny man whose unique vision

storm on to the scene. The Yummy piglets are taken hostage in the ensuing drama.

The animals talk to each other, have personalities, endure inequalities and nurture aspirations. They are choosy about their leaders.

The setting and tone are very much like *Jungle Book*. Ranjit does not exactly deny that but says he was probably influenced by the stories that used to appear in the newspapers some years ago of monkeys making a nuisance of themselves in Delhi.

"The British did try to remove monkeys from Delhi in a train only to find that they returned," he says. In Ranjit's story too the monkeys return to Delhi. The plan for a hotel in the sanctuary fails. Above all, he says, he wrote the story

LAKSHMAN ANAND

because he enjoyed writing it. "For me it was pure fun, just to have a blast."

As Ranjit points out, it is story written for "children between the ages of 10 and 100. If you are a child between those ages I suppose it is all right." But clearly in style and use of words and ideas the story is challenging for the very young. "That is part of the idea," says Ranjit, "to make it relevant to people at all levels. A very young child would perhaps be fascinated only by the story line. For a slightly older child there



Ranjit Lal at home in Delhi

discovers character and personality in the animals he feels so drawn to.

In this novel we join Ranjit as honorary members of animal society. Monkeys who regularly run riot at South Block in Delhi are shipped off to a nearby sanctuary under a devious plan hatched by a politician and an industrialist. The idea is that the monkeys will chase the other animals away. Animals gone, the sanctuary will cease to be one and the industrialist will be free to set up a hotel there.

The monkeys are as raucous as expected when, after being sedated, they wake up in the sanctuary. They very nearly take control of the sanctuary, which is undergoing a leadership crisis since Sher Bahadur, the tiger, has gone into retirement. Dhoomdham, the leopard, wants Sher Bahadur's job. But he doesn't command that kind of respect.

There is Gucci the stylish crocodile, Bholu the elephant, Giggles and Khoobsoorat the striped hyenas, Meher and Attar the wild boars who are parents of the Yummy piglets and Veer Bahadur, the jackal.

Even as the animals meet at their waterhole to decide on a successor, the monkeys, known as the Horde of 100 and led by Gutka the Gross,

would be other things that would come into the picture."

Ranjit is a keen observer of urban wild life. "Delhi is full of wildlife," he says, "excluding the human wildlife of course."

Why is it that the challenges of urban wildlife aren't properly understood? "That is because I suppose we are too darn selfish," says Ranjit.

What are the features of wildlife in Delhi that he would like to see highlighted? "Well the birds. There are so many birds. Take away the babblers and the mynas and Delhi would become a dead boring city," he says.

But isn't it difficult to have certain kinds of wildlife in a city, monkeys for instance? Ranjit doesn't agree. "If you take a walk through the ridge in Delhi in the morning, you will find clusters of monkeys. If you ignore them, they will not bother you."

Ranjit blames human beings for the imbalance with nature. "Put some young men and some monkeys together and you won't be able to tell one from the other," he says. But instead of coming together the differences get wider.

The Simians of South Block is worth buying because it is original and funny and contemporary in its topsy-turvy vision of the world.

The ideal winter diet

Dr G GANGADHARAN

GREEN CURES



THE history of dietetics is very old. One of the essential factors for maintenance of life is diet. To meet the requirements of an individual, nature provides nutrition soon after the birth of the child in the form of breast milk. In Kannada there is a saying which means: "One who has knowledge of a balanced diet will live healthy."

Wholesome food is considered to be the main cause of growth in human beings (vridhhi). Unwholesome food results in diseases (roga). Hippocrates in his book *Treaties on Ancient Medicine* (460 BC) states that man has gained knowledge on dietetics by personal observation from time to time. In the

winter season humans need more food than in summer, when the requirement is comparatively less.

With the weather cooling it is easy to reach for comfort foods. Out of all the seasons, it is only winter which provides natural nourishment to the body, helps keep it healthy and increases physical strength and potency. The energy that we store in winter is of use throughout the remaining part of the year. During this season the human body in order to keep itself warm generates a lot of energy as protection against the cold weather and chilly winds. This warmth intensifies the fire of the stomach and strengthens the digestive system of a healthy and strong person. He or she is able to digest heavier food in larger quantity. Therefore during the winter season, nutritious food that is heavy in nature can be taken.

