

Civil Society

DELHI RESIDENTS
TEACH POWER FIRMS A
LESSON, GET THE GOVT
TO ACT. BUT WHERE DO
THEY GO FROM HERE?

MIDDLE CLASS ANGER

SPECIAL ISSUE

BEST OF CIVIL SOCIETY

2nd Anniversary

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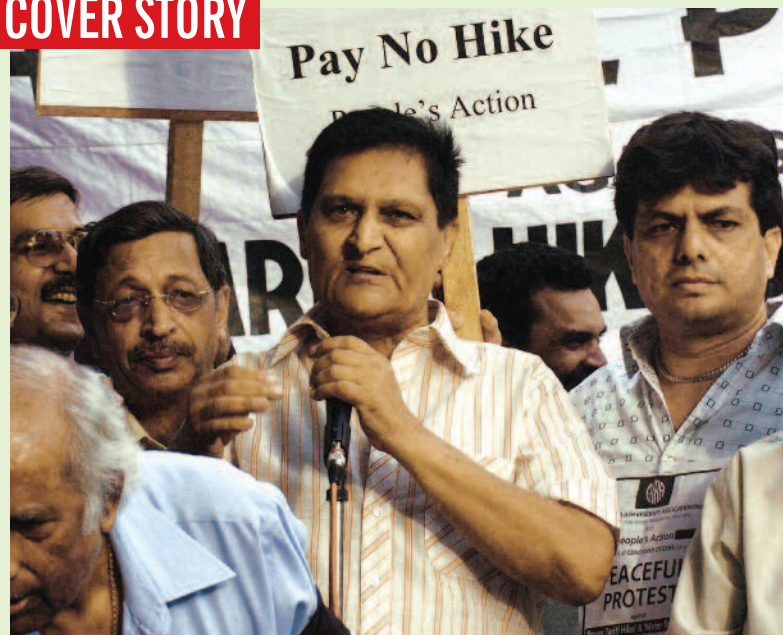
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COVER STORY



CONSUMERS HIT BACK IN DELHI

After weeks of agitations by residents the government buckles and tells BSES to shape up or face action.

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2nd ANNIVERSARY

Bumper issue for September/October

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Civil Society

Why middle class anger is so important

WHEN people who are normally content with arguing in their drawing rooms take to the streets something must be terribly wrong. The decision to raise the power tariff by 10 percent isn't in itself a big deal because a lot of people can pay that. But what the tariff hike has served to unleash is pent up unhappiness over the way Delhi is generally being governed. Power supply is just one of the pieces in the jigsaw. For an administration which prides itself on public-private partnerships under a programme named Bhagidari and has won international awards for participatory governance, the brickbats hurled at it by citizens must come as a deep embarrassment. Any impartial observer would wonder what Bhagidari can possibly be at work in Delhi if honest folk have to hold demonstrations and hang around on street corners with placards to get recognition of their rights under the electricity laws. Surely a caring government would not have allowed matters to come to such a pass.

We at *Civil Society* saw it coming. This is because we have covered community concerns and the work of residents' welfare associations (RWAs) consistently for the past two years. There has been a growing disenchantment with governance in Delhi and Bhagidari, though seen as a good idea, is regarded in its implementation to be a charade which merely lets government officials duck their responsibilities. There is a huge gap between promise and performance and residents have found their colonies going to pieces for want of adequate water, road repairs, garbage clearance and so on. Suggestions made by RWAs aren't implemented. Officials talk down to them. Senior officers in the government are often pompous and unimaginative plodders when what is needed is creative action.

Sheila Dikshit has certainly been a better chief minister than any of her predecessors. It would be a loss for the city if she has to go. But she must answer for the mess in power supply and the lapses of her officers. Bhagidari, however, has been her creation and it has clearly helped RWAs have a better estimate of their potential both as change leaders and as a vote bank. They are now more demanding and won't settle for mere promises.

But for the middle class to be effective, it will have to realise that an agitation in itself will serve no purpose. It may well lead to some concessions, but what is needed is sustained reform of the system. For this, RWA leaders will have to look closely at the rights and obligations of citizens. Both go hand in hand. They will have to learn to use the Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission (DERC). The regulator's record has been shameful because it has not been confronted and told to perform.

So, the middle class has to go beyond anger. In cities, like Delhi, where large parts of population are poor and illiterate, it is the middle class that can use its skills and education to protect the rights of all consumers and bring new efficiencies to services irrespective of whether they are provided by private firms or the government.

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Write to Civil Society at E-2144 Palam Vihar, Gurgaon, Haryana 122017 Ph: 9811787772, E-mail: civil_society@rediffmail.com. Editor: Rita Anand RNI No.: DELENG/03/11607

Rozgar campaign gathered steam

Civil Society News
New Delhi

THERE is a flurry of activity in the modest flat in Hauz Khas. Aruna Roy is not well after an arduous journey from Rajasthan. Economist and right to work campaigner Jean Dreze runs in and out. He and Nikhil De are off to the house of VP Singh for a last-minute press conference.

The National Rural Employment Guarantee bill has been tabled in Parliament and activists want to ensure it goes through without a hitch. The minimum wage provision, for instance, should not be excluded. There are other things as well.

The whole campaign for employment guarantee has been built on such nervous energy and ceaseless commitment. There was a time when the secretariat did not even have computers. But work continued apace and was driven by ideas.

The *Rozgar Adhikar Yatra* was one such idea. It came from someone and stuck. The journey across states and the many independent initiatives similarly had a single objective but didn't belong to a grand scheme. There was no puppeteer, no single organiser, no dominant leader.

When the bill was passed by Parliament at the end of August, political parties vied with each other for the credit and that perhaps was the best sign of the campaign's success. Months of lobbying, persuasion and awareness building had not just won support, but also created ownership for an idea which may otherwise have remained a mere election promise.

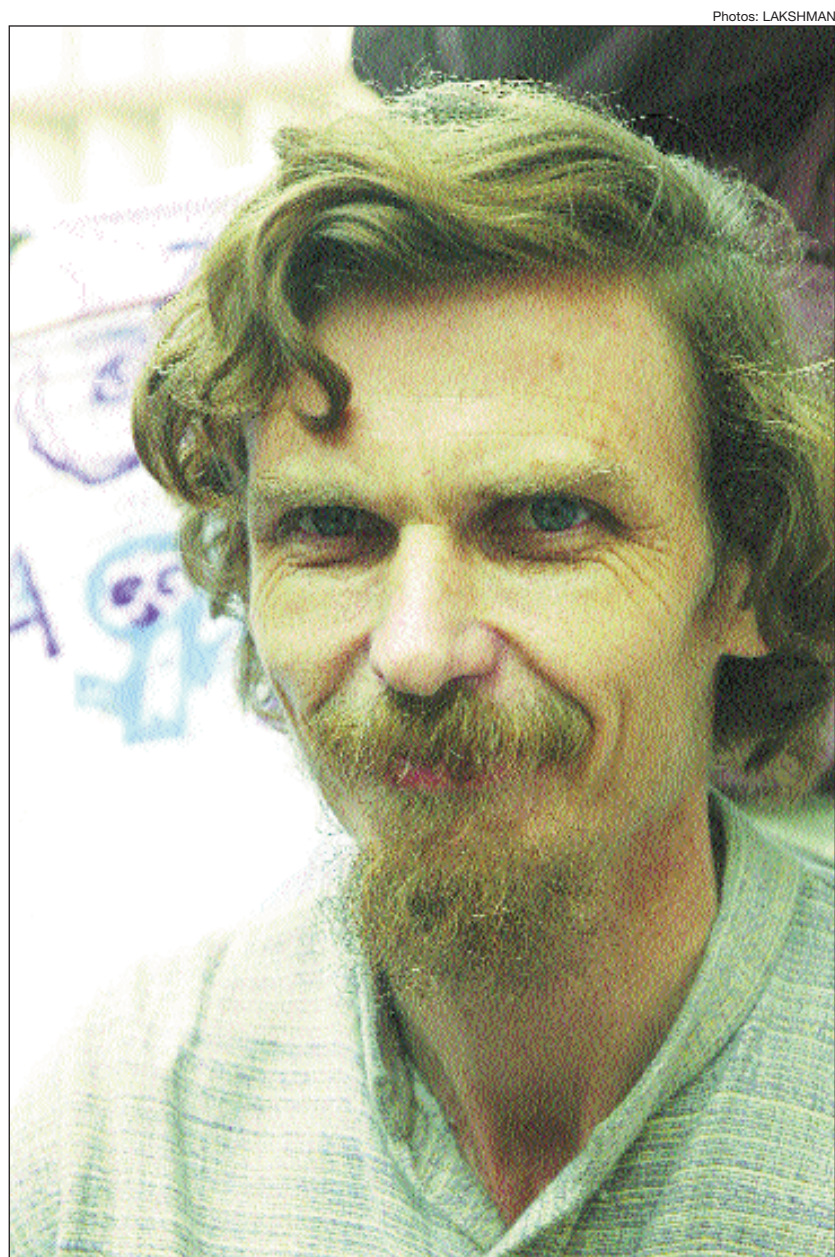
Now 200 districts will be covered under the first phase of the programme. If the government's money is used creatively to build public assets like water tanks and greener forests, the employment guarantee scheme could change the face of rural India.

Economist Jean Dreze, who played a key role in drafting the Act and defending it from relentless attacks, spoke to *Civil Society* on the unique campaign.

The most expensive activity was the Yatra, but even that did not cost more than Rs 3 lakhs - much less than the cost of a single international conference on poverty in India.

How many organisations took part in the campaign?

About 200 organisations took part in the activities (public meetings, street demonstration, cultural events, and so on) that took place at the time of the *Rozgar Adhikar Yatra*, in May-June 2005. In fact this is only a partial list. Of course many organisations campaigned for the Employment Guarantee Act outside the *Rozgar Adhikar Yatra*. It is hard to think of any important organisation committed



Jean Dreze

to the right to work that did not take part in this effort in one way or another.

Was there an organised structure in place? Did different organisations work on different aspects of the campaign?

This was certainly not a structured, let alone centralised campaign. Employment guarantee is an old demand of the labour movement, and soon after the UPA government promised to "immediately enact a National Employment Guarantee



Photos: LAKSHMAN

as it went along

Act", different organisations woke up at varying speeds to this unprecedented opportunity.

Two national conventions, held in New Delhi on 19 September and 19 October 2004 respectively, played an important role in giving some sort of direction to this growing energy. Occasionally, broad coalitions were formed for specific events, such as the "display of banners" on Parliament Street on 21 December 2004 and more recently the *Rozgar Adhikar Yatra*.

But most of the time, the issue was taken up in different ways by different organisations, without formal coordination. Yet these uncoordinated actions did add up to a strong movement for a full-fledged Employment Guarantee Act, and the government had to take note of it. The Left parties, of course, also played an important role, especially during the final round of negotiations in August 2005.

How did the idea of a *Rozgar Adhikar Yatra* come about, and who coined the slogan *Har Haath Ko Kaam Do...*?

The *Rozgar Adhikar Yatra* was just a "brainwave" someone had at a workshop for activists working in Food-for-Work districts, held in Udaipur in March 2005. The idea immediately caught everyone's imagination. A preparatory meeting took place in Delhi on April 1, and six weeks later the *Yatra* was on the road. The slogan "*Har Haath Ko Kaam Do, Kaam Ka Pura Daam Do*", which served us so well, was borrowed from an earlier campaign in Rajasthan.

How was the campaign financed?

This was not a coordinated campaign, and therefore it was not financed in any specific way. Different organisations financed their activities in their own way. For instance, the activities of "People's Action for Employment Guarantee", including the display of banners on 21 December 2004 and the *Rozgar Adhikar Yatra* in May-June 2005, were financed from individual donations.

In fact, the "*chanda*" (collection of donations) organised for the *Rozgar Adhikar Yatra* became a campaign activity in its own right, with much political value. It is also worth noting that most of the activities that made up this campaign cost very little. For instance, the media work was one of the most important activities, but it did not cost anything – most of it was done by student volunteers. The most expensive activity was the *Yatra*, but even that did not cost more than Rs 3 lakhs – much less than the cost of a single international conference on poverty in India.

Were there any two key strategies that really took the campaign forward?

Well, in a campaign of this kind it's really hard to establish links between specific actions and results. But some actions certainly turned out to have a major impact. I think that tabling a draft of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act at the very first meeting of the National Advisory Council in July 2004, along with a draft of the Right to Information Act, was definitely a good move.

The media campaign in December 2004 also had a major influence on public perceptions of the issue. But none of this would have succeeded without the sustained efforts of many people who worked quietly behind the scenes, and will never get much recognition for it.



Kolkata tries to dump rickshaws

Rina Mukherji
Kolkata

RICKSHAW unions in Kolkata led several demonstrations and a rally in the past two weeks to protest the government's decision banning hand-pulled rickshaws. On August 15, Buddhadeb Bhattacharya, chief minister of West Bengal had condemned hand-pulled rickshaws as 'inhuman' and announced a ban. He said a rehabilitation plan would be worked out for rickshaw-pullers in the next four to five months.

"Let us see what the government has in mind. Once we have taken a look at the plan, we will present our own recommendations," said Mukhtar Ali, vice-president of the All-Bengal Rickshaw Union. "We want to first hear the government. Only then will we chart out our preferences in writing," agreed Noor Ahmed and Triveni Singh, president and general secretary of the Calcutta Rickshawchalak Panchayat.

Rickshaw unions are willing to consider replacing hand-pulled rickshaws with cycle-rickshaws though they question the chief minister's logic. "Inhuman or not, it is an honest means of earning a livelihood. How can the government deny that?" says Mukhtar Ali. "It requires a lot more effort to run a cycle-rickshaw than a hand pulled -rickshaw. The mechanism is such that once the vehicle starts, very little effort is required to pull it along."

The police were keen to defuse tensions. "There has been no government order yet. Once the government imposes the ban, we will have to implement it," said Javed Shamim, deputy commissioner of police.

Rickshaw-pullers are agitated because the State Transport Authority and the Transport Department are vague about the ban and the action which is likely to follow.

"The government just wants to kill time and defuse our agitation. If they have the right alternatives to rickshaw-pulling we are willing to hear them. Only we can help identify the pullers, since we represent them. In our absence, political interests will determine the distribution of largesse," says Noor Ahmed, speaking for the union.

NGOs working for rickshaw-pullers say a rehabilitation plan will have to keep certain realities in mind. Many pullers are more than 45 years old and it would be difficult to train them for other professions, say Kumkum Kumar of Action Aid and Calcutta Samaritan's director Vijayan Pavamani.

"Besides, many suffer from varicose veins and debilitating ailments that render them incapable of carrying on with their livelihood once they reach 50," said Kumkum Kumar.

According to the government's estimates there are only 285 pullers. Everybody knows this figure is a fiction. Each vehicle runs in three shifts, and hence requires an average of three men. The real number of pullers could be around 18,000. In addition, there are mechanics, owners and users. If these are calculated then over one lakh people depend on hand-pulled rickshaws in the city.

Ever since the ban was announced the State Road Transport Authority has stopped issuing any licences to the vehicles. Licences for the puller were withdrawn over two decades ago, says Kumkum Kumar.

In 1996, the government had announcement a similar ban. When a hue and cry was raised, it was lifted. But restrictions were imposed on the areas in which rickshaws could ply. They were confined to lanes and by-lanes. Arterial roads became out of bounds for them.

On an average a puller earns Rs 60 to 70 per day. He pays Rs 15 to 20 for hiring the rickshaw. If he crosses an arterial road and is nabbed by the police, he shells out nearly Rs 150 as bribe to be let off.

Most pullers are from Muzaffarpur, Chhapra and other parts of Bihar. They live in *deras*, or community dormitories. The *dera* has a parking lot for the rickshaws, and a *mistry khana* or repair shop to keep the rickshaws in good shape. There is a community kitchen where everyone pools money and labour to cook meals.



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DELHI'S ANGRY

Residents fix power companies, beat back an unjust power tariff hike. Where do they go from here?

Umesh Anand
New Delhi

THREE years ago, the residents of Delhi breathed a huge sigh of relief when power supply was privatised. The Delhi Vidyut Board (DVB) had become infamous for its corruption and inefficiency. Not only did electricity go off for long hours, but bills were invariably wrong and it was difficult to register complaints. Getting faults repaired meant bribing linesmen and engineers.

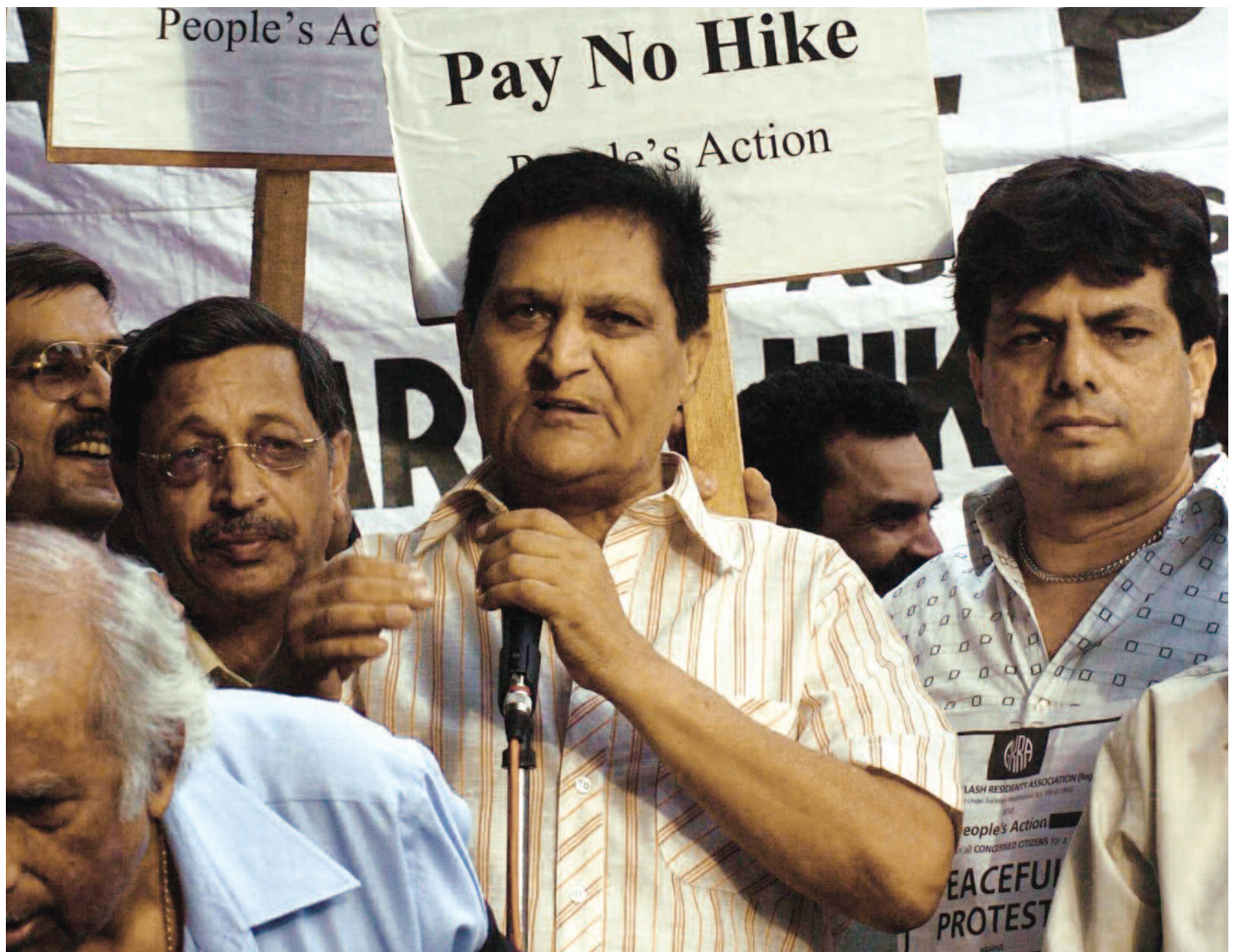
So, when distribution was handed over to two privately managed companies, BSES and NDPL, people hoped some of their worst nightmares were over. With the government out of the way, the situation could only improve. BSES is run by Anil Ambani and NDPL by the Tatas. They were expected to be accountable and

transparent in their business practices.

But in an amazing turn of events, Delhi's residents are now breathing a rather different sigh of relief, this time at having got the private power companies off their backs – the very companies from which they had such high expectations.

After some initial improvements, the companies, BSES in particular, began to be as callous as DVB and much more aggressive in their dealings, compelling many residents to take to the streets with placards and slogans.

In an unprecedented show of middle class and consumer solidarity, the residents have hit back and now forced the government to annul an unjust 10 percent hike in electricity charges. The 10 percent came on top of 30 percent in earlier hikes. Interestingly the 10 percent had only been sought by BSES and



MIDDLE CLASS

not NDPL, though both were set to benefit.

They residents have also shamed BSES for many strong-arm practices such as arbitrarily changing meters and insisting on payment of incorrect and inflated bills. To escape this fury, Ambani has had to sack the CEO of BSES in Delhi.

More importantly the residents have shaken the Sheila Dikshit government, which has thus far regarded the middle class as its vote bank and used a programme called Bhagidari to promote participatory governance. The need to go to the streets showed Bhagidari in poor light.

But if it has been tough to achieve all this, the road ahead for Delhi's middle class is much more tricky. They will have to deal with the complexities of power privatisation and speak the language of private companies. The big question is how do they empower themselves.

In the beginning, privatisation seemed to make things better. Such were the depths to which services had fallen under DVB that any substitute would bring instant relief. But as a year elapsed some of the old problems seemed to return. Bills were wrong, complaint centres uncaring and breakdowns frequent. In addition, the cost of electricity was shooting up.

If DVB was a jungle everyone dreaded stepping into, the private operators seemed to behave like predators let loose. If you complained about an unrealistically high bill, you were told to pay up first or your electricity would be cut off. Senior citizens were harassed and pushed around.

There were more complaints about BSES than NDPL. People had wanted privatisation, but they hadn't prepared themselves for the brutal measures that a company like the Ambani-run BSES could unleash.

Stories abound and get quite shocking. In Shantiniketan, a posh and upmarket colony, Padma Chib received bills of Rs 200,000 and Rs 1,000,000. She remembers how stressful it was getting those bills corrected. Being a former Ambassador's wife and an activist among Shantiniketan's residents, she managed.

Others have felt rather helpless. An old and infirm woman resident of Greater Kailash II was given a bill of Rs 9000 and accused of power theft. She had to pay up otherwise her connection would be cut. Neighbours had to come to her assistance in dealing with BSES.

It was unilaterally decided that meters would be replaced. BSES sent teams to homes with instructions to rip out existing meters and replace them with electronic meters, which had been imported from China. NDPL was gentler and sought to build communication channels with consumers. It used meters made by Indian manufacturers who were reputed and accountable.

Sometimes people weren't home when the men from BSES turned up but the meters were changed nevertheless. At Lado Sarai, for instance, several of the residents had gone home to Kerala for their annual holidays. They were told on phone by worried neighbours that their meters were being torn out. It was no different in other South Delhi colonies.

The electronic meters seemed to send bills soaring. Suddenly everyone was paying more. Was this because the meters were doctored or was it because they were more efficient in recording consumption? It was impossible to get a sound explanation.

Residents now say they have a list of demands and grievances:

- They want meters they can trust.
- They want competition in distribution.

- They question the 16 percent profit assured to BSES and NDPL.
- They say DVB's assets were undervalued by more than Rs 1500 crores.
- They want the quality of service to improve. This includes disabled-friendly complaint centres and responsive staff.
- They say in BSES areas transformers and other infrastructure are in poor shape.

The Congress government had been quick to claim credit for privatisation, but can't seem to explain what is going on. Ajay Maken, who as former state power

minister presided over the deal with the companies with much fanfare, moved on to become a Member of Parliament. Though elected from Delhi, he didn't think it necessary to come to the assistance of his constituents.

On the contrary, in an ugly display of power politics, Maken chose to take potshots at Sheila Dikshit even as people struggled to cope with the many complexities of privatisation. The opposition BJP, too, made no constructive interventions, but salivated over the opportunities the mess was providing.

If politicians abdicated responsibility, the regulator, the Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission (DERC), seemed to be some kind of toothless, shapeless wonder. The DERC is supposed to speak for the consumer and ensure fairness in the

business practices of the private players. It is the regulator's responsibility to educate consumers and help them build the capacity to cope with privatisation.

Quite the contrary, the DERC openly cavorted with the two companies. The DERC is appointed by the government. But the government did nothing to ensure that the DERC was accessible to consumers and oriented towards dealing with their concerns, though this is required under electricity laws.

For a long time the DERC had only a chairman. Then two more members were appointed. Now for the past 10 months it has had no chairman. An advisory committee of experts and consumers has never been appointed though this is crucial for the transparent working of the system. Electricity laws stipulate complete transparency and give the consumer full right to information contained in contracts and business plans. These

rights are to be exercised through the regulator.

For hundreds and thousands of consumers there is only one lesson from weeks of complaining and coming out on the streets. It is that middle class anger pays. The louder you scream the better.

Public demonstrations were held under two different banners. There was the Delhi RWA Joint Front that lays claims to some 300 RWAs as members. And there was the Campaign Against Power Tariff Hike (CAPTH), which was set up by an NGO called People's Action.

CAPTH exhorted people not pay the 10 percent hike. It called the refusal to pay civil disobedience. The Joint Front on the other hand opposed the hike but did not call for a refusal to pay bills. It stressed negotiations with the government and the holding of public meetings.

Sometimes the numbers at demonstrations were insignificant and the only way of locating them in crowded places like Janpath was by looking out for placards saying: PAY NO HIKE.

At Rajender Nagar just 88 residents decided not to pay. It was much the same in Greater Kailash, Sheikh Sarai and other colonies. At one level these small numbers did not amount to much. At another they represented a larger



A candlelight demonstration



Pankaj Agarwal, secretary of the Joint Front of RWAs

resentment.

"You can't dismiss such protests. They are a measure of what people in general think. They represent the silent majority," said Sanjay Kaul of People's Action.

Pankaj Agarwal, secretary of the Joint Front, agreed that individuals refusing to pay would bring pressure on the government. Personally he was in favour of not paying because it would compel the authorities to find a solution. But he saw this as a choice individuals had to make.

There were also protests that were big, such as at Defence Colony's Moet's Park on August 6. Some 200 representatives of residents' welfare associations (RWAs) from across Delhi gathered there. The black bands people wore said it all.

They were not the kind of folk you would expect to find saying anything outside the sanctity of their drawing rooms. But on that day they were out to loudly express their anger.

"The message this sends out," says Agarwal, "is that unless people come on to the streets and protest the government will take no action."

For the Joint Front this is a sad thing because it has been advocating a path of negotiation and talks and inclusion of consumers in the regulatory process introduced when power was privatised and DVB broken up.

Agarwal points out that it is the regulator's job to ensure that consumers get the opportunity to build their capacity to work with the new system. It is with this in mind that the Joint Front has gone to Prayas, an NGO based in Pune, which has done laudable work on energy and consumer rights.

Prayas and other groups working with it have compelled the regulator in Maharashtra to include them in deliberations and put information in the public domain.

As utilities have moved from government to private control, consumers need to do their homework and have a clear understanding of the rights and obligations of all the players in the market. They need to know how to use institutions like the regulator.

Says Shantanu Dixit of Prayas: "With the advent of regulatory commissions the whole sector has become more technical. There is more technical jargon, analysis, information and data. To succeed civil society organisations and consumer groups need to have different tools and strategies. One crucial tool is the power of analysis: technical analysis and economic arguments and trying to understand the language in which the sector speaks."

This is all the more important because the impact of certain decisions may be felt several years down the line. For instance, a power purchase agreement will determine tariffs far into the future. The time to protect consumer interests is when the agreement is being structured.

The residents of Delhi have shown none of this dexterity. They seem adrift amidst the complexities of privatisation. They have thrashed around and compelled the government to act. But in months and years to come they will have to acquire the capacity to sit and negotiate across a table, asking for details of capital investments by the private companies, insisting on good quality meters, reviewing figures for power supply and consumption and so on.

"If consumers acquire sophistication in these matters and try to understand these issues," says Dixit of Prayas, "they will become more effective in raising questions and concerns and they can expect more compelling responses from the various actors."

So, while anger has worked in Round One, clearly a lot more needs to be done. The RWAs of Delhi could be the perfect vehicle for moving ahead.

But the RWAs are mired in problems of identity. Till Bhagidari came along, RWAs were directionless bodies, which did not know that they could have political clout. Sheila Dikshit helped them realise their potential.

Now they have clear expectations from the government. The complaints over electricity were in fact just a trigger for much more that had been bottled up and allowed to fester. RWAs were fed up with being taken for granted. Bhagidari is an attractive concept, but meetings have been held with officials sitting on stage and talking down to RWAs. In real terms little has been achieved.

Sanjay Kaul of People's Action says: "Bhagidari is a means for the government to disown its responsibilities. It is designed to blunt the RWAs and keep them from criticising the government."

VC Tandon, architect of the Joint Front, worries that the chief minister says one thing, but her officials do something else. "The government has told executive engineers of the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) to take note of RWA complaints, but in reality they brush us off."

In the absence of pragmatic way of discussing urban services and the problems of governance, the chances are that middle class resentment will find further expression in outbursts of anger and street level protests.

What has begun with power will now most likely move to water over which the middle class has reached the point of exasperation. It is not uncommon to find groups of families squatting on the road and disrupting traffic in south Delhi when innumerable complaints to smug officials of the Jal Board or even to the office of the chief minister and chief secretary draw no response for days together. A single demonstration throwing traffic out of gear for a few hours, however, provides instant relief. Clearly, anger, once again, works like nothing else.

'Consumers m

*Shantanu Dixit works for the NGO Prayas in Pune. Prayas is known for path-finding work in consumer rights and the energy sector. Prayas has also tried to educate consumers. **Civil Society** spoke to him in Delhi where he was visiting the Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission (DERC) for a report that Prayas is preparing.*

What challenges does privatisation throw up for the consumer?

If you look at the power sector before the advent of regulatory commissions it was an entirely government controlled, owned and operated sector. To deal with such a sector required different strategies and tools like political mobilisation, approaching the local MLA etc.

With the advent of regulatory commissions the entire energy sector has become more technical. There is technical jargon, analysis, information and data. To succeed civil society organisations and consumer groups need to have different tools and strategies.

One crucial tool is going to be the power of analysis: technical analysis, economic arguments and trying to understand the language the sector speaks. If consumers get sophistication in these matters they will get more effective in raising questions and concerns and they can expect more compelling responses from the actors.

The power of analysis no doubt will apply to power sector agreements.

A peculiar aspect about the power sector is the delay in actions and results. New power purchase agreements may be entered into today but the plant will come up only two or three years down the line and that will be the time consumers will have to pay for it. But making a noise or raising questions about the power plant then will be too late because all legal contracts would have been entered into and there would be a lot of legal complications. So consumers really need to look at issues that will come up two or three years down the line.

For example, in Delhi the existing transition arrangement is going to be over in the next one and a half years. What arrangement needs to be put in place for the post transition period is a very crucial question. In terms of tariff policy, should the tariff be equal across Delhi or should tariffs be different for three companies? What should the provisions be for new power purchases because Delhi also needs to buy more power to meet demand. These questions need to be raised today. There should be informed public debate on these matters so that when these decisions are actually implemented and the time comes to pay for them, consumers will not have to repent.

How can people's groups equip themselves for this role?

There are several ways. For one, they should have a more detailed analysis of data in relation to licences. It's a complex sector so one can't expect consumer groups to have the ability to provide answers immediately. Consumer groups can pinpoint significant gaps which will force regulatory commissions, governments or licencees to take action on those issues. If the right questions are not asked then polemics takes precedence.

What expert advice can consumer groups draw on?

There are a number of public minded experts, professionals, engineers and economists who would be willing to provide support. The effort to build bridges needs to be made so that questions can be raised in the right manner, supported by data and analysis. I don't think there is a complete vacuum, but it's a long process.

For the system to work the regulator needs to function. How much of that depends on the consumer?

There are two things to look for. One is space. In the entire regulatory process there needs to be enough space so that consumer groups and civil society can participate. Only then does the regulatory process acquire accountability. Alongside there needs to be capacity on the part of consumer groups. Currently the legal structure offers significant space. There are gaps but compared to the earlier structure it does offer more room for consumer participation and intervention in the sector.

In the case of regulatory commissions, like DERC, by law they are expected to function in a transparent manner, which implies any document in the possession of the commission is open to the public. Even before the right to information law came into existence this was the case. Now

ust learn to deal with facts'



Shantanu Dixit of Prayas

consumer groups must learn to get hold of the documents, analyse them and go back to the commission.

The other mechanism is proceedings. The commission conducts a number of hearings. These are also open to the public. Consumer groups can participate or be a witness to those hearings.

By doing this in Maharashtra you made a responsive regulatory system?

