

# Civil Society

**DISCOVERI SHOWS HOW LEARNING CAN BE FUN**

## TEACHING TEACHERS

**ANNA HAZARE  
IS DEFENCE'S  
ROLE MODEL**

*Page 4*

**Tiger gone today,  
Sariska tomorrow?**

*Page 5*

**Thane hospital gets  
it right**

*Page 7*

**Maira: Mumbai to  
Shanghai**

*Page 19*

**Far Pavilions wins  
Diaspora hearts**

*Page 25*

**Suman Sahai: Send  
seeds bill to JPC**

*Page 22*





## COVER STORY



### CREATIVE EDUCATION

Idiscoveri is a team of young professionals from various streams who believe they can improve school education and make the classroom a happier place to be in.

9

**Tiger is gone today, will it be Sariska tomorrow?** ..... 5

**Learn community roles in forestry, wildlife from Nepal** ..... 6



**Thane hospital gives tribals quality healthcare** ..... 7

**Business: Sruti makes Rs 22 lakhs from sale of bags this year!** ..... 17

**Campus: Students of Kinnaird College in Lahore come to LSR** ..... 18

**Film festival report: Women shoot the things they see** ..... 24



**Far Pavilions wins Diaspora hearts, to open in London** ..... 25

**Essay: Let the young shine, says Jill Carr-Harris** ..... 26

# Civil Society

## The school business

SCHOOLS have increasingly become businesses. They are started primarily to make money and because the returns are excellent all kinds of people want to invest in them. These entrepreneurs may have at best a casual interest in matters pertaining to the quality of education or the larger social implications of running a school. They are focussed on profit and clout and invariably succeed in getting both in varying degrees.

The government on the other hand has steadily abdicated its responsibility to provide an equitable school system. So, those who can pay send their children to schools where they learn some gobbledygook from oppressive teachers who perhaps haven't read a book in years. Those who can't pay have no choice but to opt for the government schools where classes are hardly held and the dropout rate is high. There are of course some private schools that do have a mission beyond making money. There are also government schools where children pass their exams. But if what we are looking for is education for Indians in general, well, then the cold truth is that it does not exist.

We chose to do Idiscoveri as a cover story after considerable hesitation. This is not because we doubt the sincerity of Ashish Rajpal and his team. They are clearly highly motivated and professional people. They are also innovators and change leaders. They want a better, efficient and modern India. The question is whether their consultancy will go beyond being yet another addition to the profit-driven school economy. In my view, they can at best hope to make the rich schools, which pay for Idiscoveri's services, a little better. Chances are that with the Idiscoveri tag these schools will hike their fees a little more. The problem of providing better schools where children from average homes can go and get enrolled without prejudice remains.

Idiscoveri is nevertheless a story. Its model for teaching the teacher deserves to be understood and replicated. It needs to be plucked out of the obscene rich school environment of marble flooring and air-conditioned buses and modified for wider use. What we dearly hope for is that more thinking Indians come out and do what Idiscoveri does. The challenge of course is to do it for the millions who need education and not the handful of gold-diggers who will use Idiscoveri training sessions to pretty up their business plans. But it is always the first step that matters most. Idiscoveri and Wipro, which supports it, deserve to be congratulated and feted. And that done, it is time to carry the good work forward much closer to the ground.

Pradip Sarmah's Rickshaw Bank in Guwahati is a good example of how a social entrepreneur can drum up support for a business idea that improves urban systems and creates prosperity. Sarmah has brought together corporates, banks, insurance companies and management consultants for the simple purpose of helping rickshaw pullers own their vehicles. In the process, he has also improved the design of the cycle rickshaw and supported a clean mode of transport. Similarly, Sruti in Delhi has shown how an innovatively run business in paper, cloth and jute bags can deliver as much as Rs 22 lakhs in sales in a year and fund a whole lot of other good work. Both are examples of how the best businesses make money for the general good.

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# Defence sets sights on more Anna Hazares

## *Search for NGOs where retirees can serve*

**Civil Society News**  
New Delhi

The armed forces see a bigger role for their people in the development sector. Every year 60,000 ex-servicemen retire. Most are young, between the ages of 35 and 40. There are also 400,000 widows to be taken care of.

The Directorate General Resettlement, Ministry of Defence, would like them to find jobs in NGOs or get self-employed in socially useful work. Nearly 80 percent of retired personnel come from rural areas, so the Directorate is interested in reaching out to NGOs in villages.

Success stories about retired ex-servicemen turning activists have been filtering through to the media. The best known example is Anna Hazare, who retired to Ralegaon Sidhi and transformed his derelict village.

The Directorate General Resettlement is planning an awareness drive or a movement called 'Defence to Development: A New Vista' to sensitise NGOs, voluntary organisations and concerned citizens about the need for resettling ex-servicemen and widows. A major seminar has been planned for April.

**Civil Society** spoke to Major General Kuldip S Sindhu, Director General of the Directorate General Resettlement, on what exactly the armed forces expect from the development sector.

**Why is the Directorate General Resettlement looking for employment for retired personnel from the armed forces in the NGO sector?**

The armed forces cover different trades and specialisations, perhaps as many as 900, from someone who may be a boot-maker to someone who could be flying a plane. Now we have 60,000 people who retire each year. The jawans could be as young as 35, officers in their 40s and short service commission people in their 30s. The question is how to help them enter civilian life and put their



Major General Kuldip S Sindhu

specialisations to use? The problem is that society tends to see only a man in uniform with a gun. The reality is it's a man in uniform with a gun and a brain.

Employment for these people is getting tougher since governments are shrinking and the private sector excludes them because of a variety of preferences. NGOs on the other hand are increasingly important in the role they play in the country's development. And we feel that with the kind of national and social convictions that defence people have, they are ideally suited for working in the social sector.

**Do you feel defence people will have the flexibility to deal with complex social issues that require**

**patience and negotiation?**

Yes there is rigidity in defence people. But they can certainly come to terms with the requirements of the civil sector. A military man is taught implicit obedience to orders but that does not make him a zombie. Even orders in the defence forces come through a process of negotiation. Adaptability is one of the key principles of the services.

**What are the specific areas in the development sector you think retired army personnel and widows should get involved in?**

Some of the areas we are interested in are community education, HIV awareness, emancipation of women, girl child education, water harvesting, disaster management and literacy promotion. Many of our men go back into rural areas. We could do things for forestry, minor irrigation and village roads.

**Are you planning any training courses or hand-holding?**

Certainly training is needed for a better and more focussed understanding of the social sector. We are looking at Delhi University, Jamia Millia Islamia and the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) for courses which can provide this orientation. Hand-holding will be welcome but without riders. So it must be positive guidance.

**Have you spoken to NGO leaders? How have they reacted?**

Yes, we have spoken to some of them. They think it's a good idea whose time has come.

**What are the self-employment opportunities you would be examining?**

We will be talking to SIDBI, NABARD and ICICI. We already have a programme called SEMFEX which stands for Self-Employment for Ex-Servicemen. Under this Rs 300 crores has been disbursed since 1991. This is primarily in the agricultural sector. There is also the National Equity Fund which provides refinance for schemes.

**How have state governments reacted? What is the level of help you expect from them?**

We have not as yet begun working with the state governments but they will be invited to the seminar. The first step, as we see it, is to win over the central government ministries. Once we have some success stories we hope the message will go down to the states.

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ARE WE  
BEING  
READ?

**Civil Society is going places...**

Delhi, Dhaka, Trivandrum, Tennerife, Nadia, Nagpur, Kolkata, Ghaziabad, Washington, Geneva,

Bhubaneshwar, Ladakh, Lahore, Bangalore, Mumbai, London, New York, Versailles, Dehradun,

Chandigarh, Belgaum, Dibang Valley, Shillong, Patna,

Shimla, Ahmedabad, Panjim, Hyderabad, Singapore, Porto

Alegre, Gurgaon, Jaipur, Lucknow, Surrey, Srinagar,

Manali, Pune, Peechi, Pondicherry...

DO YOUR OWN THING

**Civil Society**

MAKE A DIFFERENCE

# Tiger today, Sariska tomorrow?

Civil Society News  
New Delhi

**W**HY has the tiger vanished from Sariska? Simple answer: It does not have a healthy forest to live in. Felling of trees, illegal mining, poaching and clumsy tourism, have taken a heavy toll. People who should be custodians of wildlife, and have been known to nurture it well, have been kept out of forest management.

Villagers had tipped off the forest department about illegal hunting several times at Sariska. Magsaysay Award winner Rajendra Singh, secretary of the Jal Biradari a national network of water activists, wrote three letters and even sent a picture, which clearly shows a trap had been laid to capture the tiger, in January last year. "But the forest department was least bit bothered," he says.

In 1985 when Rajendra Singh and his friends from the Tarun Bharat Sangh first arrived in this area to work for the people, there were four tigers in Sariska. The land was parched, and people were poor. Taking an elder's advice they began digging ponds and earthen dams to bring back the water.

But the groundwater table was very low because there were over 400 illegal mines operating in the Sariska Wildlife Sanctuary. He went to the Supreme Court and got the mines closed in 1991. The forest department harassed him no end, banning him from entering the sanctuary in 1987.

But once mining was banned and the water revived, tigers and other wildlife thrived.

There were more watering holes for wildlife. That prevented tigers from entering the villages. Multiple water sources made poaching more difficult. It was easier to kill animals when they congregated in one place to drink water. An earthen dam TBS built near Siliseri even had a resident tigress with two cubs. Though census figures are subject to huge controversy Rajendra Singh says there were about 26 tigers and some could be spotted easily. But now the jungle is silent.

"The death of the tiger spells the death of Sariska," he told *Civil Society* in an interview.

## ***Is it absolutely certain there are no tigers left in Sariska?***

In 2002 I went on a two-year *jal yatra*. When I came back and visited Sariska there were no movements of tigers, no pug marks. The roar of the tiger was not heard. People didn't complain of cattle or goat being devoured. We had built an earthen dam at Siliseri and a tigress with two cubs used to live there, near the water. I have taken people there and shown them the tigress. I can say definitely today there are no tigers in Sariska. Leopards and hyenas are there.

## ***Whom do you blame?***

Poaching has been taking place at Sariska. Since the past four years villages around the sanctuary have been informing the forest department, repeatedly. But the forest department has been least bit bothered. I have written three letters to the forest department informing them about hunting going on in the forest. On 4 January, 2004, a trap was laid and a hyena got trapped. A half eaten cow was found near this spot so a tiger had been there. I even sent a picture but no action was taken. There are some poor marginalised people who are lured by the poacher mafia to lay traps for the tiger. I



Rajendra Singh

**'If there are no tigers, the mining mafia can tell the government why should Sariska be a protected forest?'**

won't say some locals are not involved but it is people from outside who do this. So many tigers can't vanish overnight.

## ***Villagers are saying the forest department is responsible.***

The biggest culprit is the forest department. A Conservator was appointed a year ago. He feels nothing for the sanctuary. In one year, two officers were transferred. None of them is passionate about the jobs. But that is the bane of the Indian Forest Service.

## ***Shouldn't we change the present system of wildlife management and forest protection?***

Wildlife management in India is wrong. The Forest Conservation Act of 1988 and the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972 have separated communities from the forest so they don't feel it is theirs. The forest department should understand

that the jungle and wildlife belong to society, to the people. It is not their property alone. Because the forest department misbehaves with local people they get antagonised and don't want to help. I can say the present system of managing wildlife and forests has killed off all the tigers.

## ***What do you suggest?***

The government can now easily tell the arch wildlife conservationists that look, your system has failed so we are handing over wildlife and forest protection to society. A good society and government learn from such experiences. We can debate what this new system is to be. Should it be community driven wildlife management, along the lines of joint forestry management? Crores of rupees are being spent on wildlife and you can see the result.

## ***Haven't you tried to involve villages in Sariska in protecting the tiger.***

We had mooted the idea of a Sariska Sanrakshan Sangathan to villagers in the sanctuary's core area and buffer area. We thought villagers would then regard it as their responsibility to prevent poaching. We invited representatives from the state government, the union government, environmentalists and activists. But the forest department would just not participate. Even their guard would not come for the meetings. Instead they started harassing and hurling accusations at local villagers. So why should they bother? You have to give them responsibility and a clear role.

## ***Is mining still continuing at Sariska?***

They evict poor villagers from the forest and invite the mining mafia in. Mining and forests can't co-exist. The Vasundhara Raje Scindia government has appointed a minister for mines and forests. That's a major reason for the fate of Sariska. Yes, illegal mining is going on. If you ask me this sorry state of affairs has been instigated by the mining mafia. If there are no tigers, they can tell the government why should Sariska be a protected forest? We should be allowed to mine here. I can say there are about 50 mines functioning illegally.

# In forestry, learn from Nepal

Civil Society News  
New Delhi

WHILE India agonises over vanishing tigers and trees, Nepal could become a trendsetter in forest management. It is the only country in the world to have a national community forestry programme. In the years ahead, Nepal's forestry model might be replicated round the globe, just like Bangladesh's Grameen Bank model was, say development pundits.

"Community forestry has increased forest cover and wildlife in Nepal. It has boosted livelihoods and led to democratic participation at the grassroots," says Ghana Shyam Pandey, of the Federation of Community Forestry Users (FECOFUN), which represents Nepal's forest user groups (FUGs).

The removal of the elected government and the recent political turbulence has not rocked the programme. "King Gyanendra is giving community forestry top priority," said Pandey. The Maoists believe in regional autonomy and the rights of marginalised communities. So, to community forestry there is no threat, so far. "FUGs are a defence against insurgency," remarked Pandey.

The Centre for Civil Society (CCS) had invited him to New Delhi to share Nepal's experience in community forestry at the Terracotta Summit which discussed people's participation in natural resource management.

Initially, Nepal copied India's colonial forest policies. Then in 1978 a World Bank doomsday study predicted absolute deforestation in Nepal's hilly tracts by 1993. The government didn't have money to restore degraded land. Experts suggested community forestry management. The government had handed over forests to panchayats but that didn't work either. Eventually a master plan for the forestry sector was drawn up and under the 1993 Forest Act a part of Nepal's forests were handed over to village communities. They form FUGs to manage the forest area allotted to them. The forest

**'Community forestry has increased forest cover and wildlife in Nepal.'**



Ghana Shyam Pandey

department plays the role of facilitator. Today, the FUGs have increased to over 12,000.

Pandey said FUGs have opted for mixed forestry. In the middle and higher reaches of the Himalayas, FUGs are earning money growing aromatic, medicinal plants or sheesham for furniture. Some were preserving forests for eco-tourism. In the Terai region, FUGs were harvesting timber.

FUGs are like small corporations. According to Nepal's Forest Act of 1993, they can buy, sell and acquire forest produce. The FUGs raise their own funds and get a government grant. About 25 percent of money earned has to be invested in forest development.

"The FUGs spend on school programmes, drinking water projects,

irrigation and so on. Some have started health services like ambulance services. A small processing industry is also coming up," said Pandey.

Now that communities have regenerated their forests, the government wants to impose taxes, but FECOFUN has been resisting the move. Taxes levied on non-timber forest produce are inequitable, he says, so a lot of it is smuggled to India.