The Indian system of medicine takes thorough consideration of all the seasons while determining the diet, apart from the regimen for day and night. Life as a whole, starting from the womb till death, is dynamic in nature. One is continuously bound to face changes in every moment of life and with that doshas (the physiological units of the body) also undergo variation. Based upon the strength of the sun and moon outside and the variability of the body, doshas are controlled through certain ahara and vihara (diet and daily routine).

Ayurveda has divided the entire year into two phases:

1. Adana kala (a period of debility or exhaustion)
2. Visarga kala (a period of strength or enrichment).

These are further divided into two sets of three seasons.

- Sishira (late winter).
- Vasantha (spring).
- Greeshma (summer).
- Varsha (rainy).
- Sharath (autumn) and
- Hemantha (early winter) respectively.

The details of the dietetic regime of hemantha (early winter) is further elaborated in Ayurveda. Hemantha (winter) starts from mid- November to mid- January. In the winter season, the temperature of the body beaten by the cold wind, goes deep inside, gathers like a lump in the stomach increasing the digestive fire which causes great hunger, appetite and keen power of digestion. In this season, people will have the ability to digest foods which are hard by nature, so such foods and drinks which are strengthening for the body should be taken properly planned. Otherwise the digestive fire might get increased. If such foods are not available, it might even devour the dhatus (tissues) itself. With their decrease or loss, vata gets increased (aggravated) in association with the internal heat during this cold season. So during hemantha the following food is advised:

- Fatty food having predominantly sweet, sour and salt taste.
- Vegetables and fruits which have mineral, vitamins and citrus content.

- Meats of animals which live in burrows and marshy places, aquatic animals, those which prey upon others for food and those which are specially fed for the sake of food. For example rabbits, fish, prawns, crabs, buffalo, sheep, goat, hen and pig.
- Products prepared from urad dal such as dosa, idly, vada etc.
- Wheat, millet, maize, gram, moong dal, moth, black gram and masoor dal are especially beneficial.
- Sugar cane, milk and its products are advised.
- Milk, clarified butter, mawa, rabri, kheer, cream, which are foods that provide energy, are advisable.
- Preparations of sesame seeds and jaggery and sweets like gajar ka halwa could be taken.
- Freshly harvested grains can be used.
- Other foods like groundnuts, dates, dry fruits are good in this season.
- Usage of hot water is recommended for drinking and other purposes.

Foods rich in vitamins and minerals are important for a healthy diet especially the intake of fruits and vegetables is of higher priority for good health. Most root vegetables are available all round the year, but are at their nutritious best during winter. Fresh winter vegetables such as carrot, cabbage, cauliflower, sprouts, pumpkin, garlic, green vegetables, beetroot, radish, turnip, yam, lettuce and broccoli provide essential vitamins and minerals for good health throughout winter.

Root vegetables and other vegetables which are available in winter are perfect for making heartwarming soups, stews and sauces. Winter soups are an ideal way of getting lots of nutritious goodness. Simply by adding a cup of chopped carrot, sliced cabbage, tomatoes or corn kernels and sauce to winter stews you will increase your vegetable intake.

During winter, fresh fruits are to be consumed. Fruits are an important source of vitamins and minerals which are most essential for the body. Banana, orange, grapes, kiwi, passion fruit, pears, pomegranates and pumalo are excellent sources of vitamin C, Vitamin B6, fiber and potassium.

When winter begins one should avoid vata increasing food such as:

- Potatoes, whole grains (grams), green peas.
- Light food and drinks (Laghu bhakshana) has to be avoided.
- Intake of cold drinks and water is harmful.
- In general one should avoid pungent, bitter and astringent food and drinks.

Apart from diet in the winter season, one should practice massage, oil application on the head, steam bath or warm bath, sun bath and heated rooms. During the cold season one should be careful about what we wear. Clothing should be heavy and warm.