We are moving towards that, I would say. It has opened significantly in terms of transparency and availability of documents and information. There is no hurdle as such in Maharashtra.

But if there hadn't been this pressure it may not have happened?

It may not have happened and it's a long process. It took us four to five years before the entire thing opened. For instance, the first time the MSEB came forward with tariff revision was in 1999 before the Maharashtra Electricity Regulatory Commission (MERC). They had come forward with a faulty proposal. We analysed it, realised the proposal needed a lot more data and arguments. We petitioned the commission and argued our case. As a result the MSEB was forced to submit a revised proposal. And next time the MSEB came in they gave a lot more data plus data in terms of how their plants are performing, hour by hour generation from each plant, hour by hour performance of their generating stations and transmission lines, based on which we could make suggestions for cost reduction, tariff reduction and now that process has stabilised.

There is great apprehension in Delhi that BSES is hiking tariffs unreasonably.

Consumers need to make a systematic database of all these issues. There may be 10 cases of consumer complaints. Taken together they matter. Then there are issues pertaining to capital expenditure for which information can be brought into the public domain. Unless there is a commensurate improvement in the quality of service the tariff hike becomes unjustified. But to establish this, information is needed at the aggregate level.

How should regulators be appointed?

As far as the new Electricity Act, 2003, is concerned there is a selection committee for choosing a regulator. The structure is common in India, across all regulatory commissions in the electricity sector. The committee is chaired

by a retired high court judge whom the state government has to nominate. The second person in the committee is the principal secretary of the state government. The third person is either the chairman of the CEA or the CERC. So this is a body of three people constituting the selection committee. The selection committee is expected to recommend two names for each vacancy and then out of that the state government is expected to select one name.

Currently we are doing a project on assessing electricity governance in a number of countries. We have developed a tool kit. It's in the pilot stage. When going through the toolkit, gaps in the selection process become very apparent. For example, in the current selection process there is no transparency at all. People don't know when the selection committee was established, how nominations were called, what effort was made to get good candidates, what was the basis on which candidates were selected. So there is no feedback to people and this is across states. I am not commenting on the quality of regulators in any particular state. It's a process which is flawed and has lacunae.

One aspect we need to see is how we can improve transparency in the selection process. Maybe one option is mandating that the selection committee needs to be recast. Moreover why can't we have a process whereby the state government or selection committee tables a report in the Assembly documenting the entire process and justifying the choice? Ultimately the regulatory commission is going to function on behalf of the state.

If you are unhappy with your regulator what do you do?

There are very limited choices for the consumer. The legal structures are such the regulator enjoys enormous immunity. The regulator is appointed for a fixed tenure and cannot be removed unless on very specific grounds of misconduct or misbehaviour. This is not without reason. We have had a number of cases where good people were thrown out just because they were not willing to function in a manner which would please political masters.

Delhi does not have an advisory committee for its regulator.

It's a big flaw. We consider that an essential accountability mechanism. Mechanisms of an advisory committee and appointment of consumer representatives become important tools for accountability. For example in Maharashtra, the Act provides that each regulatory commission can appoint certain groups as consumer representatives to represent the interests of consumers in all proceedings before the commission. Maharashtra has appointed four consumer representatives and by

default whenever MERC issues any notice for any hearing or any meeting with the licencees that notice is copied to the consumer representatives. They are also allowed to participate in the proceedings. So it no longer remains an affair between the regulator and the licencee.

At each instance there are consumer representatives present in the debate and discussion. So that kind of accountability mechanism needs to be built in. The onus of doing this is on the regulatory commission.

How should tariffs be raised?

The current procedure is that the licencee will have to make detailed submissions. The regulatory commission has to invite public comments and give a reasoned order. I think that's a reasonable process. Supposing the

A peculiar aspect about the power sector is the delay in actions and results. New power purchase agreements may be entered into today but the plant will come up two or three years down the line and that will be the time consumers will have to pay for it.

Continued from previous page

licencee says I want to make capital investments of Rs 500 crores and the regulatory commission approves that, then the Rs 500 crores invested will be reflected in tariffs. So just looking at the end part of the process is not a solution. That is why I keep saying you need to start functioning from much earlier.

You need to focus on how much capital investment the licensee is going to propose, how much investment the commission is going to allow. Is that investment justified? Is that investment really going to improve the quality of service? So, if you start raising questions at that stage by the time you come to the tariff revision process, you have already insured that only the reasonable capital cost is passed on to consumers.

One thing that has bothered consumers is the 16 percent post tax return. A view is expressed that this is unreasonably generous. Is that so?

Traditionally electricity boards were allowed to get a return of 3 percent on their net fixed assets. If you take a debt equity ratio of three is to one or something, the return on equity would come to around this, maybe 14 percent or 15 percent. If you look at old licensees in Kolkata, Mumbai and Surat they were allowed returns in the same range. So I won't call this percentage per se highly unreasonable. Yes it needs to be moderated and we can have a range for that.

The other point I want to make is that you need to look at all the components

of tariff. When a consumer is paying Rs 4 per unit as tariff he is paying maybe just 10 paise per unit towards the 16 percent rate of return. But Rs 3.90 he pays towards the cost of electricity. The licensee has to incur this cost. I think the margin for tariff reduction is far more if you look at costs rather than just looking at profits. So the 16 percent may appear large but only if you look at it in isolation. When you compare it to the total revenue of the licensee then 16 percent does not seem that much. Roughly about 60 to 70 percent of consumer tariff goes to the cost of power purchase and therefore the importance of new purchase power agreements.

In Delhi they purchase power at Rs 1 something and sell it at Rs 4 something. In layman's terms the difference seems very big. Can you explain this a bit?

You need to consider that the licensee might be buying it at Rs 1.90 but for each unit that is being bought how much is the licensee recovering? In Delhi, because losses are 32 or 30 percent, they are recovering only point six or point seven per unit. That entire Rs 1.90 cost is loaded on that point six or point seven per unit.

Now add the cost of their own distribution network because that also entails capital investment, expenses such as metering, billing, manpower. Nowhere am I suggesting that the tariff being charged in Delhi is reasonable. It may or may not be. I have not studied it. In MSEB the losses are 40 percent so for each unit they buy they recover only point six.

Why Lado Sarai hates BSES



Photos: LAKSHMAN



Extreme right: Vinay Kumar Walia with R.C. Dhingra next to him and members of the Lado Sarai RWA. Extreme left: K Vijaya Raghaven

Above: The much hated and mistrusted Chinese meters that were forcibly installed

Civil Society News

New Delhi

ON June 8, a BSES contractor and his men barged into a block of DDA flats in Lado Sarai, south Delhi. "We have come to change all your meters," said the contractor menacingly to RC Dhingra, vice-president of the RWA. "Go away," replied Dhingra. "Our meters are fine and most flat owners are not at home."

Schools were closed. Seventy percent of Lado Sarai's residents are from God's Own Country and they were away in Kerala.

"If you don't let us change your meters, we'll cut off your electricity," threatened the contractor.

A frightened Dhingra phoned K Vijaya Raghaven, president of the RWA, in Kerala. "I guess you'll have to agree," he said.

So old meters were replaced with orange Chinese meters. The contractor and his team then yanked out panel boxes, bus bars, copper wires, DP switches etc. Vinay Kumar Walia, a resident, caught one of them red-handed and handed him over to the police. He turned out to be the contractor himself and he admitted they were stealing.

Walia filed a complaint. The police took no action. Instead, say angry residents, he's being harassed by BSES. They point out the stolen electrical paraphernalia had been installed by them for their own safety and was not the

property of DESU. "BSES has committed an act of theft," they say. Residents want their old meters and equipment returned. The contractor left many orange Chinese meters entangled in loose wires and residents fear the whole thing may blow up with a bang.

Every evening Lado Sarai is plunged into darkness. Since 1988 residents have been asking for streetlights. The women work as nurses in the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) and other hospitals in Delhi. They are on shift duty and return home at odd hours. Safety is a big concern.

Instead a *desi* liquor shop flourishes on the street under the patronage of the local beat constable. For the women the 'open air bar' is a minefield. Joining the drunks are sundry vendors plying their wares after paying the cop his *hafta*.

Liquor flows but water doesn't. DJB supplies drinking water through a narrow pipe for some two hours every day and residents, young and old, line up with buckets. People here get mucky groundwater, supplied by DJB, which has made their water meters get stuck.

This RWA is socially conscious and used the right to information law to find out how much is being spent on their area. The residents were predictably shocked. They pooled money to spruce up their park and have installed fans in the local government school. Their block of flats is neat and tidy.

"We have this big garbage dump at the back which causes dengue around here," says Raghaven, with a touch of irony.

'The best future for RWAs is as urban panchayats'



LAKSHMAN

VC Tandon in Gulmohar Park

VC Tandon, a sprightly 70 plus, heads the Delhi Residents' Welfare Associations Joint Front. It represents 300 residents' welfare associations or RWAs. A journalist who retired as a public relations officer with BHEL, Tandon has taken the lead in organising disparate RWAs under one umbrella.

Just weeks after a heart bypass surgery, Tandon was in the thick of the dispute over power tariffs and the performance of the Anil Ambani managed BSES.

He spoke to *Civil Society* at his home in Gulmohar Park. A strong advocate of women's participation in urban governance Tandon believes the time has come to seriously think about transforming RWAs into urban panchayats.

What's gone wrong with the Bhagidari movement?

The concept of Bhagidari is a good one. It was meant for better governance. But it has not worked in its execution. We have been saying we can give the Chief Minister some feedback. So far, at Bhagidari workshops, about 100 or 200 people would turn up, like a political party. But on 30 July we organised a genuine workshop where representatives of RWAs came and spoke their mind freely to her. Even in the matter of property tax when we talked to her directly, she gave us concessions. These were entitled to us but were being denied because of resistance from the bureaucracy.

Corruption runs deep in the administration. There is also a lack of communication and non-availability of information. Even if orders are given from the top, there is no follow-up. Lower down government employees regard the people they should be serving as headaches (*janta parayshan karti hain*). Government clerks don't listen to their bosses any more. Any change in this structure will lift the lid on corruption.

Is the RWA movement getting steeped in politics?

The BJP is getting involved politically with the RWAs. The RWA is an identified target audience which political parties are trying to capture. It's become a platform they can make

use of. As a Joint Forum of the RWAs we can't sponsor a political candidate. Our purpose is the lot of the resident. We work with whoever is elected.

Builders misuse RWAs for breaking building bylaws under the guise of Bhagidari. Let genuine people come forward to render service to society. In Gulmohar Park, for instance, we have many retired engineers, administrators and people of ability who can help the government without any money being involved.

What do you think should be done to strengthen the RWA movement?

RWAs should be given the status of urban panchayats and streamlined. Right now any group of seven people can come together, register under the Societies Registration Act and become an RWA. But if we are given the status of urban panchayats, things can change. We are overly tolerant people and accept everything.

If the government agrees in principle then it should bring about urban panchayats through legislation. The entire process should be streamlined with rules on holding of elections, what should be the percentage of members etc.

Will you give 33 percent reservation to women?

Women are the worst sufferers of bad civic services. If there is no water or electricity they face the brunt. We are putting in place a special women's task force of seven members in our central committee and a three-member women's task force in each RWA. They are nominated members. If you add it up it becomes a big women's task force.

What are the powers that the RWAs should have?

We do not want financial powers. Neither do we want to be a party to tenders. If five roads are being built in our colony we should have the privilege of deciding where these should be made. This does not happen. We should be consulted before a decision takes place but we are simply informed afterwards.

We can make plans for our colonies for a year. We were offered an allocation of 30 percent of property tax for civil duties. We will not accept it. Once

money gets into the RWAs we will be finished. We are not asking for money. But yes if anything is being done in our colonies it should be mandatory for the concerned government department to consult us. We should also be given full information about how much money is being spent, who the contractor is, so that we can monitor the work.

Do you support privatisation of essential services like electricity and water?

When privatisation of DVB took place nobody really knew about the terms of the agreement. These should always be transparent. The privatisation of an essential service like water can't be undertaken by the government unilaterally. Everyone must be consulted because there is no B company available to me once a service provider is installed. So there must be safeguards, some system for protecting the rights of the consumer.

Corruption runs deep in the administration. There is also a lack of communication and non-availability of information. Even if orders are given from the top, there is no follow-up. Lower down government employees regard the people they should be serving as headaches (*janta parayshan karti hain*). Government clerks don't listen to their bosses.

Naeem in the heart of America

A media activist tries to explain Islam and immigration



Aashti Bhartia

ON 5 August, the Visible Collective opened *Disappeared in America*, a walk-through multi-media installation, at the Brecht Forum in New York. The Collective brings together Muslim artists and activists to give voice and face to the thousands of people and families targeted by the suspension of civil liberties for immigrants in post 9/11 America.

Panelists like Aziz Huq from the NYU Brennan Center for Justice detailed the consequences of detention without trial, and Bangladeshi comic sensation Aladdin Ullah poked fun at the stereotypes he encountered growing up Muslim in East Harlem.

The event was also a fundraiser for the families of two 16-year-old girls, Tashnuba Hyder and Adama Bah who were detained on unsubstantiated charges of being suicide bombers in April 2005.

Tashnuba, a practising Muslim and a Bangladeshi immigrant who arrived in Astoria, New York with her parents as a five-year-old, was held at a maximum-security juvenile detention centre for seven weeks for questioning by the FBI. Adama, an immigrant from Guinea, was eventually released and allowed to return to her high school. Tashnuba, however, was deported to Bangladesh under the pretext of immigration violations.

By the *New York Times* admission, Tashnuba's detention and deportation remains 'shrouded in government secrecy'. The government, at the FBI's request, has 'declined repeated requests to present its side' sealing the case record altogether. As the first terror investigation in the United States involving minors, the murky case shows how laxity of procedure can incriminate a person using no evidence other than dress, skin, colour, religion and ethnic identity.

A few days after visiting the *Disappeared in America* exhibit, I met media activist Naeem Mohaiemen for an interview. Filmmaker and director of the Visible Collective, Naeem is active in media-activist circles in New York and Dhaka. As we walked from the Brooklyn subway stop to a café near where Naeem lives, we talked about the problems with mass media representations of Muslims.

"There's almost a top 10 list of things we're supposed to say to the media" he said, "All Muslims are not terrorists. Islam is a religion of peace. Jihad is internal jihad. Suicide bombing is not justified in the Quran... I'm sick of reacting. Part of the reason we started the collective is that we wanted to do something positive."

The issue today is no longer representations of Islam over *there* in Iran, but over *here*, making it a directly pressing concern for Muslim immigrants. In this changed context, Naeem seems to be part of a strategic shift. In addition to exposing media stereotypes of Islam, he brings to light progressive perspectives amongst Muslim immi-



Naeem Mohaiemen

"We created the project as an example of open source media activism because we really felt there aren't enough people working on these issues and we don't want to be gatekeepers of a particular kind of project."

grants, together with civil liberties issues.

How did the *Disappeared in America* project begin?

We created the project as an example of open source media activism because we really felt there aren't enough people working on these issues and we don't want to be gatekeepers of a particular kind of project. So we wanted the project to be open to everybody. Everything is on the web and we encourage everyone to take the material and create their own work. Some people have wanted to bring the exhibition to their town and I've said, well, you can just take it and bring it yourself, you don't need us. We're trying to create a movement, not one particular project.

What kind of response has the exhibition received?

Every city in America that we have gone to, I've never had people say, no, this is not happening.

Rather, people have said, 'I had no idea our government was doing this in our name.'

That's what you really want. You don't want east coast New Yorkers and west coast San Francisco people to be aware of this. You want everyone to be aware of it. The vast majority of Americans don't know that this is happening. You might say, well, how can you not know, it's in the *New York Times*, but how many people read the *New York Times*?

If I get on the New York subway and I see people reading the newspaper, nine out of ten are reading a tabloid and one person is reading the *New York Times*. And if you look at the vast majority, most people get their news on Fox or MSNBC. People get their news from the worst kind of television. So really most people don't know that this is going on.

You could turn it on its head and say that in Bangladesh we have the Chittagong Hill Tracts where there's a 30-year tribal insurgency going on.

Loud silence over the quiet victim

It has been an unusual summer so far. The dog day afternoons of August never really came around as most northern and western Europe had to go a long way south to shed their sweaters and dip into warmer waters. Southern Europe suffered from what is becoming chronic aridity, water shortages and forest fires which were followed by devastating floods in northern Europe. Critics of global warming blame it on the rising snowline and melting glaciers that are undeniably evident today.

Yet popular media ignores earth-shattering news such as the melting of the Siberian tundra (larger than France and Germany combined at a million square kilometres) which holds about a quarter of the methane stored in the ground around the world, at a much higher rate than the rest of the world. The scientists involved called it "an irreversible ecological landslide." That must wait till the summer vacations are over and we have all returned from our distant vacation spots (the more distant and exotic the better). Please note: the per passenger fuel expended on a trans-Atlantic flight is more than a year's consumption of petrol by an average car.

As a result of such frenzied summer activity we have seen a spate of airline accidents, this month alone killing 334 people. Of course the media and governments make political hay of this whenever possible. The flight of the Greek airliner, Helios, crashed near the ancient city of Marathon on 15 August in mysterious circumstances killing all 121 people aboard but meriting a very short news brief on French television, with an emphatic mention of the absence of any French citizen on board. End of story.

Two days later a Columbian Airline crashes in Venezuela killing all 160 aboard, a majority of them tourists from the French dominion of Martinique. For the next ten days 90 percent of news time was devoted to this sole topic by the same television stations, with Chirac personally flying down to Venezuela for an extravagant ceremony. The bizarre aspect of this is not that the victims' privacy is torn to shreds (as is only to be expected of popular media) but that the victims are all eager and almost prepared for their 15 minutes of television fame, mouthing rehearsed speeches.

As the airline wasn't French, the plane wasn't French, the pilots weren't French, we heard the government loudly swearing to get to the bottom of it. Ambulance-chasing lawyers were swarming around the victims' families, smelling multi-million dollar lawsuits.

LETTER FROM EUROPE



Riaz Quadir in Versailles

While in the heart of Paris a building housing African refugees and asylum-seekers burns and 17 people die, 14 of them children. They will be forgotten before the weekend is over. This fire, on August 26, was an eerie replay of one in April this year when 22 people died, half of them children, all of them disenfranchised immigrants from Africa, the majority of them from Mali. The Paris-Opera Hotel that burned in April was ironically, right across from Paris' most chic shopping landmark, Galerie Lafayette. One didn't hear any shrill government voices swearing to get to the bottom of it. The reasons were all too clear. The authorities were to blame. The building was in a deplorable condition. The negligence was unimaginable in a country like France – and that too in the heart of its capital. The building fire code and safety rules under French law are equally deplorable. Are Paris fire codes so lax as to permit an eight storey hotel with only one stairwell and one exit?

These were what are known as half-way houses or temporary housing for people in transition. Yet, we find some of the residents have been there over 10 years and were with residence permits, doing jobs and earning enough to pay the 500 to 700 Euros rent. About 10 percent of the 100,000 applicants are accommodated by the government and humanitarian organisations. Incidentally, this building was managed by *Emmaus* one of the most credible humanitarian organisations in France. The shame is that they are isolated ghettos amidst the most luxurious settings. Just a walk away are the fabulous multi-million Euro Paris apartments.

The top dogs of the government, including Chirac and the current Prime Minister (then the Interior Minister, Dominique Villepin) made the right noises, saying, "New measures to reinforce fire regulations will be introduced as soon as possible. Fire specialists have been asked for proposals and new procedures should be in place within weeks." Now, four months later who is going to hold him accountable? No big-shot lawyers are on the scene, nor any popular media holding the government's feet to the fire. The current interior minister and presidential hopeful, Nicolas Sarkozy, again made the right noises which will surely be forgotten by September when France gets back to 'serious' work. But, as the former health minister Bernard Kouchner, co-founder of *Doctors Without Borders*, said, there is a collective responsibility for disasters such as these two fires. Society must protect the weak and the powerless or perish in the long run.

How many people in Bangladesh actually acknowledge that this has been happening? Or how many people in India acknowledge what's happening in the north-eastern states? People are always more prone to finding and analysing the problems of other countries rather than their own.

So instead of trying to infiltrate the mass media, would you say that immigrant activist communities should have alternative venues for information?

Well, it's both. This is a grassroots project but the mass media has also picked it up. The *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal* are mass media and they've both done stories about this project. PBS is mass media, and they did the interview. After PBS did the interview I got an e-mail from a police officer, saying: 'I surprise myself in that my background is rooted in more than 24 years in law enforcement in and around the NYC area, surprise myself in that I tend to empathise with your views and your plight.' I basically said if you arrest masses of people, then you won't catch terrorist cells because you're doing straight racial profiling as opposed to investigation work. People in the community are your allies in any investigation work. He mailed me because he saw me on a mass media programme.

What is your take on racial profiling?

I can understand why in moments of crisis people

say, 'Well you know I shouldn't be checking elderly Chinese men, I should be checking young men who look like you.' But in the end, it won't work because you won't catch terrorists. And who's to say that the next person is going to be brown? Muslims can be black, white, Latino, anything! So whom are you going to profile?

The reason you have in London home-grown bombers is the complete marginalisation of British Muslim youth - they don't fit into their own communities and they certainly don't fit into the larger mainstream community, which still has large

The reason you have in London home-grown bombers is the complete marginalisation of British Muslim youth - they don't fit into their own communities and they certainly don't fit into the larger mainstream community.

elements of racism in it. So, if the problem is marginalisation, why would you impose a policy that marginalises people further?

Before all this happened, African-American males were the number one racially profiled group in New York City. If you look at that community, they view the state and police with suspicion and they're fearful for their lives. And now you want to repeat that racist, destructive policy with another community-- and you think the results will be positive? If the point is to build bridges within communities, it would do the opposite.

Why do you think the media often doesn't report incidents of unwarranted detention, deportation, and harassment?

The media has reported some of it, but for the most part, the people that are most directly targeted are afraid to go public. The African-American community has a tradition of dissent, which says 'no we won't be silent, we'll speak up.' For Muslim communities here, especially recent migrants, the community is still scared to speak up.

The Visible Collective's work is accessible on www.disappearedinamerica.org/ Naeem Mohaiemen is a digital-media activist and filmmaker. He is Director of DISAPPEARED IN AMERICA project, MUSLIMS OR HERETICS (muslimsorheretics.org), a documentary about struggles between moderate and radical Muslims, and co-producer of RUMBLE IN MUMBAI. Naeem is Editor of Shobak.Org (Outsider Muslim Voices), and Associate Editor of AltMuslim.com

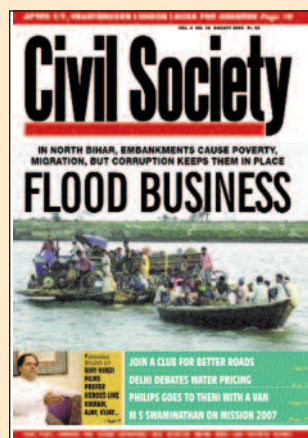
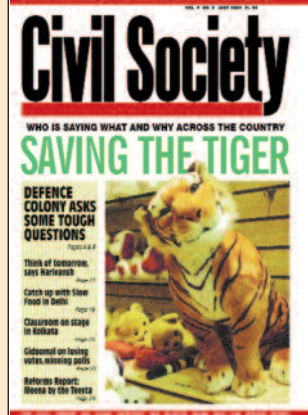
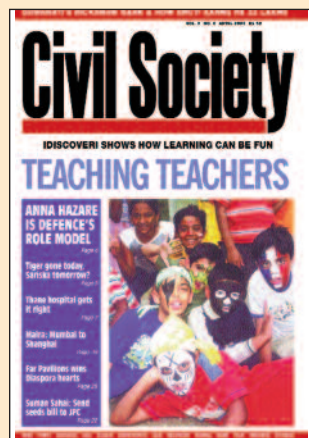
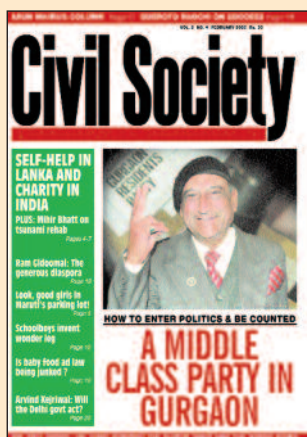
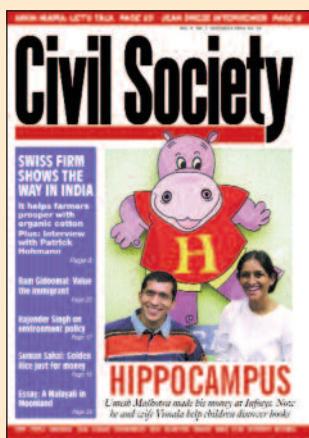
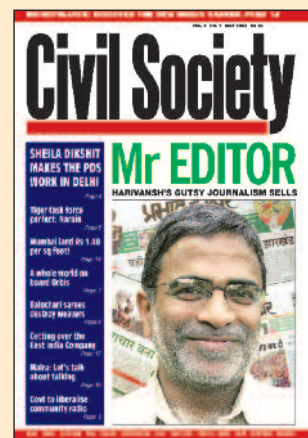


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THE BEST OF CIVIL SOCIETY

2nd ANNIVERSARY





Find us among heavenly bodies

RITA AND UMESH ANAND

TWO years ago when the first issue of *Civil Society* rolled off a rickety press on the fringes of a garbage dump in the messy Okhla industrial area of Delhi, the first thing that we did was to put it in our Santro and take it to friends. In an act of madness, we had created a publication out of literally nothing. We were thrilled, though many years in the media gave us some idea of the limitations of our enterprise. More than anything else at that point, we wanted feedback. What did other people think of our product? Most of our friends, being generous souls, gave us a pat on the back.

But friends saying nice things is one thing. Facing the market is quite another. We wanted to survive on the stalls, be bought and read. We took the magazine to Khan Market where, after some persuasion, the young man at Mercury agreed to put it on display. The first issue with Arvind Kejriwal on the cover thus went up and did quite nicely.

Thereafter, every month for the past two years we have taken our magazine down to Khan Market to give it to Mercury, Bahri Sons and The Bookshop. You could say we are superstitious about this duty.

It gives us great satisfaction to see *Civil Society* displayed with other magazines as you can see from our picture of our "Mr Editor" positioned snugly among the bare breasts on the covers of the girlie glossies displayed at Khan Market.

For a publication, nothing matters more than to be seen and bought. When we thought of creating *Civil Society* we took a decision that we would not look for funding as an NGO. We wanted to be a business because we felt any kind of journalism on issues of social importance must first prove that it is a product people are willing to buy.

Friends tell us that by pricing ourselves at Rs 50 we have perhaps stressed the point a bit too much. But we like the entrepreneurial gamble and feel a sense of achievement when we get people to pay for content.

Just as a presence at Khan Market thrills us, we are glad to know that we were on display at a small book fair in the Dibrang Valley. A reader took the trouble to send us a picture and a little account of the people who showed an interest in *Civil Society*. We are also proud to have subscribers in Jhabua and Nadia and other distant corners of the country. The street hawkers of Kolkata tell us that they read us.

The past two years have witnessed many productive initiatives by NGOs and people's movements. Sonia Gandhi's National Advisory Council has allowed some of these efforts to shape governance at the national level. Many groups work unnoticed at local levels as well, creating meaningful interfaces between the people and the government. The middle class, be it in Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore or some other city has become more demanding. It wants action and results and is ready to move courts and offer solutions.

Simultaneously, industry has shown signs of being more responsive and giving up an existence in perpetual denial. There is a greater realisation of the need to redefine profit, though the process is a slow one because it involves education and awareness creation at the top. Indian industry leaders are too accustomed to cutting corners and petulantly having their own way.

Civil Society has tried to capture all these trends with sympathy and understanding. Remember, we are not activists. We are merely reporters who like to

tell a story as we see it, without getting influenced or peddling our biases. It has been our endeavour to create an open space, which people of all persuasions can access, be they from industry or the social sector or entities in the extremities of the political system.

Civil Society has been lucky in its friends. They include both social activists and industrialists. We feel privileged that they have always respected our independence and allowed us to come to conclusions with which they may not have been in agreement.

From industry we have received money by way of advertising and we would



LAKSHMAN

We wanted to be a business because we felt any kind of journalism on issues of social importance must first prove that it is a product people are willing to buy. Friends tell us that by pricing ourselves at Rs 50 we have perhaps stressed the point a bit too much.

like to put it on record that none of these companies have helped us because they wanted to use us. Their interest has only been to sponsor worthwhile journalism.

Booking advertising for a magazine with a circulation of 5000 is tough. Space buyers don't look at you twice. But if you have a product and a mission and can get to someone at the top of a company chances are that you will land some advertising.

We have found CEOs who truly care about the future of the country and are eager to do their bit to build a just and equitable system. They worry about the quality of information and see the need for robust publications in a democracy.

"Will *Civil Society* survive?" is a question we have often been asked. Well, we very nearly collapsed twice and had to be bailed out by individuals with hearts of gold who will remain unnamed for fear of embarrassing them.

But the answer to that question really is that *Civil Society* should die if people don't want to read it. As long as we are sighted among heavenly bodies at Khan Market and keep getting feedback of the kind we have from remote districts in the country, chances are that we will be around.



Elected, electors and NGOs

T N NINAN

It has been argued for many years that the Indian citizen has an electoral relationship with his rulers, not a real political relationship. To the point where this is even the subject of many cartoons in the popular press: politicians are shown contacting voters at election time, making a number of promises and then disappearing for five years, only to return with the same promises.

Perhaps this is the result of size: when you have over a million voters for the average parliamentary constituency, it is hard for any kind of relationship to develop between voter and voted. There is more contact possible at the aggregation level of state legislator, but still on a limited scale. It is at the local level where a real two-way relationship can exist (in the municipality, corporation, or panchayat), and it is precisely at this level that India's representative democracy has not taken off. For many years, these local bodies were in suspended animation, with no elections held and the bodies themselves superseded by state administrations – which meant that bureaucrats, not elected representatives, ran the show. In any case, since these local bodies had no financial powers worth the name, there was little they could do by way of action.

The other problem has been that political alignments have mostly been defined by identity: linguistic, caste and religious groupings. So the relationship between elector and elected is between the mass identity and a distant figure on another plane. And since nature does not tolerate vacuums, intermediaries of various kinds have seen opportunity in this gap, and made hay – resulting in the birth of the now ubiquitous political fixer. The leader depends on him to get things done at various levels (mobilising crowds, for instance), while he is also the conduit from below for seeking favours of various kinds (like even simply getting access to the elected representative, or a recommendation letter for a job, or interceding with an official on a land dispute). Other than this, the individual voter experiences mostly one-way communication; it becomes two-way only at the time of the five-yearly ballot. Hence the conclusion that voters have an electoral relationship with the people who are nominally their representatives, and not a full-fledged political one.

The result, when you look at this, is that politics (in the sense of public policy and action) took on a strangely disembodied character. We dealt with abstractions and large numbers, not real people; large national goals, not everyday concerns; theories about the right and wrong kind of development, not felt needs. Indeed, development itself eventually came to mean everything that people did not particularly want. The people wanted schools that functioned, the ruler promised steel plants. The people wanted water in the fields, the ruler talked of the Mahalanobis model. And so we had waiting lists for everything from cooking gas to telephone connections, but policy stressed ensuring that telecommunications were kept in the public sector, and telephone instruments manufactured by ITI.

A variety of responses resulted. One was the search for alternative political routes – fired up young men and women joined the Naxalite movement 35 years ago, in the hope of bringing about 'real change'. Later, the distortions in the mar-



Whether it is the national rural employment guarantee bill, the tribal rights bill, the right to information bill, or some of the other proposals that are still in the works, the moving spirits and the passionate advocates, if not the originating forces themselves, have been from civil society.

ketplace created by mindless adhesion to socialist shibboleths became too great and too obvious, so market economics was given a greater chance and the neo-liberals had their say. The Supreme Court innovated by allowing "public interest litigation", providing a powerful counter-magnet to executive power. And in the segments of society where the market could not provide the immediate or obvious solution, civil society began to fill the gap. In many different ways, the system has become more responsive to pressure from below. Even technology has begun to make a difference in a small way-because the Internet is a powerful mobilisation and communication tool. At the same time, the Constitutional amendments that revived the panchayati institutions have created a third level of government and brought decision-making much closer to the individual voter. There have been other initiatives too-like the consumer courts. With each of these develop-

ments, consumer and citizen empowerment has moved another step forward.

Many of these are international trends. It is not just in India that young men and women, usually not drawn from the political class (as with many of the Naxalites of old), began to engage with disadvantaged or powerless people across a social and economic chasm. With their ability to confront more effectively the power elites, they hoped to make a difference. Some did, others merely converted the initial idealism into passable NGO careers. Sustenance came through aid from overseas (mostly). Do-gooder "social workers" became "social activists" seeking to deliver empowerment, and now even "social entrepreneurs". Over time, they attained the maturity to deal with policy-makers as equals, to move cases in the Supreme Court, to challenge the viewpoints and on occasion even the expertise of the professionals-and win. And so we have seen the Delhi government forced to introduce natural gas for public transport so as to reduce the city's air pollution, Coca-Cola forced to shut down its Plachimada plant in Kerala because of water scarcity and effluent discharge, and so on. This was real-life politics outside the mainstream political system.