He said FUGs were looking at markets in India and other countries, but partnerships had not been formed as yet. "FUGs are selling to the Nepali entrepreneur who gets in touch with Indian buyers. The two governments can talk. Or communities in India and Nepal can form partnerships."

Despite glitches, Nepal's community forestry programme has done well because a clear policy establishes the prime right of the community to the forest. Pandey said success hinges on getting the most marginalised communities involved in the FUG. Through participatory research appraisal the poorest families are identified.

One member from each household is represented in a general assembly. They elect a smaller committee. There is 33 percent reservation for women. Each FUG draws up its own Constitution that is legally enforceable. If an FUG acts irresponsibly the DFO can dismiss it but within 35 days a new one has to be formed. If a single forest has to be divided between several villages, the FUGs arrive at a consensus. There is no formal conflict management mechanism.

One headache for FECOFUN is that most of Nepal's forest officers have been trained in Dehradun, the capital of Indian forestry. "They have these joint forest management ideas which we oppose," said Pandey. The government wants to extend protected areas to fulfil its international obligations to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) agreement. Pandey says preservation of biodiversity can be done better by the FUGs.

"We are not opposing protected areas completely. You need a core protected area say for protection of tigers or certain forms of biodiversity. But the periphery of a protected area can be best managed by community forestry," he says.

## A shelter and medical help in Delhi

Civil Society News  
New Delhi

THE third Mahapanchayat of the homeless in New Delhi took place outside a night shelter along the river Yamuna. There was music and dance interspersed with stories by the homeless. The Mahapanchayat announced a federation to fight for their rights and drew up a charter of demands for the government.

"Getting admission into a hospital is very difficult because they ask for identity cards and an attendant, which a homeless person can't provide," said 19-year-old Sanjay. He suffered from TB and drug addiction for a long time but hospitals turned him away. Finally somebody told him about a night shelter run by Aashray Adhikar Abhiyan (AAA), a project of Action Aid India, and he found medical help there.

Prithvichand, a 77-year-old homeless person,

said he voted for the first time in the last elections. AAA got him an identity card and put him on the voters' list. "I am finally a part of the democratic process," he said. "I can ask for my rights. I appeal to the government to include us in the electoral rolls and give us ration cards."

Gauhar Nisha told the gathering about how she used to stay awake all night on the footpath to protect her children. Thanks to the government's Palika Hostel Shelter, her family feels secure. She wanted the government to provide her work and build hostels for homeless girls.

Harish, a homeless boy studying computer applications, said children can't even work in peace because the police harass them. He said homeless children wanted to go to school but they were not given admission since they did not have addresses, parents or birth certificates.

The homeless asked for shelters that would be open during the day. They wanted public health

services and mobile health units in areas like the Walled City where their numbers were higher. They also wanted banking services and loans for setting up small businesses.

"A new leadership is emerging among the homeless," said Paramjit Kaur of AAA. Collectives of the homeless have been formed in five zones of the city and the NGO has helped them federate. There is a homeless senior citizens' group and a homeless children's group called Jigar.

Many things have changed since AAA began working for the city's shelterless people. "For three years we struggled to get shelters. The government now initiates opening of night shelters. We don't need to write to them," says Kaur.

Paramjit Kaur said they would like Delhi's Master Plan to set aside land for the homeless. She said senior homeless citizens should get pension. Harassment from the police or NDMC, MCD should stop and anti-poor laws abolished.

# Thane hospital gets it right

**Eklavya Prasad**  
Thane

FOR people living in remote villages, quality healthcare is a luxury. But in Ganeshpuri village, in Maharashtra's predominantly tribal Thane district, an NGO called Prasad Chikitsa has set up hospital services that are being deeply appreciated by villagers and tribals.

For over two decades, Prasad Chikitsa delivered doorstep healthcare through mobile health clinics. Then in 2003, it converged all its services and set up the Gurudev Sidhapeeth Anukampa Health Centre and the Netrachikitsa Hospital in Ganeshpuri village.

Young urban doctors have opted to work at the Netrachikitsa Hospital, leaving behind the temptation of lucrative practices. The hospital has outpatients' departments (OPDs), a dental clinic and a diagnostic centre. Prasad Chikitsa's tuberculosis project has a 90 percent cure rate. There is a reproductive and child health programme. A school and village health programme spreads awareness.

"Being old and lonely is not a handicap in this hospital," says Ujwala Atmaram Choudhury, an 85-year-old widow. "Everything is available under one roof."

Balchandra Dattatray Gharat, a 48-year-old farmer from Khenwadi village, who became blind due to cataract, had his vision restored here. "Everything looks so beautiful," he says with a sparkle in his eyes.

**Small beginnings:** When the Prasad Chikitsa



**Madhavi Rathod**



**Radheshyam Pandey**



Charitable Trust, started working in Ganeshpuri, it was physically and financially impossible for people to access medical facilities. In 1978, the NGO organised a mobile health care clinic. Equipped with a doctor, nurse and two assistants, the clinic travelled thrice a week to three villages. In the first year itself, the clinic treated nearly 15,000 patients and continued to attract large numbers.

"The mobile clinic accessed areas based on

## Prescription in pictures

**How does a doctor make sure patients who can't read or write remember the correct dosage of medicine?**

**Prasad Chikitsa realised bright labels and illustrations would work better than inscrutable prescriptions. Their labels, pasted on medicine bottles, show a spoon with the right amount of medicine. The time when the medicine should be taken is depicted by drawing the sun during different phases of the day—morning, afternoon, evening and night. Sketches of the moon and stars illustrate night time.**

**The health centre and the mobile medical hospital are using these picture prescriptions. According to doctors, patients say other family members also refer to these drawings to take their medicine.**

**After examining his medicine bottle and its label, 75-year old Rajaram Vithu Hode, a farmer from Kunda village smiled and remarked, "Now I will remember everything."**



health needs, the socio-economic status of inhabitants and the distance of villages from health facilities," explains Dr Radheshyam Pandey, medical project manager of the hospital.

In 1992, the mobile healthcare clinic was named the Muktananda Mobile Hospital (MMH), after a local spiritual leader. The MMH increased its visits, travelling to seven villages five times a week and attending to 40,000 patients every year. Between 2000 and 2002, the MMH attended to 143,000 patients. A registration fee of Rs10 was charged, including medicines. People who could not pay were treated free.

Complicated cases are guided to appropriate health facilities. For instance, eight-year-old Seema Madho Jhate from Nandani village suffered from a serious heart ailment. With timely intervention and proper referral from MMH, Seema was admitted to Nayar Hospital in Mumbai and now she says, "I feel good because I can play with my friends without any problems."

After operating the MMH for two decades, Prasad Chikitsa officials realised they had to

enhance their health delivery system. "We wanted to reduce the follow-up period with patients which was on a weekly basis. Besides, the MMH service identified additional health needs of the people," says Dr Pandey.

**The fight against disease:** Tuberculosis is a priority for Prasad Chikitsa. Around 1994, Prasad Chikitsa started the four drugs and short course treatment regimen recommended by the World Health Organisation (WHO). Later, they discovered that out of 269 TB patients, one-third were women and 40 per cent below the age of 24. Since TB was increasing, Prasad Chikitsa adopted the state-run Direct Observation Therapy (DOT) tuberculosis programme.

"Once a patient is diagnosed, a health outreach worker identifies a DOT provider - a community or family member, who is given the patient's full course of medicine and the responsibility of directly observing the intake of medicine by the patient on alternative days. In case of irregularity, the DOT provider contacts the outreach worker who follows up with the patient," explains Dr Pandey. Around 70 to 80 people benefit every month, and the success rate is 90 per cent - 5 per cent above the government target!

Preventive and curative dentistry is part of Prasad Chikitsa's comprehensive health strategy. In 1991, they started a dental van that caters to around 2,200 people a year. Patients can avail of an entire range of dental services. To prevent dental diseases, Prasad Chikitsa has been building awareness about oral hygiene among school students.

Similarly, the NGO started ear, nose and throat (ENT) services through an OPD twice a month. Patients who

require surgery are referred to a clinic where they are charged concessional rates. When many cases of heart disease, hypertension and diabetes were reported by the MMH, a cardiology OPD was started once a month.

Two serious health issues in Thane district are maternal and childhood illnesses and cataract-related blindness. In March 2002, the NGO began a reproductive and child health programme in 13 villages north of Ganeshpuri, after outreach workers conducted a survey to select villages with a large tribal population. The survey revealed that girls were marrying very young and having babies far too early. Nor were they spacing their pregnancies.

Prasad Chikitsa identified all the pregnant women and encouraged them to attend ante-natal checkups at the health centre or the MMH. "A lady in my village took me to the MMH during my first pregnancy," says young Fashi Ulhas Gire. "I was embarrassed to talk with the doctor tai (sister). After a lot of interaction, I realised the importance

*(Continued on next page)*

# The 1 computer village revolution

**Rina Mukherji**  
Kolkata

**I**N every village, people hunt for critical information. Sometimes, after a lot of trouble, they get to know. Often the information given to them is wrong. Anil Shaligram's project, 'One Village, One Computer' teaches village communities how to use a computer, collect information, find out the truth and confront the government. Armed with accurate knowledge, communities are forcing the government to implement e-governance and improve services.

In the late 1990s, Shaligram was running a desktop publishing business in Thane, Maharashtra. It struck him that information technology could leverage development in villages, but nobody was doing it. He wrote copiously on the subject, excited by its possibilities.

"The government has never used e-governance. Intentions expressed have not been implemented," he says.

In 1999, Shaligram decided to carry out his ideas. He received support from Asha for Education, an NRI group in the US. He borrowed the name of his organisation, 'One Village One Computer' (IVIC) from a heading given by a sub-editor of Jansatta to an article he'd written for them.

His pilot project in 2000 was a database of landless labour in Nandurbar district for the Shet Mazdoor Union (Farm Labourers Union). He then compiled a second database of 10,000 migrant labour in the sugar industry for the Ustod Vahtuk Kamgar (Sugarcane Plucking and Transport Workers union). His third database was on ration shops in Thane and Pune for the Janawadi Mahila Sanghatana.

These successful pilot projects attracted the attention of the Maharashtra Foundation, which helped him with seed capital. Shaligram set up his first IT Sewa Kendra in Murbi, Raigad district, Navi Mumbai. From here IVIC embarked on a mission to spread computer literacy among the rural youth.

Similar Kendras were set up in Rodpali in Raigad district, Karad in Satara district, Manwat in Parbhani district, Alangul in Nashik district, Nitrud in Beed district, Dara and Padalada in Dhule district and Mod in Nandurbar district.

Dalit women supervise the Manwat Sewa Kendra. Six women activists manage the Murbi Sewa Kendra. Thanks to computer literacy, communities in each

centre work for their own development.

For instance, the Murbi Sewa Kendra conducted a survey and detected 29 cases of malaria, which were ultimately treated by the primary health centre in the village. The Manwat Kendra found 76 people affected by cholera and gastroenteritis. They exposed flaws in the government's health



Rural women at one of Anil Shaligram's Sewa Kendras

**The Manwat Kendra questioned official rainfall figures which stated the monsoon of 2003 was 15 per cent above average. The Kendra's volunteers collected rainfall data.**

care system. The authorities were forced to arrange a six-day medical camp.

Databases prepared on ration shops and below the poverty line (BPL) ration cards by the Murbi and Manwat Kendras enabled many to avail of government schemes. The Manwat Kendra compiled a database identifying homeless BPL people so that they could get housing under the government's Gharkul Yojana. Seven BPL persons, left out earlier, were finally included.

In 2002-03, a database by the Manwat Kendra on unemployed people, got 700 people work under the

state's employment guarantee scheme (EGS). In 2003-04, 4000 persons were provided work under the EGS, staving off rural to urban migration.

In Rodpali, a group of unemployed youth built a database listing their skills, education and capacities. It helped them negotiate jobs with a new company nearby and 21 boys were recruited. Youth from

Raigad district of Navi Mumbai got their job applications processed for dissemination through the Internet making it easier for them to find jobs. The gram panchayats of three villages have agreed to pay IVIC the fees of students selected from their villages for IT training.

IVIC has also been collaborating with the United Nations' Virtual University to educate people on water management and sanitation. As a result, a rainwater-harvesting project is functioning in Nitrud, Beed district.

Local panchayats and communities are being introduced to IVIC's Jalchitra water auditing and management software. Developed by Dr Vikram Vyas, the software maps water resources in villages. The Manwat Kendra has tips on prevention of water pollution, cleaning of

common water tanks, the erection and maintenance of water pumps and sanitation.

IVIC has been lobbying for accurate methods of data collection to hone up the government's official records. The Manwat Kendra questioned official rainfall figures which stated the monsoon of 2003 was 15 per cent above average. The Kendra's volunteers collected rainfall data from every village and found that the rainfall was less than average in most parts of the district. The discrepancy, the Kendra pointed out, was because the government recorded figures on the basis of rainfall received at the district headquarters.

Farmers in Manwat have recently presented a proposal for a Krishi Bajarbhav Kendra (Agricultural Market Prices Centre) to the government. The District Agricultural department has also approached the Manwat Kendra to initiate organic farming in the district.

IVIC is now venturing into Internet broadcasting. A new IT Sewa Kendra in Alangul, Nashik district is working out modalities with Adarsh Samata Shikshan Sanstha, an NGO that works in 400 villages.

(Anil Shaligram is a fellow with Ashoka Innovators for the Public.)

**(Continued from previous page)**

of periodic health checkups. I had a safe delivery. Normally, girls my age lack awareness about pregnancy. Ignorance can lead to serious consequences. I am now trying to influence my friends and relatives to access health services."

"Dealing with target groups directly has immense impact," says Madhavi Rathod, general manager of Prasad Chikitsa. Workshops with adolescents discuss the human body, sexual behaviour, hygiene, HIV/AIDS and other health issues.

Prasad Chikitsa is also training traditional midwives

to identify high-risk pregnancies for early referral. It is educating them on hygienic delivery practices, pre- and post-natal healthcare, says Marie Elrington, supervisor of the Reproductive and Child Health Programme. Prasad Chikitsa is also collaborating with Nanyar Hospital, Mumbai, for a statistical baseline on maternal and infant morbidity and mortality.

The popular Netrachikitsa hospital has a 16-bed in-patient care facility with modern facilities to treat cataract and other eye diseases. "I thought only God had the power to return eyesight to a blind person. The staff and the doctors in this hospital are no less

than gods for my family. I got my wife operated here. After her eyesight returned, I was motivated to get myself operated," says Balchandra Dattatray Gharat.

Three young, city-bred doctors manage this programme. The doctors consider themselves fortunate to work in a rural area with the latest ophthalmological equipment. Dr Anurag Agarwal, the youngest in the group, says they opted to work here because Prasad Chikitsa's offer was the best. Dr Prasad Mane and Dr Sanjay Sonawale are appreciative of the NGO's health strategies and programmes.





Ashish Rajpal (extreme left) with members of the Idiscoveri team on the terrace of their office at Anand Lok, New Delhi.