Some suggestions to keep fit during cooler months:

- Stay hydrated - Spending time inside during winter means more exposure to climate control environments. Dehydration can cause fatigue and it's easy to confuse thirst for hunger and start snacking. Keep a bottle of water with you and aim to drink around eight large glasses of water a day.
- Embrace exercise - It will be darker and colder outside but that does not have to end the exercise routine. Regular exercise will improve your mood and health to keep the body weight stable. If not a gym, a simple brisk walk will help.
- Do not overeat - It is common to overeat when the weather is cool and combined with more sedentary lifestyle, it is easy to put on weight. To avoid overeating later in the day, begin with a high fiber balanced diet.
- Beat fatigue - Winter can leave a person feeling lethargic. Eating plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables at least 2-5 servings per day will be useful. Fruits and vegetables are low in kilojoules and full of antioxidants, vitamins and minerals to keep one slim and healthy.

E-mail: vaidya.ganga@frrht.org. Dr GG is a senior physician with FRLHT, Bangalore.



Think death, be wise

SAMITA RATHOR

LAST time we discussed death and how it is an inevitable reality. Meditating on death leads to a deeper understanding of what we really are as human beings. It helps to develop wisdom and understanding and acquire inner peace.

Listed below is the art of meditation on the eight stages of the death process:

PREPARATION: Sit comfortably and relax. You might like to do this meditation lying down. Be sure that you do not fall asleep! Let go of any other thoughts of the past or future, people or activities. Keep your attention focused on the meditation, and bring it back any time the mind wanders away.

MOTIVATION: Generate positive motivation, "I am doing this meditation to make myself more familiar with the reality of death. I will prepare myself for death by doing as much spiritual practice as possible during my life. In that way I can be more helpful to others and help them overcome their fear of death, live their lives more wisely, and die more peacefully."

THE MEDITATION: The process of dying involves a progressive loss of physical, sensory, and mental functions, as nervous activity closes down from the periphery to deep within the nervous system.

On the first four stages of the death process, the mind is still on the gross level. The gross level of the mind includes our thoughts and sense perceptions. These gradually diminish over four stages.

1. The earth element absorbs; the mirage vision appears. The earth element is the quality of solidity in our body. As it absorbs, your body loses strength, becomes thinner and weaker, and you feel drained of energy. You might feel as if you are falling, or sinking under the earth. It becomes difficult to sit

SOUL VALUE

upright, or to hold anything. Your body colour fades, and your cheeks become sunken. Your eyesight becomes unclear. These are the outer signs of the first stage of the death process. The inner sign is a vision of a shimmering, silver-blue mirage.

2. The water element absorbs; the vision of smoke appears. The water element consists of all the fluids in the body, as well as the quality of cohesion-what makes everything stick together. As it absorbs, you start to feel dry in the eyes, mouth and throat. It becomes difficult to move the tongue. Feelings of pleasure and displeasure in your body diminish. Your sense of hearing weakens, and the ringing in your ears ceases. Your mind may become hazy and nervous. You experience an inner vision of a haze with swirling wisps of smoke.

3. The fire element absorbs; the vision of sparks appears. The fire element is the heat in our body. At this stage, your mouth and nose dry up completely. The warmth of the body begins to disappear, usually from the feet and hands to heart. You can no longer eat, drink or digest anything. Your mind alternates between clarity and confusion. You can't remember the names of people, even family and friends; you may not even recognise them. Your sense of smell weakens, and breathing becomes difficult. You experience an inner vision like that of sparks in space.

4. The air element absorbs; the vision of a dying flame appears. At this stage, you can no longer move your limbs; your body becomes immobile. Your mind becomes bewildered, unaware of the outside world. Everything becomes a blur. Your last feeling of contact with the environment is slipping away.

Your sense of taste and sense of touch dissolve. You may have visions: frightening ones, as a result of negative things you did in your life, or beautiful, joyful ones as a result of positive actions. Breathing becomes more and more difficult, then it stops altogether. Your last thoughts cease, and you have an inner vision of a dim red-blue light, or of the last flickering of a candle-flame which is about to go out.

Gross consciousness has now ceased, and over the next four stages of the death process, the mind becomes more and more subtle.

5. White vision. Here, you have a vision of a very clear, empty sky, like the sky in autumn, full of the brightness of the full moon.