At some stage, politicians who could see that the official system was not delivering, began to respond, to co-opt the new players. Chandrababu Naidu in Andhra Pradesh pushed hard on the formation of self-help women's groups in Andhra Pradesh. Sheila Dikshit in Delhi introduced the Bhagidari system to get a public-private partnership going in many spheres. The police began to enlist the help of residents' welfare associations, to tackle law and order issues. Micro-credit was an NGO buzzword a few years ago, now it has acquired serious commercial potential and the banks are scrambling for turf. With all this, civil society has begun to get a multiplier effect.

The significance of Sonia Gandhi and the National Advisory Council that she chairs is that she has taken this whole process several steps forward by consciously seeking out non-political, non-government opinion on a variety of issues. And she has in a sense 'mainstreamed' these views by making them part of the formal advisory process. In the process, she has brought them close to the legislative process itself. Whether it is the national rural employment guarantee bill, the

(Continued on page 30)



Past perfect, future perfect

ANUPAM MISHRA

IN Hindi the word *samaj* means society. You don't need to add the word civil to society because *samaj* is a blend of both. In India, society was organised such that civil duties were carried out as a matter of course. The word civil to describe the tasks that society undertook was not required.

I don't really know much about societies in other parts of the world. But I can at least say that the term 'civil society' originated from a society that had become divorced from the word 'civil'. In such countries, power came to be concentrated in the hands of a monarch and hence society had to bear the burden of a large army. Under such circumstances, society had to find an avenue for civil activities.

In India, the opposite state of affairs existed. As far as civil duties and activities were concerned our past was past-perfect and for this reason I don't worry much about the future of our civil society. People will once again take over.

Although the last 200 years of India's history cast a gloomy shadow over our golden past, we can, even today, find examples that ensure us a bright future. If we set aside the myriad challenges confronting India and concentrate only on the work done in the area of environment, our faith in the future will be strengthened.

When the British came to India they found an organised and elaborate structure in place. They discovered five million ponds in 500,000 villages all the way from Kashmir to Kanyakumari. There were ponds in regions of Rajasthan like Jaisalmer which receive very little rainfall. There were ponds in areas that receive heavy rainfall like the Konkan in the south. This organised structure fulfilled society's requirements for water. But the British couldn't understand this system and therefore the new work done by them proved detrimental to an existing efficient structure set up by society.

Before the British colonised India, there were no engineering colleges in our country. Yet engineering tasks in the length and breadth of India had been carried out according to the needs of society. It was society that assumed the responsibility of doing these works, not the kings.

It is a different matter that kings associated themselves with these engineering works on their own. Society and the state worked in jugalbandi. So although engineering colleges did not exist, engineers did. There were engineers and architects everywhere who ensured that society's requirement for water was fulfilled. Their work was designed to meet the needs of the community.

Similarly, social institutions took care of our forests. We didn't have any institution like the Forest Department before the coming of the British. Planting of new forests or reviving and enhancing older forests was done everywhere under the supervision of society. Only a few people would remember that forests were developed in a very organised manner.

You would find that a single village in Rajasthan had about three or four differ-



ent types of forests.

One forest would fulfil the daily needs of villagers for fuel wood and fodder. A second forest would be used for timber to construct houses, buildings, temples, mosques or a panchayat building every one or two years. A third forest would be developed, but no one would touch it. It was called an *Oran*. The word is derived from a Sanskrit word *Aranaya* which means forest. After all, in spite of safeguards, who could predict a drought? *Oran* was a forest that could be used in times of hardships. No one tampered with it during happier days. Hence the *Oran* would always have a sufficient stock of trees and fodder and the entire village

could then seek shelter there. In Bihar, such forests were called *Sarna*, meaning shelter and derived from *sharan* in Sanskrit. Even today you can find *Sarnas* in many villages of Jharkhand.

It is really hard to understand why governments of all hues, including the one that came to power in the name of Swadeshi, have not, to date, recognised these *Sarnas* or *Orans*. So, whether it was forests or water, society had put in place an organised structure and had run it for years.

Their plans were not like the schemes designed by the Planning Commission for five years only. In the past, society's plans stretched to five centuries. This is why we still find ponds, *Sarnas* and *Orans* that are four or 500 years old.

Apart from forests and water, civil society looked after agriculture, justice and health. Probably not many people know that in our country the task of providing security by enlisting in the army was also assumed by society. We didn't have the custom of maintaining a permanent army. During peace, the entire society performed its civil duties. In times of war or a sudden crisis, society would present an army to the king.

Each region was assigned the duty of raising a certain number of soldiers. During a crisis the allotted number of people came forward to join the army and fight for the people's security. It was not possible to make an exact headcount of all these soldiers during a war. Hence many cities had grounds that were named according to the number of people who could be assembled there. For instance, in the Tees Hazari area of New Delhi, 30,000 people could gather together. Similarly, one can find surnames and names that indicate an association with numbers of soldiers like Hazare and Hazarika. Today, we relate these names with some famous cricketer, social activist or musician. We don't find it necessary to dig up the history of such names.

Before the British colonised India, there were no NGOs. The work now undertaken by NGOs used to be done by society itself in a routine way. Hence, we can say, in the past, our civil society was perfect and its future too should and can be perfect. And a beginning must be made by waking up to our duties today.

(Anupam Mishra belongs to the Gandhi Peace Foundation)

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tribal rights bill, the right to information bill, or some of the other proposals that are still in the works, the moving spirits and the passionate advocates, if not the originating forces themselves, have been from civil society. Suddenly, Jean Dreze, Aruna Roy and Sunita Narain are household names, Medha Patkar has a mass following that is the envy of many politicians, and Arundhati Roy finds that pamphletting gives her as much of an audience as creative writing.

Which inevitably raises the question that you hear more frequently: who elected these people anyway? The answer is, no one did. Perhaps they are in the same shoes as the Hurriyat in Kashmir: their legitimacy comes from a broad understanding that there is a real constituency that they represent. It is not a formal legitimacy, but it is very much one that belongs to the contemporary world-and it gains power because the media, the courts and key elements of the governing elite are turning to them for perspective, advice and involvement. If that key touchstone of innate legitimacy were to be lost, of course, the NGOs and their leaders would lose whatever voice they have acquired.

More than ever, therefore, the professional politicians are learning to play catch-up. They have begun to echo, in today's context, what Mahatma Gandhi said: There go my people, and I must follow, for I am their leader. Which is not to argue that civil society is everything it should or can be. An amorphous trend of the kind we have seen throws up the good, the bad and the ugly. Often, the passionateness of advocacy is not matched by common sense; or they don't practise what they preach (who has not heard of autocratically run NGOs pleading for grassroot democracy?). And since overseas aid-givers and financiers find it hard to separate the wheat from the chaff, perhaps the time has come to start a rating service for NGOs. Which would be a nice culmination: a market for NGOs!

This much can be said: civil society will gain in strength, aided by the courts, by the spread of empowering technologies, by instant communication. Civil society could even be a necessary and important foil to the political system, and thereby help build the political relationship between ruler and ruled, the absence of which set the ball rolling in the first place.



The politics beyond politics

JUG SURAIYA

UNLESS you write about politics no one will take you seriously, said my mentor. That piece of advice was given to me some 30 years ago when I had been taken on as a feature writer for *The Statesman*, Calcutta. My mentor was several years my senior, a director in a big tea company. No one would dare not to take *him* seriously.

He asked me what I'd been writing about. I'd told him I'd done a piece on a tiny nun in a white sari called Mother Teresa who was running a hospice for dying destitutes. "What else have you been writing on?" he asked. I said I'd started a series called 'How the other half lives', for which I'd so far interviewed a rickshaw-puller, a daily wage construction worker and a man who painted cinema hoardings. The tea company director looked unimpressed. That's when he advised me to write on politics, if I wanted to get ahead in my profession – as he had in his; and be taken seriously – as he was.

The thought crossed my mind even then that perhaps a dying destitute did in fact represent a political statement. As indeed did a man who earned a liveli-

often toppled by other politicians who then formed their own government. They made alliances, crossed the floor, staged walkouts, created vote banks, announced manifestos.

That was politics. And I found it very confusing. Worse, I found it irrelevant.

Perhaps I wasn't a serious person. Perhaps I wasn't meant to be taken seriously.

Not too long after my conversation with the tea company director, the then editor of *The Statesman* (again, an irreproachably serious individual) said to me, "You don't write too badly. But all this soft stuff you write, about do-gooders and ragpickers or whatever, isn't going to get you anywhere in journalism. Look at me. My specialisation was science. But where would that get me? So I trained myself to follow Bihar politics. I made myself an expert on Bihar politics, caste equations, electoral alignments, everything. You should do something like that."

I think he was a bit disappointed in me (as had been the tea company director) in that I never followed his advice. That I never wrote about politics, about politics the way they understood it.

When I went into the heartland of Bihar, I wrote about half-finished bridges over dry river beds, of roads that were mainly dust and potholes, of a remote village called Belchi which a year previously had witnessed a massacre and where now the only visible symbol of a protective *sarkar* was a fat havildar in a stained uniform snoozing hunched over an antique 303 musket.

A week after my report was published, a panelist on a TV show cited my article as a typical case of namby-pamby soft journalism. Where was the politics in it?

The politics they talked of always eluded me. When I tried to get to grips with it, my thoughts skittered away in all directions, like marbles. Did flames of carnage still flicker behind the sleeping eyelids of

the children of Belchi? Why did a half-built bridge arc like an open-ended question mark over a non-existent river, and who was the contractor and how much had he made on the deal? If a proper road one day connected the village to the outside world would market forces replace massacre as an instrument of social and economic negotiation?

Take yourself seriously, I told myself. And I found I couldn't.

I couldn't take myself seriously on the day when, after I was working with *The Times of India* in Delhi, a visiting French journalist dropped into my office. "Can you give me a general overview of Indian politics?" he asked. By way of answer I took him to the window overlooking the road where the traffic roared, crawled, thundered, limped by. "They say that on any urban Indian road at any given time there could be as many as 34 types of transport using it. Collisions seem imminent, yet miraculously they are mostly avoided, often by a fraction of a centimetre. Look at the tiny gaps between collisions, that narrow space of almost infinity manoeuvre. That's the space of Indian politics, that is Indian politics."

The Frenchman thought I was being whimsical, rhetorical. Perhaps I was. But at that time when I had no word with which to define that crucial space, my only recourse was rhetoric. Today that space which makes interaction between us possible has a well-recognised name. It also has a publication dedicated to its promotion and its enlargement. The name of that space and the publication are the same: *Civil Society*. The politics beyond politics.



I said I'd started a series called 'How the other half lives', for which I'd so far interviewed a rickshaw-puller, a daily wage construction worker and a man who painted cinema hoardings. The tea company director looked unimpressed.

hood by pulling his fellow citizens around in a rickshaw, or someone who helped build highrise apartments which he could never hope to live in, or someone else who painted advertisements for tinsel fantasies on mean and shabby streets.

But I knew what the tea company director – or any other person like him who had to be taken seriously – meant by politics. Politics meant the collective activities and pronouncements of a certain identifiable set of people called politicians. Politicians came into power (never 'assumed office', always 'came into power') by winning elections. They formed governments, which were



Fireflies light up India's skies

ARUN MAIRA

WILL India make it? The famous BRICS Report and many others say that India will be the world's third largest economy, after China and the US, by 2050 – far ahead of even Japan. But we cannot be sure. We should not forget that 15 years back analysts had projected that Japan would be zooming into the 21st century which would be the Japanese century. But ten years later, Japan stumbled. And who remembers that in 1975 the Soviet Union was the second largest economy in the world, closely rivalling the USA? Nevertheless, 15 years later, it had disintegrated. Analysts' predictions often turn out to be very wrong. Therefore, how sure can we be what India will be like even 15 years hence, let alone in 2050?

Just now, China's growth is tantalising, perhaps even frightening the world. The Chinese have their act together. Whereas, in India, we seem hamstrung by coalition governments. According to many Indians who envy the remarkable improvements in China's cities and its infrastructure, we suffer from the drag of democratic processes. Some of these people think in despair that we would do well with a dose of dictatorship. But, they have no idea who this person will be. Nor, how she or he would suppress all opposition. They seem to be oblivious to the turmoil and trauma the country would suffer by the emergence of such a leader. India is midstream on its path to cross the river to get to its goal on the other side, of becoming a happy and prosperous nation, just as China is mid-stream on its different path to the same goal. We cannot go back. We must go forward. Therefore Indians have no option but to improve the way our democracy functions by tackling two, inter-related questions:

- What is the process by which a large, diverse, and democratic country can accelerate its development?
- What is the appropriate model of leaders for this process? (Recognising that the skills required of leaders and the context within which they operate cannot be separated)

A few years back, a large and diverse group of people in India applied themselves to these very questions. They were concerned that, while India seemed to have escaped the Hindu rate of growth that had dogged it until the 1980s, and had begun to change and grow faster in the 1990s, the improvement was not fast enough to eradicate the country's enormous problems, such as poverty, failing social services, and poor infrastructure. They used a process called 'generative scenario thinking', which had been used very effectively in South Africa in the early 1990s, when that country was being torn apart by internal divisions between whites and blacks and between various political groups. Using this process, people representing various points of views in South Africa were able to understand the alternative scenarios of what South Africa may become in the future and, more importantly, what would be required of them to produce the scenario they wanted. This led to an agreement on some fundamental principles to guide the country's evolution. Though India is not in the desperate position South Africa was in then, this process could be of use to us in India, because we too must have consensus amongst opposing parties about some basic principles and policies to accelerate India's development.

In generative scenario thinking, the underlying forces in the situation are analysed. The analysis focuses on what is happening beneath the surface, rather than what is visible on the surface as a consequence of the underlying forces. Thus, by understanding the interplay of underlying forces, insight is obtained into what is likely to emerge in the future. Using this approach, scenarioists in Shell had suggested, at a time when it was unthinkable, that the Soviet Union may soon collapse. The diverse group in India, including economists, senior government officials, journalists, artists, businessmen, teachers, students, political leaders, and others combined their varied perspectives and

constructed a systemic view of the Indian reality that they could not have seen from their own, narrow, perspectives. With these insights, four plausible stories emerged of India's future.

These stories, with their supporting evidence, were discussed in a workshop in New Delhi. Hearing these stories, a young woman produced four pictures. These pictures, with images from India's own *Panchtantra* tales, beautifully captured the essence of four alternative models of development of a nation and the alternative models of leadership that were embedded in the four stories. A picture can say more than a thousand words. On many occasions when I have been asked to speak to students and others about leadership, I have used these pictures. Sometimes I do not have the pictures with me but I describe them in a few words and let people imagine them. I am amazed at how easily they 'get



SCENARIO 1: BUFFALOES WALLOWING



SCENARIO 2: BIRDS SCRAMBLING

Hearing these stories, a young woman produced four pictures. These pictures, with images from India's own Panchtantra tales, beautifully captured the essence of four alternative models of development of a nation and the alternative models of leadership that were embedded in the four stories.

it'. Let me show you the pictures.

They are four scenarios of India's economy and society with different models of development, change and leadership. The first scenario is called 'Buffaloes Wallowing'. This is a familiar sight in the Indian countryside: buffaloes cooling themselves in a pond. It is difficult for any of them to move because they are surrounded by others. In this scenario, many experts and bureaucrats, and such people in their 'high-up' positions are expected to determine the policies and changes required and to bring them about. However, they cannot all agree on what should be done. When one proposes, others oppose, and nothing much happens. (We loosely call such people in high positions 'leaders' regardless of how ineffective they are.) Meanwhile, the people in the country wait for progress, especially the young people who will need jobs when they grow up. Do you see the little boy on the side of the pond? That is the future of India, waiting for the so-called leaders to agree and move.

The second scenario, called 'Birds Scrambling' is the story of the free market and trickle down – get the government out of the way and leave it to busi-

ness. In this story, a woman scatters grain in her yard for the little sparrows to eat. Some pigeons arrive and push aside the sparrows. Then a peacock arrives in their midst and even the pigeons move aside. All the birds look with awe at the peacock and admire its finery and its size. The sparrows hope that after the peacock has eaten, there will be something left for them, if not today, then the next day. The so-called 'leaders' of society that are admired in this model are the wealthy, like those whose clothes and revels are displayed on 'Page 3'.

The third scenario, 'Wolves Prowling', is about the uses and abuses of concentrated power. In this scenario, the tiger that cannot be challenged by other animals gets his way. Around him, wolves prey on helpless smaller animals but the tiger doesn't care. Unencumbered by opposition, a powerful leader can make things happen. (Sometimes, frustrated by the 'buffaloes wallowing' and 'slow-fast-stall' pattern of India's progress, we yearn for such a leader.) But, we must beware. As Lord Acton said, 'power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely'. Like the wolves in the jungle, the powerful leaders' family and friends feed on the little people who live in fear of them.

The fourth scenario is different in a fundamental way. Unlike the others, it puts the onus for leadership and for making change happen deeper into the system. India is a diverse, democratic and complex system. The theory of 'complex self-adaptive systems' says that dynamic systems with great diversity (like

hope to people around them. Once it was a successful businessman. Another time it was a woman whose children had grown up and she was back in university to complete her education. And many times it is young people.

India has many fireflies arising already. The four scenarios are based on analysis and also evidence, and hence are plausible. In fact, one can see elements of all four in India at this time. If we want to make one of the stories our preferred way to the future, we must identify the forces that bring it about and strengthen them. Analysis by the group that developed the four scenarios

Change in India will be brought about by many hundreds of thousands of people who take the initiative in local centres of action, rather than waiting for an all-powerful (and hopefully benign) leader to emerge at the center. This scenario is called 'Fireflies Arising'.



SCENARIO 3: WOLVES PROWLING



SCENARIO 4: FIREFLIES ARISING

India) cannot be 'controlled' from a single centre. Change in India will be brought about by many hundreds of thousands of people who take the initiative in local centers of action, rather than waiting for an all-powerful (and hopefully benign) leader to emerge at the centre. This scenario is called 'Fireflies Arising'. The picture is a dark, hot, summer night in the Indian countryside. Little fireflies arise out of the surrounding darkness. Their numbers increase. Soon the night is glittering brightly. Rabindranath Tagore once said, "My fancies are fireflies – specks of living light twinkling in the dark". Fireflies carry their own light. They are living lights, in Tagore's words. The first fireflies in this scenario are the leaders, whoever they may be and wherever they are, who take the first steps towards what they deeply care about in ways that others wish to follow. Very often, when I describe these stories to large groups of people, someone will get up and say he or she wants to be a firefly bringing light and

of India revealed that, in addition to a sound macro-economic framework, five forces should be supported to produce the scenario called Fireflies Arising. They are:

- Relevant knowledge to children and women through new technology
- Facilitate local initiatives
- Strengthen infrastructure
- Develop new models and skills of leadership
- Propagate successful stories and build confidence

I was drawn to *Civil Society* because it has devoted itself to propagating stories of people in many walks of life who are taking courageous and innovative steps, in communities and for causes that they care about, to change the world around themselves. These are the fireflies arising in India. May they inspire many more.

**WHERE
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...

Civil Society
READ US, WE READ YOU



The world lives in my country

RAM GIDOOMAL

I have never lived in India. My parents fled partition and we grew up in East Africa. Another resurgence of ethnic and economic identity forced us to find a new way of life in Britain. My children have barely visited India. Yet our roots are still there and our links are if anything closer as the roles of India and Britain evolve in a world that is getting both closer and further apart.

It seems to me that civil society faces very similar issues in India and the UK. I will pick out just one, which has always been there but has now been heightened by the London bombings and their aftermath: how do we build and maintain a genuinely plural society, in which people of all backgrounds – social, ethnic, religious, economic and cultural – can make their contribution?

We have just realised that for a tiny minority this has become impossible. They found no alternative to destroying themselves, and as many others as they could.

While they represent an extreme, the reality is that most of us here have not seriously engaged with people of different backgrounds. Ted Cante, Home Office Advisor on community cohesion, commented:

"In the 40 years we have had race relations legislation, we have never actually attempted to get people to interact with each other, to understand each other. We have focussed on controlling people's behaviour. The consequence was that people saw that as being politically correct: they didn't change or challenge their underlying views." (The Observer, 17th July)

So how do we interact with each other? Multi-culturalism was the mantra of the liberal consensus of the 90s. But now 'multi-culturalism is dead'. Trevor Phillips, head of the Commission for Racial Equality, made this comment some months ago, without much response at the time. In the wake of the bombings numerous political and community leaders have rushed to support him. Everybody must conform to a single identity, it seems, in case anybody develops extreme ideas.

But Iftiqar Ahmed of the London School of Islamics challenges this view:

"Multiculturalism has always been defined and implemented wrongly by the British establishment. Multiculturalism involves a level of complexity which cannot be understood from the perspective of any single discipline. Instead, historical, cultural, linguistic, political, economic, educational, sociological and psychological factors and processes all play a critical role. Multiculturalism is not about integration but about cultural plurality. It is not about separation but about respect and the deepening awareness of Unity in Diversity. Each culture will maintain its own intrinsic value and at the same time would be expected to contribute to the benefit of the whole society. Multiculturalism can accommodate diversity of all kinds – cultural, philosophical and religious, so that we can create a world without conflict and strife. Britain can assume the role of accommodation and concern for all peoples, for our planet and indeed for our survival... British Muslims are ordinary people with the same sorts of ambitions, frustrations, failures and successes as anybody else. We are just like you, go to work, pay taxes, obey the law and just want to get on with our everyday life. We are hated simply for following Islam."

This debate is set to run. Another has arisen over human rights vs national security. The government seems bent on a collision with the courts on the issue

of deporting foreign activists who face the prospect of torture in their own countries (from which they fled to the UK for asylum). The courts have blocked such deportation: the government now wants to change the law. The public perception of asylum seekers and refugees has always been in danger of demonisation.

Government proposals to curtail free speech and strip naturalised citizens of their citizenship are worrying. Free speech is not a privilege to be revoked if misused. It is a pillar of democracy. Threatening to strip naturalised citizens of their citizenship will create two classes of citizens: the British-born and the rest. It will only undermine the inclusive British identity that the government has worked so hard at trying to achieve, not to mention the incalculable harm to race relations.

The government has issued statements seeking to reassure a nervous public that it will use any new powers with restraint: only nasty Muslims will be targeted and everybody else need not be worried. The government pleads for the public to trust its intentions. But even if a government could be trusted to keep such a promise, which none can, it would be dangerous to grant such powers. Good legislation means setting clear guidelines about what is acceptable and what is not.

There are no simple answers to these issues. But a large part of the answer has to be the strength of the various constituents of our society other than the government – families and communities, business and the media, the arts and leisure activities – which have key roles in maintaining diversity and preserving identity while at the same time building bridges and strengthening the larger whole. They can engage with each other and ask the questions that we all need to keep on hearing. Of course, this is what civil society is.

I was forcibly struck by this while participating in two conferences in Delhi in January 2004 – the place where I first encountered *Civil Society* and its editor!

Building Bridges – an NRI Civil Society Partnership was organised by India Development Trust (IDT) and the Group for Economic and Social Studies (GESS). It was followed immediately by the Promise of India conference linking Peace and Development. Both conferences brought together a range of individuals and organisations representing social activists, academics, entrepreneurs, business people, politicians, administrators, campaigners, faith community leaders, the police and the judiciary. The IDT-GESS conference was part of the follow-up of an earlier conference in London – Healing the Wounds – with a similar range of participants. In all three conferences the source of their strength was the breadth and depth of civil society. Nobody agreed with everything that was said. Some disagreed strongly – but that was the whole point. There was room for disagreement within a shared framework of larger values, including the willingness to respect and listen to each other in the search for truth and justice with peace and harmony.

Building and maintaining a genuinely plural society, in which people of all backgrounds – social, ethnic, religious, economic and cultural – can make their contribution, is not an easy goal to achieve. Things will change, not because politicians demand that they do, but only through a strong and vibrant civil society, both in the UK and in India.

RAM GIDOOMAL, CBE, is Chairman of the South Asian Development Partnership



So how do we interact with each other? Multi-culturalism was the mantra of the liberal consensus of the 90s. But now 'multi-culturalism is dead'. Trevor Phillips, head of the Commission for Racial Equality, made this comment some months ago, without much response at the time.



For democracy try panchayats

ARVIND KEJRIWAL

A lot has been written on the deficiencies in our electoral system. That it involves huge amounts of money to fight an election. That it is almost impossible for an ordinary and good citizen to fight an election.

Theoretically, an MLA or an MP is a people's representative. But in reality, he is far off from the people. Most people do not even know who their elected representatives are. There is absolutely no mechanism whereby the people, whom he represents, can hold him accountable for his daily actions. The number of people that an MLA or an MP represents is so large that it is practically impossible for a significant number of his constituents to meet together at some platform regularly and discuss matters related to governance. So, once elected, he is totally unaccountable. People have that 'once in five year' tenuous and vague control over him when they can elect him out, if they were dissatisfied. But this control hardly provides any relief to a citizen in his daily life.

A lot has also been written on the party system. Today, the Congress is in power. Therefore, the BJP has to criticize them, irrespective of the merits of the issue. The converse would happen if the BJP were in power. Top bureaucrats are appointed largely on the basis of their political loyalties rather than their competence. Every little thing is looked at from the lens of party politics rather than from a national perspective. In Parliament, an MP votes on the basis of the party whip rather than his own judgement and conscience.

Is such a system inherently capable of delivering? Most people would say no, not because they have understood the system but because they are certainly disillusioned with its performance so far. The present political system does not offer any relief to a common man in his day-to-day life.

Is there a way out? Today power flows from the top to the bottom. This has to be reversed. It has also been seen that a good MLA or a good MP does not make much difference to the lives of people as much as good panchayats or good Resident Welfare Associations can. It has also been seen that people have much greater say and control over the affairs of their panchayats and RWAs than they have over their MLAs or MPs.

I suggest the following as food for thought.

The party system should be abolished. Panchayats should form the core of polity. Direct elections should be held only to panchayats. There should be a panchayat for every two to three thousand voters. For urban areas, a Resident Welfare Association (RWA) could act as a panchayat. The Election Commission should conduct elections to both urban and rural panchayats. The panchayats should have the power to directly deal with most local issues. They should have complete powers to plan and spend all the money meant for that area. However, the panchayats would simply act as an executive to implement the decisions taken by the 'collective body' of voters of that area, which would meet regularly, say every two months.

The 'collective body' would decide which roads to make, which parks to develop, how to spend the money, what action should be taken against officials whose performance is questionable, how and which officials to reward, etc. The panchayats would simply implement the decisions taken by the collective body. The local bureaucracy would directly report to the panchayat and the 'collective body'. The 'collective body' should also have the power to recall any member of the panchayat, at any time during the tenure of five years, through a laid down process, for misconduct or non-performance.

Members of the Legislative Assembly would not be directly elected. Representatives of panchayats or a group of panchayats would form the



LAKSHMAN

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Assembly. Any MLA would conduct himself in the Assembly, not on the basis of any party whip, but according to the directions received by him from the collective bodies of panchayats that he represents. There would be no opposition party, as understood today.

The composition of the opposition would change depending on the stand taken by Members on each issue. The issue would be important, not the party, which in any case would not exist. The State Assembly and the State Executive will have powers only on such subjects, which have trans-panchayat bearings. Here too, the directions on what decisions to take and which issues to take up would come from the collective bodies of various panchayats. So, power would flow from bottom to top unlike what happens presently.

Likewise, the State Assemblies would elect the National Parliament. The Central Government would also function similarly. However, the Central Government could have some powers to deal with extra-ordinary circumstances related to various forms of external and internal aggression or to deal with inter-state relations.

Such a system has several benefits. It will cut down costs of elections substantially – both for the state and for those contesting elections. There would be direct elections only to the panchayats, and not to State Assemblies or the National Parliament. The people would be directly involved in setting the agenda of the Assembly and Parliament. The decisions would also be directly dictated by the people. Such a system would be directly accountable to the people on a day-to-day basis. Every action of the government would reflect the aspirations of the people. It will be a true democracy, where people will actually run the government. And elected representatives will think of the country rather than their party.



A milestone in journalism

HARIVANSH

It was towards the end of 2003 when I first saw *Civil Society* among a whole lot of other magazines at the office of someone I was visiting in New Delhi. It was immensely attractive. The most important thing was its name, *Civil Society*. In a country where mainstream journalism assumes that government, politics and industry are the only worthwhile topics of news and where Page 3 culture—a heady mix of fashion, parties and gossip—has become the content that drives circulation, the very name *Civil Society* seemed to represent a different stream of journalism.

Everything caught one's eye: the printing, layout and the size. More often than not, magazines that focus on raising basic issues don't bother much about how they look. They are usually rich in ideological content, but poor in visual appeal. I found *Civil Society*, an ideal synthesis between rich content and enticing presentation. Serious issues presented in a post-modern form.

2004). When society has lost the vigour to give politics a new direction, how and from where have middle-class people found the strength to launch their own party? Gurgaon is not just any city. It is a post-modern urban centre, a hub of the soft power of a post-industrial era where India's new youth is making innovations in information technology. The general belief about this new force is that it is apolitical. But Gurgaon is clearly much more than a new modern city. It is a laboratory for change. When *Civil Society* captures this, it delivers a message that leaves an imprint on other parts of the country as well.

Similarly, the August 2004 cover story, 'Is It Beyond Business?' focused on professionals in the corporate sector who are working in collaboration with NGOs. That story provided us with thoughtful and investigative material on how these professionals are able to change mindsets within their companies even though this process may be at a nascent stage.



Since I myself belong to the world of journalism, I can understand how difficult it is to bring out a magazine without the support of big capital or adequate infrastructure, ensure readers get rich content and then undertake the task of marketing the magazine. It is really a challenging and uphill task. I would even say that it is impossible.

Since that introduction, I wait for this magazine every month. There are other magazines that reach me every week and are soon forgotten; but I've treasured each issue of *Civil Society* with the enthusiasm of a collector.

I was curious to know who the people behind this meaningful venture were. The annual issue of *Civil Society* (September/October 2004) finally told me something about them. It also revealed the struggle that lies unseen behind the effort to do something new.

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But the impossible is being made possible by Rita and Umesh Anand. In May, last year, I heard Umesh speak at a conference on the Right to Information in Delhi. Subsequently I got the opportunity to see them at close quarters. Their home has been turned into a workplace. No formal office, no regular employees. Still, the magazine has been coming out regularly for two years now. This is almost a miracle made possible by their determination and struggle and an uncompromising attitude to bring perfection to every article, each task. For me, *Civil Society*, as a magazine, is a milestone in journalism and the struggle of Rita and Umesh a source of inspiration in my personal life.

In *Civil Society* you find excellent and enriching material on new social experiments and people's movements occurring across the country and elsewhere in the world. *Civil Society* is the only representative of the new civil society that has been emerging since 1991, the beginning of the era of liberalisation in India.

For example, I came to know about the emergence of a middle-class political party in Gurgaon from *Civil Society* (A Middle Class Party In Gurgaon, April

The magazine doesn't confine itself to processes occurring within India. It also keeps a close watch on challenges confronting a globalised world (In A New World, February 2004). People from across the globe, thronged to the World Social Forum held in Mumbai. They came with the aspiration of forming a new world based on the principles of egalitarianism and justice.

Unfortunately, mainstream newspapers gave only sketchy reports of this big event. The meeting, with all its seriousness, its radical intent and zeal was reflected amply only in *Civil Society*.

The greatest *dharma* of journalism in this society plagued by wanton individualism is to generate social awareness and a sense of civic responsibility in readers. Be it the issue of Satyendra Dubey or the campaign by Aruna Roy and Nikhil De on the Right to Information or any other issue impacting and changing society *Civil Society* has worked hard to capture them all in an attractive and appealing way.

It was *Civil Society* that provided authentic and first-hand information on the innovative initiatives taken by Sheila Dikshit, Chief Minister of Delhi. We get our daily diet of information about celebrities from the fashion and film world in mainstream papers; but it was *Civil Society* that told us where new leaders at the grassroots are emerging from (The New Leaders, January 2005).

We can talk in detail about every issue. Each shows that the magazine is a forum for new experiments in alternative culture being undertaken by emerging groups that are part of a new consciousness. The cover story Delhi's Street Bankers (November 2004) about how homeless children in Delhi helped by an NGO called Butterflies formed their own bank to get loans for their small enterprises could have been published with pride by any newspaper. Similar comments can be made about the story on Parivartan and Arvind Kejriwal.

(Harivansh is Chief Editor of the immensely successful Hindi daily, Prabhakar Khabar.)