Photographs by LAKSHMAN

# TEACHING TEACHERS

## A team of young professionals gets down to making education creative

**Vidya Viswanathan**  
New Delhi

LAST month 25 teachers at St. Kabir's, a school in Chandigarh, were asked to hold pencils in their left hands and copy Oriya letters from the blackboard. They were told to write within two fine lines and fill a whole page. After five minutes they were groaning. But their instructor, Tapaswini Sahu, a child psychologist whose mother tongue is Oriya, was firm. They had to complete the task. After they were done, she asked them to jot down their emotions. The words that came out were 'anger', 'resentment'...

"This is what you make children do. Alphabets mean as little to them as these Oriya letters mean to you," Sahu told the teachers. "So what you have in class, 365 days a year, are the emotions you just described."

Tapaswini designs curricula for teachers at Idiscoveri, a nine-year-old Delhi



based for-profit social enterprise whose ambition is to change the face of classrooms in 150,000 public schools in the country. "Education in this country means success for a handful and mediocrity for the rest," says Ashish Rajpal, the 35-year-old CEO of Idiscoveri. "I cannot accept mediocrity for my own two children. So, for me mediocrity for other children is also unacceptable. And who are CBSE, a principal and or some teacher to judge them?" he says.

The 15-member schools team at Idiscoveri wants to make education a process that encourages excellence by being meaningful and fun. They want to break regimentation in schools and in classrooms, bring communities into schools and most of all reinvigorate bored schoolteachers. Classrooms should be centres of activity and not rows of desks and a black board with an authoritarian teacher.

The mission of Idiscoveri is to get teachers to understand the development stages of children at different ages, keep abreast of current learning research

# 'Schools are like Tihar Jail'

**A**SHISH RAJPAL, 38-year-old CEO of Idiscoveri, is determined to make a difference to education in this country. He studied management at XLRI in Jamshedpur and went on to work for Procter and Gamble and Danone. He then spent a year doing a masters in education at Harvard. He spoke to *Vidya Viswanathan* about his views on education and his plans for Idiscoveri.

## So how did *idiscoveri* start?

We were five friends who got out of XLRI in 1990. We knew we had to do something on our own so that we didn't just end up selling soap for an FMCG company. We wanted to do something different.

We first started a very successful events and marketing company. But what we had in common was the outdoors. I had been to the US in 1988 as a camp counsellor to Camp America. There were 6000 camps there

then and none in India. So when Tarun wanted to start a camp in 1996 all of us pitched in with Rs 15,000 and leased a place in Sitlakheth with more loans from friends and family. We went door to door to parents. We held focus groups. We were in our mid-twenties and our sincerity and background were on test.

When we got good feedback we were a lot more confident. We did not have a "change the world" idea then, it was just a fun outdoor thing. We just got feedback from middle-class parents who said their children had enjoyed it and they were a lot more independent. I was wondering if we were really doing something about learning by experience or had just got lucky. I had then moved from Procter and Gamble and was working at Danone in Paris. I could support the venture financially a little more but wanted to come back. Then Jayant Kriplani, the theatre personality who held some workshops at our camp, filmed the children there and I got the film in France. That set me thinking.

## You are addressing rich schools with upper middle class children. What difference does it make?

What is the aspiration today? DPS with 4500 children in one school, 45 to 50 children in a classroom, all going to tuitions after school? Look at the World Bank site and they quote DPS and NIIT as the models for education. If a man earns Rs 5000 today, his aspiration when earns Rs 10,000 is to get his child into DPS.

I have studied Gandhi's work and the independence movement. In 1905 when he returned every Indian wanted to be a Brit, talk and dress like one and go overseas and become a lawyer. In 1925, Gandhi brought about a social transformation because he caught the imagination of the Sarabhais, Birlas and the Nehrus. He made it chic to wear khadi. Gandhi changed the social aspiration. The privileged always have responsibility with them. Now there are 400 million Indians in subhuman condition. Does a rich Indian



Ashish Rajpal

**In 1925, Gandhi brought about a social transformation because he caught the imagination of the Sarabhais, Birlas and the Nehrus. He made it chic to wear khadi. Gandhi changed the social aspiration. The privileged always have responsibility with them. Now there are 400 million Indians in subhuman condition. Does a rich Indian have more responsibility than a rich European? I think the answer is yes.**

have more responsibility than a rich European? I think the answer is yes.

## What are your principles in education?

Now we have five principles - Every child has the right to win. We are bothered about what is to be taught and how it is to be taught - construct experiments and activities that promote real understanding. The curriculum should emphasise the real utility of knowledge and should be aligned to the developmental phases of children. Education should also deal with emotional, physical and spiritual development. Schoolteachers should be interested in

children, be well compensated and empowered to design the classroom experience. Schools should be more like communities. Today they are like Tihar jail. The walls go up every year. A school doesn't need marble floors and air-conditioning. It needs good human resources.

## How do you break the cynicism in a school leadership programme?

We do a lot of plain speaking. Everyone feels pressurised by the system. But who is the system? Can school authorities exhibit leadership or should they wield authority? Can they trust their own teachers for example? Do they care? If they do what have they done?

## What is the business model at Idiscoveri? Is it sustainable?

Everyone here earns a fraction of we could earn outside. Everybody in this company owns stocks. We do not want to raise funds from outside because some 28-year-old venture capitalist from Hong King is going to tell us what to do. He will want us to train corporates instead of schools where we make more money. The schools business is now sustainable because of backing from Wipro. Eventually we will be sustainable on our own. Look, all of us know school trusts are a front to make money. They are going to have to become transparent. There are a lot of resources in the system.

and also understand that each child has multiple intelligences. A teacher should find multiple entry points into any subject and be sensitive to the emotions of children. Assessment systems need to discard being judgmental and instead profile a child. Ultimately, Idiscoveri wants to turn school teaching into a sought after, creative, well-paid profession.

If that sounds like a huge task, Idiscoveri has chopped it into three services.

First: A 12-day leadership module targeted at educationists - school owners or principals - in three modules that costs Rs 30,000 per head.

Second: A 20-day schoolteacher's empowerment programme at Rs 11,000 per head.

Third: A whole school transformation programme where they handhold a school through several months. Each school pays one-third of the training cost. Wipro, the Bangalore-based technology company, pays for the rest under its Wipro Applying Thoughts in Schools (WATIS) programme.

Wipro is also looking at a whole school as a unit of change and is working with several partners. "We would like to think we influenced their business model rather than the other way around," says an extremely confident Rajpal. Anand Swaminathan, Wipro's manager for community initiatives is upbeat about Idiscoveri. "Ashish is one guy who really believes that change will happen and that he can make it happen. He has a very strong view on action. He has studied the Gandhian movement and believes in the idea that mass movements can happen. Idiscoveri has attracted a lot of good people in their team in a very short time unlike most NGOs or even young corporates. That is an indication," he points out.

Even though the team at Idiscoveri now has lofty aims it began very modestly. Nine years ago, five classmates from XLRI (Xavier Labour Relations Institute) were looking for something to do other than sell soap in a consumer company. All of them also happened to love the outdoors. Tarun Chandna came up with the idea of running an outdoor camp for children. They leased a place in the Himalayas with an investment of Rs 15,000 each. The camp business grew and several schools participated too. Idiscoveri also started working with training and team-building workshops in the outdoors for corporates.

One by one, three of them quit their jobs, but Rajpal, who had joined Proctor and Gamble from campus, had moved to Paris to work with Danone, the dairy company. The Idiscoveri camp, which was mainly for upper middle class kids, started getting a lot of extremely good feedback about how children were learning to be independent and enjoying the experience. That set Rajpal, who was then wondering about how to expand the business, thinking if he could do more about learning.

He gave up his lucrative corporate job in Paris and enrolled for a one-year masters programme in education at Harvard in 2000. At the university he met Anustup Nayak, an engineer who had already studied public policy and had now enrolled for the education programme after working in a couple of technology companies for six years.

"I was his subject. He was looking at why some people wanted to do socially useful work rather than just pursue success. I was studying large scale systemic changes around education," says Nayak, who is now a partner in the company along with the original founders.

Meanwhile their children's camp business had already attracted several mavericks like Gerry Martin, a self-taught wildlife biologist who has a reptile show on National Geographic, and Anubhav Das, a photographer who has trained at the International School of Photography and is interested in art education.

Rajpal came back to India with some ideas. Just then several corporates like Intel, IBM and Wipro were looking for partners to work with in education. Rajpal met all of them but felt that most of them just wanted to sell more computers.

Wipro's education programme, however, seemed to have a larger agenda. Their research had shown that even children who went to some of the best schools in the country were not creative and lacked critical thinking and problem solving skills. The view in Wipro was that there was a need to train teachers.

"Wipro being a consumer goods company was allotting different areas to different partners. We got Chandigarh and Dehradun because Delhi was already taken," quips Rajpal.

Idiscoveri had come to be known as campwallahs. Now they had to convince schools that they were into more serious business. They hit the pavement. As luck would have it Kanti Bajpai was taking over Doon School and he wanted to bring in change. So they delivered a 12-day programme. The Doon School teachers gave them excellent feedback. Wipro backing and Doon School's recommendation gave the fledgling company a lot of credibility. They trained teachers in half a dozen schools but soon realised that if they had to bring in

**Manit Jain, 31, the owner of Heritage wanted a school where education went beyond covering the syllabus. So he attended Idiscoveri's leadership workshops and is now part of Wipro's whole school programme.**



The lobby of the posh Heritage School in Gurgaon with its promotor Manit Jain (inset)

real change, they had to infect the top. "The decision-makers in schools are often the school owners and in rare cases principals. So we launched a leadership programme for them," explains Parminder Singh, who had earlier set up a centre for learning excellence at Mahindra BT.

Singh, who has been dreaming of setting up a school since he himself left school and has met several educationists over the years to understand how to do so, sold the first leadership programme held over 12 days in three modules.

The first module is about discovering the self. "Learning happens when people are out of their comfort zone. So we take them outdoors. With activities that include rappelling down rocks, role-playing and readings, we get them to figure themselves out. They figure out the kind of learners they are and whether they have learnt anything new in a long time. We stretch their horizons," explains Gerry Martin.



Many questions about self are raised. "You become truly yourself. You come out with personal and professional problems that you have never told anyone. Your levels of confidence soars sky high. Everything is like a transparent box and you come out with things that cause negative feelings in you," says E Prasad Rao, an educationist who has started a school called Prakriti in Karim Nagar, a town about 160 km from Hyderabad, with his own savings and loans.

"The participatory nature of the exercise was interesting. Ashish would draw from everybody and then put it up as methodology," says Rao, a farmer's son who is the first in his family to have studied beyond Class X.

June Jose, the head of Pallikudam, a progressive school in Kottayam in Kerala, started by Mary Roy, writer Arundhati Roy's mother, went through the same leadership programme that Rao did. Pallikudam got to know of the framework at a WATIS forum at Wipro. Jose chose Idiscoveri because Pallikudam children had already been to Idiscoveri camps in the Himalayas. She recollects an exercise in which they had to picture their dreams as little kids and reflect on what happened to them. Then they had to speak about their dreams now and say what they were doing to fulfil them.

"That forces you to focus," she says. "Also I was climbing rocks and jumping off a tree for the first time. It made me think that if I could do this anybody could do anything."

Idiscoveri's aim is to inculcate positive thinking in jaded educators who feel boxed in by the system. In the second module there is discussion on how classroom methods can work and in the third module the focus is again on the educator. What can the educator as a leader do for the school?

"They all blame the system," says Ashish. The problems run deep: the examination board, the syllabus, books that are controlled by a publishing mafia and finally the teachers. "So we ask them what they are doing from class one to seven. Why use those books? How interested are you? We show them that there is a lot of room for change."

So far, Idiscoveri has conducted four leadership programmes covering 80 educators. Their goal is 500 leaders in the next three years by which time they expect that they will be a 100-member team. "Out of the 500, there will be 50 who will want us to train their teachers and five will want us to work with the whole school. None of what we are saying is new. It has happened in a few individual schools but by influencing more schools we hope to be able to change the system," says Gerry Martin.

In the whole school programme Idiscoveri covers teaching, recruitment, admissions, curriculum, branding, processes in the school, the ambience... So far they helped set up the junior wing of the Strawberry Fields School in Chandigarh. The whole team is now working on transforming the junior section at The Heritage School in Gurgaon.

Manit Jain, 31, the owner of Heritage, wanted a school where education went beyond covering the syllabus, but did not know how to go about it. He considers his own education at the elite Modern School in Delhi and at Hindu College very limiting. So he attended Idiscoveri's leadership workshops and is now part of Wipro's whole school transformation programme.

Idiscoveri, which admits that so far it is only working with schools that can pay for all their development, wants to work with a rural school and a government school in addition to three schools that can pay in the next three years. They also want to set up an Idiscoveri institute of

# 'We realised that teachers are pawns in the system'

**W**IPRO, the Bangalore based technology company, supports a large effort called Wipro Applying Thought in Schools (WATIS). The tech company works with 15 partners who in turn work with several schools. Idiscoveri is a Wipro partner. **Anand Swaminathan**, manager, community initiatives at Wipro, spoke to **Vidya Viswanathan**.



Anand Swaminathan

## What is Wipro's goal in running this programme?

Terms used in education like 'mould a student like clay' bother me. I realise that there are lots and lots of people in this country who share this view. But many people are pessimistic about any possibility of change. I think the natural evolution process allows children to be creative. One needs to give them space.

In 1913, Rabindranath Tagore, in an essay, wrote in anguish that education has come to mean doing well in a onetime written exam. And after all these years we complain about the same thing. We cannot expect change through the government. The government has excellent people. Professor Jalaluddin the former director of NCERT (National Council for Educational Research and Training) and Krishna Kumar, the current director, are both widely respected people with a lot of ideas but feel boxed in too. So we have to bring all like-minded people on one platform to debate on new curriculum and push for change. That is what we are creating at Wipro. Idiscoveri is one of the agencies that approached us. We work with 15 others.

## Are the agencies you work with for-profit or non-profit?

You need to gather a critical mass. It does not matter if they are for-profit or non-profit. They have to be social enterprises. They have to have many reasons to exist and the model has to be sustainable over a long period of time. Idiscoveri has a sustainable business model.

Now we too started with the idea that if you guided the teachers, they could see the potential for change. But soon we realised that teachers are pawns in the system. They are the managed and not the managers. So we now involve all stakeholders. We now look at a school as a unit of change. Creating reflective schools: impacting the learning of children in a manner that can be sustained over time. Can you get people to start thinking? That is the bottom line.

## Idiscoveri is working with The Heritage School in Gurgaon. Are you involved with that?

Yes very much. We pay for 50 percent of the cost of that programme. Constructivism in learning says that different people construct their own meaning of the world. You can construct experiments for them to experience. The Pavlovian theory of learning to respond to repeated stimuli is not acceptable in education. Now if we are looking at constructivism as the principle of school change, you cannot tell teachers what you expect them to do. Most of them carry their own baggage from their legacy.

If you are saying that children derive completely different meaning at different time periods at different depths in very different ways, then the same is applicable to teachers. Now the learning that teachers are going through at Heritage follows the same methodology that we want them to use with children. To me that is very ethical.

However for me an equitable society is important and Heritage is a wealthy school. But, what the hell? Children are children even if they come in air-conditioned buses and they too deserve good education. I have been influencing Manit (Manit Jain, the owner of the The Heritage School) about this. A business can be in good business.