6. Red vision. This is an inner vision like a clear, empty sky filled with the rays of a copper-red sunset.

7. Black vision. This is a vision of total darkness, like dark and empty space. It ends in a momentary complete loss of consciousness.

8. Clear-light vision. The mind is now at its most subtle level, that of the clear light of death. The appearance is like an autumn sky at dawn, completely pure and empty, and filled with clear, colorless light. Keep your mind focused on this experience for as long as you can without getting distracted. If it does become distracted, bring it back to the clear-light experience. Remember that this is the most pure, subtle level of your mind. When the clear light of death ceases, the consciousness passes back through the stages of dissolution in reverse order: the black vision, then the red vision, and so forth.

DEDICATION: Dedicate your meditation to developing wisdom and compassion and freeing yourself from the cycle of death and rebirth.

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Carterpuri revisited

RITA ANAND

FOR many years Carterpuri, in Gurgaon, has lived as an ordinary, ramshackle village. A 13-member panchayat did pretty much as it pleased. Walk through its broken roads and stinky drains and you'll see what I mean.

The village got its name 30 years ago after a brief brush with fame. In January 1978, Jimmy Carter, US President, visited the village which was then called Daulatpur Nasirabad. His mother Lillian, a volunteer in the US Peace Corps, had worked here as a nurse. Carter's visit was a big success. Even today elderly villagers recount that day with nostalgia. The whole village was spruced up. Daulatpur Nasirabad was renamed Carterpuri in honour of Jimmy Carter. The rest too is history: promises of funding were made, the then state government played spoilsport and Carterpuri lapsed into oblivion.

In 2000, an 80-year-old retired Army Colonel (who is so self-effacing that he doesn't want to be named) noted the sad state of Carterpuri's government-run primary school. He was doing social work and had started an NGO, Friends of Rural India. The Colonel wrote letters to Jimmy Carter. Now the school has an institute on its premises which teaches computers and stitching and has a children's library. There are clean toilets and drinking water. Carter, it appears, got an American multinational to finance it all.

Eight years later, two Dalit girls, 20-year-old Suresh and her sister 22-year-old Poonam run the institute. They studied in this primary school, and were early birds at the institute. Suresh is a taekwondo expert teaching this martial art to children from the school.

Urbanisation has been creeping up on Carterpuri. From the village, you can see skyscrapers glinting in the sun. Not far away, there are BPOs, factories and shopping malls. Since the 1980s farmers' fields have all been bought by the Haryana Urban Development Authority (HUDA) and converted into colonies for the middle class.

Migrant labour from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Orissa began to arrive some time in the 1980s looking for work. They needed places to stay. Carterpuri's villagers were paid compensation for their lands. With this money, they built concrete homes with small rooms to rent out.

Today, migrant labour exceeds the population of the village twice over. It is their children, poor and underfed, who join the government's free primary school. Carterpuri's former farmers, since they made money from selling their land, send their children to private schools where the medium of instruction is English, says Suresh.

Has this pattern of development been good or bad? Would Carterpuri's residents have been better off as farmers?

You will get different responses. This is what Suresh says: "They frittered away money buying consumer goods. Grooms were bought with dowry and girls married off. With nothing to do, the men idle around, the boys study with difficulty till Class 12 and then open shops or drive auto rickshaws. The girls dropout in Class 8 to get married. It is an attitude problem."

But if the landowners in the village blew their chances, some of the oppressed gained. Lower caste

Dalit families like those of Suresh and Nandini had no land. Their parents worked as labourers but encouraged the girls to get an education. Now the girls are teachers instead of being married and hunched over a stove like girls from landed families.

Urbanisation and education helped the two girls break out of the gender trap.

Panchayat to RWA

In June this year, the state government abolished panchayats and introduced a new Municipal Corporation, bowing to demands by wealthy residents of Gurgaon for better services.

Grungy Carterpuri was in any case sinking into an abyss and becoming a slum. Integrating it with pros-

RITA ANAND



Suresh teaches taekwondo at her school

perous Gurgaon would be more inclusive since the village could access the same services as the rich and middle class.