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The Economic Times Brand Equity Survey conducted by AC Nielsen - ORG Marg has ranked IndianOil as the # 1 and the "most trusted petrol pump brand" in the country, followed closely by its subsidiary, IBP. In addition, with a ranking of 11,



IndianOil

INDIA INSPIRED

IndianOil is also the only petroleum company to be featured in the top 50 in the overall services brand. With a score almost twice that of its nearest competitor. *Thank you, dear customers, for making this happen. For us, you continue to remain our # 1.*



The PM at prime time

MILINDO CHAKRABARTI

ANOTHER 15 August passed by with the Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh, reading out a list of pious wishes from the ramparts of the Red Fort. He vouched for inclusive growth that benefits the common people. Such efforts are meaningful, especially since economic reforms have failed to reach those at the lowest rung of the socio-economic ladder and, in fact, put them at a much more disadvantageous situation. To repeat what has become a cliché, the rich have got richer and the poor poorer. Employment opportunities have shrunk, real wages in rural areas are threatened, the proportion of the undernourished population has increased, farmers are committing suicide all over and simultaneously India is being cheered globally for steady and spectacular growth in GDP since the early nineties.

Our forefathers visualised an India that would follow a 'socialistic pattern' of development and ensure basic levels of livelihood to all citizens. Markets alone were considered ineffective in ensuring a 'just' distribution of resources. The role of the state in moderating and controlling the activities of those in the market environment was considered extremely necessary.

The earlier captains of Indian industry – the Tatas, the Birlas, the Thakurdases – also agreed with this perception. The 'Bombay Plan' formulated by them in 1944 urged the Congress to ensure that the State took a commanding height in managing the economy of independent India. The Planning Commission was set up to chart a State-led development roadmap. Plan models were formulated, targets finalised and barring the first two Five Year Plans, the targets mostly remained unachieved.

Meanwhile, Indira Gandhi, the Iron Lady, gave a clarion call for 'garibi hatao' during the early seventies. But that wish remained unfulfilled. Another 20 years down the line, we listened to the call for liberalisation – a reduction in the space reserved for the State. The government had failed miserably in fulfilling its duties to the underprivileged, so give 'markets' a chance, we were told. We got into a market-centered distribution system. 'Pay as you use' became the new mantra. Pay for the education of your children, pay for health services, pay for water you consume and so on.

Public sector undertakings are up for sale because of their failure to meet their objectives, even though they supplied intermediate raw materials to 'private' industries at highly subsidised rates for more than four decades – steel, coal, electricity etc. Don't be mistaken, no private investor was willing to produce raw material in 1947 as such projects involved a low rate of return and a high gestation period. Ditto for investments in health and education.

The experiences of the last decade and a half add to our dilemma. Which way should we go? Why are we failing to achieve 'inclusive' growth? Should we dump markets and arrange for a greater role for the State? Or should the markets be given more time to stabilise and deliver in tune with our aspirations? I argue none of these options can really deliver unless and until we create a space for civil society to work and establish a system of checks and balances on the functioning of the State and the market. One often hears a common refrain - 'the policies were good, we failed to implement them'. We should ask why.



Exercises to frame district level plans supported by plans developed at village levels have been initiated. These plans may at the most be termed ad hoc efforts since no serious thought was put into linking them to plan models developed at the national level.

Planning Commission has of late given up the rigorous exercise of developing specific models for each plan – an effort taken up religiously till the Sixth Five Year Plan.

One may assert that it is not an easy job. Painstaking efforts are necessary to ensure linkages across different tiers of the decision-making process. But it is not impossible either. An absence of such efforts has led to lack of transparency and subsequent corruption with resources spent by the State accumulating in the hands of a select few. Our country has fallen into a vicious circle of corruption - an unholy nexus between bureaucracy, business and politics.

There is a second option. An effective system of monitoring and evaluation by the Planning Commission could have had a positive impact on achieving the desired goals. The Programme Evaluation Organisation does evaluate some programmes from time to time. Many such evaluation studies have been made. Has any action been taken on the basis of the findings of these studies? Perhaps not.

Plan expenditures are simply an allocation of society's resources by the government for the greater common good. Such efforts will surely be antagonistic to the interest of society at large, if no proper mechanisms are put in place to link the planning processes at several tiers and a process of monitoring and evaluation of the programmes is ensured. Who else but members of civil society can shoulder these responsibilities? After all every citizen has a right to development.

If civil society does not come forward to help, 50 years later another Prime Minister of India, will pull out a copy of the speech delivered by Dr Singh and read it to the audience without changing a single line.

India opted for planned development since the early fifties. Typically, a plan process constructs a relational model with a number of variables. Some of these are called target variables. They represent the objectives we want to achieve – growth in GDP, employment etc. The rest are called instrumental variables that can be manipulated to achieve the desired goals – savings, investment, tax etc. Relations assumed beforehand among the variables were not logically incorrect. In this sense our plans were good. However, they failed to deliver. The reasons are not difficult to seek. Let's elaborate.

A plan process involves targeting some macro variables

whose values are obtained by aggregating individual values. For example, a national plan attempts to raise the GDP. It cannot consider raising the income of an individual as its target. Our planning was always based on the assumption that necessary institutional structures were in place to ensure the achievement of the distributional goals – the 'trickle down' syndrome as it is often referred to. Realisation of the structurally inactivated trickle down process led to the emergence of the idea of decentralised planning.

Unfortunately, such decentralisation could not be achieved at the desired levels. Exercises to frame district level plans supported by plans developed at village levels have been initiated. But these plans may at the most be termed ad hoc efforts since no serious thought was put into linking them to plan models developed at the national level. This perhaps is the reason why the



The real test lies ahead

RIAZ QUADIR

WHEN speaking of civil society we intrinsically refer to the implementation of democracy, the day-to-day, nuts and bolts functioning of this great political concept involving not just fancy characters filling up history books but the common mass of humanity. In the sixty odd years since the end of the last great European war, Europe has been at relative peace – with itself, if not with the rest of the world.

Cosmetic changes were made and territorial empires (which had become logistical nightmares anyway) were redesigned as markets, and cabined, cribbed and confined by financial and currency restraints that would ensure their subservience in the foreseeable future. With Kafkaesque surrealism this new arrangement even provided a mechanism for repentance for the excesses of colonialism. Euphemism in diplomacy and international trade stretched imagination to absurd levels. Religious proselytising gave way to more secular forms and the spread of European thought and culture took on the "soft approach."

Civil society, however, prospered. Europe was being rebuilt. The goals of producing wealth and spreading it was essential to the well being of the populace at large. The laws of the land were being duly processed as there was little dissension between the vast masses of Western Europeans and their governments on the whole. The minor hiccups were generational, cultural and often times about the strange goings-on in faraway places (usually ex-colonies attempting to shed their shackles). It didn't directly affect the daily lives of European citizens – for the moment.

Under such a climate of prosperity humanism did indeed develop. The UN Declaration of Human Rights is a fine example of this. Nations and governments rushed to adopt it; not only to distance themselves from the barbarity of yesteryears but to convince the world and their own citizens of their benign intentions. It seems to have been working quite well – till we ponder on the juxtaposition of a curious mix of free-market economics, civil and human rights, democracy and yet more free market capitalism. The inherent contradictions between the political and the economic systems of choice have been lying dormant for decades, glossed over each time there was an urge for freedom and liberty. Despite Benjamin Franklin's sage advice that when offered a choice between liberty and security one should always choose liberty or one is in the danger of losing both, we curiously always chose security – or rather, the promise of it.

In effect, this underlies the social contract Rousseau famously described: yielding a part of our liberty and freedom as a compromise to gain peace and security. As we do not live in a perfect world our hopes have been constantly belied and the exchange of security for liberty has never been fully realised. That of course has never stopped the ruling powers to continue the myth and impose greater and greater restrictions on our liberty in the name of peace and security.

The laws that emanate from this process ought to be the real strength of democracies, and to a large extent is, till it meets the economic forces that are currently at play in capitalistic societies. Such a tug of war could very well be a healthy sign in a vigorous soci-

ety, were the dialectic between the two not as unequal as we see it to be today. The socialism of 20th century Europe has yielded to the 21st century globalisation and the rush to be more competitive and more productive has started a swift dilution of the basic tenets of civil society that we are still not fully aware of. Furthermore, the poisoned chalice of international laws that Europe and America initially designed to control the world are finally returning home to continue the wrecking process there. One can only imagine the chaos and confusion this creates for the politicians and the law-makers.

A case in point: As Europe turns right (an eccentric description of Blair's New Labour but quite straight forward for Chirac's, soon-to-be Sarkozy's, France; and Merkel's Germany) France's agricultural subsidy has become a big thorn in the side of EU's position vis-à-vis the rest of the world and will no longer be supported by Germany, EU most powerful member, when Merkel comes into power next month. In a dog-eat-dog world it's each one for himself.

The economics of consumption which capitalism has bestowed upon us is now being challenged by the undeniable physical and environmental limitations. "The time has come," the Walrus said, "To talk of many things: Of shoes and ships and sealing-wax. Of cabbages and kings..." We are compelled to re-examine the fundamentals of our changing times, every aspect of it, if we are to survive. Civil society has greater and greater responsibility to do this, now, because as I said earlier, governments have abandoned politics for economics. Surely, growing scepticism for politicians and governments worldwide is an indicator of how we sense this truth in our guts.

Yet, a part of us fantasizes that we are being offered security simply because the government is going to spend GBP 100 million to "update" the Trident nuclear warheads. Where will that money be ultimately dispersed? Lying about Iraq's WMD was one thing but blatantly lying about the UK government's complicity in ushering in the American gambling industry giants against the best interest of the British population, or passing a new law allowing 24-hour drinking against the reasoned advice of 636 circuit judges and APCO (representing 44 police forces across England, Wales and Northern Ireland) is quite another.

The recent development in Europe after the July bombings in London are reminiscent of the Patriot Act unleashed in the USA after 9/11. Blair has even asked for the suspension of Human Rights principles when treating terror suspects. France already practises it. The real test for civil society in Europe lies in the days ahead. As the sage reminds us, generosity is easier practised in times of plenty but takes on real meaning only in times of hardship. In imitation of the USA, due process of law, the watermark of any democratic society is being jettisoned at the first sign of threat. The governments with their monopoly over 'legitimised' violence revert at once to the use of it and must be vigorously checked if our liberties are to be maintained. Only civil society has the power to hold the governments accountable. To guard our liberty we must not be lulled into false promises of security.

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Sister Leonardo is Delhi's nightingale

Madhu Gurung
New Delhi

THE first thing you notice about 57-year-old Sister Leonardo Lakra is not her nondescript brown saree or the silver medallion of the Ursuline Convent to which she belongs, but her brown eyes that reach out to envelope you with warmth.

Day in and day out in indifferent Delhi, she, a doctor and a counsellor move from house to house, maybe five or six, letting relatives unburden their fears about their loved ones while they try to make the last days of terminally ill cancer patients comfortable.

Leonarda Lakra was 20 when she joined the Order of Saint Ursuline in Ranchi, leaving her peasant family behind in Gumla district. At 22, she underwent her first professional commitment to nunhood. That very year she began a three-year training programme as a nurse and mid-wife. Her first posting, as a nurse, after she had worked a year in a hospital, was to the remote villages of Jumpani, Rangari, Samtoli and Tongo in Gumla district. "Patients would come to the dispensary carried on bullock carts or on the backs of their relatives. Often I was their last stop." For seven years Sister Leo, as she is popularly called, would visit villages for delivery cases and to cheer up her patients.

In 1982, she was chosen by the Convent to attend the All-India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health

in Kolkata. She returned to teach a post-graduate course at the Ranchi Diocese, training village health workers in first aid and basic medical care. For 10 years she remained at the Lohardaga Saint Ursula Hospital as a public health tutor, after which she came to Delhi as health coordinator for the Arch Diocese in 1995. In 1998 she joined Cansupport as a nurse to provide palliative care for cancer patients.

"In the beginning it was very difficult to watch the agony of the terminally ill and the constant stress and helplessness of their loved ones. Every day I would leave a part of me behind," she recalls. Most of the terminal cases that Cansupport takes in are from the organisation's own helpline, or referred by the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS).

Often when she encounters despair from her patients she prays for their "happy death". The case that left a lasting impression on her mind is that of 45-year-old Ramesh, who was suffering from cancer of the penis. His relatives were unable to look after him because of the foul smell that emitted from his body. Sister Leo asked his relatives to boil neem leaves in water. With this she showed them how he had to be sponged and cleaned. "The next visit was



Sister Leo

a happy one. There was no smell, he had guests and he was eating."

Sister Leo travelled to London recently to receive the prestigious 'Best Palliative Care Nurse of the Year Award, 2005' which has been jointly instituted by Macmillan Cancer Relief and the International Palliative Journal of Nursing.

Trek in Nepal with 3 Sisters

Rina Mukherji
Kathmandu/Kolkata

A few years ago, 20-year-old Batuli Giri was desperately seeking employment to escape the misery of her home in western Nepal. Today, she confidently leads a group of European adventure tourists on a trek across rocky terrain in Himalayan Nepal. Looking at her, it is hard to believe that Batuli belongs to a marginalised family and has studied only up to Class 3.

But that is the magic wrought by Lucky Chhetri and her NGO – Empowering Women in Nepal (EWN). They teach women to be guides for treks. Brought up in Darjeeling, Lucky Chhetri's training at the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute sparked her interest in adventure tourism. She recognised the market potential of such training when she qualified as Nepal's first woman trekker guide in 1990.

A large number of single women tourists visit Nepal for the thrill of adventure in the outdoors. Some recounted to Lucky their unhappy experiences with male guides. That

gave her the bright idea of a guide service consisting of women. So, in 1993, Lucky and her sisters, Dicky and Nicky, started the '3 Sisters Adventure Trekking Private Limited.'

In 1999, Lucky decided to train girls from marginalised areas in western Nepal as trekker guides. She set up EWN to coach the girls with the intention of absorbing them in her adventure tourism outfit and thereby providing them a stable income.

Lucky Chhetri's training is not confined to

mountaineering and basic language skills, which are essential since most adventure tourists come from Europe. Her girls are taught hygiene, health and environmental awareness. They make sure a trekking expedition does not leave behind plastic bags or non-biodegradable material. The one-year free training she provides comprises classroom teaching with fieldwork and learning on the job.

Every girl is neatly turned out and trained to take good care of her health since the job is rigorous. The training offsets the disadvantage women face in Nepal due to their low literacy rate, which is just 14 percent.

Lucky has trained hundreds of guides. Many have returned to teach others in their villages. Although her rates are more than others in the same business, demand for Lucky's services is so high that she is forced to hire guides from outside for tourists who come knocking at her door. And the Maoist insurgency has never affected her business.

"We are the most expensive, but people realise the superiority of our service. Besides, our reputation is such that every one trusts us, more so in these troubled times," says Lucky.

Email: ewn@3sistersadventure.com



The 1 computer village revolution

Rina Mukherji
Kolkata

In 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 care system. The authorities were forced to arrange



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.

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. In 2003-04, 4000 persons were provided work under the scheme 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.)

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Rs 22 lakhs in Sruti's bags this year!

Civil Society News
New Delhi

RUCHI 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

Ruchi Kashyap and Prathistha Goswami

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 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



LAKSHMAN

'Tribals can lead a green revolution'

If water is enhanced in tribal regions, they won't be poor

Eklavya Prasad
Chosala

IN 1974 when Harnath Jagawat started the Navinchandra Mafatlal Sadguru Water and Development Foundation (NMSWDF) at Dahod in Gujarat, he worked as chief executive, typist, clerk, driver and peon. His team of four shared a single desk to ensure their sparse annual budget of Rs 35,000 was well spent. Exactly 30 years later, NMSWDF has a full-fledged office at Chosala village and has expanded operations into Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.

NMSWDF's biggest achievement is to have provided India with a model for tribal development based on water management. When Jagawat and his team began working with impoverished tribals in the Panchmahal hills, they found lack of irrigation to be the main reason for mass migration. Through sensible natural resource management, NMSWDF resuscitated the flow of water. Today, areas in which they work have food and water security. Tribals are making money from horticulture, milk production, vegetable cultivation and agro-forestry.

The Rajasthan government has nominated Jagawat to an expert committee set up to formulate the state's water policy. The Planning Commission has invited him to be part of a consultative group on water resources for the mid-term review of the tenth Five Year Plan. He has recently been appointed to CAPART's national standing committee on watershed and water resources. In an interview to **Eklavya Prasad**, Jagawat explained the NMSWDF model and said it should be replicated across India's tribal belt.

What is NMSWDF's contribution to tribal development?

For nearly three decades we have been advocating the water potential of India's tribal belt. This region of 1,500 km stretches from Gujarat across central India right up to Western Orissa and the Jharkhand plateau. Over 70 per cent of India's tribal population lives here. The tribal belt does not offer scope for big irrigation or intensive groundwater development but has high drainage density and virtually limitless scope for small-scale water and land resource development of the type we have been promoting. However, this opportunity remains unutilised.

We therefore took it upon ourselves to enhance the overall status of tribals in our areas. Our focus is to reduce poverty by making good use of natural resources and technology. From the start, we wanted to bring tribal communities above subsistence level so that they could cope with drought and other natural calamities, have food security and be gainfully employed. Our integrated model has been tested and replicated in villages of Gujarat and Rajasthan and I am confident it can be used in different tribal regions for a secure future.

Could you explain the NMSWDF model?

In a tribal region, community and natural resources control the existence of local inhabitants. Both are interdependent and essential for a secured existence. To strengthen the link between community and natural resources, water has been made the core premise of the model because it is

the most crucial component for agricultural development, food security and to reduce distress migration. Most tribal areas receive adequate rainfall, which if harvested, stored and utilised judiciously can increase land productivity.

To strengthen social, economic and governance systems, our model looks at five components - village institutions, water resources, agriculture, wasteland, forests and off-farm options. We build the capacity of stakeholders and strengthen village level institutions so that they can manage their resources effectively. Water management consists of lift irrigation, water-harvesting structures especially masonry check dams and watershed development focusing on soil and water conservation. Plantations on private and community land and



Harnath Jagawat

afforestation including farm forestry, community forestry and Joint Forest Management (JFM) are carried out. The model creates opportunities for villagers to take up horticulture, floriculture and vegetable cultivation and enhance household incomes. The emphasis is on judicious use of natural resources through irrigation technologies like drip irrigation.

What has been the impact of this model?

In several tribal villages, on account of agro-forestry, large numbers of tribal families own trees worth more than one or two lakhs of rupees each, which is a handsome amount.

In fact, several tribal farmers sold trees worth these amounts particularly during drought years. More than 350 tribal villages have no drinking water problem despite successive drought. Interestingly, federations of tribal lift irrigation cooperatives are specialising in drip irrigation systems, wastelands development, drinking water supply, etc.

Village transformation has been extremely fascinating. For instance, at Vankol village in Dahod district we started with a lift irrigation scheme in 1995 and ended with a watershed programme in 2001. Agricultural production increased from 86 metric tonnes to 621 metric tonnes. Crop yields of maize, paddy, wheat, gram, groundnut and pulses have gone up.

Prior to our work the village had only three wells containing water for eight months. By 2000-01, Vankol had 17 wells with water for 12 months, despite a bad drought. Even after three consecutive drought years, wells located downstream from the local check dam yielded sufficient water to meet drinking water needs.

Horticulture has transformed common and barren wastelands to productive use. Villagers planted saplings of nilgiri, neem, teak, mango, amla, and lemon. Their purpose was to provide green cover and ensure fuel, fodder and timber. We were able to address distress migration. A significant population in the village has become self-employed, which has drastically cut the migration rate from 83 per cent to 10 per cent.

Mota Dharola in Dahod has a tribal population of about 50 per cent. Agricultural income has increased from Rs 1.2 million to over Rs 10 million a year. The village is producing milk worth about Rs 3 million annually because green fodder is available. Tribal farmers are earning between Rs 25,000 to Rs 45,000 every year from milk production.

During the rabi season of 2003-04, 26 farmers grew ginger on 13 acres and earned Rs 2.3 million. A tribal village called Rozam has 250 horticulture and floriculture plots. Families that cultivated roses are earning around Rs. 150 to Rs 300 every day for about eight months in a year. Those who have grown marigolds get Rs 150 every day. Tribal women and their associations are managing horticulture and floriculture programmes benefiting 12,000 tribal households. All this was made possible because of irrigation.

Can all tribal areas benefit from this model?

Our tribal regions are the poorest. Paradoxically, these areas have immense potential for development through natural resource management.

The tribal population has increased from 67 million in 1991 to 83 million in 2001. An incremental change in the economic profile of this community will substantially impact the Gross Domestic Product.

Scientists claim that any region that receives more than 500 mm annual rainfall need not be poor. The rainfall in all our tribal regions is much higher. Rain drainage systems such as rivers and rivulets are more than enough to meet the water requirements of local people.

In Jharkhand, Chattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Maharashtra, it is possible to construct about 45,000 masonry water harvesting structures on small and large water sources. The integration of big and small water harvesting structures could be an excellent combination. Large systems can occasionally release water for the smaller systems and thereby the entire river could have water round the year. This has been demonstrated at some places and can be replicated.

The average actual irrigation in our tribal districts is five per cent or less. It should be possible to achieve around 30 per cent irrigation. When irrigation is combined with plantation and horticulture, results are amazing.

If an effort like ours is replicated a second green revolution, led by tribals, is in the offing.

Giving girls their bodies back

Shuktara Lal
Kolkata

IN 1996 Sohini Chakraborty visited Kolkata's annual book fair. It was very crowded, as usual. She moved from stall to stall and then a poster caught her eye. It had a picture of a girl with a poem that read: *They sell me, my own blood for some gold and some silver, I rinse and rinse my mouth but the treachery remains...*

"I went inside to know more about them and unconsciously embarked on a new journey," says Sohini. She now uses dance as a medium of therapy to rehabilitate girls and teenagers who have been forced into prostitution.

Sohini has a Master's degree in Sociology. She has trained in *Bharatnatyam*, *Navanritya* and theatre. She has also worked with the Dancers' Guild and *Rangakarmee*.

While drama therapy, art therapy and music therapy have been explored in Europe and America, Indians are much less familiar with creative therapy. Artistes who want to practice alternative healing either apply to universities abroad or teach themselves by reading foreign publications on the subject.

Sohini volunteered as a dance trainer for the girls of Sneha, a home run by Sanlaap, an NGO in Kolkata, for rescued prostitutes, their children and sexually exploited girls. Initially, Sohini taught the girls dancing. But gradually she realised that the sessions were becoming therapeutic.

She began planning her classes so that the girls could talk about their suffering and express their pain through dance movements. "I started my session with physical exercises and story-based movements. Each was based on a simple theme: the movement of people walking on the street, the movement around a home, etc. Through such sessions I started to teach them about the body and different positions using various kinds of music, including Hindi film songs. After two months they began to communicate with me and at that time I also started to spend more time with them".

Sohini's association with Sanlaap grew deeper. In 1999 she launched *Rangeen Sapney* (Colourful

Dreams). The programme was supported by the government. Using art forms like dance, drama, mime and music, *Rangeen Sapney* helped the girls deal with their trauma and get involved in normal social activities. Sohini worked with 120 children between the ages of 6-14 in the red-light areas of the city and in homes run by Sanlaap.

Rangeen Sapney led to the birth of Sanved in 2000, an autonomous unit under the umbrella of Sanlaap. Sanved strives to rehabilitate child prostitutes, including HIV positive children and adolescent mothers. Around this time, Sohini met Tripura Kashyap, a renowned practitioner of dance therapy and she fine tuned her skills with her guidance.

"Girls who are subjected to sexual trafficking are extremely uncomfortable with their bodies," she explains. "They do not like their physicality because they feel it is responsible for the stigma attached to them. I teach them dance movements so that they can learn to love their bodies and be proud of them. Dancing also makes the girls self-confident. They believe that they can embrace all kinds of career options".

Members of Sanved work as performers and lobbyists spreading awareness on rights issues. Some have become trainers who assist Sohini. Her unique form of therapy enables her to rehabilitate as many girls as possible. NGOs in New Delhi and Mumbai have sought her advice on how they could incorporate these techniques. Recently, Sanved collaborated with the Association for Community Development in Bangladesh (ACD) to rehabilitate young Bangladeshi prostitutes. This initiative was funded by Sanlaap and Dayawalka Foundation which is based in the US.

Sanved puts up performances for the public. Tickets are sold commercially. In 2003, they performed at the Asian Social Forum. In the same year, Sohini became a recipient of the prestigious Ashoka Fellowship. She has also run a school programme



"I teach them dance movements so that they can learn to love their bodies and be proud of them. They believe that they can embrace all kinds of career options"

that enabled school students to communicate with sexually abused children. This interaction helped to curb prejudiced perceptions of prostitution and establish mutual respect.

The astonishing success of Sohini's endeavor can be seen in the responses of the girls. Sohini gives them detailed questionnaires asking them whether the dance therapy sessions were beneficial. The girls effusively write about how they loved the classes. They also observe that the workshops reduced their aversion to their bodies. They could accept and love all that they were. The girls have written beautiful Bengali poems as well.

For Sohini, it is of paramount importance that society sees these girls not as victims, but as human beings. In future, she hopes to open an institute in the country where creative therapy can be taught as a vehicle for self-expression.

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—Usha Cho

THE MAGAZINE EVERYONE LIKES

Special jobs for special kids

Vidya Viswanathan
Bangalore

TEN students who graduated in computer training from the Vishwas Air Force Special School campus at Hebbal in Bangalore have got jobs to do backend work for Tata Teleservices. They will enter customer data and get paid about Rs 1500 a month. "That's a big jump for their families which have an income of just Rs 3000," says Sugandha Sukratraj, director, Special Olympics, India. Sugandha has also negotiated life insurance of Rs 60,000 and medical insurance of Rs 30,000 for these special young people.

They have been given a chance to lead a dignified life because of collaboration between Special Olympics, a non-profit, Intel, a large corporate and the Indian Air Force.

"The disabilities in many children could have been completely avoided. It is because of poor prenatal and postnatal care or perhaps malnutrition. Down's Syndrome is another cause. Karnataka alone has 212 special schools, struggling for funds. Most youngsters who come to our training center have IQs of less than 40. But many can learn repetitive tasks and do them well," says Sugandha.

Sugandha's meeting with Intel came about because of an international alliance between Special Olympics in Washington and Intel. "We were approached to help out. So we rolled out a programme where we trained the Special Olympics Staff in India on how to use software, created a database for them and gave them 35 laptops," says Sindhu Caveriappa, manager for community relations at Intel in Bangalore. After that Sindhu and Sugandha struck up a relationship. "Instead of doing many small projects we decided to identify one special interest community and make a larger impact," says Sindhu.

Intel has equipped the Special Olympics lab at Vishwas and got its partner, Educomp to design a

special curriculum for a three-month computer-training course. Two instructors, Padmini and Meera, have been trained as well. At the end of the course, students get a certificate from Intel during a ceremony. "Just this felicitation makes so much difference to the attitude of parents towards these children," says Sugandha. She points out that one child was the reason for a marriage breaking up.

The students greet visitors and introduce themselves. They sing songs. Most of them travel to school by bus on their own. "We are opening a



training center in the Special School in Chennai. The headmistress, Mrinalini, had never touched a computer. Sunil, who has Down's Syndrome, taught her to close a computer. Sandeep C, who has accident-related problems, explained how to open the computer and use a mouse. On the second day we could not get the headmistress off the computer," says Sugandha.

Yet when the youngsters began, Sugandha and her two trainers had to start from scratch. They took the students to the Jain hospital and got their eyes tested. They had to teach them how to travel to school by bus, alone.

"We told the parents to get in through the front door and get the child in from the back". For one

month, after the first batch of ten students started using the bus, Sugandha would wait for a phone call to say they had reached. The trainers had to make sure that these students did not wander off onto the road. They introduced the security guard to each child and taught them all how to cross the road in front of the school. They had to toilet train the children because they had never seen a western toilet. Every child needed one instructor. So they encouraged parents to work with another child and not their own. There were many setbacks. Fifteen

days into the programme, Padmini, who is trained to work with spastic children, discovered that three students did not know the alphabets. They were typing the keys because their parents were pointing at the keyboard. So the trainers put aside the computers and started teaching the alphabets. They played word games and got the students to learn A to Z in a week. After five months these students can key in forms.

They key in fewer forms per hour than a normal person. But their accuracy is far higher. Tata Teleservices has agreed to set up a centre on the Air Force school premises.

"It took us six months to convince them," says Vinod Thimayya of Third Wave Telecommunications, a marketing

company that works for Tata Teleservices. Thimayya met Sugandha through a mutual friend and told her that training would not get the youngsters anywhere if they did not network with the corporate sector to get them employment. He works with the National Association for the Blind (NAB) and has trained 10 blind students to make outbound telesales calls.

The good news is this is not a one-off project. A second centre has started in Mandya, and a third one is coming up in Chennai. Talks are on with HCL to get sponsorship for two more in Delhi and Chandigarh. "The Air Force has special schools all over the country. These are safe and beautiful environments. We could run training classes all over," says Sugandha.

root activists like us.

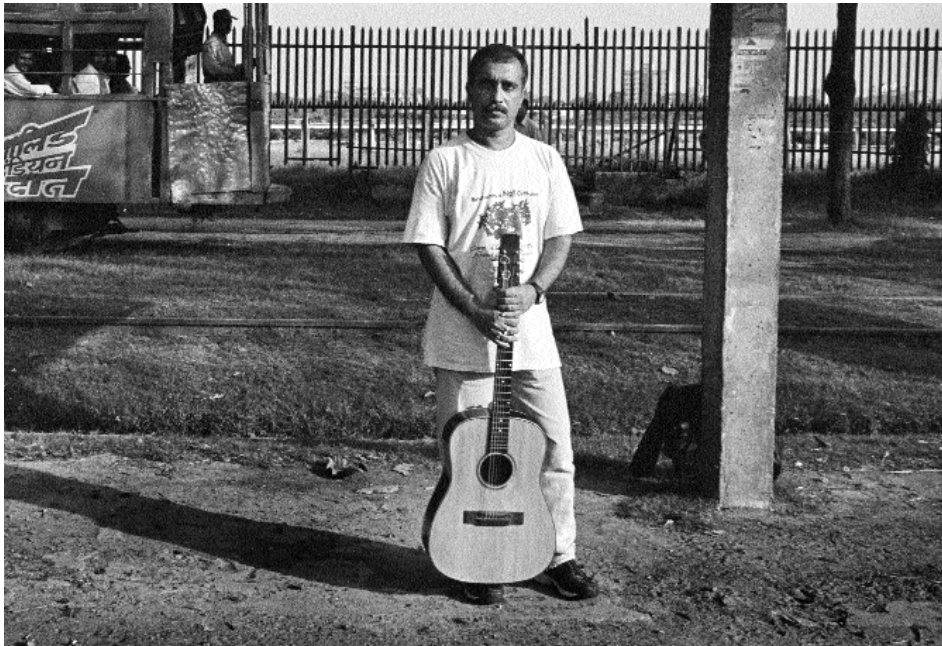
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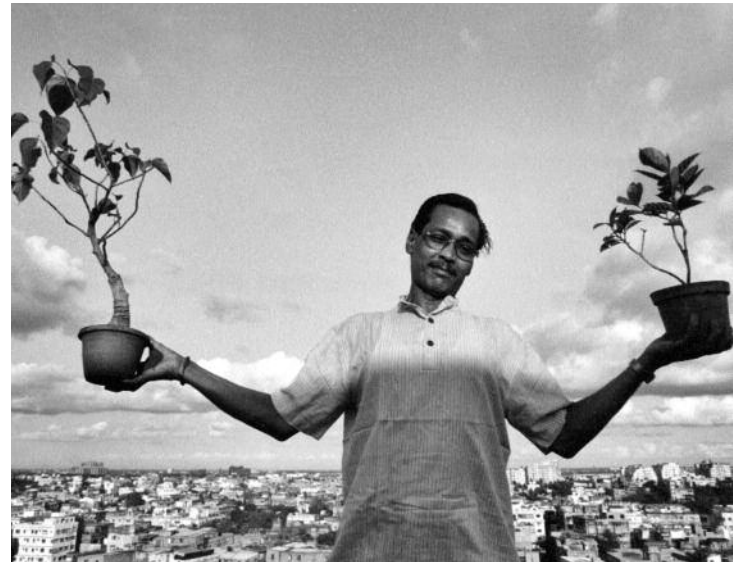
TO READ

Civil Society

READ US, WE READ YOU



Dhruba Basu Roy, tram conductor and gifted guitarist



Amit Hazra greens Kolkata's concrete jungle



Sukhsam Singh runs eastern India's only all woman petrol pump



Anil Mahanta plays music on the streets

Extraordinary lives, ordinary people

Rina Mukherji
Kolkata

NEXT time you walk down Kolkata's streets take a look at the crowd. There are many people tucked in there who are artists and poets. There are others who make life special with the things they do. Would you believe, for instance, that a traffic policeman could be an inspired poet?