Heritage is one of the most expensive schools that we work with. We work with a school in Bhopal where the fee is Rs 50 a month. Ekalavya is working with five schools in Bhopal. NEEV (Network of Enterprising Educational Ventures) run by Professor AK Jalaluddin is working with Blue Bells and Gyan Bharati in Delhi. CEMD (Center for Education Management and Development) is working with two government schools.

## Are there other for-profit organisations with a sustainable business model in your portfolio?

Educational Alternatives in Ahmedabad that is working on a comprehensive independent assessment system (ASSET) is another. They work with a school called Rachana. They have a very interesting assessment system.

However I'm extremely upbeat about Idiscoveri because Ashish Rajpal is one guy who really believes that change will happen.

They have attracted a lot of good people in their team in a very short time unlike most NGOs. That is an indication. Even young corporates have problems attracting people. The fact that they have grown so much in a short time is an indication.

# 'Lively, engaging, no magic potions or instant pills'

**K**ANTI BAJPAI, who was a professor of international affairs at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), is now the principal of Doon School. Bajpai took the job to "see what small role I could play" in the process of improving schools and preparing students better for university. He is also an old boy of Doon School. He spoke about his views on education and his experience with Idiscoveri.

## What kind of changes are you bringing about at the school?

You want to keep the best practices of the school. But you also want to bring new practices and perspectives to bear from both India and outside.

Boarding schools tend to become townships of their own. So we want to bring in development outside in society -- in politics, international relations and the economy.

We want to stress more on the importance of reading and cultural issues. We have instituted reading awards to get children to come into the library and read. We want to get children to think about culture. We have started history trips. We took one batch of children and teachers to Delhi. We are taking another to Madhya Pradesh.

We want to talk a lot more about philosophy -- not metaphysical but issues that confront us in everyday life: capital punishment, ethics around cloning, euthanasia, democracy and practical significances of democratic life. Students make decisions in school governance. We have added a few things in that. We now have elections between two nominated school captains. This is not a fully wide-open election but students have to make real choices. Students have been made part of the discipline council. We give school colours for excellence. Now they make choices, they give recommendations for these awards.

## How did you come to engage with Idiscoveri?

Idiscoveri came to us. As the school reinvents itself we need exposure to a wide array of practices. They were backed by Wipro, a company that does not make idle choices. They are immersed in the philosophy of education, they have had the opportunity to look at comparative best practices across

institutions in India and overseas and are an organisation committed to innovation in education.

## How did the programme go and what were the results?

It was a tailor made 10-day workshop. We played leadership and team-building games that corporates play and now other organisations have started playing. There were informal brainstorming sessions moderated by a Idiscoveri facilitator who was posing questions, getting answers and then shaping the discussion. There were some formal lectures on how the brain processes information, how do you think or come up with new ideas - physiology of education. We discussed learning styles, cutting edge education research. Six months later there was a follow-up. They sat through classes and gave us further feedback.

It was a complete package. They were lively, engaging and responsible. They did not offer any magic potions or instant pills. We have a set of teachers here who feel they are in the best school in the country. They had to be persuaded and not overwhelmed. Even a veteran here said he felt stimulated and challenged and at the same time relaxed.

What makes a good teacher? You think you know. But when you begin thinking, it is not an easy answer. There are also special challenges in a

residential school. There are pastoral care issues. A 24 X 7 existence is stressful for teachers. They know how to open up issues and make you self-conscious.

## Is Doon School modelled on a British public school?

Yes of the 1930s, 40s or the 50s. We have 20 kids in a class and 55 teachers in the school for 500 students. The students here don't respond to day school type lectures. They feel they are the best and that they deserve the best. Teachers are expected to be lively and stimulating.

Today children have more access to information. They have competing sources and perspectives from radio, television, computers and movies. You have to persuade them and convince them about choices.

**What makes a good teacher? You think you know. But when you begin thinking, it is not an easy answer. There are also special challenges in a residential school.**

learning and enterprise. "The teachers we train here will become change agents. Some may even set up their own schools," says Ronnie Gulati, one of the original promoters.

A batch of 36 teachers from The Heritage School was taken to Badal, a village near Rishikesh. They were then broken into groups. They had to come up with questions that they had about the village and spend four days exploring those questions in the village in addition to other outdoor activities that they had never done before. "I was in a group interested in the effect of tourism on the village and we sought out the oldest man in the village (he was 90 years old) to find out what it was like before. Then we sought the opinion of the youth, women and men," says Nisha Raghuvanshi a junior-school teacher.

Other teachers chose different subjects. They learnt the history, geography, culture, education system and the economy of the place without books.

Has the training made a real difference to the way they feel and the way they approach problems in the classrooms? "Definitely," says Nilam Sharma, a Class 2 teacher who quit her job as a trainer with American Express. "Earlier, when I walked into a class I had children classified as intelligent, average and duh. Now I have learnt to ask why the performance was average that day."

Nisha says that even though she completed her bachelors in education through correspondence from the Indira Gandhi National Open University, it is only now that she has begun to understand theories. "Here we were made to observe children of different age groups as they played with objects that floated and sank. Each group presented how the children they had observed had behaved. Then we were told about Piagets's theory of development and how that matched with our observation," she says.

Nilam says she even plans her lessons with several activities now. She got children in class to act. Some were trees, some tigers and some woodcutters. When trees were cut children fell and they observed that tigers got exposed.

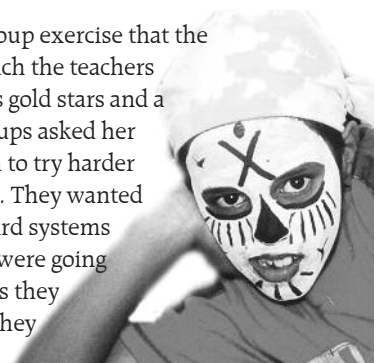
"Children then came up with what they thought would happen now that the tigers were in the open. We talked about what happens when we build houses. Then some kids talked about what they saw in Corbett and Gir. The conversation then moved on to rhinos," she says, quite proud of her class.

A child came the next day and talked about how killing tigers has been going on since the Assyrian times. They killed tigers in parks and the child also had a description of the parks of that time. Another child brought a newspaper clipping of how 18 tigers had been killed in Sariska.

Over the past six months, the 34 Heritage School teachers, along with another 30 that Idiscoveri helped recruit, have been going through rigorous training. They have been given a glimpse of how interesting maths can be. They have been reading research material. They are doing projects in groups or pairs and giving feedback, learning to observe children in a class of 30.

"Observation is a science now. You cannot write Jayant was disruptive and noisy in class because... that is judgmental. You just catalogue what Jayant did and at what time and the next day plan what you can do to help Jayant," says Gerry Martin.

Nothing has been left to chance. After a group exercise that the teachers completed, Tapasvini decided to teach the teachers about reward systems. She gave some groups gold stars and a couple of others silver stars. When some groups asked her why they hadn't got gold stars, she told them to try harder the next time. Soon there was furore in class. They wanted specific feedback. Then a discussion on reward systems ensued. The point was driven home. If they were going to design reward systems for children in class they should at least be aware of the feelings that they were going to arouse.



# Read us. We read you.



**Suresh Sharma's mission is to rescue snakes from people. Here you see him introducing his snakes to children. *Civil Society* found him in Chandigarh.**

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# Business

## BEYOND PROFIT

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

## A Rickshaw Bank in Guwahati

**Civil Society News**  
New Delhi

**G**UWAHATI may be nondescript and tucked away in the northeast, but it has the problems of a mega city: pollution, traffic chaos and the absence of efficient public transport. If you want to get around, you had better use a cycle rickshaw. It's safer and quicker and rickshaw pullers know local addresses well. But like other Indian cities, Guwahati did little for its rickshaws till a young veterinary doctor, Pradip Sarmah, transformed some of them into a modern, integrated fleet with the setting up of his Rickshaw Bank.

Five years ago, a chance conversation with a rickshaw puller made Sarmah think. He'd taken a ride and started chatting to while away the time. Sarmah listened patiently to the bedraggled rickshaw puller's long, familiar, woebegone story. And then one sentence got stuck in the good doctor's head.

"Sir, I have been pedalling this rickshaw for almost 17 years. But it doesn't belong to me," said the elderly rickshaw puller. Every day he paid Rs 20 out of his hard earned income of Rs 80 to the owner of the vehicle.

This was terribly unjust, thought Sarmah as he climbed out of the rickshaw.

The idea of a Rickshaw Bank slowly dawned on him. In 2003, he posted his proposal to the Citizen Base Investment Competition held by Ashoka Innovators for the Public. It won. International management consultancy firm McKinsey stepped in as guru. Big corporates lent their support. And in November 2004, Sarmah's rickshaw bank project became a reality. ONGC, IOC, Hindustan Lever and McKinsey, marked their presence at the bank's inauguration ceremony.

The rickshaw puller could not only own a redesigned rickshaw, he could even get insurance against accidents. A blue uniform gave him a sense of dignity. Local assembly units were set up to make the rickshaws. Unemployed Assamese youth found work. Eight rickshaw service stations sprang up. More people rode the rickshaw, decreasing pollution and increasing incomes.

The Rickshaw Bank is not a formal bank. But it collects money and provides finance to rickshaw pullers so that they can own their own vehicles. It is an arm of the Centre for Rural Development (CRD), an NGO started by Sarmah to boost incomes of people in Assam's villages through animal husbandry.

Sarmah had left a job with the state government in 1991 to join the voluntary sector. He worked with the Rashtriya Gramin Vikas Nidhi for a while, implementing a credit and small savings scheme sponsored by the Small Industries Development Bank of India's (SIDBI). He then launched CRD.

His first venture, Pet and Vet, spawned a chain of clinics for pets. His second, Vet Aid Centres, improved animal husbandry through self-help groups (SHGs). He partnered the World Bank to spruce up tanks and fisheries. And he started MANGO (Marketing Network of NGOs) so that SHGs could sell their products.

Micro-finance, he found, could work wonders.

Sarmah first found out if the rickshaw puller he'd talked to was telling the truth. He carried out a survey in Guwahati



and discovered out of 100 rickshaw pullers only three owned their vehicles. Although pullers did save a little money, they had to ferret away their cash. Without a fixed address, they had no access to banks and there was nobody to introduce them. Even if they lived in the city for 15 years, banks still considered them migrants. The police pounced on them. Most rickshaws were unlicensed, because getting the licences meant bribing the municipal authorities.

Sarmah rickshaw bank idea was to buy the rickshaws and rent them to the pullers for Rs 20 per day. This money would be treated as repayment towards the cost of the rickshaw. Once the entire amount had been paid, within a year, the puller would own the rickshaw. To become a member of the bank, a puller has to pay Rs 30.

Anirudh Gopalakrishnan, an analyst with McKinsey, shaped Sarmah's business plan. "We rewrote it and helped him with strategic planning, branding and marketing," says Anirudh. He got advice on how much he could raise from corporates, what to charge and whom to approach.

Sarmah got the rickshaw pullers licences and identity cards. Applications are sent by the Rickshaw Bank to the Municipal Corporation which forwards it to the Superintendent of Police (SP) for verification. After that the licences are issued.

Not a single rickshaw was insured. Sarmah floated tenders. Four insurance companies applied. He negotiated for the best terms. Finally, Oriental Insurance got selected. Every rickshaw is now insured for Rs 7000, the puller for Rs 50,000 and two passengers for Rs 25,000 each. A 30 per cent commission is paid to the bank on a premium of Rs 132.

By the time the insurance was worked out, the cost of the rickshaw had climbed from Rs 5,500 to Rs 7,000, including uniforms, insurance, licence and an identity card. Sarmah wanted to establish his bank with 500



**Dr Pradip Sarmah**

*(Continued on next page)*

## HOW TO RAISE MONEY

### Max New York Life gives SOS Rs 10 a policy



**Civil Society News**  
Gurgaon

**F**IND the right position for your cause. Choose the right large operation for support. And there could be substantial funds available without any strings attached. SOS Children's Villages gets Rs 10 on every policy sold by Max New York Life, a joint venture between Max India Limited and New York Life, a Fortune 100 company. Some 446,000 policies have been sold since the company began business in India, which means SOS has got around Rs 40,00,000.

Max New York Life sees this as cause-related marketing and has established a long-term relationship with SOS Children's Villages of India. There is an obvious synergy between its business philosophy and its corporate social responsibility (CSR) programme targeted at children.

Children are thus at the very heart of Max New York Life's strategy. SOS Children's Villages of India is internationally recognised for its work in giving underprivileged children a wholesome life. The mission of SOS is "to help orphaned and abandoned children, by providing them with a family, a permanent home, education and strong foundation for an independent life." It's a mission that ties in with Max New York Life's philosophy of helping people secure the future of their near and dear ones.

The involvement of Max New York Life in corporate social responsibility programmes is not just management driven. Several employees have donated clothes and toys and some others regularly donate funds at a personal level. Employee visits to SOS Villages are organised regularly to generate a sense of ownership and involvement among employees. An outcome of this involvement was a painting competition organised by Max New York Life employees on Children's Day in 2003. The theme of the painting competition was: "Making my wishes come true". The employees instituted two revolving trophies for winners of painting competitions.

Last year, employees donated Rs 18,900 of their own accord for supporting the education of SOS children. In August 2004, the company's Delhi-based employees organised a fund-raising event and raised an amount of Rs 70,000 for SOS Children's Villages.

Max New York Life has also instituted the David Allen trophy for the Most Socially Responsible Student at SOS Children's Villages. David Allen, an employee of New York Life, the parent company of the foreign partner headquartered in New York, has donated Rs 50,000 towards the rolling trophy, which will be awarded to a student, of the Herman Gmeiner (SOS) School at Faridabad, who displays and shows caring and a social responsibility towards his/her schoolmates or on a larger stage.

At Max New York Life, financial strength, integrity and a caring attitude are defining beliefs. Humanity is the essence, the foundation upon which the company makes decisions and interacts with policyholders, agents and employees. These principles also shape the responsibility to the communities where the company conducts business and where its involvement makes a difference in other people's lives.

(Continued from previous page)



Rickshaw pullers of the Rickshaw Bank

**Not a single rickshaw was insured. Sarmah floated tenders. Four insurance companies applied. He negotiated for the best terms. Oriental got selected.**

pullers. That would cost him Rs 35 lakh.

He turned to the corporate world for support. For Rs 7000 per rickshaw he offered advertising space at the back of the rickshaw for five years. "Rickshaws ply all over the city," he says, "so I reckoned the advertisements would have higher visibility than hoardings." Once one group of rickshaw pullers owned their vehicles another set would be bought for a new group.

His ad proposal found favour with ONGC, IOC and Hindustan Lever. One hundred rickshaws are sponsored by the corporates and 200 by the America India Foundation. To Sarmah's surprise none of the corporates wanted to advertise products. They opted for social messaging in Assamese. So slogans on "Small family, happy family" "Guwahati is our city keep it clean," began trundling through Guwahati's streets.

Sarmah's Rickshaw Bank got featured in newspapers. A touch of fame opened many doors. When he wrote to the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Delhi, inquiring whether they had energy efficient rickshaws, they replied, eager to offer him new models. But Sarmah opted for the IIT Guwahati model. "We needed rickshaws which could weather the rain in the northeast," he says simply.