Carterpuri will now be part of a municipal ward. Villagers will elect a municipal councillor and political parties will play a big role. For any complaints about crumbling infrastructure, villagers can line up like the middle class at the Municipal Corporation.

Sitting glumly in a chair, Satveer Singh, member of the defunct panchayat and Ishwar Singh, an ex-member, disagree. Satveer doesn't think the Municipal Corporation will spruce up his village. For several years the village was 'adopted' by HUDA and they were supposed to provide water, sewage lines, repair roads and see that street lights worked. They didn't do it, he says accusingly.

Under the 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution, panchayats are vested with wide-ranging powers to devolve governance to the grassroots. Agriculture, road repair, schools, nearly all local development was put under their purview and funding was supposed to be provided by the state.

Panchayats could levy certain fines and taxes too.

All that will be lost, rues Satveer, insisting that the panchayat was good for the village. He will not stand for elections. Panchayat elections were non-partisan. But in municipal elections since he has neither money nor muscle to stand as an Independent, he will have to rely on getting political backing.

The councillor will have to cater to a much larger population, may be 40,000 people. Carterpuri will just be a blip, he fears. Wealthier colonies will always get their voices heard. What about the uneducated villager? Previously, it was easy for Dalits to get caste certificates which entitle them to special government schemes and to reservation. The *sarpanch* knew every family so nobody could fudge. But now Dalits will have to approach the councillor who will be a busy person. It will all be cold and impersonal, says Ishwar Singh.

Satveer says if wards were smaller and elections non-partisan, he would contest. For now he will just go back to his job as a welder.

RWA to panchayat

Middle class colonies never had panchayats. They elect residents' welfare associations (RWAs) to deal with their problems of infrastructure. Satveer says he too is thinking of starting a Carterpuri RWA. Every residential colony in Delhi and Gurgaon has one. But the RWA has none of the powers bestowed on the panchayat.

Things have changed, though. RWAs have got a taste of being consulted and want to run their neighbourhoods much like a panchayat runs a village.

This aspiration is recent. For many years RWAs were seen as toothless bodies run by the elderly while the young went to work. It was Chief Minister of Delhi, Sheila Dikshit, who realised the potential of the RWA. She started the *Bhagidari* scheme under which RWA representatives could talk directly to the Chief Minister and senior officials. Every year the best RWA was given an award.

It worked. The RWAs became a vote bank. Younger people started taking an interest. Sheila Dikshit won term after term as chief minister. This limited empowerment boosted the morale of RWAs. Some became very innovative taking to environment protection and rainwater harvesting.

The opposition too cottoned on and tried to split the RWAs by forming an alternate forum. Partly this was possible because a section of the RWAs began to feel that just talking to government wasn't producing results. Services whether by the government or private agencies were shoddy. In Gurgaon, RWAs even got together and started their own political party. It was badly trounced in the last elections.

The RWAs want more authority. A section has asked for 'urban panchayats' similar to village panchayats with funding and authority to carry out local development works. There is room for urban panchayats under the 72nd Amendment which empowers local councils, they point out.

Politicians can make all the legislation they want. But the bureaucracy cannot implement radical change. It does not have the processes to ensure things are done efficiently at the grassroots and the details of implementation looked into. Its important to empower people. But there should be accountability for both.



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Roads

Community Buildings

Schools

Toilets

Awareness Programs

my
story...

Earlier, community meetings used to take place in peoples homes in my village, Sindhuvalli. So, Srinivasan Services Trust constructed a community hall in collaboration with the Gram Panchayat. This became the focal point of the village, and is now used for a variety of community activities. It serves as a meeting ground for members of SHGs, the Village Development Federation and the Gram Panchayat. It also functions as a Balwadi, Children's Resource Centre, Primary Health Centre and a summer camp for schoolchildren. Youngsters learn bhajans, develop hobbies and participate in a variety of youth development programmes. Adults attend adult literacy classes and publish a community newspaper from here. The entire village comes together under this roof to participate in festivals and annual day celebrations.