News photographers Kumar Roy, Swapan Nayak, Rajib De and Nilayan Dutta scoured the city to catch on camera a range of unusual ordinary people. They displayed their pictures at an exhibition called 'City Characters,' organised with Kolkata Images.

There is Surendranath Boral (*Boralbabu*) of Bowbazar, Kolkata, who buys a bagful of fish every Sunday to release into the Ganges. A vegetarian for the last 40 years, Boral has been assiduously throwing fish back into the river since the past 25 years.

There is nothing fishy about Boral's affection for fish: he even collects stamps with fish pictures. He has never married. The reason? He couldn't find a Bengali woman who wouldn't eat fish. Boral's service to society extends to his community too. He dedicates part of his day attending to street children at the Nabodisha school in his locality.

There were photographs of people like Ramananda Bandopadhyay, an artist, who nurses pigeons back to health. Some 10-12 years ago he put

an injured pigeon back on its feet. Since then he has healed thousands of pigeons and his bungalow is home to some 300 pigeons recouping from injuries.

Bipin Ganatra has devoted his life to rescuing people caught in fires. Any blaze has him rushing to the spot. Yet Ganatra has refused an offer of employment by the Kolkata Fire Department. This do-gooder is happy preventing casualties in a fire prone city.

Then there is Gauri Dhamrampal, Kolkata's first female *purohit*. Dhamrampal conducts wedding rituals in accordance with traditional Vedic rites. She has broken the Hindu patriarchal code of priesthood.

There is also Sukhsam Singh who runs eastern India's only all-woman petrol pump.

Amit Roy looks like just another police officer, directing Kolkata's traffic. But at heart he is a poet, in search of inspiration. His four selections of poetry speak volumes for the intriguing influence his job has on his creative talent: *Krishnachura aar traffic* (Gulmohars and the traffic), *Paakhir thonte chithi* (An epistle on the bird's beak), *Baishakher ei bhorer hawa* (The early summer morning breeze) and *Aadigante Mukti* (Freedom on the far horizon).

Commuters collecting their tram tickets would never guess that their conductor Dhruba Basu Roy is a gifted film guitarist. Neither would customers

sipping tea at Rajesh Pal's 24-hour shop in Nimtala Ghat realise that the muscular tea stall owner is a three-time state wrestling champion and a national level wrestler.

Likewise Bholanath Mahal the proud owner of Bholanath Cabin at Bagbazar started life as a tea-stall owner with savings of just one and a quarter rupees. He has business acumen, say people. What they don't know is that he has authored two books. Similarly, Pranesh Kundu, who repairs bicycles, is an internationally acclaimed wood sculptor.

Dhrupadiya and flautist Anil Mahanta makes music on the streets. He is happy sculpting, selling and playing flutes. Sometimes he stops in his tracks to teach an interested learner a thing or two about the flute. The flow of money may be erratic, but his is a life devoted to the arts.

There is Amit Hazra who zealously greens Kolkata's concrete jungle by planting saplings in and around his home on Vivekananda Road and generously gifting potted plants to friends and acquaintances.

Visually disabled Alefiya Tundwala has an MA in politics. She is now studying the partition of India to earn a doctorate degree. There is pavement artist Ramzan Ali who has moved up the social ladder to lower middle class status, and Raju Charlie from Belegkata *bustee* who has been portraying Charlie Chaplin with a conviction that makes him a fixture at most city functions.

Stories that made young people think

Civil Society did a random survey

Right to information

Rishabh Gulati, 20

I think the most successful story related to development has been the right to information. This is one story

which received adequate media coverage and rightfully so. It finally culminated in the Right to Information Act (RTI), 2005.

It is my favourite story not only because of the power of the Act, but because of the work that has been done in advocacy and spreading awareness about RTI. Civil society groups have fought a long battle to put this law in place. The journey has just begun. Everybody has to recognise the power of this law, and now proactively participate in the functioning of Indian democracy.

We have let corruption persist on the pretext of not knowing what to do or not having something to work with. But not anymore. RTI is one potent tool that can put an effective end to corruption. There is going to be no getting away now. Whether it is problems with the public distribution system, electricity, roads or contracts, RTI is the solution.



A school on the pavement

Ashruti Khera, 19

My heart aches every time I see children on the road begging. I see these children without a childhood.

I see these children being denied the opportunity to learn about the marvels of the universe. I have always wanted to teach these kids, but lack of resources has not let my intentions culminate into action. I was always aware that a large number of people shared the same passion. And I just presumed that they were faced with the same problem as I am. But I was wrong.

My favourite story is of a school started by a man on the footpaths of Mumbai. Every evening he would sit with children from neighbouring slums and help them finish their homework.

He helped them with everything—maths, English or accounts. Initially, parents were a little apprehensive about this initiative which was completely voluntary, but his students were so happy with their progress that it left no room for apprehensions.

I would like to do something along similar lines and I feel inspired by this story.

I think education is the basic right of every individual and this is one area where the government needs to pay explicit attention. I truly believe that it is education that can change the face of India.

Healthy highways for truck drivers

Supriya Arora, 19

I heard of the Healthy Highway Project (HHP) some time back.

A lot of research work and studies have been done on the sexual behaviour of truck-drivers. These indicate high vulnerability to HIV/AIDS.

A group of NGOs working on the HHP reach out to truckers at various halt points. They speak to them about HIV/AIDS, distribute free condoms and demonstrate their correct use. The government of Goa is now implementing this project.

About 10,000 truckers were reached in a year. The programme was very successful. The project did a lot of things right. The NGOs were practical. They identified a group of people, studied their sexual behaviour and accordingly made plans to counter AIDS.

This approach should be widely adopted. If we start by educating the masses, we will begin a virtuous cycle. Education will lead to employment, which will lead to a better quality of life for all Indians.



Bags, money and freedom

Sugandha Malhotra, 20

One story that has stayed with me was about an NGO that started training women from slums how to block print and make bags. The NGO was surprised by how receptive these women were and how quickly they learnt.

I can't remember the name of the NGO but I do recall the story with all details. Within months, these women started making their own bags and selling them in the market. Business was sluggish in the beginning, but it eventually caught on. They started earning money of their own.

Besides the monetary benefits, they benefited in a range of other ways. Slowly but surely they became confident, so confident that some of them actually thought that they could take on the world.

The story stayed with me, because it was so simple. Often we forget that we don't need big, fancy ideas to be able to make a difference. Sometimes simple ideas make the biggest differences. I think what this NGO was able to do was rather remarkable.

I think only education can rid us of all our problems. If each of us actually starts teaching one, I think we can really make a world of difference. And I think we should not restrict this to formal education but include vocational training.

I've already volunteered with an NGO and am trying to convince more of my friends to do the same.

The polio eradication campaign

Abhinav Kohli, 20

The polio eradication programme is an example of great ideation supported by corresponding

action. The government went all out to reach virtually every citizen. The sustained campaign on TV, in newspapers, on billboards and through leaflets, conveyed to every family with little kids the need to rush to the nearest polio centre and ensure their children had the polio drops.

The roping in of big stars like Amitabh Bachchan, Aishwarya Rai, Sachin Tendulkar and repeated advice on TV through them had tremendous effect on the public. The programme achieved success because for once the government appeared sincere and caring.

Factors like polio booths in each and every area, volunteers going to houses and inquiring about little children and whether they have been administered polio drops or not, are all very important and have contributed greatly to the campaign.



Smile freely with Operation Muskaan

Athira Vijayakumar, 19

Operation Muskaan is a project initiated by Tata Steel. As part of this project, children with cleft lip and palate are operated on free of cost. All the patients belong to the underprivileged sections of society, who could not have afforded this operation otherwise. I particularly like this initiative because apart from just the operation, superstitions about cleft lip and palate have also been dealt with. Doctors at these free camps came forward to explain to parents that these superstitions were nothing but myths. Many children also benefited.

Windmills on the mind

Shruti Nishthal, 19

Around two years ago, the state government of Maharashtra set up two windmill farms and later allowed the private sector to use them to generate electricity for their own consumption.

Wind farms have generated thousands of jobs for skilled and unskilled labour. The state isn't planning to stop at this. They have zeroed in on other feasible sites for more wind energy farms. This is another aspect why this story is my favourite, because the government is not becoming complacent.

Welcome to Hippocampus

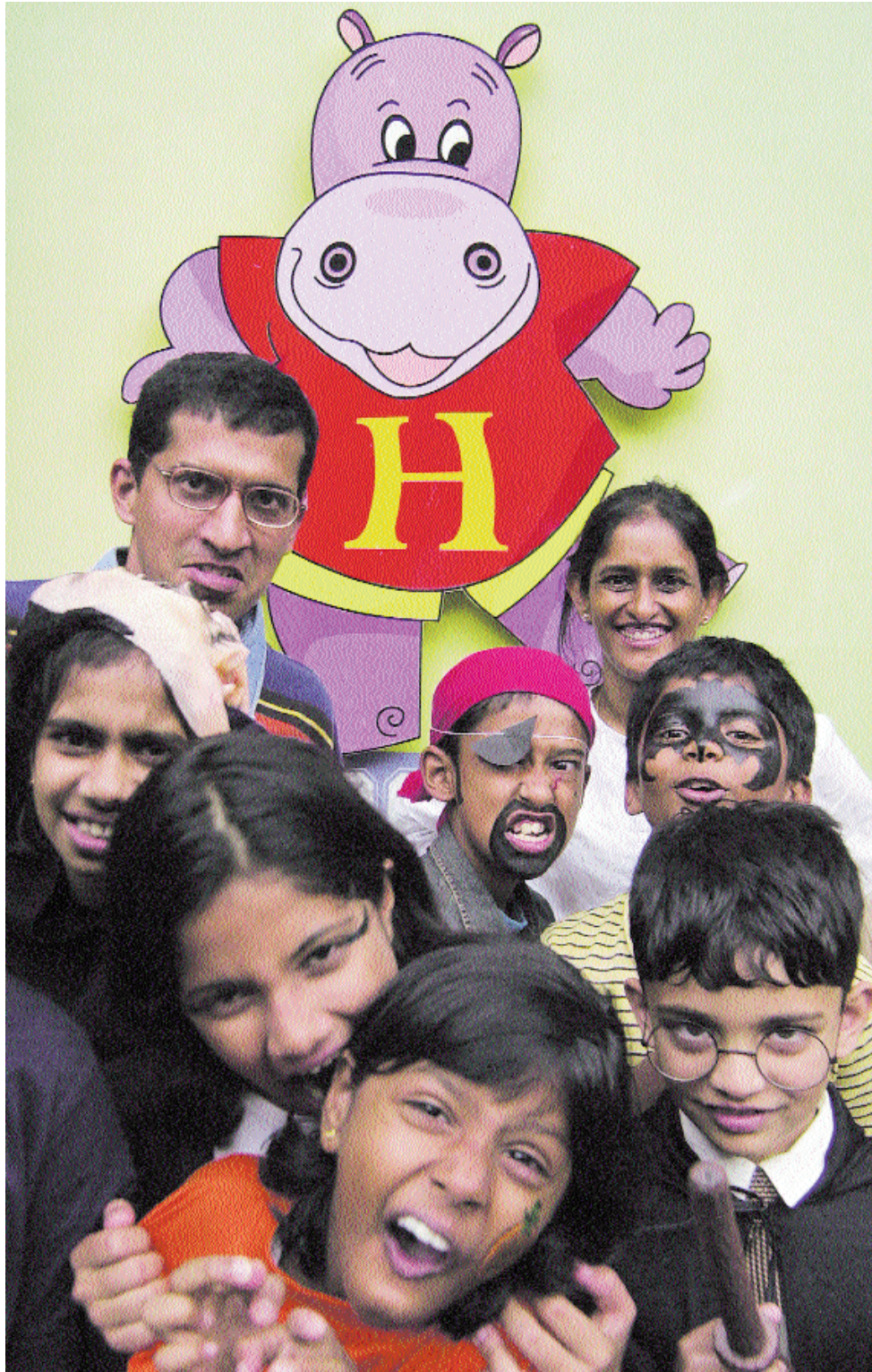
Vidya Viswanathan
Bangalore

YOU walk into a large, brightly lit room. A three-year old child is engrossed in a picture book his father is showing him on a low table. There are half a dozen multi-coloured beanbags in the room, mostly occupied. Sounds waft from a room upstairs. A voice is reading aloud, pierced by peals of laughter and applause. An audition for a play? You step out. There are three children chasing each other in an open corridor leading to a backyard with a mango tree. Climb to the first floor and walk into the only enclosed room there. Two girls in their early teens are flopped on the floor, watching a movie on a home theatre system.

This is Hippocampus, an activity hub and library for about 600 children living around posh Koramangala in Bangalore. Members include Nandan Nilekani's children, who stay in the neighbourhood. There are 6,000 books on the unobtrusive pine wood bookshelves that line the rooms and a hundred new titles are added every month. There are books for two-year-olds and moms, on potty training, good manners and supper. There are biographies of Mother Teresa and Martin Luther King for older children. There are fun books and books on how to learn maths. There are books from all over the world.

Umesh Malhotra and his wife, Vimala, who run Hippocampus, say they love buying books. It took them about seven months to research and order all the books you find here. They went to different publishers in India. They hunted on the Net. They got a list of 10,000 most popular children's books in the US from Ingram and hunted among them books that would interest Indian children. "We got a list of Newbury medal winners. The Newbury is equal to the Pulitzer in children's publishing. We have books by Sharon Creech, an American author who writes for 12 and 13-year-olds about the turmoil they grow through. We have books for parents on sex education and how to handle children's tantrums," explains Umesh.

But how did the Malhotras build a collection of books from around the world? "When we went to Korea and Japan, we picked up some. We got Korean folktales in English. A friend called from



Umesh Malhotra and his wife Vimala with children at Hippocampus

South Africa and asked what we wanted. We told her to pick up the 10 most popular books there. That's how we got Nelson Mandela's favourite stories." Most books in the library have a price tag of \$18-25 and would be unaffordable even to Bangalore's well-heeled techies.

Hippocampus also stocks computer games, CDs and DVDs. The Malhotras wrote to PBS and asked for some of their broadcasts. There is a series called School House Rock, which was created by advertising professionals and broadcast in the 1980s. It uses rock themes and teaches politics and maths through music. "That was an Emmy winning show," recalls Umesh.

BRIGHT SPARK

How did a busy couple in their early 30s start a public library? Umesh Malhotra, an IIT Chennai alum-

nus, was one of Infosys' first employees and was posted to the US in 1998, where Vimala and he lived with their only son, Tarutru, for a year and a half. They stayed in a 30-year-old Californian town called Foster City. Tarutru started going to a public school that had a small library. According to the Malhotras, Tarutru's life was transformed by the library. He started enjoying himself. He was encouraged by the school system to pick up books himself.

"A 30-year-old town had a library that was spacious, airy and bright. We felt India, too, deserved a library like this," recalls Umesh. In 1999, they picked up 5,600 square feet of land as investment right in the middle of Bangalore. Thanks to Infosys' generous stock options scheme, the Malhotras were comfortably off and could think bigger. They would once in a while talk about the idea, but nothing happened.

In 2001, they set themselves a goal. They would build a role model library – a beautiful, bright place. Not just that, it would also be economically sustainable. In 2002, Umesh quit Bangalore Labs, a start-up he had co-founded, and submitted the building plans. The library became operational in May 2003. Today, he has lost weight, looks 10 years younger than he did a year and half ago, comes to 'work' in long shorts that 18-year-olds would find cool, and brings his dog along. Malhotra treats his real estate as an investment and claims that for the amount he

has invested in books, he gets more than the regular bank rate of interest. The library has 600 members now. They pay an average of Rs 255 a month. That adds up to Rs1.35 lakh a month.

THE FUN PLATFORM

Hippocampus is gaining a reputation in Bangalore as a platform to work with children. Many people contact the Malhotras through word of mouth. Just a month ago, an Englishman came to Bangalore, wanting to stage a musical called Noah's Small. A friend directed him to the Malhotras, who had seen the musical in the UK. As a result, Hippocampus now has a theatre which can accommodate 50 children.

On weekends, Hippocampus holds all kinds of activities for children. "The idea is to make Hippocampus a happening place so that reading

books is not considered nerdish," says Malhotra. He keeps a stock of bicycles. One Sunday he took the kids on a treasure hunt to Majestic, an older, bustling part of Bangalore. There are chess games in the yard. Nikhil, a freelance cook who graduated from the Centre for Learning, an experimental school in Bangalore, teaches cooking, dishing out the history and culture of the place along with its cuisine. Nikhil's parents teach science at Hippocampus through fun workshops. Ozone, an adventure company, runs a scuba diving club. There is a journalism club that toured the Deccan Herald office. The art club often has gallery owners who take the kids to an art appreciation class. Gopal and Michael, two musicians who have a farm in Nelamangala on the outskirts of Bangalore where they teach village children music, often jam at Hippocampus.

"Once you are in this, you meet amazing people. What is happening in society now is very, very interesting," points out Umesh, who says he is enjoying himself thoroughly. He talks of a phone call he received from Mrs Padmanabhan, a 75-year-old lady who lives in an old age home in Koramangala. She wanted to do something with Hippocampus for Dassera. The previous Dassera, Hippocampus had organised 'Golu', a dolls exhibition, and she had heard of that.



THE ROBIN HOOD MODEL

However, building a public library for upper middle-class children was not enough for the Malhotras. They wanted to include underserved children as well. They began by networking people who worked with such children. As a result, on Tuesdays, children from a shelter called Ananya come and spend time at Hippocampus, which is then empty. Volunteers from GE's Elfun programme and Dream A Dream, a non-profit organisation, help these children with books, computers and movies.

The Malhotras often hold fundraising events. On Independence Day, they got Hippocampus member kids and 30 underprivileged kids to put up a show. The member kids paid for the fun.

But even this was not enough. Umesh had something more ambitious on his mind. He wanted to set up a string of libraries across Bangalore for underserved children and get them excited about reading. He knew he could not go it alone, so he approached Rohini Nilekani, who is the chairperson of Akshara Foundation, a partner of Pratham's nationwide network, which is involved in children's education.

Rohini realised that although children in government schools were promoted from one class to the next, they could barely read. So, Umesh and Rohini networked 10 stakeholders and got Rajeev Narang who works for a Bangalore based innovation consulting firm, to facilitate a discussion and come up with a plan. The Hippocampus Reading Foundation was born out of this talk shop.

The Malhotras intend to make Hippocampus pay for the activities of the Reading Foundation. They kicked it off with a fund-raising screening of Shrek II. In May 2004, they held a carnival for children. "Now six months later, CRY has come to us to help them raise funds. So, we will become event managers for

them and ask for part of the income to go to the Reading Foundation. For that, we have to constantly think of positioning Hippocampus as a premium brand," says Malhotra, who is brimming with ideas.

READING FOR REAL

One of his ideas is to set up libraries in government schools and have reading related activities there on weekends. What is amazing are the number of organisations working together to make this happen. The Akshara Foundation, which interacts with the Karnataka government, has 600 volunteers who can speak Kannada; the foundation also organises the infrastructure. Teacher Foundation, a Bangalore based education consulting firm, has

come up with a manual on what kind of books should be read in each session, what will be done before reading a book, and the fun, but learning, activities to which the children can be introduced after the book reading session.

Dream A Dream, an organisation that raises funds innovatively to work with children in shelters, has built up a volunteer base of 300 youngsters who are either in college or working. These youngsters have been trained by the Teacher Foundation and they help the English reading sessions in the libraries. "Umesh is extremely good at getting people together," says Maya Menon of the Teacher Foundation, who holds a management degree in education.

Intimately connected with Hippocampus' activities are several other initiatives.

Akshara has set up libraries in nine government schools. They have appointed mobile librarians to go door-to-door, lending books to children. Each child has to pay Rs 5 to become a member. This also creates employment for women and gains them respect in the community. But the idea of reading is alien to most of the children and so the 'Reading for Real' programme is designed to get children excited about reading.

These libraries stock 10-15 copies of the same book so that the children can read aloud with a volunteer. Maya and her colleagues have chosen inexpensive books like those published by the Children's Book Trust. They have also trained volunteers of Akshara and Dream A Dream. "They have to be able to manage groups. They have to know how to read from a book - gestures and voice modulation," explains Maya. To enable this, not only did her team make a manual for reading related activities, the volunteers too went through the same experience. To ensure that the children are

really learning, the Teacher Foundation has also developed an assessment system.

Come Saturday and there are reading sessions in nine libraries across Bangalore throughout the day. The session at Yarub Nagar starts at 3 pm. This has children from classes five, six and seven. The sessions here are in Kannada. They have just read a book called Ninaginta Nane Melu ('I'm Better than You'), which is about a squabble between a sister and a brother. After the session, each group of four children has to draw and colour on the same page to learn how to cooperate.

The English session at the Government Urdu School in Jagjivanram Nagar starts at 4.30 pm. Malathi Nayak, a third-year law student, K P

Pavan, a chartered accountant who has just joined Intel, and Sunil Kennar, a Dream A Dream employee, go there every Saturday. "I heard about Dream A Dream when a trustee of the organisation came on Radio City, so I enrolled as a volunteer," says Malathi, an attractive young girl in faded jeans. The trio are adept at thinking up word games and getting the children to play. Before a reading session, they make large cutouts of all the big words in a book and 15 sets of each cutout. After Malathi finished reading the book aloud, each group of four children had to search for words in the book and pick the cutout of that

word and paste it on a poster.

The entire reading programme is monitored by Hippocampus. Umesh drives over in his Mahindra Bolero to oversee reading sessions at random. In addition, he has two women on his rolls in the Reading Foundation - one a qualified librarian and the second with some experience in education. Every Monday and Tuesday, the librarian holds a review meeting with the mobile librarians and the Akshara volunteers. They find out what works and what doesn't, which books move and which don't. The programme's final goal is ambitious - to grow to 45 libraries, covering 50,000 children, in three years.

SCALE THE MODEL

Being able to cross-fund from Hippocampus to the Reading Foundation has tickled Umesh's imagination. He has now come up with yet another audacious plan. Why can't other NGOs use the same sustainable economic model? "The Children's Lovcastle Foundation, for example, had been funded by Intel to create a technology clubhouse for underserved children for two years. But now they are struggling to raise fresh funds. They have the infrastructure and could easily build a Hippocampus library for children who can afford to pay and use the surplus to run the clubhouse. In fact, several NGOs working with children who have campuses could do that," says Malhotra, who has worked his numbers well. If there are many Hippocampuses in one city, they could share books. In fact, Malhotra is open to the idea of working with partners across the country to set up similar libraries. "It could even be someone who wants to run it as a business. Including infrastructure, it would take an investment of Rs 30-35 lakh and that would pay back in two years," he explains. Any takers?

The smart street bank

Civil Society News
New Delhi

Although things are changing, banks don't open their glass doors to street children. A bank spells money and respectability and that a homeless child doesn't have. But in New Delhi there is a bank that rolls out the red carpet for street children even if they don't have a shirt on their backs. It's called the Children's Development Bank.

Street and working children run the bank and decide its rules and regulations. They do get a helping hand from adults at an NGO called Butterflies, where Rita Panicker thought up the idea. But it is the children who manage their finances. They collect, save and negotiate loans and the bank manager is chosen by them from among them.

Says Rita Panicker, director of Butterflies, "A Youth Bank had been suggested. But when we asked the kids, they said, look, we are not youth, we are children. We want a children's bank and we'll run it with our own concepts and rules."

A social worker from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, Rita got interested in street and working children while commuting in Mumbai's trains. Her first project was a credit and savings scheme for adolescents who'd spent years in Mumbai's jails. Rita abandoned it when she moved to Delhi.

"I never forgave myself," she says. The Children's Development Bank, or the Bal Vikas Bank, gave her a chance to make up for the past.

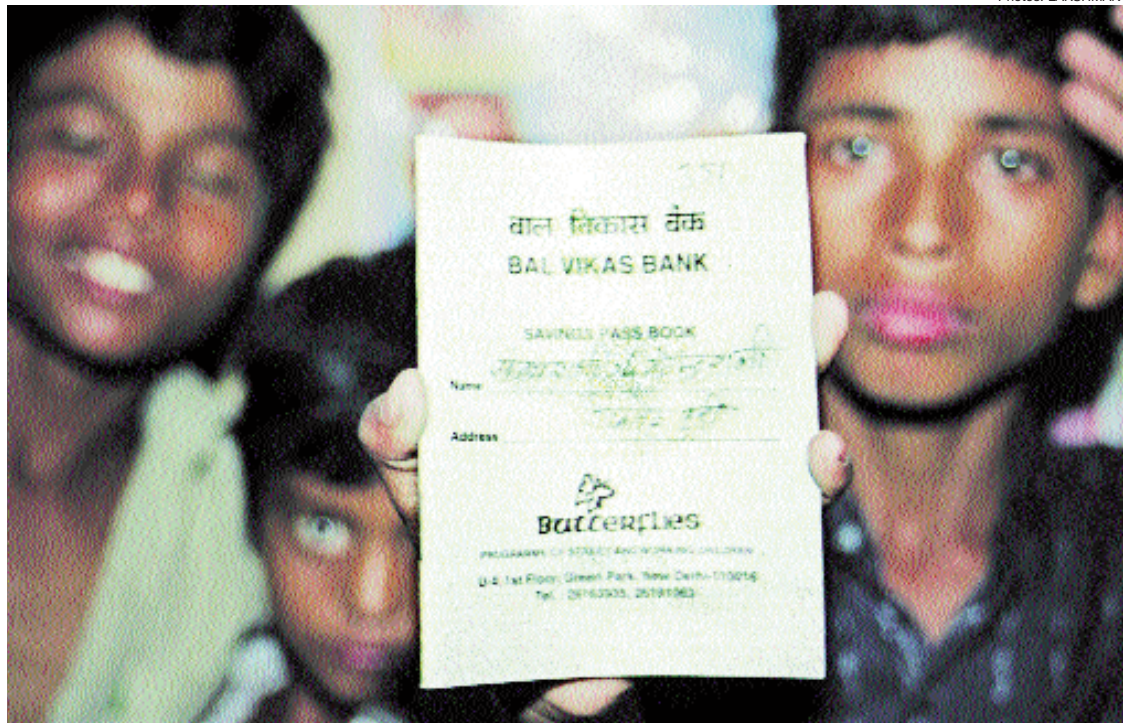
The bank was launched in September 2001. It has gone global with branches in Afghanistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Pakistan. There are inquiries from NGOs in Iran, Sudan and Central Asia. Rita would like to establish an International Children's Development Bank akin to the Asian Development Bank.

Rita says the first bank was started to help working children acquire life skills such as learning to save and use money sensibly for education, training or to start businesses. She says banking develops a child's personality and teaches accounting and management. "It also gives them a sense of security," she adds.

Each Bal Vikas Bank starts with a seed capital of Rs 2 lakh provided by Comic Relief, an international funding agency. The money is routed through a British organisation called CIVA (Centre for Innovation in Voluntary Action). The first Delhi bank got money from the Ford Foundation through the National Foundation for India.

Delhi has two branches, one at a shelter run by Butterflies in Fatehpuri near the Old Delhi Railway Station and the other in Okhla, an industrial hub in south Delhi.

The Fatehpuri branch is the main bank. Eighty



children between nine and 18 are clients. At 6 pm, bank manager Suraj, just 16, slips inside the teller's cubicle as children line up to deposit or withdraw money. Rs 3 is the minimum amount accepted, but most children deposit upwards of Rs10.

"It's not very easy being a manager, though I do enjoy it," says Suraj. "You need patience. Initially, we had lots of fights. The children kept getting confused about how much they had deposited or withdrawn. My calculator collapsed showing them."

Bank members then decided to bifurcate the deposits into two *khaatas*, or accounts - the *jamma khaata* (current account) also called the *chalta phirta khaata* and the *bachat khaata* (savings account). They elect a management committee, a loan committee and the bank's two managers. A general body meeting takes place once a month and members can talk freely.

Bank promoters inform other street children about the bank, collect money at designated contact points - Delhi has 12 - and submit applications for membership or loans. This enables children who don't live in the shelter to become members. Development promoters are usually older children, 16-18 years old, well versed in banking. They trav-



Rita Panicker

el to different cities to train other children.

Loan applications are forwarded to the loan committee, which meets once a month. The applicant has to field questions. The committee asks the applicant how he intends to pay back. Would a year be comfortable? Once his proposal is cleared, the money is credited to his account.

Certain rules are sacrosanct. Pickpockets and drug addicts cannot become members. Money will not be sanctioned for starting a cigarette shop. A child can't take an advance on behalf of his family.

So far, no child has absconded after taking a loan says 21-year-old Muhammad Kalam, the shelter's gentle caretaker. "They open an account, deposit their money. Then they decide to go work somewhere else and leave their cash behind," he says.

The shelter is a real money saver. The boys used to spend around Rs10-20 every day on food bought off the streets. Now they get clean, subsidised food - Rs3 for lunch and Rs2.50 for dinner. A second expense was movies. But the shelter has a large colour TV with a DVD player. Each boy is a member of the Bal Sabha and a decision was made collectively to buy one.

"Every working child has a small surplus," says Sunil, street educator. "They used to waste it on gambling and drugs. Thankfully, that's all over now. The bank has inculcated in them the habit of saving. We'd like to encourage them to invest their money on further education."

A school functions morning and evening and helps street kids appear for the National Institute of Open Schools (NIOS) exam. Some attend local government schools and work part time. There are computer classes, dance classes and theatre classes.

Muhammad Kalam maintains discreet discipline, switching off the TV when it's time to study. He understands the children's fierce sense of independence, but also the value of education. He was a rag picker when Butterflies opened its first shelter at Jama Masjid. "I used to sleep in the park," he recalls. "Butterflies invited me in and I have never looked back since." After 12 years, he went back home to Muzaffarpur, persuaded by Butterflies. His family was delighted. They had given him up for dead.

Butterflies want to encourage adolescents to start group enterprises. They have identified the food business, computers and horticulture as viable. They also publish a newspaper and hope to train kids to become publishers.



A clean world car

Umesh Anand

New Delhi / Bangalore

IMAGINE a car without an engine and smelly exhausts, but fully loaded with an air-conditioner, temperature-adjusted seats and stereo. A car so loved that governments shower you with subsidies when you buy it and then waive parking fees and congestion taxes when you take it out on the street.

Where in the world would you find such encouragement for driving a benign and efficient electric vehicle? We can give you two cities to choose from: London and Tokyo.

And in which technologically advanced country do you think it would be manufactured? Why, India, of course.

To be precise, the car is called the Reva and it is made at a nondescript factory near Bangalore by Chetan Maini, 34, an engineer by training and an uncompromising champion of clean automotive technology.

For almost a decade, Maini has worked in the US and India on developing and now commercially producing the Reva, a small battery-run car with stunning good looks and many unique features.

It was an idea which came to him after he developed a solar car in the US. Maini worked on the assumption that a battery car would be ideal for congested and polluted Indian cities. But in a weird twist to his saga, Maini's car has been ignored by the Indian government and is instead being picked up and vigorously promoted in Japan and Europe.

From December, anyone who buys the Reva in Japan gets \$2600 as an incentive from the Japanese government. In Britain, a Reva buyer gets 1000 pounds. London's congestion tax has been waived for the Reva and there are no charges for parking.

The Reva, in fact, is being ranked as the most energy-efficient vehicle in Europe.

It is also much cheaper than any comparable automobile in Europe. "Ford used to make a small car the same size as Reva. It used to sell for \$ 25,000 in Europe. Today the Reva in Europe sells for roughly \$10,000," says Maini.

In the five years or so since it was launched in 1999, the Reva has found just 800 customers in India, mainly in the southern cities of Bangalore and Hyderabad. By comparison, Maini hopes to sell 500 cars in the coming year in Britain alone where the Reva is known as GWiz.

But it is in India that a small electric car is most needed. In the absence of adequate public transport, thousands of personal cars and two-wheelers come onto the streets of cities each year.

Urban air pollution has reached alarming levels and almost all of it is linked to the use of petrol and diesel. By one estimate, if there were even just 40,000 Revas on the road in India with an annual driving distance of 12,000 km a vehicle the harmful effects of 30,000 tonnes of pollutants would be avoided.

The Reva is also cheap to run. At a unit price of Rs 4 for electricity, the Reva does a kilometre in just 40 paise! Once fully charged, its battery lasts for 80 km. Commuters within Indian cities don't tend to do more than 30 to 40 km in a day.

It is capable of zip and does respectable speeds of 40 to 60 kmph with ease. With a turning radius of 3.5 metres, it is ideal for congested cities and can be parked easily. The body is made of dent-proof plastic and the bumpers are moulded from the same material that water tanks are made from.

A remote-controlled air-conditioner and temperature adjustments for seats add to driving comfort in the Reva's high-end model, which has leather seats and a stereo. The high-end model comes for Rs 3.3 lakhs and the base one Rs 2.5 lakhs.