IIT Guwahati's model is 40 percent lighter than the old rickshaws. It has ergonomic advantages too. The seat is flatter and the rickshaw is safer because it doesn't tilt when making a turn. Sarmah also got eight people trained at IIT in assembling the rickshaws and a unit was set up under the supervision of the Rickshaw Bank.

He then set up service stations for the new rickshaws. Five unemployed youngsters are formed into an 'affinity' group. They promise to abide by the rules and regulations of the Rickshaw Bank. They select a leader. Five groups form a garage or a little service station. Land is taken on rent. The Rickshaw Bank provides tools for repair. There are now eight service stations in Guwahati. There is a field collector who collects Rs 20 per day from the puller and notes it in the passbook. The Rickshaw Bank pays a nominal charge of about Rs 400 per month for this arrangement.

The new rickshaws have increased the income of the pullers by about 60 percent. Sarmah now wants to redesign the rickshaw as a school van, and as a mobile fast food joint.



# Rs 22 lakhs in Sruti's bags this year!

**Civil Society News**  
New Delhi

**R**UCHI Kashyap sits a little bit lost in the conference room of the defence ministry's directorate of rehabilitation. It's a big room with a table to match. But the four or five file covers Ruchi is trying to sell stand out even in this large space. The files are made from cloth and so pretty that your eye travels to them to the exclusion of everything else. The designs, embroidery and colours are quite unique and Ruchi is hopeful of getting a large order for a seminar that the directorate is planning.

"We are an NGO, but please don't buy our products for that reason," she tells Commander Ricky Srivastava. "Judge us on the quality and creativity of our work. If you want us to design something different we can do that as well for you."

Commander Srivastava leaves Ruchi in the conference room to take us to Maj Gen Kuldip S. Sindhu, the directorate's chief. We need to take some pictures and complete an interview with the General. By the time we return, Ruchi has left. She is a busy businesswoman travelling across Delhi and its suburbs in search of contracts that can sustain Sruti, the NGO she works for.

Sruti stands for Society for Rural Urban and Tribal Initiatives. It funds change leaders at the grassroots. They could be in cities or in villages but they must primarily work with the needy and disenfranchised. Some of Sruti's money comes from funding, but the rest it has learned to earn.

Ten years ago it launched into business by collecting waste paper from offices and selling it. Then there were export rejects in garments which came its way. One thing led to another and soon Sruti was making paper bags with cloth handles.

Ruchi joined fresh from a sales job with Dabur and a brief stint at another NGO. Her job was

**Ruchi Kashyap and Prathistha Goswami**

to build a market for Sruti's products, widen the range available and industrialise the operation primarily by stabilising production.

Rohit Jain, Sruti's executive director, and MM Singh, a board member, also plunged in. They wanted Sruti to build on its self-reliance and reduce its dependence on grants and other sources of funding. An NGO could do business and be competitive, it was agreed, though not without eyebrows being raised and some well-intentioned concern over being able to manage an enterprise efficiently.

As it turns out, there was little need to worry. Sruti closes this year with an estimated Rs 22 lakhs in sales and perhaps Rs 6 lakhs in profit. It produces some 4000 bags a month and gets export orders. It supplies retailers like Westside, Bombay Stores, Landmark, Ebony, Shoppers' Stop. Sruti's bags go across the country to Kolkata, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Chennai, Pune and Kanpur.

The business began with six designs. Today there are 42 designs, many of them the result of what customers ask for. There is a workshop at Shahpur Jat where the NGO employs 10 boys who earn between Rs 2500 and Rs 4000 a month depending on orders. A screen printing machine has been installed with Rs 60,000 or so received as a gift from the British High Commission.

Slowly, an NGO in need of funding has become an enterprise and learnt how to fend for itself as it has gone along. Bhagwat Singh Bist is the supervisor for the production unit. He was lured away from an export house. Prathistha Goswami, a young fashion designer, has joined to keep up the pace of innovation.

What has been the secret of Sruti's success? Ruchi believes it is the resolve to take themselves seriously and offer value for money. "We never say we are a poor NGO, help some poor people and buy our products. No. We first talk about the quality of our products, then our ability to always deliver on time and finally we tell customers that the money we earn goes towards good causes."

Innovation is also important. To be competitive a range of products and designs is needed. Thus file covers and attractive envelopes are also being made. Sruti believes one of its strengths is that it gives people what they want. It creates for its customers. Most NGOs do not do this.

"The marketing person is the best designer," says Ruchi. "He or she knows what will sell, what interests people." So far it has been Ruchi, Rohit and others at the NGO who have been putting their ideas together. "We all chip in," says Ruchi.

Flexible marketing is the other thing. Bags for wine bottles do well abroad, so Sruti does lots of them, in different models.

Like any aggressive start-up, Sruti doesn't like to miss a sale. "Wherever we get a chance we set up a table and put out our bags. The embassies have been very good to us. But we don't fool ourselves. Our products only sell because they have a certain quality. Take that away and we would be nowhere," explains Ruchi.

Contact Sruti at: Q-1, Hauz Khas Enclave, New Delhi-110016  
Phone: 26569023, Fax: 011-26964946, E-mail: sruti@vsnl.com



## A blind school's appeal

A school for blind and deaf children near Chamoli in Uttaranchal is relocating to Rishikesh and needs Rs 75 lakhs for construction. The state government has provided land. The school is run by Aadharshila, an NGO. It was founded four years ago by Jairaj, a journalist from Delhi and Chanchal Thakur an advocate in the Delhi High Court, who works as a project coordinator with Aadharshila.

The group has 50 members including journalists, doctors, lawyers and social activists. Each donates Rs 1000, so the school has been running on Rs 50,000 per month.

The children are from neighbouring villages. There are no roads, health centres or even a post office here. Aadharshila went to surrounding villages identifying children with disability and persuading their parents to send them to school. They have a vehicle that picks up the children and then drops them home in the evening. The school currently has 16 students, boys and girls between 8 to 15 years of age. Four teachers, trained at the Lady Heller Institute in Bangalore, teach them Braille. The school provides hearing aids and other assistance.

Setting up a bigger school will help Aadharshila provide residential and other facilities. The new school will be a *gurukul* called Kshitij. It will welcome children from poorer families regardless of their abilities or disabilities, says Jairaj. Fees will be charged on a case-to-case basis. They estimate a running cost of Rs 2 lakhs per month. Forty teachers will be trained with help from the Perkins School for the Deaf and Blind in Boston.

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Mobile: 9810766913



Maria Amir, Mehnaz Sukhera and Resham Zaigham at Delhi's Walled City

## LSR's pact with Lahore

Tonusree Basu and Shailey Hingorani  
New Delhi

LADY Shri Ram College (LSR), New Delhi, and Kinnaird College (KC), Lahore, are forging a partnership. Sponsored by the Medeleine Ihsan Ullah Programme, an exchange has started between LSR's department of journalism and KC's mass communication programme. Three students and a faculty member from LSR visited Lahore for two weeks early this year.

"In 40 minutes we covered a distance that once seemed insurmountable," commented Vanessa Chisti, a student, when she landed at Lahore airport. This month, a delegation from Pakistan, consisting of four students and the head of KC's mass communication programme, stayed at LSR for two weeks.

"The present generation has grown up with impressions of oscillating peace efforts and media perceptions of the 'other' across the border," remarked Rina Kashyap, head of LSR's department of journalism. "Through this, students of these two colleges will be encouraged to walk beyond the legacy of the Partition and form their own opinions, first-

Lahore's elite. "Sometimes home seemed tucked away in a far and distant land and sometimes we had to pinch ourselves to believe that this wasn't home," they said.

When Maria Amir, Mehtab Lasharie, Mehnaz Sukhera and Resham Zaigham from KC came for their Indian sojourn, they felt the same. They claimed that the traffic, roads, weather and even historical monuments, made Delhi seem no different from Lahore. The only difference, according to them, is that a lot more girls wear jeans. They were keen to confirm, or even dismiss, pictures that the 'saas-bahu' serials and Bollywood movies painted of India.

The Pakistani delegation spent their time meeting editors and other media persons working with national dailies, magazines and TV channels. They shopped at markets in Delhi. Faculty member Sameera Jamil even bargained in Bengali with shopkeepers at Dilli Haat!. They learnt about Jama Masjid's history and listened to stories about the labyrinth of gullies in Chandni Chowk. The KCites spent considerable time in LSR attending lectures and talks on subjects ranging from the Resonance of Colour in Indian consciousness to the representation of Indo-Pak relations in Bollywood.

LSR students learnt about themes ranging from Lollywood (the Pakistan film industry based in Lahore) to the status of women in Pakistan.

"We are completely overwhelmed with the hospitality here. We hope this programme is just the first step to something much larger," said Mehtab Lasharie. They also cautioned the media on both sides from projecting stereotypes. "The media has a crucial role to play - whether news media or popular films. One recent popular film showed people in Pakistan greeting each other with *adaab*. Nobody says *adaab* back home!" they said.

hand."

Nandini Chawla, a student who visited Lahore, said a very thin line separates perceptions from stereotypes. "After the visit some stereotypes got broken down while others were reinforced," she said. The Delhi students interacted with students at KC, discussed core issues with eminent Pakistani media persons, explored Lahore, which they said reminded them of Old Delhi, and even partied till the wee hours with

## Sharing dreams at Shri Ram

**C**HARITIES Aid Foundation, New Delhi celebrated their first donor meet by organising an event called Share My Dream at the Shri Ram School, New Delhi. NGOs put up stalls and sold products made by grassroot organisations.

A drawing competition followed. Children were asked to share their dreams on paper. The ten best painters were rewarded with the opportunity to learn murals at a future workshop. Chotu, a Class 5 student from Prayas got the best artist award.

There were group songs, folk songs and poetry recitation by children from Sankalp. Cansupport and Sankalp were judged the best stalls in the stall contest.

## PIPFPD's Youth Assembly

**T**HE Seventh Joint Convention of the Pakistan-India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy (PIFPD), held a youth assembly for the first time. Colleges from all over India including Miranda House, Lady Shri Ram College in Delhi and National Law School, Bangalore took part.

Started in 1993, PIPFD has two national chapters in India and Pakistan consisting of peace loving people from all walks of life. They realise that youth frame the future of Indo-Pak rela-

tions and its essential for them to get together. Participants were introduced and this helped break the ice. A peace song, "The world is a family", a song specially composed for the youth assembly, was sung.

Sunil Dutt, Union Minister for Sports and Youth Affairs, who was the chief guest, talked about his days in Pakistan as a young adult. He said because of tensions between the two countries he could not visit his village for years. And finally when he went back, he was welcomed with

open arms as a son of the soil.

The Oscar-nominated movie, 'The Little Terrorist' by Ashwin Kumar, was screened. The film is about a young Pakistani boy, whose cricket ball bounces to the other side of the border.

The film traces the boy's efforts at retrieving his ball by crossing the border and how a Hindu family provides him shelter. The family shaves the boy's hair to make him look like a Brahmin child and protect him from being captured by the border police.

# Perspectives

## CATCHING TRENDS

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

# When Mumbai wants to be Shanghai

ARUN MAIRA



## Let's Talk

WE are proud that we are a democratic country. We should also feel safe. The right to invade another country to introduce democracy has been claimed in recent times as the ultimate, God-given right, when all other reasons to invade could not stand scrutiny. Nobody has an excuse to invade us to introduce democracy to our country. Indeed, it is ironic that we had to seize our own country from a foreign power to enable democracy to develop! Mahatma Gandhi wanted democracy—the right of every Indian, including Harijans to be equal, as much as he wanted freedom from the British. In fact, as the freedom struggle played out, he was on occasions willing to give the British more time in India if they would allow more participation in governance to Indians. And he even moderated his struggle against them when he felt that Indians were not yet ready to treat each other and all human beings, including the British, with the respect that every human deserves.

Democracy is an idea. The principle that all human beings are equal. The right of every human being, man or woman, to be free from bondage to another. These were the ideas that drove the Mahatma. And these are the fundamental beliefs on which the concept of democracy is founded. But the idea alone is not enough. Democracy needs structures to enable people to participate in decision-making. And democracy also requires processes for people to understand issues that affect their lives so that they can use the structures of democracy—elections of representatives and debates in the elected assemblies—intelligently. If the constitutional structures, and assemblies are the muscles of the democratic body, the processes of public education and public debate are the circulatory systems—the blood flow and nervous system—that a healthy body also needs. India has the constitutional structures that enable people to vote in elections, and they do so regularly and in large numbers, making India the largest democracy in the world.



LAKSHMAN

**Democracy needs structures to enable people to participate in decision-making. And democracy also requires processes for people to understand issues that affect their lives so that they can use the structures of democracy—elections of representatives and debates in the elected assemblies—intelligently.**

The idea of democracy is alive in India. Participative democracy is also functioning, by and large. But what is the quality of the processes of deliberative democracy and public reasoning—the third essential component of a democratic society?

In a democratic and diverse country, such as India, consensus is required for all stakeholders to move together, forward and faster. This consensus cannot be commanded in a democracy. Nor can it be obtained by debates within elected assemblies in which representatives take pre-determined party positions, and where their objective most often is to embarrass the other side. The consensus has to be developed through, what Amartya Sen calls a process of "public reasoning". Therefore, it behoves economists, businessmen, and policymakers, who are keen to get the economy onto a faster trajectory of growth in GDP beyond the 7 percent trend rate we may be now approaching, to apply the right methodology to improve the process of public reasoning in India. Many problems in India, such as the improvement of Mumbai to make it comparable to Shanghai as many aspire for, require consensus for solutions. While we may learn great skills for

large-scale project management from China, we may have to look elsewhere, to democratic countries, for insights into how to rapidly achieve consensus in a democracy.

Let us turn to the USA, one of the most vibrant democracies in the world, to learn what we can emulate and what we should not. In his book, *Democracy's Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy*, Michael Sandel says, "After World War II, the civic strand of economic argument faded from American political discourse. Economic policy attended more to the size and distribution of the national economic product and less to the conditions of self-government. Americans increasingly viewed economic arrangements as instruments of consumption, not as schools for citizenship." In *The Future of Freedom*, Fareed Zakaria describes the deep division of American public opinion created by competing "think tanks" aligned with opposing ideologies. The first think tanks in the USA, such as the Council on Foreign Relations, were created before World War II with bipartisan support because "people truly believed that it was important for a democracy to have a place for civil discourse on important public

*(Continued on page 21)*

# Support the other Satyendra Dubey

ARVIND KEJRIWAL



## The Right To Know

**T**HE Eklakhi-Balurghat New Railway Line in West Bengal was designed for a speed of 100 km per hour. Money was spent to achieve that speed. But corruption took its toll and the line has been finally approved for a speed of just 60 km per hour by the Commissioner of Safety. At some places, the quality is so poor that almost about 40 km of the total stretch of 87 km could be approved for just 10 km per hour. The ballast and blanketing material used in the construction is so defective that it can be the cause of derailment in future. The cost of this railway line is so high that per unit cost spent on the construction of this project is more than that spent on the state-of-the-art Konkan Railways.

And when S K Nagarwal, the then Executive Engineer working on this project reported corruption to his superiors including the Railway Board, the letter of complaint was leaked to the contractor mafia. He has since been subjected to several transfers and his Annual Confidential Reports (ACR) have been spoiled by his bosses. The contractors have threatened to eliminate him and his family.