**Shobha.E, Member,
Sri Mahadeshwara Women's Self Help Group,
Sindhuvalli Village, Mysore**

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	(Kms)	06-07	07-08
Formation of Roads		91.77	116.77
Filling of pot holes		66.77	86
Construction of Drains		38.27	51
Construction and improvement of community buildings		49	67
Structures maintained by the community		45	70

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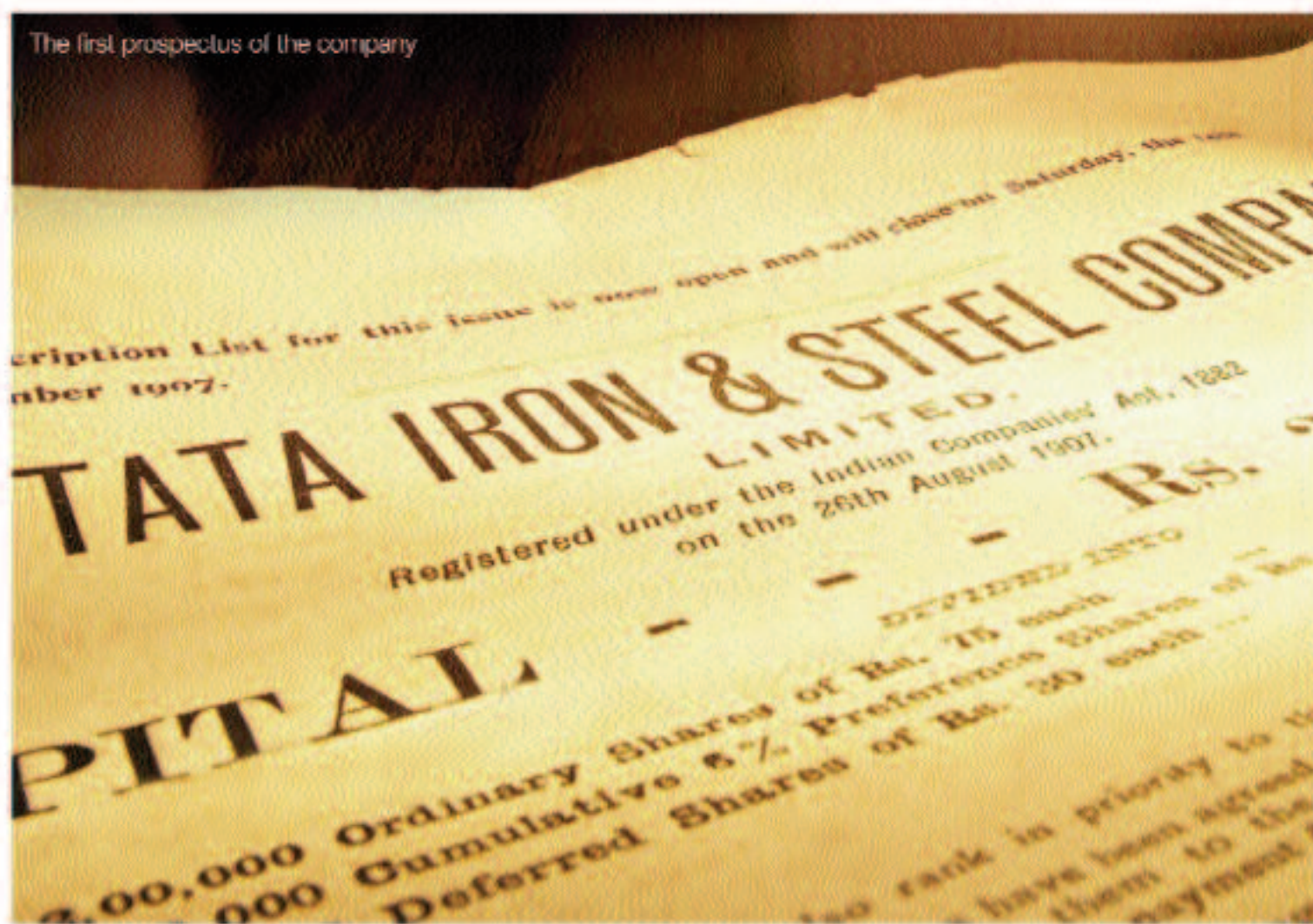
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