What did it take to enter developed markets and win this support? "Very little," says Maini. "The moment we told them we have an electric car they wanted to see how they could get more on the road. In Britain we got a chance to show it to 40 MPs. They were very proactive because it is a technology which can improve the environment." In India, on the

other hand, Maini's presentation to MPs had no effect. The Reva does get a few state level tax concessions, but he has had to work hard for them and they don't really mean much. There is a Rs 75,000 subsidy for Union government purchases. But in the absence of strategic support for clean technologies, government departments aren't buying the Reva or variants, like battery buses, which could come off Maini's assembly line.

The important thing is to get individuals to opt for a car like the Reva so that clean personal transport becomes a movement and pollution comes down or is curtailed. For this the government has to step in with meaningful incentives, as in Japan and Britain, and make a statement in support of a healthy environment and against polluting engines. At one level it means setting up charging stations and giving tax breaks. At another level, it involves making a non-polluting, small car something worth aspiring to.

Switzerland, for instance, gives 30 percent off on the purchase price of all electric vehicles. China is investing \$100 million in a technology mission to put 1000 battery-operated buses in operation before the 2008 Olympics.

Mothering by the government is important because a new technology competes with well-entrenched commercial interests. In the case of automobiles, brands come to India with a long history of using fossil fuel engines. They shape preferences through huge advertising budgets. These economies of scale are difficult to contend with.

Chetan Maini's father's business involves automobile components and battery operated material handling equipment. This experience helped in developing Reva technology at low costs. But building a market presence and service and dealer networks is an altogether different game. It is also very expensive and in financial resources the Reva Electric Car Company and the Maini family do not come anywhere close to automobile majors.

In 1997-98, Maini had been given by the Indian government a subsidy of Rs 1 lakh per car. The excise duty was set at eight percent when it was 40 percent for other cars. But two years were spent making the Reva entirely indigenous except for eight parts. By the time it was ready to roll, the subsidy vanished. Excise on all cars came down to 16 percent.

This was a major blow from which the Reva never recovered even though it received a warm response in Bangalore at the time of its launch.

"Everywhere, globally products like this get initial support to create enough awareness. After that market forces take over. If there was the right direct support at that time, it would have really helped us," says Maini.



Chetan Maini

Villagers fix their own road, outsmart contractors

Rakesh Agarwal
Sargipalli

THIS was a different road. Although *kutch*a or untarred, it was built by villagers to connect three faraway villages, Sargipalli, Bhaludhungri and Bhakikhmain in the Bargarh district of drought stricken western Orissa. During the 2003 monsoon a big part of the road got washed away. After that the villagers wanted to repair the road themselves and earn the money that the government would normally pay to contractors. Local officials, however, had other plans.

In December 2003, the Block Development Officer (BDO) sanctioned Rs. 1.42 lakh to repair the road. Immediately, two contractors from the Dahita gram panchayat, which oversees the three villages, bid for the contracts. Sensing trouble, the BDO diverted the money to some other village.

At once, the people called a meeting to decide what should be done. They became a united force, fighting corruption and drawing up village development plans without any external help. In 2001, Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (GSA), a programme that makes people active subjects rather than passive recipients in development was launched here. GSA is a combined effort of People's Science Institute (PSI), Dehra Dun and Sahabhangi Vikas Abhiyan (SVA), a consortium of voluntary organisations in western Orissa.

"We decided to approach the highest official in the district, before thinking of direct action," says Sagar Maher, a key figure who organised the meet.

The district collector once again sanctioned the money and said a local self-help group (SHG) would be awarded the contract. But the contractors were cunning and one was close to a political leader. They formed an SHG called the Dahita SHG and won the contract.

The villagers met again and decided to intervene. "It was our road and we have ten active SHGs in our village so if the contract has to go to an SHG, why not one of ours?" asked 38-year old Subrat Mahato of Sargipalli. The villagers got ready to fight tooth and nail. If the contract were not given to them, they would build the road by *shramdaan*, anyway.

This time, the villagers not only wrote to the BDO and district magistrate, they went to meet them in large numbers. Just then the Orissa Assembly elections were announced and the code of conduct was in force. The people had no option but to wait. And they waited till June 2004, when the elections were over.

Once again the villagers went to the BDO but he tried to get the work done through the department. "This was also a trick since in reality the *gram-sewak* would be doing the work and he was actually the contractor's man," informs 24-year old Prema Bohidhar of Bhaludhungri. Sensing this, the villagers opposed the move.

The BDO reverted to his old order and awarded the work to the Dahita SHG. They started repair work on the first bridge on the road.



Villagers of Bargarh district mending their road

Pragati Vadi, a prominent local Oriya newspaper highlighted their work and then Vijay Ranjan Singh, member, Orissa Legislative Assembly, visited the village, praised their efforts and asked the BDO not to favour the Dahita SHG.

The people of all three villages gathered to protest. "It was our right to work and we will not let people belonging to the greedy contractor usurp our legitimate right," said an angry Biman Misra of Bhakikhama village. The protests continued for two days. People lay on the road, making it impossible for the usurpers to work. They had to leave the site. But they threatened the villagers with dire consequences.

The villagers met in July to take a final decision on what they should do. "We decided to complete the work ourselves and do it immediately," says 23-year old Saraswati Panda of Bhaludhungri. Next day, as dawn broke, about 600 people gathered at the site and began work. Seeing such a huge crowd the contractors couldn't do anything. They warned the villagers that since they belonged to a powerful group, their efforts would be wasted and they won't get paid for the job.

Undeterred, the people continued and the entire work was done in three days flat. Next the battle to get their rightful dues began.

The people got unexpected support. First, Pragati Vadi, a prominent local Oriya newspaper highlighted their work and then Vijay Ranjan Singh, member, Orissa Legislative Assembly, visited the village, praised their efforts and asked the BDO not to

favour the Dahita SHG.

The people decided they must get paid. "It was our rightful share. We decided to get the money. We could use it for other development work in the villages," says Padma Bodhiraj. People approached the district magistrate in vain. He told them since the work had not been allotted to them in their name and they don't have any bills, they won't get any payment.

The villagers listened calmly and then retorted that if the payment were made to the Dahita SHG on the basis of some false bills, there would be a big revolt.

Support from political quarters gathered momentum. In September, the state's minister for agriculture, Surendra Nayak, visited Bargarh district.

After he heard about the incident, he ordered the district collector and the BDO to cancel the old contract and in future to get this kind of work done only through the village SHGs.

The BDO immediately cancelled the old order. He got the people's work assessed. It was valued at Rs. 38,000 and awarded to the Vindhyaivasini SHG in Sargipalli. The people generously gave Rs. 5,000 to the Dahita SHG to keep good relations. They now have Rs. 33,000 in their kitty plus a work order of Rs. 1.04 lakh in the name of their SHG.

How to take over a dead govt school



Vidya Viswanathan
Gurgaon

From left: Damayanti, Radhika, Anna and Surabhi

FOR two years, Commander KK Choudhary, a retired naval officer in Gurgaon, requested the Haryana government to allot him land to build a school for children of migrant workers. His school, Sankalp, catered to 200 such children in a cramped, lousy tin shed. The government wasn't interested. Then four ladies, living in Laburnum, an upmarket apartment block in Gurgaon, came to his rescue. They lobbied tirelessly. The Haryana government's child welfare department finally relented and signed a joint venture agreement with the Sankalp Foundation, handing over one of their many vacant schools on a two-year lease.

Surabhi Kakar, Anna Godura, Radhika Sethi and Damayanti Mukherji enjoy being with each other. What binds them together? The answer is activism.

"The four of us came together in late 2002 because we needed to do something with our time. We then discovered Sankalp. The Sriram School provides them midday meals. My daughter studies there," says Surabhi, who graduated from the Xavier Labour Research Institute (XLRI) in 1983.

The commander's spirit was rather low. In 1998, he had applied to the Haryana government for some land. After sitting on the files for two years the government told him to buy it at an open auction. "Land comes in sizes of 500 square yards. That meant I needed at least Rs 60 lakhs. It was out of question," recalls Choudhary. He decided to raise funds for a building on his own. "I organised two walks and a carnival and col-

lected Rs 2.5 lakhs," he recalls. He put together Rs 8 lakhs but ran into financial trouble when Degremont, a French firm which had promised Rs 20 lakhs, pulled out of the project.

Meanwhile, the four women heard that Neelima, another resident of Laburnum, ran a school for children of migrant workers in a vacant government school that had been allotted to her. But she was politically well connected. When the four women found out that many more government schools were lying unused, they decided to launch a campaign. They got 25 residents of their apartment block to sign a petition, went to the media and showed reporters all the empty schools and the chicken coop in which 200 children were studying.

A couple who lived in Laburnum were friends of the former Deputy Commissioner (DC), Anurag Rastogi, and they chipped in. Choudhary got sup-

port from the Rotary Club of Cama Place in New Delhi. A youngster who worked there mentioned that his uncle, LS Yadav, was the district child welfare officer (DCWO) of Gurgaon. So a lot of personal pressure was applied from that quarter.

The four women accompanied Choudhary to the DC's office. "Whenever he needs to show a team, we are there," says Radhika, a former investment banker. "Once there is pressure from two or three sides, it seems like there is a lot of community support. They helped us convince the DC," says Aradhana Gupta, a volunteer at Sankalp, who worked as a management consultant with Tata Consultancy Services for 14 years.

LS Yadav, the DCWO, suggested a vacant primary school could be handed over under a joint venture agreement between the child welfare department and Sankalp Foundation. Accordingly, a two-year lease agreement was signed in January 2004, on a verbal assurance that the number of students enrolled would go up from 200 to 400 in two years. In return, Sankalp pays the Haryana government Rs 1000 a month as lease fee. The number of students enrolled is already 350.

After six months of pushing files, the school premises were finally allotted to Sankalp. But the fully furnished red brick school, built on an acre of land, lay idle for about four years. It was in no condition to be occupied. "The building was used as a shit house by slum dwellers. The *chowkidar*, appointed by the government used to take money and let people sleep in the paved front yard. I told them that I did not want him," says Choudhary. He had to spend money to repair the school premises.

In the winter of 2002, the Laburnum ladies had raised money to buy sweaters, socks and blankets for the children. They got into action again. A Laburnum resident worked in ICI. The ladies appealed to him and he got his company to donate some paint. "We try and make most of living here. People run when they see us now," jokes Damayanti, who has just returned with her family from the US. They sourced paint, brushes and turpentine and whitewashed the walls along with children from Sankalp.

Choudhary went ahead and raised funds for his other school building that now houses 70 children. "Cargill, Rotary Club and Xansa bailed him out. Aradhana put in one and a half lakh from her personal money. The building was built but there was no money to run this school," recalls Radhika. "So we focused on the needs of the school and went on a fund-raising campaign," says Anna, a techie born in the US and now married to an Indian. They made presentations to several corporates. Gurgaon-based Incentive Destinations gave them Rs 1 lakhs. Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) gave them money to fund the salaries of three teachers. "CAF funding required extensive periodic reporting and we helped out with that," says Radhika. They raised Rs 17,000 from some Laburnum residents for textbooks.

But there were still no funds to run the school on a day-to-day basis. Radhika's husband worked for the Commercial Finance Group in GE. A friend from GE advised the four ladies to get savvy and design a brochure. Sankalp had been talking to GE's commercial finance group for sometime but nothing had happened. Then suddenly the group got a new head. Radhika Gulati, the head's wife also lives in Laburnum. She pushed the case. A group from GE visited Sankalp. The ladies sent them the brochure that they had designed. It costs about Rs 2500 per child per year to take care of the school's expenses.





THE PEOPLE'S DAILY

Rita & Umesh Anand
Ranchi

IN 1989, a small and unknown newspaper in Ranchi called *Prabhat Khabar* was up for sale. Its reputation was mostly mud. It was all of eight pages and it had a print-run of just 500 copies which came off an outdated press. The Usha Martin Group was interested in buying *Prabhat Khabar* if it came cheap and, more importantly, if professional journalists could be brought in to revive it. The group had business interests in Bihar and a newspaper is always a nice thing to own, particularly in a state so prone to tumultuous politics.

At the same time in Kolkata, an assistant editor by the name of Harivansh in the Hindi weekly, *Ravivar*, was getting impatient with the quality of journalism that he was doing. *Ravivar* had gone from being a respected magazine under SP Singh, to being a mouthpiece for the Congress. Harivansh was known within the profession for his skills and objectivity. He hadn't joined journalism to be anyone's mouthpiece. He was restless and eager for a change that would put his own idealism to test.

So, when the Usha Martin Group, after asking around, offered him the job of reviving the defunct *Prabhat Khabar*, he said yes at the first meeting. It did not take more than a minute for him to make up his mind. He was attracted to Ranchi even though he had never been there before. In South Bihar's well-known contradictions Harivansh saw the perfect laboratory for an experiment in journalism. If a modern and independent newspaper could be built here, amid runaway corruption, violent politics, huge wealth, abject poverty and collapsing infrastructure, then it would surely be the achievement of a lifetime.

Fifteen years later that dream is a reality. *Prabhat Khabar* prints 300,000 copies and has 1.1 million readers across all its six publishing centres.

It is of course Jharkhand's largest daily, having knocked out the *Ranchi Express* and *Aaj*. But, more significantly, in the past four years it has got the better of *Hindustan*, the Hindi avatar of the *Hindustan Times*, and *Dainik Jagaran*. Both national media houses were eager to muscle their way into the region.

Far from succumbing to the might of the two big titles, *Prabhat Khabar's* circulation and revenues have continued to grow. *Hindustan* sold 161,942 in Jharkhand in July-December 2004. *Prabhat Khabar* did 218,380 for the same period. This is significantly higher than the 168,000 copies that it did in 2000 when *Hindustan* and *Jagaran* began making an entry. *Jagaran* has not subjected itself to ABC scrutiny in this market.

The result has been rapid spikes in the profitability of *Prabhat Khabar*. Advertising revenues are expected to touch Rs 25 crore in the coming year. In 1996-97 advertising revenues were just Rs 2 crores and in 2000 Rs 7 crores.

The paper rolls out 11 editions from Ranchi alone. It has four publishing centres in Jharkhand and one each in Patna and Kolkata. The Kolkata edition does 60,000 copies. A vast rural network has been created and it has been linked through computer and modem.

The Usha Martin Group invested Rs 6 crores between 1989 and 1994 in reviving the defunct *Prabhat Khabar*. It now has a brand and fixed assets which can be valued at several times the initial investment. Ironically, it is a business which has grown out of providing complete freedom to Harivansh as editor. This is rare in times when

independent minded editors, who insist on telling a story as they see it, are widely regarded by proprietors as a liability.

What is the secret of *Prabhat Khabar's* success? The paper has relied primarily on the quality of its journalism. It has zealously guarded the sanctity of its editorial columns, keeping them free from the influence of political and commercial interests. It has become fashionable for publishing houses to depend on pricing and marketing initiatives for their growth, but *Prabhat Khabar* is priced at Rs 3.50 and its management is unwilling to give out copies free.

Hindustan and *Jagaran* have offered colourful, tabloidish content. But *Prabhat Khabar* has stuck to serious issues with soft feature pages and supplements to provide balance and completeness. Though tucked away in Ranchi, Harivansh has worked to inculcate a worldview among his young journalists and readers. He has encouraged them to look for modern and efficient answers to problems of social equity and poor governance.

The newspaper's commitment to the common citizen has been constant. It exposed the massive corruption in Bihar's animal husbandry department in 1992, four years before national media woke up to it. *Prabhat Khabar* did 70 investigative reports, which finally cost Laloo Prasad Yadav his job as chief minister.

Prabhat Khabar also broke the news of starvation deaths in Palamau. The government denied the deaths and tried to browbeat the newspaper, but the reports finally became a part of the Supreme Court's ongoing intervention on the question of the right to food and the working of the public distribution system in the country. The court vindicated *Prabhat Khabar*.

Harivansh's staff have been relentlessly reporting land scams and fake drug rackets, campaigning against the government over the shortage of power. They have delved deep into corruption by politicians and government servants, going to the extent of naming officials and printing the amounts charged as kickbacks in various departments.

The paper has associated itself with mass movements such as the one for Jharkhand, which was created out of South Bihar and of which Ranchi is now the capital.

Prabhat Khabar has raised an alarm over the flight of capital from the region because of poor governance. It has campaigned for land rights and community access to forests. Stories done by its reporters have helped tribals get back property usurped from them.

It has taken up women's rights on a sustained basis.

It is important to understand that the variety of emotional bonds that *Prabhat Khabar* has built with its readers and its image as a courageous champion of the truth have been important ingredients in its commercial success. At a time in the country, and particularly so in Bihar, when journalists are seen as being a part of the power structure, Harivansh and his team are seen as brave hearts.

So just who is Harivansh and what makes him so special?

Harivansh's chosen hallmark is simplicity. It needn't have been so because he is easily one of eastern India's most influential editors. But he has none of the self-importance that powerful journalists like to give themselves. He doesn't want to be a celebrity. A short man with a greying stubble and a quiet, polite demeanour, you would miss him in a room full of people.

When he is late for lunch and finds we have left to complete our work at the *Prabhat Khabar* office, he dissolves with embarrassment. At his spacious but modest flat in the core of the Bengali quarter in Ranchi, breakfast is a leisurely affair amid light-hearted banter among local friends. The pace is easy, homely. But the phone rings for him every now and then.

Harivansh, who has just turned 50, grew up in a village in Uttar Pradesh. School was under a tree. "There was nothing there. When people fell sick, they died," he tells us in his office in Ranchi.

Since he knows what it is to be poor, he genuinely feels for issues which affect the poor. When we arrived in Ranchi he was away in Hazaribagh where women had come together to demand a ban on alcohol. Harivansh was impressed. "There are uneducated women but they have managed to organise huge protests," he tells us. The next day *Prabhat Khabar* had a detailed story done by Harivansh himself.

But while he cares for the poor, he isn't boring. He does not wear his heart on his sleeve. He can be as blunt and combative with unreasonable trade unions as with people who believe that the media's only role is to celebrate the lifestyles of the rich.

Just as *Prabhat Khabar* investigates politicians, so also it scrutinises Naxalites and their lawlessness. Harivansh has uncomfortable questions to ask of NGOs.

Thanks to his father's foresight, Harivansh managed to go to Benares Hindu University to study. He did an MA in economics. He began writing letters to publications on the Jayaprakash Narayan movement. He then happened to take the examination for *Times of India's* trainee journalist programme and after his training began working for *Dharmayug*.

When life in Mumbai and work at the magazine did not appeal to him any longer he took the bank officers' examination and moved out. A few years later he was back in journalism, at *Ravivar*, and from there he made the ordained journey to Ranchi.

Rebuilding *Prabhat Khabar* has meant mostly working round the clock. "For a very long time we would be here in office at nine in the morning and leave at two the next morning," says Harivansh. Resources were scarce and at times there was not enough money for paper. In 1996, the Usha Martin Group felt that the *Prabhat Khabar* team was ready to fend for themselves.

Harivansh remains grateful for the advice in running the business that came from DS Sharma, one of the directors on the board.

The *Prabhat Khabar* management also has two key players who have grown with the business. KK



Prabhat Khabar's modern office at Ranchi

Goenka and RK Datta had been appointed as managers by Usha Martin in 1989. Datta originally handled only personnel, but then took over circulation. Goenka is a chartered accountant who looks after finance and marketing. It was first-time employment for both of them. They were as stunned by the rundown condition of the paper as Harivansh was. But they were small town boys – Datta from Ranchi itself and Goenka from Bankura in West Bengal – and they decided to make a go of it.

"We have worked together as a team. Decisions are taken collectively. It is management and editorial together. No one side dominates. There is no all-powerful brand manager or marketing head," says Harivansh.

Harivansh, however, is clearly the boss. It is he who has given *Prabhat Khabar* its soul and public presence. In addition to being editor he functions as the CEO.

In his 14 years of editorship he has taken on politicians of all hues. He is hated equally by the BJP and Laloo Prasad Yadav. Ask him how many cases of defamation he has against him and he has to check with his lawyer. There are 30 cases against him.

Prabhat Khabar has come to be regarded as a watchdog for the ordinary citizen. But it hardly crows about its successes, unlike several national papers, which get all excited when they make even a small impact. At *Prabhat Khabar*, it all happens in the course of a day's work. One of the few extravagances the paper permits itself is its chosen slogan:

"Not a newspaper but a movement."

Prabhat Khabar's success has come out of Harivansh's unique vision for the paper as a modern product. So, while it has sharply focussed on corruption and poor governance, it has also built up features sections, colour supplements and a career guide. There is sports and foreign news.

He travelled to *Malayalam Manorama* in Kerala and *Eenadu* in Andhra Pradesh to see how these publishing empires have been built and are managed today. He learnt from them the need for connecting with readers and replicated their use of multiple editions so as to be able to highlight local stories for targeted audiences.

Books like *The Death of Distance* made him aggressively pursue connectivity and computerisation. "I realised we had to move to more efficient arrangements by which any of our journalists would have to know how to file a report, edit copy

and make a page," says Harivansh. "We also had to ensure accuracy with speed."

An important strategy has been to stay in touch with readers. *Aap Ke Dwar* (At Your Door) and *Pathak Manch* (Readers' Forum) have become popular devices for knowing what is expected of the paper. These devices have bridged the gap between the people who buy *Prabhat Khabar* and the journalists who produce it. When people hungry for information they can trust see young and idealistic faces their faith in the paper becomes unshakeable. Harivansh's own reputation is truly awesome.

Repeated interventions to ensure better governance, such as the campaign on Jharkhand's power shortages and the exposure of corruption at all levels, has positioned the paper as a sentinel.

Stories which help poor tribals get back their land may have no immediate relevance to the middle class, but they reinforce the perception of *Prabhat Khabar* as a weapon individuals can use against a callous state machinery.

Harivansh's message to his journalists has always been not to take their salaries for granted. He expects them to face the market. A newspaper cannot expect to be around for long unless it is commercially viable. On the flip side, a newspaper that is only a business does not deserve to be around either. The big challenge he took up in 1989 was to build a newspaper that could make money without playing games with its content. In 2005, he can say he has succeeded.

Daily hits road with a burst of rain

Malayala Manorama promotes water harvesting with folk songs

Rathi A Menon
Thrissur

LAST year journalists at Malayala Manorama realised Kerala was truly hurtling towards a water crisis. Alien words like drought were entering the Malayali lexicon, for the first time. In cities and villages, Keralites were running around, buckets in hand, searching for water, forgoing the old luxury of a twice-daily bath.

God's Own Country is blessed with ample water bodies and a bountiful monsoon.

The road show had a float with models of rooftop rainwater harvesting. Designed by award winning art director Sabu Cyril, it offered two options: one for a tiled-roof house and the other for a home with a concrete, terraced structure. At every stop, the road show held a demonstration. Water from a sprinkler tumbled down and people were shown how this water could be stored and used.

The rainwater harvesting campaign started with an editorial campaign called 'Palathully'. It educated readers about water management. "Prior to

Azheekkode flagged it off. The second route started from Parassala in the south. Poet ONV Kurup gave it a warm send off. The road shows stopped at more than 300 places. Finally, they converged at Palakkad where matinee idol Mammooty asked people to pledge they would 'save rainwater and save Kerala.'

At Thrissur, the cultural capital of Kerala, a caparisoned elephant and ritualistic sounds of the 'tayambaka' greeted the road show. The journalists were showered with garlands and flower petals. Folk singers sang about the dire effects of consumerism. The mayor recited his welcome speech. Ravi Varma, project-in-charge, Malayala Manorama gave a brief introduction.

Joji from Maithri, a Palakkad-based group, told people how to construct the model, offering them alternatives to suit their pockets. He gave them a list of dos and don'ts. "You should not put your hands or buckets directly into the tank as it will pollute the water," he advised. "Use a pipe or hand pump to draw water."

People were told that they were replenishing the earth by harvesting water. After that, they were free to ask questions.

"The response is more in rural areas, especially from women, since they have to suffer the consequences of water shortages," said Kuriakose who was accompanying the road show.

Malayala Manorama also entered campuses with workshops and competitions. "An

award was announced for the most water-friendly campus," says Varghese. "Now we are busy setting up rainwater harvesting models. Seventeen are already up, with the first one at Palakkad. There is also a telephone helpline." All Manorama offices have been fitted with rainwater harvesting units.

The newspaper arranges technical advice so that the best method can be identified. "Though the ferro-cement storage tank is considered one of the cheapest water harvesting methods by the UN, the options are plenty. The mindset is what matters. But we do tell people to take landscape, soil structure and so on into consideration," says Kuriakose.

Thanks to the campaign, success stories have started trickling in. A fire station in Kochi always had trouble filling their 1,40,000 litre capacity tank. Then the pamphlet and the road show happened. The fire station set up a huge rainwater-harvesting unit. After just four showers of rain, the tank filled to the brim. Fire station officials say they have enough water for a year. Similar units in all fire stations are planned. And the Kerala government has made it compulsory for new buildings to install rainwater-harvesting systems.



People turned up in their Sunday best to shower petals on Malayala Manorama's water harvesting roadshow

"Kerala is like a pitcher turned upside down, raining water. Nature has bestowed us with such wonderful gifts. But have we ever considered conserving them?" thought K M Mathew, chief editor of the Malayala Manorama media group.

Mathew's words got journalists in the newsroom to think. "People blamed sand-mining, deforestation and so on," says P A Kuriakose, the newspaper group's coordinating editor in Thrissur. "Now we can't set up a forest or put an end to sand mining. So we decided, let's leave long-term policies to the government. Instead, we can offer people a short-term programme that will prevent a water crisis. For we believe that newspapers have a duty to guide the people and better their lives."

This is how the idea of propagating rainwater harvesting was born. The newspaper group launched a unique road show called 'Palathully' (a few drops) with a slogan, which said 'Palathully Peruvellam' (a few drops can make an ocean). The road show travelled to every nook and corner of the state, serenading Keralites with folk songs of the good old days when rainwater was stored in ponds, wells and courtyards.

launching the road show, we distributed a handbook, explaining different water harvesting methods, to our 1.4 million reader-households," says Mathews Varghese, chief news editor, who is heading the campaign.

The handbook has lots of practical information. There are inspiring short stories as well. One chapter relates how Peethambaran made his first water harvesting channel using bamboo poles split into two. There are stories of Shripadre's rainwater pits in drought-prone Kasargod and Gopalakrishnan's earthen dams, which brought water to Attapady hill region. Another is of a film video studio in Thiruvananthapuram, which does without a water connection, thanks to rainwater harvesting. The handbook includes names of water-loving trees. It explains different ways of constructing rainwater-harvesting systems. There is information about agencies that can help, and banks which give loans for such projects.

The handbook became an instant bestseller. Keralites thronged to see the roadshow too. It took two routes. The first started from Mancheswaram in the north of Kerala. Litterateur Sukumar

Picking up the pieces on India's deadly highways

Rina Mukherji
Kolkata

A brave doctor and his determined wife have set up a meticulous lifeline medical service for the injured stranded on highways. Some years ago they too escaped death in a traumatic road accident.

In 1999, Dr Subroto Das, his wife Sushmita and another couple were driving from Baroda to Cambay on a national highway, when they met with an accident. "Thirty two pieces of glass shards entered my arm," recalls Dr Das. "Sushmita's knees were seriously injured. My doctor-friend, who was driving, received chest injuries, while his wife was badly hurt." Stranded at 1.30 am on a highway just 22 km from Baroda and fairly close to Anand, there was no way they could get any medical attention.

Finally, at 5 am, a milkman cycling to Anand noticed them. He blocked the road with his bike and stopped a passing bus, which took the hapless Dr Das and his co-passengers to a hospital in Baroda. They arrived there at 6 am.

"My hand was so bad... so full of dirt and blood that the first medico who examined me declared it would have to be amputated," recalls Dr Das. Fortunately, another doctor saved Dr Das's mangled hand with some effort.

After they recovered Sushmita suggested they do something for the thousands who died in accidents on highways every year. Her husband agreed. "She told me: We are lucky to be alive. Let's make sure that others don't die on the highways," says Dr Das.

And that's how Lifeline Foundation's Highway Rescue Project, a critical helpline for highway accident victims came into being.

Dr Das started by examining emergency medical infrastructure in the US and Europe. "Hospitals every few kilometres and trauma centres all over were models that could not be replicated here. I realised that an alternative had to be worked out."

The biggest difference was that in those countries most road accident deaths were caused by the impact of the collision, while in India bleeding and lack of timely medical assistance resulted in death, points out Dr Das.



Dr Subroto Das and his wife Sushmita

So Dr Das and Sushmita began mapping highways. Initially, they would set out every Sunday morning and walk a few kilometres, noting every landmark and jotting details on a map. This was meticulously done, with even hoardings, culverts and temples finding a place.

Dr Das and Sushmita set about customising acquired ambulance vans in keeping with the needs of emergency services. Meanwhile, they started liaising hospitals and informed them that no law stood in the way of transporting injured accident victims across inter-state borders for emergency medical treatment.

They approached companies for sponsorship. Birla Tyres, Tata Steel, Tata Motors, UTI Bank, and Sir Dorabji Tata Trust were the first to respond. Hutch in Gujarat, and Idea Cellular in Maharashtra enthusiastically tied up with the Lifeline Foundation to provide emergency dialing services. Indian Oil Corporation financially supported the project with a monthly contribution. The National

Highways Authority of India (NHAI), Maruti Suzuki, Hero Honda, Mahindra, HDFC were among 21 others who sponsored the project.

Backed by the corporate world, Dr Das and Sushmita trained their ambulance drivers in Airway Breathing and Circulation (ABC) emergency first aid for six months. They advertised their accident helpline phone number every 5 km on roadside boards, inside STD booths, on state transport buses, petrol pumps, roadside eateries and two-wheelers.

The Highway Rescue Project was launched in July 2002. It has 113 ambulances with metal cutters and cranes to extricate victims. On receiving a call, a central control room equipped with advanced communication systems spots the site of the accident and notifies the nearest ambulance and hospital. The police station is alerted.

The first stretch of the project covered 263 km between Ahmedabad and Surat on National Highway 8. Services were also made available on a 196 km length of road between Bhuj and Morbi on National Highway 8A.

In March the project hopes to cover 121 km from Kajri in Gujarat to Dahisar on the outskirts of Mumbai. After that services will be extended to the old Mumbai-Pune highway and Mumbai - Pune Expressway. The project will be funded by UTI Bank for three years.

By the end of 2005, Lifeline Foundation plans to move into Tamil Nadu and provide services along the Hosur-Chennai highway through their local partner Ashok Leyland. It will also extend services to the Asansol-Bally route in West Bengal next year.

Dr Subroto Das and Sushmita received international recognition for their selfless work when they were awarded the 2004 Prince Michael International Road Safety Award. Ironically, they have never ever worked on road safety.

"In fact, we come in when all road safety fails," says Dr Das with a smile.

Dr Das is a fellow with Ashoka Innovators for the Public.



Dr Das and Sushmita began mapping highways. Initially, they would set out every Sunday morning and walk a few kilometres noting each landmark and jotting details on a map.

Accident helpline numbers:
Gujarat: 9825026000
Maharashtra: 9850026000
E-mail: info@highwayrescue.org

Look, good girls in Maruti's parking lot!

Civil Society News
Gurgaon

It takes a public-spirited woman Airbus pilot to make professional drivers out of village girls in male-dominated Gurgaon.

Every day 36 mint new cars have to be driven from Maruti Udyog's factory in Gurgaon to its two parking lots, 5 km away. The job is outsourced to Peregrine Security Systems, which hires 120 drivers to shift the cars. Till a month ago, only men served as drivers.

Then Sushma, a village girl in her early twenties, turned up, sponsored by Captain Indraani Singh, India's first woman Airbus pilot, whose NGO Literacy India works in the vicinity of the Maruti factory. This month Asha, Anita and Manju joined Sushma and the male bastion in Maruti's parking lot has gone to pieces.

"We employed more girls because Sushma proved to be really efficient," says Captain (ret'd) MS Chauhan of Peregrine Security Systems, somewhat nervous about his new image as a male feminist. On the first day Sushma joined she was told, since she was a girl, to move, well, maybe 10 cars. Instead, she drove 37, impeccably.

The male drivers were shocked. And livid. They used to shift only 26 cars every day.

"During my training I learnt that the job involved moving 36 cars. I drove 37. I told them, if a man can do it, so can a woman. And I made my point," says Sushma.

The men could not meet their target because they would while away time chatting and drinking tea. "Besides, they were always late for work," says Sushma. She fought off the first wave of male resentment: rude remarks, sniggers and cold snobbery by just doing her job well and raising efficiency standards.

Captain Indraani Singh is not new to the business of breaking into male bastions. As India's first woman Airbus pilot she remembers the first day she signed in for her first solo flight. "Indian Airlines did not discriminate. But all eyes were on me," she recalls. "I knew they thought, can she do it? I steeled myself and did it."