Nagarwal is an officer of the Indian Engineering Service of the 1995 batch. He was asked to pass false bills, prepare false records of testing and allow payments to contractors. When he did not succumb, his superiors made adverse entries in his ACR, when he was to be considered for promotion just two days later. His official facilities like a vehicle, supporting staff, telephones etc were withdrawn. He was forced to work under an officer junior to him. He was insulted before his subordinates.

Nagarwal noted several other irregularities taking place in this project. He reported them to his seniors with documentary record by way of photographs, file numbers, modus operandi etc. He made complaints to various agencies including the Executive Director, General Manager and Railway Board. In his complaint to the Railway Board, he specifically requested - "It is my request with folded hands that kindly do not disclose my identity to any of the persons connected in present or past with N F Railways. It will certainly result in my victimisation by the strong corrupt lobby of Narendra Singh in the N F Railway."

However, Nagarwal's complaint was routinely forwarded, along with his identity, to N F Railway Vigilance Department. The vigilance department of N F Railways conducted raids on the Eklakhi-Balurghat Project, seized about 35 files, collected samples from the field and advised stoppage of payments to contractors against substandard work.

However, the affected contractors were able to influence the Vigilance Department. All the seized files were returned. Samples were either tampered or thrown away by the vigilance officials. The officials were even directed to tamper and remove documentary evidence in files. Payments were released to the contractors against substandard work and investigations stopped. Nagarwal's complaint was successfully dumped.

Photocopies of Nagarwal's complaints were leaked to the affected contractors, who are threatening to kill him. Nagarwal was transferred to Katihar. Within three months, he was again transferred from Katihar to Guwahati. The transfer orders said

that he was being transferred because there was a threat perception to his life from his erstwhile colleagues and contractors working in the Eklakhi-Balurghat Project. He requested for security. He did not receive any response. He was even denied official facilities at Guwahati.

Scared by all these developments, in February 2004, Nagarwal filed a writ petition in Guwahati High Court praying for security and a CBI enquiry into allegations of corruption. The court issued interim orders that security should be provided to Nagarwal but N F Railway authorities disobeyed court orders. Nagarwal had to file two contempt petitions to force railways to comply with court orders and to provide him security, which is still inadequate.

Nagarwal wrote about his plight to the Chairman Railway Board with all evidence including audio-tapes and requested him to put an end to his victimisation, order a thorough enquiry and take action against the guilty officials but the Chairman also chose not to respond. Nagarwal's wife wrote a desperate letter to the Minister of Railways in July 2004. Again, no response was received. Nagarwal made complaints to the local CBI office. Again, he did not receive any response.

Under Supreme Court directions, the Central Government had recently issued an order making the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) the nodal agency to protect whistleblowers. According to this order, if any whistleblower makes a complaint of corruption to the CVC, the CVC would be required to provide protection to the whistleblower against any physical attack, any administrative victimisation of the whistleblower, to protect the identity of the whistleblower and to ensure proper investigation into charges of corruption.

Nagarwal complained to the CVC in February 2004. Nagarwal again wrote to the CVC in August 2004 seeking protection. However, Nagarwal has not received any response from CVC on any of his letters. Nagarwal's story appears to be a repeat of the Satyendra Dubey episode. There are several such whistleblowers, who are victimised no end. We do not even come to know about most of these stories. Bound by strict conduct rules, they cannot even talk to the media. They keep on tolerating victimisation and harassment in silence. For me, they are heroes. They could have chosen to continue working like thousands of their colleagues but they chose to speak up.

Last year, the government of India empowered the CVC to entertain complaints from whistle blowers and provide protection to them. The experience of

Nagarwal and some more whistleblowers confirms that the CVC will have to play a much more pro-active role to be able to inspire confidence in whistleblowers.

Such officers have critical information on corruption going on in their departments. It would be a serious blow to corruption, if all such officials could report their cases without fear of victimisation. It is to provide a credible platform to whistleblowers that a group of eminent and concerned citizens have come together as Citizens Forum Against Corruption (CFAC). CFAC has on its panel, citizens with integrity, credibility and independence. The panel consists of retired judges, advocates, activists, retired police officers and eminent members from various sections of society. Any government official, who has evidence of corruption taking place in government, may report it to the CFAC. If he so desires, the identity of the whistleblower will be kept confidential. The panel will take up the case with various agencies including CBI, CVC etc. As a last resort, the court's intervention may be sought.



**When S K Nagarwal, the then Executive Engineer, reported corruption to his superiors including the Railway Board, the letter of complaint was leaked to the contractor mafia. He has since been subjected to several transfers. The contractors have threatened his family.**

*To report cases of corruption, please contact:  
Naveen, c/o Citizens' Forum Against  
Corruption,  
C- 67, Sec 14, NOIDA.  
Email: tk.naveen@gmail.com*

# Not a poor country, but 260m poor...

RAM GIDOOMAL



## Through NR Eyes

THE outcome of state elections in India is fairly predictable. Incumbent governments usually lose except of course in Bihar, which for the past 15 years has defied this trend. Under the rule of the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), Bihar has become synonymous with poverty, crime and corruption. So it was a relief to see the RJD get its comeuppance when it won just 75 of the 243 seats in the state assembly (down from 115) with the Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) of Ram Vilas Paswan, a leader of the Dalits, holding the balance of power with 29 seats.

While it was encouraging to see voters exercising their democratic rights to bring about much needed change, the imposition of direct rule from Delhi is a serious development. One can only hope that it is a temporary solution to

resolve the current political impasse and that this opportunity will also be used to clamp down on the 'jungle raj' in the state and bring about the much needed improvement in governance.

But politicians alone are not of course the only drivers for change and good governance. Other stakeholders, including economists, NGOs, the business community and many more, need to work together to build civil society.

In this context, Arun Maira raises some interesting issues in his recent columns in Civil Society. Maira asks whether economists have real answers to the problems of development. He argues eloquently for the need to engage in more dialogue, rather than relying on mere statistics. I agree with Maira that dialogue is important, but talking will not in and of itself achieve results.

Put ten Indians together, an old joke goes, and you would never get them to shut up. Put ten Chinese in a room however and you would be hard pressed to get them to speak. (It is a gross generalisation, but anybody who has worked in both countries would recognise a grain of truth, in political as well as cultural terms. I write from personal experience as former group vice-chair and UK CEO of the Inlaks Group which operated in 15 countries including India and China.)

Comparisons between India and its neighbour China will always be inevitable given that each country is home to over a billion people. I was therefore intrigued to see a survey comparing India and China showing that China has done better than India on virtually every measure of economic growth and poverty reduction. But many will argue that India growing at 6% in a democratic context has every reason to be proud when compared with a brutal anti-democratic China growing at 10%.

Yet, some of the main reasons for China's better performance have nothing to do with the political system. China seems to have done a better job than India in educating and providing health care for its poor. One statistic that stands out above all and is most telling is the female literacy rates. According

to the World Bank, 87% of adult Chinese women are literate. The equivalent figure in India is 45%. The results of educating girls are better health and education, longer lives for the whole family, more productive workers and a boost to industrialisation and urbanisation.

But, as Maira has argued in his column, to rely on mere statistics is dangerous. I recently met a visitor from India who reminded me that while westerners are obsessed with Gross Domestic Product, those from his village were more interested in Gross Domestic Happiness! There is more to life than GDP and materialism!

A prominent example is Azim Premji, chairman of IT Giant WIPRO who with a personal fortune of £4 billion still makes do with an ancient Ford Escort which has done 145,000 km on India's roads! Premji's brand identity as the father of the Indian outsourcing phenomenon is pretty strong in India and is growing throughout Europe, the USA and even the Far East. But the 'offshoring' industry that he has pioneered is becoming a controversial business. It became a big issue in the recent USA elections and in the UK unions are kicking up a fuss.

Discussions about outsourcing tend however to focus only on what goods and jobs leave the USA and Europe. Yet for every call centre outsourced to India, the demand for western high-tech goods and services - and the jobs that provide them - increases. In 2002, according to Dan Griswold, director of the Centre for Trade Study at Washington's libertarian Cato Institute, US companies exported \$14.8 billion worth of computer, data-processing, research, development, construction, architectural, engineering and other information technology services. That compares with \$3.9 billion of imports in those services in the USA. Here is an urgent wake up call to India's IT sector to move up the value chain and become software innovators instead of remaining as 'the software coolies' that some observers have branded them as.

And for all the hype about India's IT prowess, the industry makes up only 4% of GDP and employs only about 1 million people. The outsourcing boom it has helped spawn cannot disguise its irrelevance to the vast mass of Indians.

India's finance minister, Palaniappan Chidambaram, may have felt able to boast in his budget speech on 28th February that India 'is not a poor country'. 'Yet', he went on to say, 'a significant proportion of our people are poor'. India's poor number 260 million and as Mr. Chidambaram noted, nearly half of its children under four are underweight.

These statistics are real and depressing and raise so many questions. How and where to intervene? How best to complement local enterprise solutions to poverty, setting poor people on 'the economic ladder to personal betterment'? How can the 'nearly invisible markets' operated by the poor become growth centres for wealth creation? How, to that end, to use the 'value-creating assets' of multinationals as catalysts?

And how to organise and persuade and cajole and force state and Central politics to ensure good governance that enables wealth-creation, not for the politicians, but for the poor?

(Ram Gidoomal CBE, Chairman, South Asian Development Partnership, London)

(Continued from page 19)

issues." Now think tanks represent opposing ideologies and "Scholars at most public-policy institutes today are chosen for their views and not their expertise," says Zakaria. The media is also divided along ideological lines that parallel the divide amongst the think tanks. People choose from the plethora of competing journals and channels that clamour for their attention and get locked into hearing one point of view only. It is no wonder that public opinion in the USA has become more divided than it was in the past century.

In fact the USA is witnessing the emergence of 'conceptually gated communities', analogous to the physically gated communities that separate 'People Like Us' from 'Them'. People within these communities of like-minded people talk only to each other and read only what their own members write. Such closed-minded, conceptually gated communities are inexorably emerging all over the world, even in so-called

open societies, as an unintended consequence of the combination of otherwise desirable forces, such as the masses of information to which people have easy access, but do not have the means to digest.

India needs think tanks to guide policymakers and influence public opinion. But they will not help to create consensus. Indeed they may aggravate divisions as US experience shows. We have a free media, as does the USA. But that too may not help to create consensus. The disease of commercialism already infects the media in our country. As Zakaria says of the USA, so perhaps in India: "While, like other mediating groups, it historically tempered public passions, the press today often inflames them. It sensationalises, dramatises, and trivialises news". Therefore we need another mechanism specifically designed to bring people with different perspectives together: to listen to each other, to distil the essence of their shared aspiration for the country and the critical principles they will adhere to in the work

they have to do together as partners in progress. An ongoing process of public scenario thinking, conducted with good techniques of dialogue, in which people from many walks of life participate, and people with different ideologies listen to each other, could provide the glue we need.

The tools for such a process of scenario thinking and dialogue are available. They have been tried in our country on a pilot basis in forums the CII has recently facilitated and they work very well. Let us use them more extensively to bring together the stakeholders in various initiatives required so that the desired change in the country can be accelerated with the democratic participation of people. Let us not make excuses for democracy. The all-round development of India will not happen in spite of our being a democracy. It will happen because we are a democracy, provided we use the right tools.

(Arun Maira is chairman of the Boston Consulting Group in India.)

# Send draft seeds bill to a JPC

SUMAN SAHAI



## From The Fields

THE stakeholder consultation on the draft seeds bill that was organised in Delhi, by the National Commission on Farmers and Gene Campaign on 15 March, 2004, concluded with a set of recommendations for substantially overhauling the draft bill. A range of participants representing farmers' organisations, the seed industry, academics, research foundations, civil society groups working on agriculture, environment, development and rural development, legal experts and concerned citizens expressed reservations about the features of the bill and wanted that a more widespread discussion be held before the contours of the bill could be finalised. One of the principle recommendations to emerge from the day long discussions was that a Joint Parliamentary Committee be appointed to look

into the seeds bill.

The draft seeds bill which is awaiting enactment by Parliament is being pushed through without any stakeholder discussions and it is clearly an anti-farmer bill. It dilutes many of the pro-farmer provisions provided in the Protection of Plant Variety and Farmers Rights Act (PPVFR) of 2001. Although the PPVFR was passed by Parliament in 2001, it has still not been brought into force whereas the controversial seeds bill which makes almost reckless concessions to the seed industry is being pushed on priority.

Any legislation related to agriculture in this country must first and foremost ensure an enabling environment for farmers and their access to seeds at reasonable cost. Their rights must be ensured over their own varieties and they must be compensated every time their varieties are used by the seed industry. Above all the rights of farmers cannot be made subservient to the rights of breeders and the seed industry. Instead of this, the bill deprives the traditional rights holders and transfers these rights to the seed industry. At this rate it is likely that in 10 years the seed trade will be in the hands of the MNCs which will have grave implications for the nation's political sovereignty.

A fundamental flaw in the process and philosophy of the bill is the primary statement of the governments' approach and intention in an area, no law can or should be enacted that violates the letter or spirit of a policy. Unfortunately, the seeds bill, 2004, is clearly violative of the National Seed Policy of 2002 and the policy statements implicit in the earlier PPVFR. Therefore the bill must be amended and be made consonant with these policies and laws.

A seeds act is necessary to regulate the seed trade and make the providers of seeds accountable. The seeds act should not favor one party but should balance the interests of all sections and be sensitive to the needs and vulnerabilities of farmers, especially small farmers. Instead of showing any sensitivity however, the seeds bill contains imperious provisions like in Section 46 that states that the central government "may by notification, make rules to carry out the provision of this Act". This effort by the babus to illegitimately snatch power is not just of a piece with their usual anti-democratic practices but anachronistic in today's climate of participatory governance.

The stakeholders were of the view that the country needs a strong, trans-

parent and unambiguous Seed Act to regulate the seed trade and ensure that farmers get good quality seeds at a reasonable price. Further the bill must balance the rights of farmers, scientists and the seed industry and ensure food security for the nation and for local communities. A set of recommendations emerged from the discussions. These recommendations are being forwarded to the Prime Minister Sri Manmohan Singh, the Agriculture Minister Sri Sharad Pawar and other Ministers of the Union Cabinet.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- The seeds bill should be harmonised with the Protection of Plant Variety and Farmers' Rights Act (PPVFR), 2001 and the Biodiversity Act, 2002.
- Nothing in the seeds bill shall dilute the rights and protections granted to farmers under the PPVFR.
- Registration of varieties under the bill shall require a sworn declaration of the parentage of the variety and make provisions for benefit sharing in harmony with the PPVFR and the Biodiversity Act, when farmer varieties and public sector varieties are used.
- Registration for sale should be required only for new varieties as in the Seed Act 1966 which limits the requirement to notified varieties. No registration should be required for extant varieties and landraces.
- Wherever registration provides for marketing rights, there should be explicit provisions for ensuring adequate seed supply at a reasonable price.

LAKSHMAN



**Any legislation related to agriculture in this country must first and foremost ensure an enabling environment for farmers and their access to seeds at reasonable cost. Their rights must be ensured over their own varieties.**

- The seeds bill contains several provisions biased in favor of a specific stakeholder; it is against the interest of farmers and in that sense, against the larger national interest. Parliament may therefore kindly refer the bill to a Joint Parliamentary Committee with the mandate to prepare an amended draft, rectifying the existing drawbacks of the bill in consultation with stakeholders.

- The compensation for non-performance of seed supplied by agencies must be regulated through the National Plant Variety Authority, not the District Consumer Courts as in the present draft bill.

- The duration of protection granted to registered varieties in the seeds bill should be commensurate with what is granted under the PPVFR. An extension of five years may be considered for those varieties that are very popular with farmers, provided the decision is taken transparently

- The provisional permission granted to transgenic varieties is dangerous and violates principles of biosafety. It must be rescinded.

- Multi location testing of varieties bred by the private sector must be done by the ICAR. It is proposed that industry contributes to a fund to pay for multi location testing but the testing

itself should be done by the ICAR.

- The small token penalties for violations contained in the seeds bill must be revised. When the declared source of registered material has been accessed illegally, registration would be cancelled and criminal and civil liability will be determined.

- To ensure transparency, a process for pre-grant opposition to registration of a seed variety must be included in the seeds bill, like it is in the PPVFR.

- An autonomous institution should be established to do seed testing by DNA fingerprinting.

- A consultation process of governance should be established where the communities that will be affected are part of decision making.

# Europe's Bush identity

SO, Emperor Bush was visiting and the princelings were all in tow, bowing low, full of reverence, making obeisance to the head of the sole superpower that the USA has become. It was February 21 and anyone worth a political dime was in Brussels, one of the headquarters of the European Union - and also that of NATO. While Monsieur Chirac and Herr Schroeder were playing footsie with the Emperor, the joint-venture Franco-German Television, Arté, was airing their documentary version of "Not without my daughter" - the original being the Hollywood version, starring Sally Fields portraying a hapless white American, Betty, married to a tyrannical Iranian Dr. Mahtab Mahmoody, holding her against her wishes in Iran. She and their daughter make a harrowing escape with the help of good, Americanised Iranians while the backdrop was littered with ugly, Muslim Iranians. The year was 1984 but the release of the movie (no coincidence) was during the build-up to the Gulf War in 1991. Nor was the Arté release of the documentary a coincidence. Dr. Mahmoody in this version comes across as a humane doctor deprived of his beloved daughter by a coniving materialistic woman hungering for her 15 minutes of fame under the spotlight.

While we may never really know the truth of the Mahmoody family story, it turned the original "true story" on its head giving a subtle but clear message of what most Europeans think of the Empire and its current stance.

And how exactly do Europeans think? If we are to go by the Spanish experience during its year of mourning the Madrid bombing that killed almost 200 people on March 11, 2004, then we can all regain some of the hope that was lost by the sheer lunacy of anti-terror bills passed by the Americans and attempts by their cousins across the pond in the UK. Spain with its large number of Moroccan and Algerian inhabitants saw practically no violence against or even maltreatment of these minorities. It was almost miraculous in a climate that has been so poisoned by anti-Islamic tirades sweeping across vast swathes of the planet.

If we look at the UK, again we see a topsy turvy world in which the left has become the right (pushing the right off the chart) and the democratically elected have become monarchical while the unrepresentative Lords in the upper house have become the true keepers of the people's rights. I refer here to the Prevention of Terrorism Bill which was boldly protested against and skilfully debated in the House of Lords and sent packing to the Commons again. We are indeed living in interesting times. I can never get over human indifference to the lessons of history. Never in the history of man has coercion or suppression ever succeeded in quelling opposition in the long run. Rarely are the real terrorists ever caught by

these means. In the end they merely become tools of oppression that can only give birth to more terrorists and further acts of terrorism. No finer example than Iraq in the last two years is there for us to learn from.

★★★

THE women in France have had something to celebrate as a new law was passed which would make it mandatory for all newborns to carry the name of either or both parents and not just the father's; making the concept of 'surnames' obsolete. That means a couple can now give a newborn either the mother's last name, the father's last name or both names in the order the parents choose.

This pragmatic change is meaningful mainly because of France's changing demographics. Today, forty-five percent of all children in France are born to unmarried mothers. In the absence of known paternity, mothers are forced to give their babies their own names. The new law will help remove the stigma of doing that.

France is in fact among the last of the EU countries to pass this law. Germany for example did so in 1976. Nonetheless, considering how much meaning the giving of a name (patronymique) carries in France one must accept it as a major leap in a culture where, legally, man is still the "head" of the family. Even for this law, in case of dispute between mother and father over what name to give their baby, the father wins.

★★★

WHILE enjoying a glass of Bordeaux at a friend's on Sunday evening we were startled by the sound of Bollywood dance music coming from a neighbour's TV across the courtyard. My friend went and zapped across the TV channels in his living room till he found the one playing it. It was the annual "Miss Europe" contest and we watched unbelievably as 36 svelte European women were expertly doing a Bollywood dance number which remained the theme music for the entire contest.

The next day I was asked by certain French acquaintances whether I had been watching the two weeks offering of Bollywood movies on Arté. He had watched about nine of them. A quick survey of the mainstream video stores (i.e. Virgin Mega store of the Virgin Group) revealed that Bollywood has indeed arrived in Europe. Depending on one's take on this genre of films one will have to make up one's mind as to whether one should feel proud of this or not. We always have the Indian rockets successfully sending the French Ariane satellites to outer space to fall back upon.

## LETTER FROM EUROPE



Riaz Quadir in Versailles

## China's needs threaten global forests

BECAUSE of its rapidly rising demand for wood, China is set to lead the world's wood market and this will have devastating impacts on some of the planet's outstanding forests unless major changes are made in the country's current policies, a new WWF report warns.

According to the report, *China's Wood Market, Trade and the Environment*, more than half of the timber imported by China comes from countries such as Russia, Malaysia and Indonesia, which are all struggling with problems such as over-harvesting, conversion of natural forests and illegal logging. China is one of the major destinations for wood that may be illegally harvested or traded, it says.

The report indicates that while the average Chinese citizen uses 17 times less wood than a person in the US, China's wood imports have dramatically increased over the past ten years and will continue to do so to meet the demand of the country's huge population and rapid economic growth.

The report also found that measures taken by the Chinese government to protect its forests - including a ban on logging - after the 1998 devastating Yangtze River flooding have resulted in a significant drop in China's domestic wood production.

The country's forests and plantations will provide less than half of China's expected total industrial wood demand by 2010, and this puts more pressure on the forests of the countries that export timber, the report stresses.

"China's efforts so far in forest restoration and forest sustainable management are a good start towards preserving valuable and threatened forests," said Dr Claude Martin, Director General of WWF International. "But logging bans in China should not lead to forest loss in other parts of the world. Decisive action is needed to ensure that supply chains leading to or through China begin with

well-managed forests."

WWF believes that China's demand for wood from regions where forest management is poor could be reduced by developing environmentally responsible wood production in some of the country's forests where logging is currently banned.

The report also suggests that incentives are created to improve the efficiency of wood production and use in China, and reduce the waste of timber.

Furthermore, WWF calls on both governments and the private sector to take concerted measures to promote imports and purchases of wood from well-managed forests.

Such measures include responsible procurement policies, use of systems to trace wood from its source to final use, forest certification, enforcement of government policies and regulations to prevent the import of products containing illegally-sourced wood, and cooperation with other nations to combat illegal trade of forest products.

"China will soon be leading the global wood market, we hope that it will also lead the efforts to safeguard the world's forests," said Dr. Zhu Chunquan, Director of WWF China's Forest Programme.

The new WWF report was released in Hong Kong at a meeting on illegal logging organised by *The Forests Dialogue*, a forum for trade associations, major corporations and government officials, among others.

The China Forest and Trade Network (FTN) was also launched at that event, as part of a global WWF initiative to facilitate market links between companies committed to responsible forestry and purchasing of forest products.

# Women shoot the things they see

Shailey Hingorani and Tonusree Basu  
New Delhi

RURAL, illiterate women armed with cameras moved around an auditorium full of urban, educated, elitist people. They were Dalit women from Andhra Pradesh. They make films for international audiences. They have started an autonomous radio project that talks about everything from crops to folk music. Not only do the women earn money, they earn respect.

This sense of empowerment sums up the spirit of the women's film festival, 'Expressions in Freedom,' held at the

India International Centre (IIC) New Delhi, on International Women's Day.

Organised by the International Association of Women in Radio (IAWRT) and IIC Asia Project, the festival showcased documentaries and animation films by Asian women. Powerful tales were told in as little as three minutes or spun across two hours. Genres varied and so did styles from film to film.

The festival started with a three-minute documentary called 'Line of Control' by Surekha. The film examines how one behaves when confronted by imaginary boundaries. The camera zeroes in on an ant crawling inside a boundary outlined with a pen. The ant hesitates to cross that mark. Inset is the clip of a woman behind bars, with a similar hesitation, fearful of finding a way out. The sound of rapid breathing is always in the background to convey a sense of urgency.

'Unlimited Girls' by Paromita Vohra was a 94-minute film exploring a woman's search for the meaning of feminism. The narrator 'Fearless' is in a virtual chat-room and encounters feminists, a woman cab driver, college students, academicians, a priest etc. The film concludes that feminism is subjective. The audience seemed to appreciate Vohra's style of narration.

'My Mother India', a film by Safina Uberoi, tells the story of a marriage between a Sikh and an Australian, against a tumultuous backdrop. It follows the filmmaker's family through Partition, Operation Bluestar, the 1984 anti-Sikh riots, and examines questions of identity. What begins as a quirky and humorous documentary about an eccentric, multicultural upbringing unfolds into a complex commentary on social, political and religious events that change the attitudes and lives of each member in the family.

Another popular film was 'Ladies Special' by Nidhi Tuli. The film travels on a local Mumbai train reserved for women. The viewer becomes part of a motley group of women for whom this train is their space. During the 50 km distance the train covers, they share their lives, chop vegetables, celebrate festivals and break into song and dance. Aboard the train, the women step out of mundane roles as mothers, wives and daughters and bond as women.

Other films included 'Until When' by Dahna Abourahme set during the current Intifada in Palestine and Vasudha Joshi's 'Girl Song', a film about Anjum Katyala a Blues singer in Kolkata and her conversations with her mother and daughter on living in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society. There was also Mira Nair's 'India Cabaret' a 60-minute film on the lives of female strippers in a Mumbai nightclub.

A Sri Lankan film by Sharmini Botle and Siyangka Nawaz was screened on the second day. Their documentary 'Rajeshwari' was part of a TV series that explored conflict and its impact on the lives of Sri Lankans. The film encourages reconciliation and peace. The programme included screenings of shots from other episodes of the TV series, like 'Women Waging Peace' 'Defiant Art' etc. " The Sri

Lankan market is small and movie consumption is extremely limited. In the absence of a full-fledged media and training school, there is a need for plurality of thought," explained Botle.

'Manjuben Truck Driver' by Sherna Dastur is about gender stereotypes. As a truck driver, Manjuben has an identity despite odds, and commands respect from the community. But this identity is deliberately 'male'- that of a macho truck driver. As the film reaches its climax, we realize that though Manjuben lives a free life compared to other women, she is just as patriarchal as the man on the street. Manjuben is no crusader. This film captures this paradox.

'In the Flesh' by Bishaka Dutta tells the story of three women and how they get ensnared into prostitution. Shabhana is a street-smart woman soliciting in the dark highways of Outer Mumbai. Uma is an aging theatre actress who lives in a brothel in Kolkata, where she earlier worked and Bhaskar, is a trans-gendered person who sells sex to men. The movie revolves around their lifestyles and workplaces. They are seen picking up customers, fighting AIDS and battling violence.

They are also portrayed as human beings fighting for space and respect.

The highlight of the third day was a presentation by women of the Deccan Development Society (DDS), a rural development organisation from Andhra Pradesh which works with nearly 5000 women. In 1998, DDS taught 10 rural Dalit women in Medak district how to use a video camera. The women were mostly single mothers who worked as agricultural labour.

'Ten Women and a Camera' examined how the skill of using a camera changed their lives. Four women said they had become more confident, extroverted, aware and, most importantly, economically independent. The people in their villages looked at them with pride and respect. The women now make films for international and national programmes and a few have travelled to Canada and Peru to train people there. The presentation by DDS included one on 'Why are Warangal Farmers angry with Bt Cotton?' The women requested the other filmmakers, to take up their cameras for the cause of farmers.

A second film they screened was about an autonomous radio project that they have started. They have used radio as an open forum for discussions on crops, nutrition, traditional knowledge, folk music etc. The film highlighted the problems the women faced in getting a license to air their programmes. Though they have close to 400 hours of airtime, the government is unwilling to give them a license unless they apply for it under their panchayat, a local university or NGO. But the women don't want to give up their independence.

This was followed by a thought provoking animation film called 'Who will mend my Future'. Made by a team of girls between 11 and 17, supported by Plan India, the film explores the dangers of ignoring sex education and the importance of imparting information in a compassionate manner to adolescents. When a teenager's questions about sexuality are unanswered by teachers, parents and other adults because of irrational social stigma, adolescents get confused and things go out of hand.



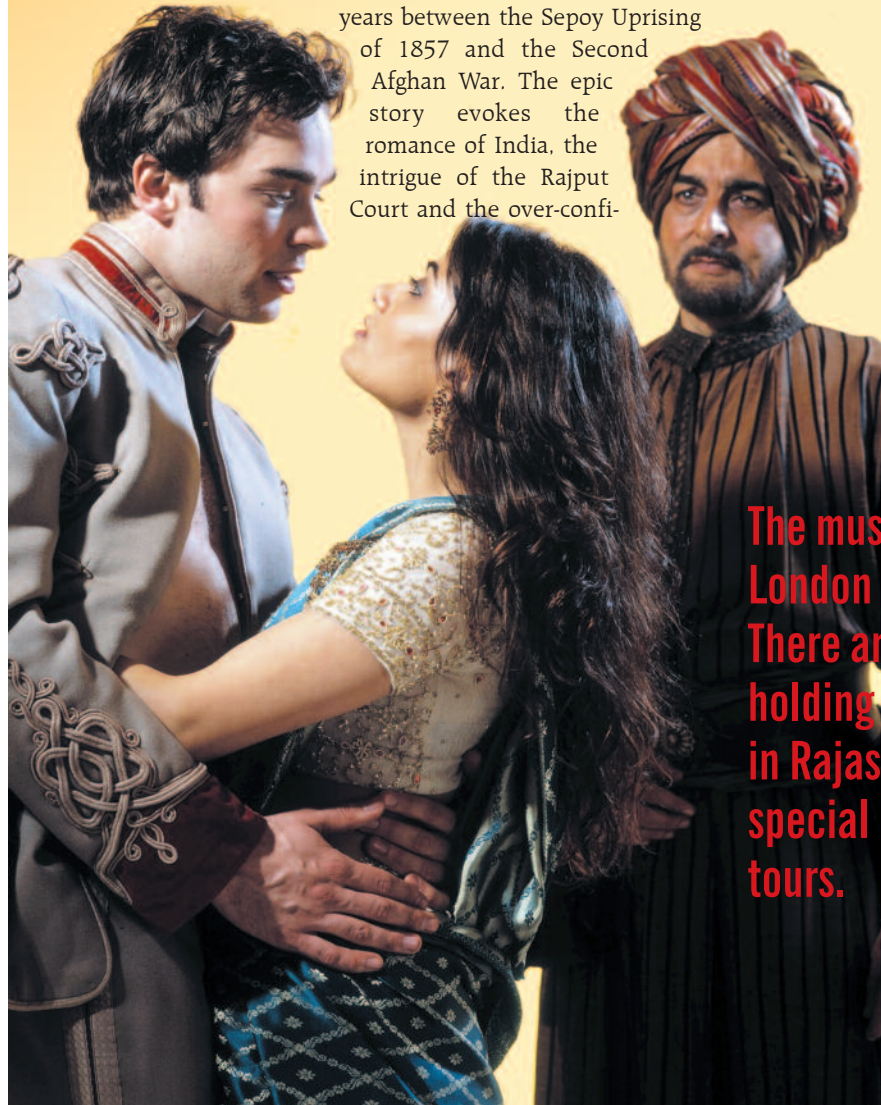


# Far Pavilions wins Diaspora

Civil Society News  
London

**M**M Kaye's famous romantic novel, *The Far Pavilions*, has been made into a musical extravaganza and is all set to have its world premiere at London's Shaftesbury Theatre on April 14. There are plans for holding a performance in Rajasthan with special *Far Pavilions* tours.