When Indraani began her career at the Hissar Flying Club she was the only girl and the men weren't kind. She learnt the best way of earning respect was by being better than anyone else. "You have to decide if you want to do it. Then be thick-skinned and focus on achieving."

When she gets off a flight she likes nothing better than heading for the primary school Literacy India runs at Chauma village. The NGO has now extended its activities to education and livelihood programmes in Gurgaon district as a whole.

Although the region is urbanising rapidly, villages retain a conservative outlook. Men drink, mistreat their wives and girls don't get to join the workforce. Indraani wanted to change gender equations and was looking for a male bastion to break. She found driving to be a good target.

But Indraani had to counsel the girls' families. Driving is seen as a somewhat shady male occupation. The girls talked to their families too. "We argued it's not the profession which is bad. Everything depends on how we conduct ourselves," says Sushma. "I don't believe parents are reluctant to see their girls succeed. We ourselves



Sushma driving one of Maruti's brand new cars

On the first day Sushma joined she was told, since she was a girl, to move, well, maybe 10 cars. Instead, she drove 37, impeccably. The male drivers were shocked. And livid. They used to shift only 26 cars every day. "If a man can do it, so can a woman," said Sushma.



Captain Indraani Singh



Pradeep Verma

lack confidence and live in fear."

Indraani sent the girls to the reputed Institute of Driving, Training and Research (IDTR) to learn. She hired a car for Rs 1000 per day to get the girls there safely. Once they got driving licences, she even bought a second-hand Maruti car so that the girls could gain experience.

Then began the job hunt. Indraani came to know the Maruti factory hired drivers on a salary of Rs 2,700 through Peregrine Security Systems. She asked IDTR to put in a word and spoke to Captain Chauhan who talked with Maruti's Sales and Despatch team.

The auto giant had already been tinkering with the idea. "Female drivers would instil discipline and drive with care, we thought," says Pradeep Verma, Assistant General Manager of the Sales and Despatch section. "Even slight damage to new cars can really hurt us financially."

After Sushma successfully infiltrated the male

bastion, the other girls followed. The men bitched behind their backs and continued to be hostile. But the supervisors were helpful. According to Asha about 15 percent, mostly younger drivers, have started accepting the girls as colleagues. "It's the drivers in the 35 plus age bracket who are the worst," she says. Drivers retire at the age of 40. If the girls do well they can get promoted as supervisors.

Captain Chauhan says he's doing his bit. Every morning he informs the men to behave like 'brothers and sisters'. "You study together in school so you can work together, is what I tell them. If I get any complaint I will deal with it strictly."

The girls say they are not complaining because they want to be friends. "We want to break down these perceptions about women being lesser beings. It's all in the mind. This job is a big challenge for us." All through Indraani counsels the girls telling them to be friendly, confident and not huddle into a group. Body language, she says, is important and here a dress code counts.

The girls always reach work on time. They pedal furiously on their bicycles, setting out from their villages at 6 am to reach the factory at 7 am sharp. Their families wait, fretting over a moment's delay. The girls then cook, fetch water and tend to buffaloes. Sushma is a final year graduate from Dronacharya Government College in Gurgaon and computer literate. So is Asha. Their success is breaking down conservative perceptions. "A village woman approached me recently and asked whether I could convert her daughter into a professional driver," says Indraani.



Fuad Lokhandwala in his spanking clean Lodhi Garden facility in Delhi



Photos: LAKSHMAN

The toilet tycoon of Delhi

Vidya Viswanathan
New Delhi

DELHI must have the most swanky outdoor advertising boards. They are backlit and framed by pleasing, red-brick structures that meld well into their surroundings. Now enter one of these red-brick structures. What do you find? A public toilet.

The one at Lodhi Garden, Delhi's historic green lung, for example, has polished brass signage and an eye-catching aquarium occupying an entire wall. The facility is well lit with sunlight streaming in from the bay windows. There is a hand faucet, rather than toilet paper. The pots are spotless and the green marble floor, dry. There is liquid soap and a drier, exhaust fans to suck out odours and ceiling fans to keep waiting customers cool. There is even a wall clock and a full-length mirror. Charges? Two rupees per use for the pot and a rupee each time for the urinal.

The facilities are the brainchild of Fuad Lokhandwala, a US-educated, self-made businessman, and Mehru, his wife, a self-taught designer.

Lokhandwala runs 25 such toilet facilities in Delhi. Pioneer Advertising rents out the exteriors. The toilets have been built by Lokhandwala's firm, Fumes International. The hoardings bring in revenue, but the business goes much beyond that. It is about providing citizens a high quality service and running, at the same time, a self-sustaining, even profitable facility.

"Nearly 10,000 people use these loos every day. That's the figure from my ticket sales, but I suspect it's at least 50 per cent more," claims Lokhandwala, standing before one of the five toilets he has set up in Lodhi Garden. Just then a woman comes out and complains that the cashier at the toilet took money from her, but did not give her a coupon, confirming what Lokhandwala has just been saying.

"See, building these is easy, but maintaining them and running them professionally is a long haul," adds Lokhandwala, who now employs 10 supervisors and 150 janitors. He is on a quick inspection tour of the Lodhi Garden facilities. Four

of the toilets do not smell. One does. Lokhandwala, as he steps into his Mercedes Benz, is quick to admit that he has a long way to go.

But the one smelly toilet does not detract from the fact that Lokhandwala is providing a public service that is way ahead of anything that government agencies have to offer.

A gentleman at Bahri's magazine stall in posh Khan Market, for example, never ever used the NDMC (New Delhi Municipal Corporation) toilet in the complex. Now he regularly uses the Fumes toilet. Natasha Chona, who owns a restaurant in Khan Market, says she, too, depends on the Fumes facility when in the past she would trek to the toilets in the nearby Taj Ambassador hotel.

The Fumes facility in the parking lot of the Indra Gandhi International Airport offers hot water showers for a charge of Rs 5. "I can't give you soap and a towel for that price. The shower facility at the Frankfurt airport cost me five Euros, that amounts to Rs 350!" says Lokhandwala.

Lokhandwala has come up with a business model where the government is now seen as providing high quality services and even earning revenue for that while making no investments of its own. "I'm told this was one of the feel-good factors that brought the Congress government in Delhi back to power in the in the last elections," he chuckles. He has a memorandum of understanding and build-operate-transfer contracts with the various Delhi authorities. The investment in each facility varies, but Lokhandwala pegs it at an average Rs 7 lakh.

Lokhandwala mostly converts existing government toilet facilities. He pays a monthly licence or lease fee that ranges from Rs 5000 to Rs 50,000, depending on the location and the government agency. He, in turn, gets between Rs 40,000 and Rs 80,000 for the advertising space. Lokhandwala claims that his average pay-back period is two years. His average monthly expense, including electricity (for the ad space too), salary and maintenance (he claims he gets the buildings painted four times a year), is Rs 25,000.

It took Lokhandwala six months to get his first

contract. In 1998, when India had just tested a nuclear bomb, Lokhandwala saw a Jay Leno show on CNBC Late Night, in which Leno joked that India was a nuclear power, but it had no loos. The "joke" hit a raw nerve in Lokhandwala, who called up K J Alphonse, the activist bureaucrat and an acquaintance. Alphonse introduced him to Ram Jethmalani, the firebrand criminal lawyer and then minister for urban affairs. Jethmalani was genial with the Bishop Cotton School educated, cigar-smoking Lokhandwala, but a trifle patronising. "You don't look like a guy who can clean loos. You NRIs want to come to India and convert it into another America. This is a dirty country and difficult to change," he told Lokhandwala.

Lokhandwala was back again in 10 days, armed with an acrylic model of his toilet. Jethmalani bit the hook. He introduced him to B P (Bobby) Mishra, then chairman of NDMC. "He was a man who wanted new ideas," Lokhandwala chuckles, recollecting the meeting. They haggled back and forth. The future toilet tycoon wanted 50 facilities at one go. Mishra was willing to give him only seven. But the differences were soon resolved. When Lokhandwala was looking for advertisers for the first loo, Mishra called up the managing director of the State Bank of India and it was the first company to advertise.

The Khan Market facility was the test site. It worked. But, in spite of all his haggling, Lokhandwala's idea remains unprotected and open to imitation. At least 10 others have got similar contracts. He now has to bid for the licence fee and has just submitted a proposal to transform 190 Municipal Corporation of Delhi toilets. "Any loo that stinks is not mine," says Lokhandwala, clearly miffed. "They don't understand that this is not a business. The standards in this country have to be raised. This is about delivering a high quality, self-sustaining service to the citizens."

Lokhandwala says he wants to work with large volumes now – about 500 instead of one at a time – because he can then set up a training institute to ensure service standards. Are the authorities listening?

Light the lamp within, Teacher

SUBROTO BAGCHI

THE people who write my textbooks and the ones who prescribe the syllabi will not tell you how important inclusion is for me to do well in life. Without the sense of inclusion, I will not know that boundaries are meant to be pushed – not to be lived in.

Take for example the fact that I clean my house but empty my garbage on the road. That is because the road is not "included" in what I deem to be my own.

I feed my own child but do not enquire if the maid has eaten today. Her hunger is not included in my hunger.

I take my child to the movies but do not ask him to call the neighbour's child. That child's seclusion is outside my zone of parenting. So, Teacher – teach me inclusion.

I pray to you to teach me to communicate

More I am caught in the rat race of the common entrance tests and cut throat competition – everyone will tell me that my survival depends on my power to impress and in that urge, more I impress, the less I will communicate. Teach me to speak and be able to write such that I am able to convey what I feel.

Teach me to communicate with the simplicity of the child and the nakedness of the flower.

Teach me to communicate with those who cannot speak and hear.

Teach me to communicate with people less gifted, less privileged than I am.

Teach me to communicate with those who have come before me and those who will follow.

Teach me to communicate with things animate and inanimate.

I pray to you to teach me to understand the nature of things

Teacher, teach me "sense making" in an increasingly senseless world. Teach me not just what is good or what is bad. I may not always be lucky to be in situations that will be simply either black or white.

In a world in which Gods will have feet of clay and Godmen will be more men and less God, teach me how to make sense of things such that I am able to see the larger picture. I am able to understand things around me without the intermediation of soothsayers and spiritual Gurus. Teach me such that I am able to, and willing to, receive inputs from everywhere and wisdom from some.

But in moments of crisis, teach me such that I am able to come to my own conclusions.

As you teach me to deal with moments of crisis - teach me how to come out of them without residual toxicity.

For there will be moments in life when I will see the failing of those I have admired. I will see cracks in the walls of those who had taught me the meaning of strength and solidity. In those difficult moments, I should know that sometimes situations make people who they are. Teach me such that cynicism does not impair my power to behold the beautiful nature of creation of which the human nature is also a part.

I pray to you to make me learn. More than that, Teacher, teach me how I can learn to learn

As you prepare me for the wide world in which I need to fend for myself and for others, one-time learning will not be good enough. I will have to have the ability to learn newer things and more difficult things. Some of it I will need to learn in increasingly lesser time. In all this, what will become critical is the process of learning itself, more than just what I am able to learn. Help me to learn newer ways to learn. And that will make learning a joy for me.

As you teach me to learn how to learn, I pray to you to teach me to learn from unusual sources

Teach me how I can learn from small people. As people come and touch my lives, as they do small things for me, teach me how I can learn from them – things that no classroom will ever teach.

Teach me to learn sense of duty from the driver of the school van who must rise before I do.

Teach me to learn compassion from the Sisters of Charity in whose fragile arms, even death can sleep like a baby.

Teach me to learn contentment from the traffic policeman who is paid to inhale carbon monoxide for the 76,800 hours of his life that he has to stand in the middle of the road.

Teach me to learn to work unsupervised like the ant and the bee who do not need anyone to breathe down their neck so they add value each new day as they wake up to work.

As I learn to learn from unusual sources, I pray that you teach me to appreciate the interconnected nature of things

Teach me, not just about the way the waves rise but what causes them to engulf. Teach me to appreciate that the trees I fell, the small creatures I kill with indiscriminate use of fertilisers and pesticides on the ground, the urban decay I cause with my consumptive ways – all catch up with awesome imbalances in the natural state of things that cause death and destruction and can one day, engulf me and whatever else I am trying to leave behind.

Each time I see a scavenging bird on my city's skyline, Teacher, tell me why the singing birds are going away. And tell me how I can see them again, perched on my windowsill.

I pray to you to teach me not just the ability to answer, but also the power to question

It is because everyone is telling me to do as told. Before I know, I am becoming enslaved in a social, economic and political state in which progress is held hostage because we do not ask questions. Only if we ask the questions, we can get the answers. If we get the answers, we can explore how to establish a higher order of things. If we ask the questions, we will also learn to be accountable. We will be more willing to accept that when we ask the questions, we can be questioned too.

In that mutuality, truth will emerge and balance itself.

As you teach me the ability to ask questions, I also pray to you to teach me the ability to say, "I do not know"

In all humility, I must admit Teacher, that not always will I have all the answers. When I do not have the answer, teach me to say, "I do not know". I know it takes courage, and self-confidence to say that I do not know. So often I see people around me keep silent when admission of ignorance could have opened them to new relationships and new knowledge. Teach me the power to say "I do not know" even if it causes me momentary disgrace. Because Teacher, when I develop the self-confidence to say that I do not know, I will be comfortable in being who I am. That will make me more real in an increasingly make-believe world.

Just as you teach me to say, "I do not know", I pray to you to teach me to actively seek help

Higher my achievements and greater my position of power, the more helpless I will become; the less I will know about the state of things. In those moments of my helplessness, my ego will come in my way of seeking help. My workplace will make me falsely believe that seeking help is a sign of weakness.

Teach me to seek help from small people. Teacher. Teach me that the flower needs help from the bee to pollinate. The water needs help from the air to raise itself to the sky.

O' Teacher, please teach me such that I understand that even the Lord of the Universe can do with a little help from me. Hence, I have no shame in seeking help from others.



Corporations in society revisited

SHANKAR VENKATESWARAN

A few years ago, if a company CEO was asked about the role of companies, the response would have been simple – to maximise profits and returns to its owners or shareholders. Today, most would talk about the larger role and responsibility of business beyond maximising profits, a notion broadly referred to as Corporate Social Responsibility or CSR.

The 1990s saw some intensive debates and writings on the issue, as globalisation took root and corporations began to rule the world (to borrow from the title of David Korten's immortal book). Individual companies, led by some really innovative work done by corporate organisations like International Business Leaders' Forum, Business for Social Responsibility, World Business Council for Sustainable Development to name a few and some others like John Elkinton of SustainAbility and Simon Zadek began to unpack the idea and provide meaningful ways by which companies could retain their place in society.

Despite the fact that so much has been written and spoken about globally on CSR, the understanding of CSR in India seems frozen in time. To most people in corporations, including CEOs, the practice of CSR is seen as merely complying with the law, something that some recent surveys also confirm!

Where companies go beyond that, they understand it as a new name for corporate philanthropy or charity and thus focus on just one of the stakeholders (albeit a critical one in the Indian context) – communities. Also, it tends to be less corporate and more CEO driven, so much so that it can almost be an acronym for CEO's Social Responsibility!

But life has moved on. CSR is about complying with the law and being philanthropic and more! Much, much more.

Many companies argue that they pay their taxes and comply with all the laws of the land. What more should they do? There are two reasons why this is not enough to qualify as a responsible company. First, non-compliance with the law means that the company is operating illegally.

Therefore, compliance merely gives it the right to stay in business and nothing else. Why is there a need to invent a term for companies operating legally? A company that is acting responsibly has to be one that is not only complying with the law but going beyond it. Secondly, as laws everywhere are increasingly influenced by companies, compliance with these laws can hardly be termed as remarkable.

Isn't Corporate Community Development the same as CSR? The question is a bit more complex than that. A company that gives crores of rupees to charity can claim that it is being socially responsible.

But, if in the process of earning these crores, it exploits labour or pollutes the environment beyond legal limits or does not ensure that its suppliers are paid sufficiently so that they are able to maintain basic wage and working conditions for their workers, it is NOT being socially responsible.

Having spent several years working on CSR in India, I have come to the conclusion that the reason why the idea of CSR is not fully understood is that it uses the term "social". Somehow, that seems to suggest to everyone that CSR refers to companies doing "social work" and so nobody wants to think beyond that. And many NGOs, who suffer from the same myopia, perpetuate this notion by telling companies that by funding them, they are being socially responsible.

Globally, there is a broad convergence of the meaning of the term CSR around two ideas: maximising positive and minimising negative impacts of a company's activities on all its stakeholders and measuring company performance on the "triple-bottom-line" – financial, social and environmental.

At the minimum, a socially responsible business is one that ensures that its business processes do not socially or environmentally harm any of its stakeholders, particularly the most disadvantaged i.e. communities, employees (including contract and casual labour), suppliers (including its smallest supplier), customers

(especially its low-value ones), shareholders and so on, beyond what is required by law. Additionally, socially responsible businesses would attempt to maximise the positive impacts on these disadvantaged stakeholders, beyond what is required by law and support sustainable community development efforts to the extent it has the resources to do so.

Perhaps the answer lies in coining a new term for the idea. Perhaps, Corporate Responsibility to Society?

Therefore, being socially responsible is not an activity but a way of doing business. Perhaps, a more useful description of a socially responsible company is one that operates in a manner in which the social and environmental impacts on all its stakeholders is net positive and exceeds legal requirements.

While many Indian companies have a long way to go in coming up to speed with existing thinking on CSR, there are a few issues that are still not on the radar screen. These fall in the realm of business in society. They are the formulation of regulations and public policy and combating corruption and communalism.

As India becomes more globalised, many public policies and regulations are increasingly adversely affecting poor communities. For instance, while developing product standards, the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) expert panel consists of people from the manufacturers of the products.

All laws relating to displacement of people due to setting up factories (including the proposed amendments to the Land Acquisition Act) are increasingly in favour of business and to the detriment of the persons being displaced, who are typically illiterate and who will stand to lose the only resource that their skills can exploit – land. And monetary compensation results in consumption and further deepening and feminising poverty.

In a country like India, companies play a significant (and many would argue, disproportionate) role in formulation of public policies. Come January every year, captains of industry are found less in their own offices and more in the Finance Ministry in Delhi in various consultations leading to the annual budget!

It is of course quite legitimate for a company or a business coalition to seek to influence public policy that enhances their business. But a socially responsible company would seek to influence such policies and regulations in a manner that, at the very least, is not harmful to those less powerful than them

and, preferably, in a manner that benefits both business and the larger society.

A recurrent lament in Pavan Verma's monumental work, "The Great Indian Middle Class" is the lack of role models in India. Present day politicians leave most in despair and academics seemed to be increasingly marginalised in a world that has no time to read and think. Cricketers and film stars seem to be more admired for their wealth than as thought leaders. There is clearly a need for more Kalpana Chawlas – achievers based on sheer merit, talent and a commitment to give back to society!

Industry leaders have the potential to play this role as some, most notably JRD Tata, have played in the past. Anu Aga and Deepak Parekh are some people who spoke out after the Gujarat carnage in 2002.

If we look at the two burning issues that threaten to tear India apart – corruption and communalism – who better than a socially responsible company and its leadership to show the way. By practicing and promoting corruption-free and secular behaviour, companies and their employees can play a significant role in transforming India. Not just for their benefit but to benefit the nation.

Perhaps never before has it happened that senior company executives have an opportunity and potential to become real leaders in thought and action. But are they listening? Are they ready for the challenge?



A recurrent lament in Pavan Verma's monumental work, "The Great Indian Middle Class," is the lack of role models in India.

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.

(Jill Carr-Harris is director of LEAD India, New Delhi)



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The militant who loved Rafi

RAHUL PANDITA

WHENEVER I see kohl-lined eyes, I am reminded of Latif Lone wearing a pathani suit on his well-built body. Latif looked at you, his eyes rimmed with kohl, and the world looked more beautiful.

Those days there was no cable television and Doordarshan was as insipid as it is now. So the only entertainment in the Kashmir valley came from the antenna, fitted in the attic, shooting through the tin roof. Thanks to that we saw serials on Pakistan Television.

My uncle's son Ravi, who was our neighbor, had installed an antenna with a long handle on his verandah in the first floor of his house. The weather often played spoilsport and the antenna would change direction so we couldn't receive signals. When that happened, Latif Lone would be in demand. Wearing faded jeans, he would climb to the rooftop while Ravi's mother prayed for his safety. He would look at the sun, then look in the opposite direction, as if offering namaz, and set the antenna's direction right.

On the base of the antenna was a wooden block to keep it in an upright position. When rain or snow fell, it became damp. Moss and some mushroom-like growth would cling to it. "What is this?" I would ask Latif impatiently, tugging at his pheran sleeves. He would lift me in his arms and say, "Algae."

Those days Mohammed Rafi's songs ruled the hearts of lovers and Latif Lone was one of them. On the streets if you met him, he always hummed a Rafi song. Latif ran a cosmetics shop, where girls went unhesitatingly and he slipped red and green bangles on their delicate wrists. But there was one who would not let him do so. Her name was Ghazala and Latif loved her. Ghazala was like a couplet on the lips of a Sufi singer. She always draped a dupatta over her head and looked like a leaf from a newly printed Quran.

As a child I would go for long rides on my cycle and often I saw Latif and Ghazala walking together on the by-pass bridge. Latif would see me and smile. I would wave enthusiastically at them and they would wave back. Everybody in my family knew Latif. If any lady got into a crowded bus a seat for her was assured if Latif was there.

Sometimes Latif would go to Lal Chowk to pick up Ghazala from the women's college and then board a Swaraj Mazda minibus from the bus stand near the clock tower. If I was occupying a seat and there was none other, I would leave the seat for Ghazala and stand with Latif. I felt proud, like a man and looked forward to giving her my place. Ghazala would want me to sit on her lap but I always declined. She would take my heavy school bag off my shoulders and keep it with her.

I told her one day that if I ever had a girl friend she would look just like her. Latif, who was standing nearby, burst into laughter and she hid her face in her hands.

In 1989, I saw very little of Latif. Ghazala would board the minibus alone and even when she smiled at me, her eyes were like deep pools of sadness. Latif would disappear for months on end. And then suddenly one day, outside Amla's grocery shop, I saw him with a few men, holding a sheet in his hands.



Those days Mohammed Rafi's songs ruled the hearts of lovers and Latif Lone was one of them. On the streets if you met him, he always hummed a Rafi song. Latif ran a cosmetics shop, where girls went unhesitatingly and he slipped red and green bangles on their delicate wrists.

with the Army. Suddenly everything spun around me – the Bombay Beauties cosmetics shop, the algae at the foot of the antenna, faded jeans...and then Rafi's song came to an end.

It happened the day the results of the higher secondary school examination were declared in Kashmir. Latif stood outside his shop, under the Angel's Garden School building. He was wearing a new pathani suit and his eyes were decorated with kohl. Suddenly an army jeep screeched to a halt in front of him. Latif started running behind the school building. As he crossed the barbed wire leading to the nearby fields, his dress got entangled. While he struggled to release himself, the soldiers shot him. His body lay there, dangling on the barbed wire, like Toba Tek Singh's body in Manto's short story. That day, as I broke the news to my parents, the gas burner in one corner of the room that served as our kitchen, did not burn.

Around two lakh people attended Latif Lone's funeral. Another newspaper informed us that Latif had even fought in Afghanistan against the Russians. He was an expert in handling anti-aircraft gun, reported India Today. His comrades killed one of our Muslim neighbors, known for his addiction to opium, for allegedly informing the army about Latif. The neighbor had curly hair and his body was found hanging on a tree, a short distance from his residence.

A few weeks later, I was traveling in a minibus in Jammu. I got down before my destination and my friend thought the heat had driven me crazy. How could I tell him that I was just trying to avoid listening to the Rafi song the driver of the minibus was playing on his stereo system?

(Charkha Development Communication Network)

He was collecting money for the local mosque. The radio played a song by Mohammed Rafi, I remember, but his lips did not hum that tune.

In a few months time, the word 'crossfire' became an integral part of our lives. The killings started - selected killings. Militants barged into the house of B.K. Ganju, a telecommunications engineer. They wanted to kill him, but he hid himself in a rice drum in the attic of his house. The militants could not find him and began to leave. At the gate of the house, Ganju's neighbor signaled to them to go to the top storey. They climbed up and found him hiding in the rice drum.

Heartlessly they killed him on the spot. They even forced his wife to eat the blood-soaked rice. Killings like these resulted in a mass exodus of Kashmiri Pandits. We too left for Jammu, to start from scratch. In Kashmir, I had been gifted a pair of football shoes by my father. But I could not carry these with me. So I bought a pair of inexpensive shoes from Bata. They became a symbol of my 'migrant status'. The shoes felt like a badge, like a yellow star worn by the Jews during the Nazi rule in Germany.

In June 1990 I was sitting on a cement pavement outside my single-room home browsing through a local newspaper. Somewhere in the neighborhood, Mohammed Rafi's songs echoed across. Jo unki taman-na hein barbaad hoja. I read the headline: Dreaded militant Latif Lone shot dead in an encounter

Kolkata theatre has Punjab touch

Shuktara Lal
Kolkata

CHANDIGARH'S robust theatre movement, led by veteran director Neelam Man Singh Chowdhary, is finding fertile ground in culture-smitten Kolkata. In 2002, her disciple Ramanjit Kaur, started a group, 'The Creative Arts' (TCA) to conduct workshops on theatre and art in Kolkata. Participants write scripts and even stage a performance. Young and old, are shown how to look within for inspiration.

Shades of Neelam's craft are reflected in Ramanjit's ideas. "She has been my main guide," says Ramanjit. "I am indirectly teaching these students everything that she taught me. I try to instill in them the dedication and commitment she instilled in me."

Ramanjit stresses on improvisation. Interestingly, Neelam's famous production, *Sibo in the Supermarket* evolved through improvisations too. Ramanjit describes Neelam's plays as 'a theatre of imagery'. The visual element is striking in TCA productions as well.

Ramanjit joined Neelam's Chandigarh-based group, 'The Company' after she finished school. She stayed with the group for 18 years playing the lead role in Neelam's adaptation of Lorca's *Yerma*, Giraudoux' *The Madwoman of Chaillot*, and Girish Karnad's *Nagamandala*.

Six years after Ramanjit got married and moved to Kolkata, she founded TCA. "I wanted to impart formal, systematic training in fine arts, especially theatre," she says explaining her decision.

Ramanjit invites artistes to design and execute the workshops. Participants are divided into groups depending on their age. The workshops begin with theatre games that help students shed their inhibitions, master body movements and undergo a process of self-realisation.

Participants start to build relationships with the group. Voice exercises, training in rhythm and expression and physical exercises are part of the workshop's curricula.

There are script-writing sessions where students examine their emotions. They explore story writing, characterisation and, finally, the creation of a performance text.



Ramanjit Kaur

Ramanjit stresses a lot on improvisation. "This is the most important tool in actor training," she says. "Improvisations help students use their imagination to create characters and situations instinctively."

The workshops range between two weeks to three months. They end in a performance staged by the students. Most often, they write the scripts. These could be collective products of creative writing sessions or pieces written by individuals during the workshops.

In 2002, after the first series of workshops, students performed *The Forest Party*. Children and adults collaborated to construct an exciting maze of relationships. They also presented *The Essence of Life*, which was conceptualised by

senior students. This composition charted the life and times of a person pulled by manifold external forces, struggling to find inner peace. The students researched for music to match their presentation.

Contemporary political concerns inevitably form part of TCA workshops. *Closed Spaces*, which was produced in 2003, was inspired by the invasion of Iraq. The children who participated in this set of workshops staged *Saving of the Old Mango Tree*, which voiced environmental concerns.

One of TCA's much lauded productions was last year's *Is Job Charnock Coming to Dinner?* This was a site specific performance held at Swabhumi, Kolkata's cultural centre. There were 50 performers, comprising children, professional artistes, hearing impaired actors, students from economically under-privileged backgrounds and working professionals.

The script emerged from a poem called *Oh Calcutta*, written by Arthur Cardozo - a staple conductor of workshops for TCA. *Is Job Charnock...* related the story of an archetypal Bengali joint family.

The expansive environs of Swabhumi were ideal. The actors used the entire grounds. The audience had to move with the performers, directly interacting with them.

The production tried to capture the spirit of Kolkata and the theme was close to Ramanjit's heart. "People say they don't like Kolkata but they never leave the city because, paradoxically, they can't think of living anywhere else," she says.

Ramanjit too was looking for answers. "I had to figure out why I was staying here and understand what Kolkata meant to me."

TCA workshops have a positive impact on participants. "I've become a changed person after I joined TCA. I was very shy earlier, but now I am so much more self-confident," says Payal De, a college student.

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Imtiaz Ali

'I believe religion as a concept is redundant'

Shailey Hingorani
New Delhi

IMTIAZ Ali, director and scriptwriter of the recently released film *Socha Na Tha*, was in Delhi for India International Centre's (IIC) lecture series, 'The growing consciousness of the other'. His talk was about what integration meant to him, a sensitive and successful Muslim, married to a Hindu. Imtiaz grew up in Jamshedpur, a city where *Ramnavami* was also called the festival of riots. He shifted to Delhi to study English literature at Hindu College and later moved to India's tinsel town to pursue his dreams. Involved in different aspects of theatre from an early age, he went on to script TV serials before scripting his maiden film, which tasted box office success.

How did you become a film director in Mumbai?
I directed my first play when I was in Class 11. I knew from a young age that I wanted to be with the visual media. But nobody in Jamshedpur had ever heard of anything like this, so I never mustered the courage to tell my parents. Then I moved to Delhi. As part of the Dramatics Society of Hindu College, where I was studying English literature, I directed and scripted at least two plays every year. Later, I was involved with a theatre company called Act One. Then I moved to Mumbai and started copywriting for ads. I worked with Zee TV and Crest Communications. I wrote *Purushetra*, a talk show hosted by Kiran Kher on man-woman relationships. I also scripted *Imtihaan*, a TV serial. I was writing a script for another TV serial but it didn't happen. So I decided to make a movie out of it. I think I was just destined to be where I am.

How conscious are you of your religious identity?

I am not a practising Muslim. I would say that I am wholly unconscious of my Muslim identity. In fact in my ordinary life this thought never even crosses my mind. It's not as if I am ashamed of my identity. I honestly believe religion as a concept is redundant today. Of course, stray incidents, like difficulties in getting my passport, remind me of my identity.

Have you always been so unconscious of your identity?

I come from Jamshedpur, a city known for its communally charged atmosphere. In fact *Ramnavami* is called the festival of riots in

Money has become too big an entity. This attitude is rampant in the place I come from. And I am sure this kind of secular culture exists everywhere. That's why I think the casting couch doesn't exist in the Indian film industry today.

Jamshedpur because every year so many riots happen around that time. I have seen it all. This unconsciousness of identity has evolved over a period of time. Questions like why we pray, and why we pray in a particular way have always bothered me. For example, why can't I get into a temple to pray? The place of worship shouldn't matter. To find answers, I studied theology and read about many religions. I realised that all religions were essentially the same. Then came a time when I didn't see any point in defining myself with respect to religion.

What does integration mean to you?

Integration is largely based on education. It is about opening up people's minds to the reality that the eventual goals in life are common. Development will be easier if certain unnecessary angles are removed. We should try and get rid of artificial, synthetically created divisions of religion, caste, creed and concentrate on achieving our common goals of education, employment and better standards of living.

But if certain religious communities benefit because they belong to a particular religion, why would they get rid of these divisions?

They will not like to get rid of divisions, but here it is the responsibility of the state not to make policies that are communal in nature. Merit should never be compromised.

India has witnessed communal riots and that surely makes a dent on integration.

People should realise that riots are carefully orchestrated political events. Riots are political drama staged at the cost of people's lives. Frankly, I don't think integration figures on the list of priorities of people right after riots. At that point they are more interested in getting food, medicines and other essentials. But after some time has passed, the state should, through equal and just governance, try to build levels of trust.

Have you faced any discrimination because of your religious identity?

Professionally, no. When I look for someone who can work for me, I am looking for somebody who can give me the best value for my money. Whether he is a Muslim, a Christian or a Hindu, doesn't matter to me. Money has become too big an entity. This attitude is rampant in the place I come from. And I am sure this kind of secular culture exists everywhere. That's why I think the casting couch doesn't exist in the Indian film industry today. Nobody will compromise the quality of a multi-crore film by casting somebody only because of certain special favours.

You are a Muslim, married to a Hindu. Did you face any difficulties?

When I first spoke to my parents and her parents I faced some difficulties. But those were more because I was 21 years old. There were some other problems like how to conduct the wedding ceremony especially since the *Nikaah* requires a woman to convert to Islam, but I was against that. In the end everything worked out fine.

My daughter is four years old. She is learning both our cultures. She is a free-floating person. She can decide whichever religion she wants to follow. That's of no concern to me. I just want to provide her with an ethical and moral atmosphere at home. In fact, if I were in her place, I would choose no religion at all.