The *Far Pavilions* tells the story of forbidden love between a British officer, Ashton (Ash) Pelham-Martyn, and an Indian princess called Anjali. Set against the backdrop of the dusty plains of North India, the story spans 25 years between the Sepoy Uprising of 1857 and the Second Afghan War. The epic story evokes the romance of India, the intrigue of the Rajput Court and the over-confi-



**The musical opens in London on April 14. There are plans for holding a performance in Rajasthan with special *Far Pavilions* tours.**

dence of an Empire at the height of its power.

Directed by the Emmy Award-winning international director Gale Edwards, the star cast has Kabir Bedi who plays Kahn Sahib. Gayatri Iyer is Anjali, Sophiya Haque plays Janoo Rani and Hadley Fraser is Ash.

The Indian Diaspora has rallied round to make the musical possible and provided 80 percent of the four million pounds spent on the production. It took Ram Gidoomal, a founder director of the musical, eight years to piece the funding together. Now Indians in New York and elsewhere want the musical to be staged in their cities.

In January 2004, director Gale Edwards approached a group of NRI investors in London with a proposal to turn the book into a musical production. The presentation was a warts-and-all, rudimentary staging of Act One of a musical project that needed that particular audience's approval in order to move forward as a fully-fledged West End production.

The story appealed to producer Michael Ward, who had been born and raised in Assam. He realised it would appeal to the NRI audience as well for the same reason and so had a good chance of working commercially in West End. Two co-producers emerged from that audience: Arjun C. Waney owner of the hugely successful Knightsbridge restaurant, Zuma, and Reita Gadkari, a property developer and philanthropist whose family settled in London some six years ago after adopting New York.

"My involvement in *The Far Pavilions* started over 20 years ago when I read the book on holiday," says Gidoomal, who is chairman of the South Asian Development Partnership (SADP).

"What fascinated me about the story was its coverage of Indo British history from the time of the Indian Mutiny and in particular M M Kaye's insights into Indian culture," explains Gidoomal. "I, of course, identify very much with Ashton Pelham Martin's background as I was born into a Hindu family, brought up in the Sikh tradition, educated in a Muslim school and became a follower of Christ over 30 years ago. Apart from all that, like Michael, I do believe it makes business sense and agreed to join him as a Founding Director in 1998 along with John Whitney (Chairman)."

M M Kaye, who is survived by two daughters, was tremendously excited by the project, having

been consulted regularly during its development: "Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine *The Far Pavilions* would be turned into a West End musical. I don't mind telling you that if I should fall off my worldly twig before the curtain is up, I shall make an awful nuisance of myself in the next life unless I am allowed back to see it run!" M M Kaye died at the age of 95 in January last year.

## The vulnerable Muslim woman

Shuktara Lal  
Kolkata

**I**NTERNATIONAL Women's Day in Kolkata saw Manish Mitra and his Arghya theatre group stage *Simar*, a searing saga about the harsh treatment meted out to Muslim women by their own men. The play is based on a short story by Abul Basher, entitled *Ek Tukru Chithi*.

The story unfolds through the eyes of a Muslim girl called Minu. Her father marries Shireen, who is not much older than her. In the opening scene, Shireen tries to kill herself and then recounts the oppression she's had to suffer at the hands of men.

For Minu's father, Shireen is just a sex object. If she resists, he beats her up. Into this claustrophobic rural setting, arrives Sadik, a relative of Minu's. Urban and seemingly liberal Sadik attracts the affection of both Minu and Shireen. In a fit of rage, when Minu's father

divorces Shireen, she chooses to live with Sadik.

But Shireen goes through hardship to prove to the court that Minu's father did divorce her, because he tries to drag her back to his suffocating household. Shireen believes Sadik will stand by her, but he too lets her down.

Mitra delineates his characters perfectly. Minu's father is shown as extremely religious, but his devoutness does not extend to his women. After saying his prayers, he virtually rapes Shireen. Despite Sadik's outward idealism and love for the arts he, too, is spineless. Mitra also etches Shireen's trauma with fine subtlety. For instance, before Minu's father throws her out, we hardly hear her voice. She speaks through Minu or Sadik. The only time we hear her is when she sings to herself. She retrieves her voice after she is given *talaq*.

One of the most chilling sequences in the play occurs before Shireen is divorced. A fundamentalist

mob enters the auditorium carrying torches of fire and shouting slogans. The audience is reminded of recent communal atrocities. Mitra works his way through many levels of oppression. Within families, there is marital rape, within the community exists the absurd, one-sided nature of *talaq* and, on a larger canvas, there is mass fundamentalism.

The performances are uniformly competent. Avanti Chakravorty ably projects the disillusioned Shireen. But the most effortless performance was that of Seema Ghosh. As Minu, she essayed her part with élan and sensitivity. Ghosh, who teaches in a school in Kolkata, didn't find it hard to enact a role in an emotionally harrowing text. "After I read the story, I was extremely excited that we would be performing a theatrical construction of it," she said. "Even though I have not personally dealt with such brutality, I could relate to Minu, so it wasn't difficult to take on her character."

# Let the young shine

JILL CARR-HARRIS

WITH the onset of middle age, more and more I find that one does not give much credence to new ideas and youthful energy because it seems always to be a repeat of the same. Hindsight often plays a negative role leading us to refer to 'what has happened' at different moments, keenly making reference to past events allowing them to roll out like a colourful canopy of occurrences that are made to seem more real than anything existing in the present. Then one finds infinite satisfaction in talking about 'what one imagined would have happened if so and so would have occurred'...indulging in an endless litany of conditional 'would haves' i.e. failed expectations - a danger that comes with having too much hindsight and increasing age! This is particularly the case with people of my ilk that has seen their cherished dogmas in bygone eras never fulfilled. It is also the case with many of our political pundits on both ends of the political spectrum.

Any such new forms of political action need to be based on foresight or a clear recognition of the realities that are getting manifested and finding ways to shape processes and people accordingly. Young people need to be given creative opportunities for trialing new expression and testing their foresight.

In a world that is terribly bereft of political legitimacy and good leadership, this nurturing of youth is perhaps the single most important activity in building any kind of positive political change process for the future. The challenge is how does one effectively work with youth on issues where they can contribute to a larger national vision that includes issues of social equity, political empowerment of marginalised people and environmental sustainability? Young people today often admit that they are ensnared in a paralysis of action given the changing nature of political freedom and the lack of an open society.

I would like to argue however that India is a much more "open society" than many others. The country's diversity and socialist antecedents has made it very different from many other Asian countries, and in fact there is a feeling that in last year's World Social Forum in Mumbai, that there was a tremendous mosaic of social action groups and a din of voices from the grassroots level -- a situation seldom experienced in most countries, anywhere in the world. Even in my own experience with people's organisations in India, there is political space to make your voice heard --if one is organised and has a non-violent approach.

The key to young people's capacity development is to have them involved in the political action as participants. The urban middle class youth are not given much chance to intersect with issues of society, and their passions are often put into the deep freeze given the pressure of the formal schools system. In one sense there is in places like Delhi, home of many of the political elite, the youth are spirited away from any genuine experience of the poor and rural India in an effort to derail any opportunities of losing the social mobility that one aspires for. Young people often see through this ruse and work to get out of the hall of mirrors, which includes working in rural areas, traveling extensively, but they rarely have

a chance to see that the development planning is being done by one elite group with another with little or no consultation with the people it is affecting.

Getting middle class youth to work with the poor has been done increasingly by faculties of social work and this has been instrumental in changing many in their attitudes and behaviour that we see in the profusion of NGOs working in poor rural and urban areas.

Working with rural youth is also very important, not "to urbanize them" but to get them take responsibility for their communities and society. To do this one has to create an environment to break down caste and regional barriers, and to get young people out of the consciousness of *guru-shishu* forms of action.

The strategies with urban and rural youth are different, and this is reflected by the fact of the dichotomies generally between urban and rural population -what one may see as a complete disconnect. So whereas one is

bringing "the local experience" to the urban based youth, one is bringing "the global" to rural youth. This helps to build convergence in a society that may be seen as "two solitudes".

Moving the urban youth to a consciousness around "the local" means that one gets them to appreciate the importance of say, land or agriculture in the shaping of human identities. Because urban youth are modeling themselves after the mores given primarily through western media and western education, this is a provocative awakening, to see the importance of the local and rural. Moreover when young people begin to see the importance of local sufficiency and people's freedom from social engineering, there is a questioning of their culture and a desire to change.

Moving the rural youth in the opposite direction to a consciousness of "the global" is also interesting because young people get to

compare their own region with others and to see that they are able to voice concerns to other places (such as the state/national/international arenas). This gives a kind of empowerment which they do not have (for the most part) and which the urban middle class do have.

Imparting foresight then is engaging youth in some larger societal concern is that they can see the connections between the local and global. With a lens from which to see different levels operating simultaneously, they appreciate that they do not have to just accept everything that is coming to them, but they can throw something into the mix.

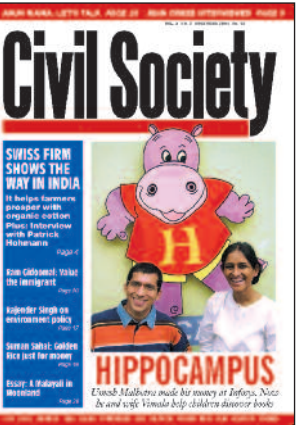
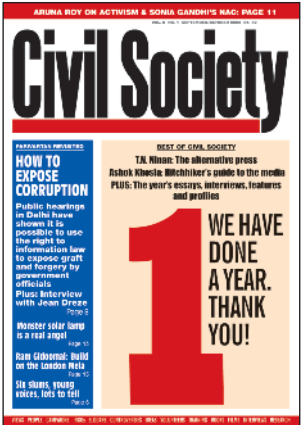
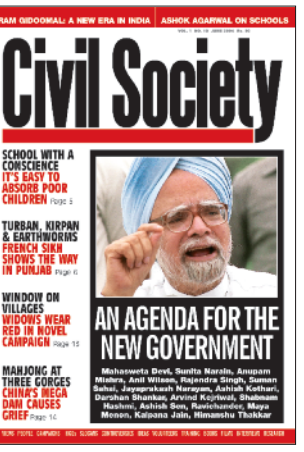
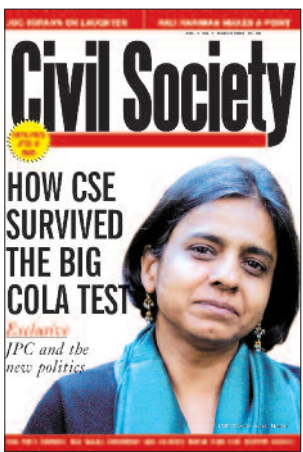
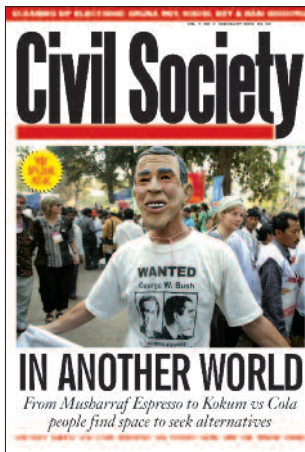
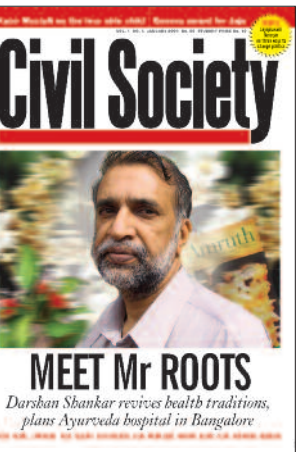
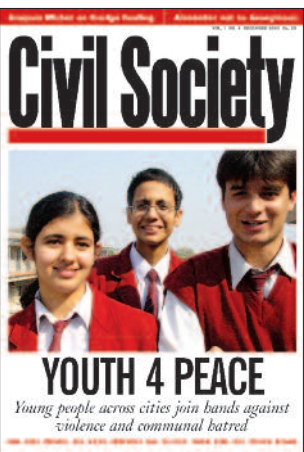
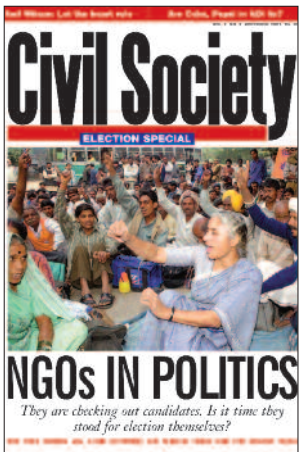
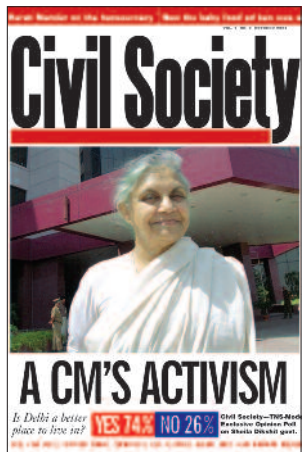
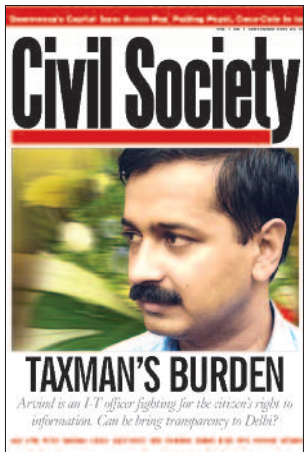
A sense of free will for young people is always the precondition for creative movement. In my own work both with young people in rural India, and presently with urban youth in an environmental training institute in Delhi, I am always amazed at the potential of young people to come together across urban and rural divides. I think its time to give a lot more space for this kind of experimentation. For this we need to have faith in our young exponents of change and give them a chance.





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