WHERE TO VOLUNTEER

Rahi

Rahi is a support centre for urban middle class women suffering from the trauma of incest. It provides information, individual support, group support and referrals. Through workshops and peer educators they help survivors and spread awareness. Contact: H-49 A, Second floor Kalkaji New Delhi-3 Phone: 26227647

Association for India's Development(AID) - Delhi Chapter

AID works for the environment, children, women's issues, education, and health. They also undertake fund raising. Contact: Anuj Grover B-121, MIG Flats, Phase-IV, Ashok Vihar Delhi- 110052 Phone: 9818248459 E-mail: anuj.grover@gmail.com

Youthreach

A volunteer team at Youthreach helps to match your skills and interests with the needs of their partner organisations. This exchange is monitored and facilitated from beginning to end by their volunteer team. The team also partners other non-profit organisations that are working with children, women and the environment. Contact: Anubha or Ria 11 Community Centre, Saket New Delhi - 110 017 Phone/Fax: (011) 2653 3520/25/30 Email : yrd@youthreachindia.org

Deepalaya

They work with economically, socially deprived, physically and mentally challenged children. They believe in helping children become self-reliant and lead a healthy life. Deepalaya works on education, health, skill training and income enhancement. Contact: Deepalaya 46, Institutional Area, D Block Janakpuri New Delhi - 110 058 Phone: 25548263, 25590347 Website: www.deepalaya.org

Mobile Crèches

Mobile Crèches pioneered intervention into the lives of migrant construction workers by introducing the mobile crèche where working parents can leave their children. They work in the following areas: health, education, community outreach, networking and advocacy, resource mobilisation and communication. You can volunteer by filling out a simple form online. Contact: DIZ Area, Raja Bazaar Sector IV New Delhi -110 001 Phone: 91-11-23347635 / 23363271 Website: www.mobilecreches.org

Indian Red Cross Society

The society provides relief, hospital services, maternity and child welfare, family welfare, nursing and community services. Contact: Red Cross Bhavan Golf Links, New Delhi-110003 Phone: 24618915, 24617531

Child Relief and You(CRY)

CRY, a premier child rights organisation, believes that every child is entitled to survival, protection, development and participation. You can sponsor a child's education, healthcare, or a health worker and a teacher. Website: www.cry.org

Community Aid and Sponsorship Program (CASP)

CASP enhances the capacities of children, families and communities through participation and advocacy leading to sustainable development

Vidya

Vidya works for education, empowerment and micro-credit. Volunteers are accepted for a week to six months and longer. Those with knowledge of English and Maths can tutor children who need extra attention. The athletically inclined can help with sports classes. Volunteers can also conduct workshops or train women on micro-credit. Contact: Mala Goyal C-52 Mayfair Gardens Hauz Khas New Delhi-110016

Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH)

INTACH works for conservation of India's vast cultural and natural heritage. You don't have to be an archaeologist or a historian to volunteer. You can become a member and volunteer for numerous activities they undertake which include workshops, heritage walks etc. Contact: 71, Lodhi Estate New Delhi-110003 Phone: 24641304/ 5482 Website: www.intach.org

Ashray Adhikar Abhiyan (AAA)

The right for shelter campaign is a citizen's initiative to address the problems of the homeless in Delhi - people sleeping on pavements, flyovers, under bridges and in parks. Contact: Paramjit Kaur S-442, School Block Shakarpur Delhi-110092 Phone: 22481609

Udayan Care

They work with disadvantaged children and help them to build a future. They have setup LIFE (living in family environment) homes for these children. You can volunteer and spend some quality time with children. Contact: Basement C-9, Lajpat Nagar-III New Delhi-110024 Phone: 29840151

The International Association For Human Values (IAHV)

IAHV is an international organisation conducting volunteer work for Mumbai flood victims in Agarpada, Vakola and Kalina districts. They are primarily working in a slum that houses over 200,000 people in nearly 20,000 shanties. IAHV is distributing medicines, bed sheets, blankets etc. Volunteers are needed for segregation of these items and for distribution. Contact: Alpa, 9820334944

WHERE TO DONATE

and empowerment. You can help by sponsoring underprivileged child/children from any work area where CASP implements its programmes. These include building old-age homes, projects relating to AIDS etc. Website: www.caspindia.org

ActionAid

ActionAid is an international development organisation which works with poor and marginalised women, men, girls and boys to eradicate poverty, injustice and inequity. You can become a part of their Karma Mitra loyalty program, which is based on the concept 'When you do good things you should get good things in return.' As a member of this program you can avail various tangible benefits.

Contact: ActionAid India C-88, South Extension - II New Delhi-110 049 Website: www.actionaidindia.org

India International Centre

1-4 Sept.

Art Gallery (Annexe) 11:00 - 19:00

Still Life: The Inscrutable Genre

An exhibition of still-lives by senior Indian artists - K.M. Adimoolam; Jhupu Adhikari; Jyoti Bhatt; Jogen Chowdhury; Jatin Das; Gopi Gajwani; Suraj Ghai; M.F. Hussain; Krishen Khanna; Prabhakar Kolte; Badri Narayan; Sudhir Patwardhan; Chameli Ramachandran; Paritosh Sen; Haku Shah; Lalu Prasad Shaw; Paramjit Singh; K.G. Subramanyam; and Anupam Sud Curated by eminent art critic and historian Santo Datta (Collaboration: Gallery Art Motif)

1 Sept.

Conference Room-1 at 18:30
• The Sudan Peace Process
 Speaker: Lt. Gen. Lazaro Kipkurui Sumbeiywo, Kenya's Ambassador & Special Envoy to the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the Sudan Peace Process (Collaboration: Delhi Policy Group)

2 Sept.

Conference Room-1 at 18:30
• Radical Islam
 Speaker: K. Murat Belge, academic, writer and social commentator, founder and editor of the political magazine Yeni Gundem (Turkey); and Dr. Barnett R. Rubin, Director of Studies, Centre for International Cooperation, New York University and author of several books including Blood on the Doorstep: The Politics of Preventing Violent Conflict (2002) Chair: Dr. Radha Kumar (Collaboration: Delhi Policy Group)

3 Sept.

Auditorium from 10:00 - 17:30
• National Seminar on Education for Women and Girl Child
 Welcome address: Murlidhar C. Bhandare Inaugural address: Arjun Singh, Minister of Human Resource Development Presidential address & chair: Justice B.N. Srikrishna, Judge, Supreme Court of India (Collaboration: Justice Sunanda Bhandare Foundation)

5 Sept.

Conference Room-1 at 18:30
• Museums as Civic Spaces
 An illustrated lecture by Prof. Amareswar Galla, Professor & Director of Graduate Studies in Sustainable Heritage Development, Research School of Pacific & Asian Studies, Australian National University; and Professor of Museum Studies, School of English Media Studies & Art History, University of Queensland

7 Sept.

Auditorium at 18:30
 On the Occasion of the European Union Cultural Week
• Concert
 Presented by The Strings Quartet from Poland - Anna Boniecka (1st violin); Magdalena Stelmazyk (2nd violin); Sylwia Mroz (viola); and Dorota Wozniak-Mocarska (cello) Malgorzata Wejsis will join the artists on the piano for the first piece The Strings Quartet will present works by Corelli, Mozart, Wieniawski, Oginski, Beethoven, Brahms, Offenbach, Bizet and others (Collaboration: Embassy of Poland and Delhi Music Society)

8 Sept.

Auditorium at 18:30
• Hindustani Classical Music - Dhrupad and Dhamar Recital
 By Satinath Bhattacharya from Kolkata, disciple of the late Pt. Shib Shankar Mukherjee and Kumar Prasad Mukherjee Accompanied by Apurba Lal Manna (pakhawaj) Shri Bhattacharya will present Gouhar Bani style of Dhrupad

8 Sept.

Conference Room- II at 18:30

Eye Donation Awareness: Myths and Solutions

Speakers: Prof. R.B. Vajpayee, Professor & Head, Cornea and Refractive Surgery Unit, Dr. Rajendra Prasad Centre for Ophthalmic Sciences, AIIMS; and Dr. Radhika Tandon, Officer-in-Charge, National Eye Bank and Additional Professor of Ophthalmology, Dr. Rajendra Prasad Centre for Ophthalmic Sciences, AIIMS

9 - 15 Sept.

Art Gallery, Lecture Room & Committee Room-III (Annexe) 11:00 - 19:00
• Sui Dhaga: Crossing Boundaries through Needle and Thread
 An exhibition of specimens of embroidery, specially of Phulkari common to India and Pakistan; Rabari embroidery common to India, Baluchistan and Iran; Kantha common to India and Bangladesh; and Chikan work common to India, Afghanistan and Iran Opening on Thursday, 8 September at 18:30 A parallel event will be held in the Chinmaya Mission where women artists and artisans will be invited to participate in a workshop on how traditional embroidery has been modified for meeting the needs of a market economy (Organised by the IIC-Asia Project in collaboration with Crafts Council of India)

9 Sept.

Auditorium at 18:30
• Hiroshima Ki Kahani
 Presented by the Urdu Natak Sabha, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, Japan Directed by Asada Yutaka Based on a cartoon novel Hadashi no Gen (barefoot Gen) written by Nakazawa Keiji (Collaboration: Sangeet Natak Akademi and Jamia Millia Islamia)

9 Sept.

Conference Room - I at 18:30
 Book Discussion Group
• Sustainable Energy Security in India
 A discussion around the book Energy Policy of India by Dr. S.K. Chopra Keynote Speaker: Mani Shankar Aiyar, Minister for Petroleum & Natural Gas and Panchayati Raj Discussant: Dr. Prodipto Ghosh, Secretary, Ministry of Environment & Forests Introduction: Dr. S.K. Chopra Chair: Dr. Karan Singh, MP

12 Sept.

Auditorium at 18:30
• Piano Recital
 By Christopher Ungerer who will present a concert featuring works by Mozart, Schumann, Brahms and Beethoven (Collaboration: Delhi Music Society and with the support of Air India)

13 Sept.

Conference Room-1 at 18:30
• Independent India Economic Policies and Performance since Independence
 Speaker: Dr. Shankar Acharya, Economist, Honorary Professor & Member, Board of Governors, ICRIER (Collaboration: The New India Foundation, Bangalore)

15 Sept.

Auditorium at 18:30
• Odissi Recital
 By Sumelika Bhattacharyya from Delhi, disciple of Smt Kiran Segal

15 Sept

Conference Room - II at 18:30
• Democratisation in Progress: Women and Local Politics in Urban India
 Main presentation by Dr. Stephanie Tawa-Rewal, Research Fellow, Centre for South Asian Studies & Visiting Scholar, Centre de Sciences Humaines; and Dr. Archana Ghosh, Senior Faculty & Head of Urban Studies Dept., Institute of Social Sciences, Kolkata Discussants: Prof. Nirja Gopal Jayal, Centre for the Study of Law and Governance, Jawaharlal Nehru University; and others

(Collaboration: Centre de Sciences Humaines)

Lecture Series:

• The Growing Consciousness of the Other

6 Sept.

• **Women's Liberation and the Personal Law.**
 The speakers are Subhashini Ali, President of AIDWA and Justice Leila Seth Prof Imtiaj Ahmad will chair the discussion.

29 Sept.

• **A debate: Party Politics and the Muslim Question.**
 The participants are: Salman Khurshid from the Congress, Shahid Siddiqui from the Samajwadi party and possibly Arif Mohammad Khan from the BJP. The interviewers are Shahira Naeem, Lucknow based correspondent from Tribune and Seema Mustapha from Asian Age. The moderator is Rajdeep Sardesai. However he will confirm closer to the date.

Habitat World



Priyadarshani Govind

1 Sept.

7.00 pm: Film Club screening.
 • **'Private'** (2004) Dir. Saverio Costanzo. With the Italian Cultural Centre.
 • 7.00 pm: Noted Bharatnatyam dancer Priyadarshani Govind of Chennai presents an evening of **Abhinaya**. HCL concert series.

2 Sept.

• 7.00 pm: **'The Best of IDPA Road-show'**, screens excerpts of IDPA's (Indian Documentary Prod. Association). Award winning films followed by a question and answer session.
 • 7.00 pm: **Katha & Japan Foundation present 'Rakugo'**. A Japanese sit down comedy (in English) by a group from Tokyo. Rakugo is an expression of Japanese society and culture. Entry on first come first serve basis.

3 Sept.

• 7.00 pm: **A Tribute to Dom Moraes** featuring Keki Daruwala, Devdas Chhotray, Yashodhara Mishra, C Aryama Sundaram, Lakshmi Kannan, Oopali Operajita and others. Presented by: Oopali Operajita, Distinguished Fellow, College of Fine Arts, Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, USA. Collab: The Pavane Educational & Cultural Trust, Bhuvaneshwar.

4 Sept.

• 7.00 pm: Abhineta presents **'Who Is Afraid Of Virginia Wolfe?'** (Hindi adaptation) Edward Albee's harrowing portrayal of a night in the life of an unhappily married couple. Dir. Professor Harish Bhatia. Translated by Dr Atul Vir. Arora & Professor Harish Bhatia. Collab: Public Affairs Section, Embassy of the USA. Entry by invitation.
 • 7.00 pm: Sur Sarita presents **Hindustani Classical Vocal Recital** by young vocalist Sakhavat Hussain Khan 'Nishat' of the Rampur -

Sehswan gharana.

5 Sept.

6.30 pm: **'Can Economic Development Go Together with Ecological Security'**. The 5th debate in the series in collaboration with Centre for Environment & Food Security. Panelists include Gurcharan Das, Author & Columnist, Ramaswamy R. Iyer, Hon. Research Professor, CPR and former Secy. Min. of Water Resources, Dr. Suman Sahai, President, Gene Campaign and Prof. Smitu Kothari, Environmental Activist and Visiting Prof., Princeton University. Chair: Eminent journalist B.G. Verghese.

7.00 pm: Odissi dancer and choreographer Geeta Mahalik explores man's eternal longing for union with God in her new dance-drama **'Krishnabilash'**

6 Sept.

7.00 pm: An evening of **light classical music** by Smt. Parul Banerjee

Collab: Freshwater Films

7.00 pm: **'Kalabush'** Dir. Adonis Florides & Theodoros Nikolaidis. Collab: Cyprus High Commission

7 Sept.

7.00 pm: **'Wings of Glass'** Dir. Reza Bagher (2000, 105 mins) Collab: Embassy of Sweden

8 Sept.

A unique **vase exhibition** designed by the house of Klove Designs, represented by designers Prateek Jain & Gautam Seth at the Visual Arts Gallery.

9 Sept.

Open Frame 2005: Please check for details.

7.00 pm: Smt. Geetha Krishnamurthy, disciple of the renowned Veena maestro late Dr A. Chittibabu, presents a **Carnatic Veena recital** in the HCL Concert Series.

10 Sept.

10.30 am: Habitat Children's Book Forum. For the older age group: on the spot writing activity-**'Do you think J.K. Rowling needs your help?'** Come and write your own Harry Potter story! Guidelines will be provided. For the younger age group: storytelling from popular classic picture books.

7.00 pm: **Songs of great composers** by Nupurchanda Ghosh (Kolkata) Collab: Impresario India Open Frame 2005: Please check for details.

11 Sept.

7.30 am: Historian Swapna Liddle leads us on a **walk around the Dargah and other monuments of Chirag Dilli**. We meet outside the Chirag Nursery on Outer Ring Road.

7.00 pm: **Songs of Tagore & IPTA** by Gautam Adhikari (Kolkata) Collab: Impresario India

12 Sept

Open Frame 2005: Please check for details.

7.00 pm: **Youth Parliament** in collaboration with Wide Aisle productions presents an adapted version of Chilean activist Ariel Dorfman's play 'Reader' which deals

with the issue of repression and freedom set in a futuristic Indian context. Dir. Anirudh Nair. Entry Free.

13 Sept.

Open Frame 2005: Please check for details.

7.00 pm: Youth Parliament repeats **'Reader'**

14 Sept.

Open Frame 2005: Please check for details.

7.00 pm: **Hindustani Classical Vocal recital** by Sangeeta Bandopadhyay, disciple of late Pt. Chinmoy Lahiri, late Ustad Munnawar Ali Khan and Shri Kamal Bandopadhyay. Tabla accompaniment by Mihir Kundu HCL Concert Series.

15 Sept.

Open Frame 2005: Please check panel for details.

7.00 pm: Priya Kanungo, disciple of Pt. Deepak Chatterjee, presents a **Hindustani classical vocal recital**.

16 Sept.

6.30 pm: Kiran Karnik, President NASSCOM speaks on **'The Future Of India's IT Industry'**

7.15 pm: As tribute to Uday Shankar, Bhoomika presents three ballets **'Homage', 'Flying Cranes' and 'Antim Adhyay'** (The Last Chapter) Directed & choreographed by Narendra Sharma.

7.00 pm: **Hindustani Classical Vocal recital** by Pt. Mani Prasad of Kirana Gharana.

17 Sept.

6.30 pm: **Panel Discussion on Corruption**. Participants: Shri P Shankar, Central Vigilance Commissioner, Admiral RH Tahiliani, Chairman, Transparency International India, Eminent columnist Shri. Kuldip Nayar, and Eminent Lawyer Shri KTF Tulsii. Collab: Foundation For Peace, Harmony and Good Governance.

7.30 pm: Leela Arts Academy presents Vjy Tendulkar's 'Jaat Hi Poocho Sadhu Ki' Dir. Sanjeev Johri. Limited invitations available at the Programme Desk from 14th.

18 Sept.

7.30 pm: Repeat of **'Jaat Hi Poocho Sadhu Ki'**. Limited invitations available at the Programme Desk from 14th.

7.00 pm: Swaranjali presents an **evening of Sufi music and dance**.

19 Sept.

7.00 pm: Film Club Discussion Group meets to discuss Neil Jordan's **'The Crying Game'** (1992/112 mins) Winner of the Academy Award for the best Original Screenplay, Neil's Jordan's psychological drama and political thriller develops in a fast paced narrative rhythm until its final startling and ironic twist. Film Scholar Ira Bhaskar will introduce the film and co-ordinate the discussion

7.00 pm: Ram Narain Jha, disciple of Pt. Sarathi Chatterjee, presents a **Hindustani classical vocal recital**.

20 Sept.

Apparao Galleries presents a group show of collages titled, **'Passion with Paper'** at the Visual Arts Gallery.

21 Sept.

7.00 pm: **Songs and Recitations**

by Jayati Ghosh and Avery Chourey (in Bengali)

22 Sept.

7.00 pm: Film Club screening, **The Butterfly Chase** (France/1992 / 115mins) Dir. Ottar Iosseliani

7.00 pm: Continuing with our series on 'Middle Life Onwards Health Crises', we present a discussion on 'Strengthening Memory Capacity and Understanding Memory Loss'. Introduced by Dr Mala Kapur Shankardass, Health Sociologist. Collab: Development, Welfare & Research Foundation.

Collab: Dev. Welfare & Research Foundation.

23 Sept.

7.00 pm: **'Spiritual Stories In Classical Music'** by author and columnist Renuka Narayanan

7.00 pm: **Bharatanatyam recital** by Aranyani Bhargava, disciple of Leela Samson

24 Sept.

7.00 pm: Film Club screening, **Tanguy** (France/2001/ 108mins) Dir. Etienne Chatiliez

7.00 pm: Sarathi Chatterjee, disciple of Pt. Rajan and Sajan Mishra, presents **'Bandish Baithak'**, compositions in different ragas from



Geeta Mahalik

the Benaras and Kirana gharanas. HCL Concert series.

25 Sept.

7.00 am: Nikhil Devasar of Delhibird leads a **bird walk in the Sultanpur Bird Sanctuary**, Gurgaon. We meet at the main gate of the Rosy Pelican resort. Please carry money for the entry fee.

7.00 pm: At The Basement Series - Giles Chuyen presents **'Rasa' - the dance of emotions** - a dance in theatre presentation. Collab: Class Apart Productions & Old World Culture. Tickets at Rs 50 available at the Programme Desk

26 Sept.

7.00 pm: Ruchika Theatre Group presents playwright Arun Kukreja's **'Buddha', a soliloquy**, read by Sunit Tandon. Sohaaila Kapur reads from 'Peace And Happiness For All', a prayer poem by Daisaku Ikeda, President Soka Gakkai. Readings will be followed by a panel discussion. Panellists: Uma Vasudev and Varsha Das.

27 Sept.

7.00 pm: Film Club screening, **Emotional Destinies** (2000/180mins) Dir. Olivier Assayas

7.00 pm: Book launch and reading. Kaveri Nambisan's new novel **'Hills Of Angheri'**. Collab: Penguin Books India

7.00 pm: **'Chal Khusro Ghar Apne'** Rashmi Agarwal sings some of Hazrat Amir Khusro's favourite and popular work as 'Nazrana' for his 'Urs'

28 Sept.

7.00 pm: Kuchipudi Dance Academy presents, **'Pratisthitaa'**, a 2-day Dance Festival, highlighting the empowerment of women. Duet by Vedantam Venkatachalapathi and his wife (Vijaywada)

'Chitrangada', dance ballet by Guru Jayaram Rao, Vanashree Rao & Troupe. Limited invitations.



Sangeeta Bandopadhyay

7.00 pm: Tamasha presents **'Wake Up Call'**, a light musical comedy on the life of senior citizens (in Hindi & Punjabi) Wr. Sharda Desoares and Vinod Verma. Dir. Vinod Verma. Tickets at Rs 100 & 50 available at the Programme Desk.

7.00 pm: We conclude the series on **'Psychology, Self and Contemporary Life'** with focus on 'Inter-Personal Psychology-Part II: Understanding Family Dynamics' by Jasmeet Kaur, Psychotherapist and Process Trainer.

29 Sept.

7.00 pm: **'Pratisthitaa'** features Dr Sandhya Purecha (Mumbai) and Deepika Reddy (Hyderabad). Limited invitations.

7.00 pm: Repeat performance of **'Wake Up Call'**. Dir. Vinod Verma

7.00 pm: IHC Management Talk Practices 20: 20 brings a talk on 'Marketing Strategy Analysis of Internet job site' by Prof. Arvind Sahay, IIM Ahmedabad. Supported by Institute of Quality Ltd.

30 Sept.

7.00 pm: **'Road Journeys In The Indian Himalayas'** by Manmohan Koko Singh. Collab. Himalayan Club. Introduction by Mandip Singh Soin.

7.00 pm: **'Abhisaarika'**, a Kathak dance presentation by Sushmita Ghosh, disciple of Guru Munna Shukla. HCL Concert Series

DOD FOYER

1 - 30 Sept.

An exhibition of photographs on **monuments of Delhi** by Komala Varadan

CONVENTION FOYER

10 - 14 Sept

An exhibition of paintings from **'Alluring Fantasies'** by Harpreet Ahluwalia

16 - 18 Sept.

An exhibition of **glass paintings** by Anchal Bhrary

VISUAL ARTS GALLERY

1 - 7 Sept.

Ganesha Online presents a series on the theme **'Devotion'**

8 - 9 Sept.

A unique **vase exhibition** designed by the house of Klove Designs, represented by designers Prateek Jain & Gautam Seth

10 - 15 Sept.

Galleria presents **Papermark 2005**, to celebrate the paper as an ideal medium for artistic expression.

16 - 29 Sept.

Apparao Galleries presents a group show of collages titled, **'Passion with Paper'**.

OPEN PALM COURT

16- 29 Sept.

An exhibition of paintings by Alexis Kersey, presented by Apparao Galleries

LOBBIES ON VIEW

August - October

Youthreach Spirit presents **'Nobody's Children? Myth, Reality'**- A tribute to the spirit of India's disadvantaged urban child.

A fundraising exhibition of photographs by Tarun Chhabra. Curated by Gauri Gill.

EU CULTURAL WEEK

1 Sept.

7.00 pm **Private** (Italy/2004/) Dir. Saverio Costanzo. The film takes a look at the life of a Palestinian family whose house is occupied by the Israeli military. Winner of the Golden Leopard for the best film at the Locarno film festival in 2004. Courtesy: Italian Cultural Centre

6 Sept.

7.00 pm **Kalabush** (Greek/2003/90mins.) Dir: Theodore Nikolaidis and Adonis Florides Story of illegal immigrant Mustafa and his escapades. Courtesy: Cyprus High Commission

7 Sept.

7.00 pm **Wings of Glass** (Sweden/2000/105mins.) Dir: Reza Bagher Nazli, daughter of Iranian parents, has grown up in Sweden. She wants to be Swedish and independent and this leads to a discord in the family. Courtesy: Embassy of Sweden

FRENCH FILMS

French Cultural Centre & FFSI

22 Sept.

7.00 pm **The Butterfly Chase** (1992/115mins) Dir. Ottar Iosseliani A noble family of France maintains dignity despite the onslaught of modernism and non-white immigrants.

24 Sept.

7.00 pm **Tanguy** (2001 / 108mins) Dir. Etienne Chatiliez. An excellent comedy, which balances an outrageous script of overly polite parents who just want their little 'poulet' to fly the coup.

27 Sept.

7.00 pm Emotional Destinies (2000/180mins) Dir. Olivier Assayas. Set in the Aftermath of the First World War, the story revolves around the heir to a devoutly Protestant porcelain dynasty in Charente, and his life-changing encounter with a non-conformist niece of a family friend.

FILM CLUB DISCUSSION

19 Sept.

7.00 pm Film Club Discussion Group meets to discuss Neil Jordan's **'The Crying Game'** (1992/112 mins) Winner of the Academy Award for the best Original Screenplay, Neil Jordan's psychological drama and political thriller develops in a fast paced narrative rhythm until its final startling and ironic twist. Film Scholar Ira Bhaskar will introduce the film and co-ordinate the discussion

Association of Writers & Illustrators for Children & Indian Section Of International Board For Books For Young People present **Asian Conference on story telling to promote reading habit in children**

19 - 21 Sept.

10:00 am to 5:30 pm
Registration fee: Rs. 1200 for three days

For further details, please contact **Shail Tiwari at 23311095**

Geetha Krishnamurthy



Revive the knowledge economy

Your magazine may not be recovering its cost of publication but, trust me, it has endeared itself to a large number of people particularly those whose hearts beat for the poor. The story entitled '600,000 villages, each a hub of knowledge.' was very timely and informative. It made me feel proud that not all well-to-do people are only after money and that they too realise their social responsibilities. Even if a fraction of our political class were like this, India would have been a land of milk and honey today.

Never mind the big let down by our ruling politicians, people like M S Swaminathan actively supported by civil society groups and other well meaning persons will make India one day find its true place in the world. As you have rightly observed in your editorial, no one can stop an idea whose time has come.

Ankita Mehra

Spread the news

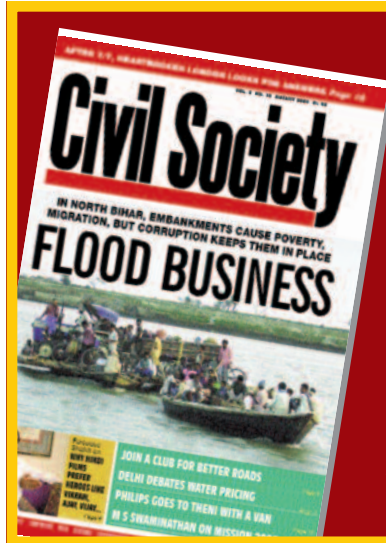
Content wise, your magazine stands tall among all other contemporary magazines, but sadly it does not reach many. Is there really nothing that you can do to increase the circulation of your magazine? I think it should reach every nook and corner of the country so that the public gets to know that there are magazines like Civil Society that espouse socially relevant causes. It's a magazine that gives prominence to people who silently work for the uplift of the poorer sections of society.

Smridhi Kapoor

Repay the people of Bihar

Your cover story, 'The Curse of Bihar's Embankments,' was very thought-provoking. Your reporter Eklavya has done a wonderful job. It is my fervent hope that the story gets read by the powers that be. It would not be a bad idea to send a complimentary copy of the August 2005 issue to Buta Singh and Lalu Prasad Yadav. Politicians like them have plundered Bihar for long. It is time they take a break and get down to repaying by implementing the suggestions made in the story.

Akshita Vahi



"It is heartening to note that citizens want to do more than just crib and curse the government's failings"

"Roads are just the beginning. Groups can take up causes like cleaning the Yamuna and maintenance of public buildings"

Get real glamorous

Come on editor, magazines do not sell on social issues. Take a leaf from an old fox like Khushwant Singh or his modern version Vinod Mehta and see the sales figures of your magazine skyrocket. Who in his right frame of mind would fork out Rs 50 to read about poverty in Bihar and all that? I bet even if you reduced the price of your magazine to zilch, there would be no buyers. So my humble advice is: splash glamorous pictures here and there between the serious stories or interview the current crop of film stars and not stars of a bygone era like Farouque Shaikh.

Abhishek Dua

Take the right turn

Your report 'A club for better roads in Delhi' was a revelation. I'm so glad that you provided readers a positive example of a person who has actually used the RTI law for everyone's benefit.

It's great to know that the common man not only has the power to question how his city is being run, but to actually do something about the way it is managed. I'm hoping more people follow the example of Uday Gosain and take up various causes in Delhi. It is heartening to note that citizens are keen and interested and want to do more than just crib and curse the government's failings.

Roads are just the beginning. Groups can take up causes like cleaning the Yamuna, maintenance of public buildings and so on. In fact, while poor roads are more of an inconvenience, the status of monoliths like flyovers is especially troubling. For example, a flyover recently

completed at the Sarojini Nagar junction has already begun to sag dangerously and it is not even a year old.

Aakash Gupta

Keep people informed

Arvind Kejriwal's article in the August issue of Civil Society was very timely. The public needs to know why the DJB cannot do without raising water usage charges. Arvind has done a very good dissection of the working of the DJB. His articles in the earlier issues of the magazine too were of great value. I see a perceptible change in the behaviour of local officials. They no longer think the public is stupid and ill informed. The public too, on its part, has become very conscious of their rights and does not hesitate in agitating for them, thanks to the good work done by Arvind and socially responsible magazines like Civil Society. Keep it going.

Salil Bhatia

Advani and Jinnah chapter

The Essay on Jinnah was really insightful. Advani has finally realised that the over used Hindutva card is no longer working. He's getting on in years and I frankly think he doesn't want to be remembered by history as the man who caused riots between Hindus and Muslims.

Perhaps he overplayed his hand with his remarks on Jinnah and misjudged the extent of the controversy it would cause, but all in all this is a man realising that he made a mistake. It is difficult to guess the story behind his resignation, but it would have been best if he had resigned at that time. He had the high

moral ground and it would have been a good way to bring a long political career to a close. Instead he has to drag on and wait till his opponents within the party and the RSS muster enough support to throw him out.

Gaurav Ban

Sensible celebrity talk

I came across your interview with Farouque Shaikh. Real candid. I was glad to hear an Indian celebrity talk sensible and practical things for a change. Most top actors in Bollywood today are Muslim. The fact that they are not cast in Muslim roles should not detract from that. With over 250 million Muslims, India has the second largest Muslim population in the world. It is a credit to Indian secularism that so many religions coexist largely peacefully. Only when friction happens, the media covers and the world comments. But no one bothers to appreciate that most of the time and in most of the country, Hindus and Muslims live together peacefully.

Divya Arora

Connect with London

I think the London bombings have left the world bewildered. The stereotyping of terrorists as being manic Islamic fundamentalists seeking to destroy a society that they hated because they didn't understand democracy was shattered. Here were young kids, born and brought up in Britain, a part of the fabric of society, who had seen its advantages, yet were completely

disconnected from it. So disconnected that they were seduced into blowing themselves up. I think this is a wake up call for the world. The problem of terrorism does not arise from places like Iraq, but from our own backyard. Our young are being disenfranchised from society and are turning into rebellious lunatics.

Gaurav Gurung

Educate citizens on pricing

Regarding your article on water pricing, I think it would be a good idea to have some articles explaining how and at what rates electricity and water are provided to different areas of Delhi. For example, most of us don't even know what a 'unit' of electricity is in practical terms and what are the ways of controlling excessive consumption.

This will make the discerning reader more aware and therefore he will be able to identify anomalies in his bill with greater ease.

Shiney Thomas

Teach the unlettered

I was particularly happy to read the article, 'Hole in one with literacy in slum', which appeared in your July issue. For one, I am an avid golfer. We run the TCS package and I have been after my club to run these classes for caddies ever since I discovered many of them cannot read! I am photo-copying the article and I sending copies to the golf captain and secretary so that they get inspired to take action.

I was also very interested in Eklavya's article on Nimmi Chauhan's film. Would it be possible for us to get a DVD or CD of her film? Tata Steel does sensitisation programmes for its officers, their families and for school children.

I thought this would be a good film to show them. We would be happy to pay a nominal amount.

Shakti Sharma

Useful reading

Civil Society is a worthy magazine for grassroot activists like us. We are regularly enriching ourselves by reading it.

Usha Chowdhury

Please mail letters, listings and other feedback to shaileyhingorani@gmail.com or civil_society@rediffmail.com



IS YOUR DRINKING WATER
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Home RO System

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