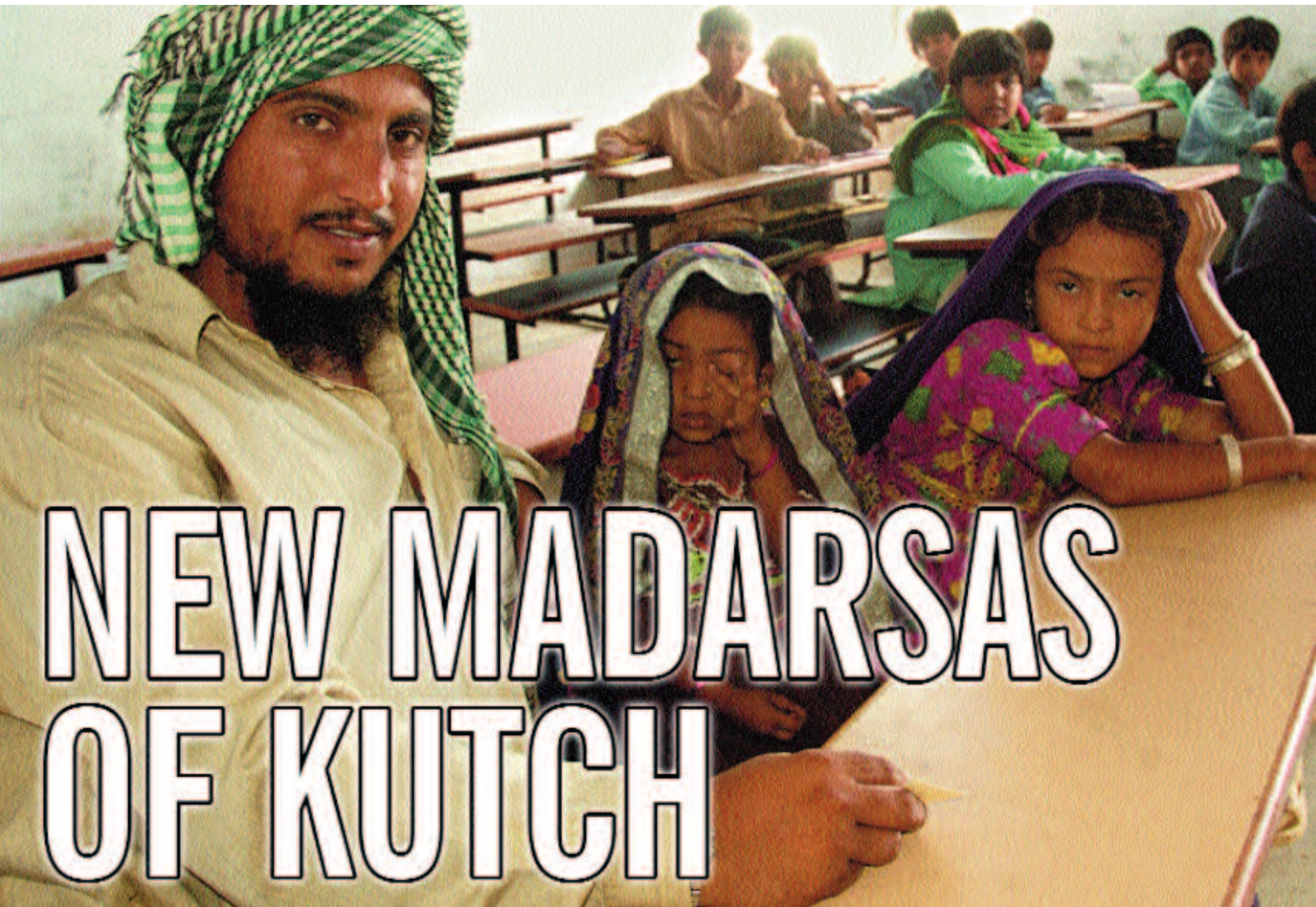


Civil Society



NEW MADARSAS OF KUTCH



VILLAGERS BRING RANBAXY TO BOOK IN HIMACHAL PRADESH

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CHANGE LOOMS WITH THE YOUNG

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IN CIVIL SOCIETY EVERYONE IS


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TAXMAN'S BURDEN

Amassed in an effort to fight for the commoner's right to information. Can he bring transparency to India?

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A CM'S ACTIVISM

Is Delhi a better place to live in?

YES 65% NO 29%

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ELECTION SPECIAL



NGOs IN POLITICS

They are checking out candidates. Is it time they stood for election themselves?


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YOUTH 4 PEACE

Young people across cities join bands against violence and communal hatred

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MEET Mr ROOTS

Darshan Shankar revives health traditions, plans Ayurveda hospital in Bangalore

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GURGAON WANTS TO VOTE

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

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THE FOREST CRUNCH

Demand for paper is growing but where are the trees?

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AN AGENDA FOR THE NEW GOVERNMENT

Civil Society



SHOWDOWN IN MANALI

A 192 AM byed project, with 42 government departments in the name, runs into trouble. But NCCo find a solution in impartial public hearings


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IS IT BEYOND BUSINESS?

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

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NEW LEADERS

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A MIDDLE CLASS PARTY IN GURGAON

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WHAT IS A WORLD CLASS CITY?

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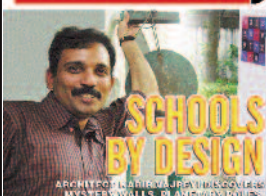
TOP DOCTORS IN SLUM

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WHEN THE GOVT WANTS YOUR HOUSE

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SCHOOLS BY DESIGN

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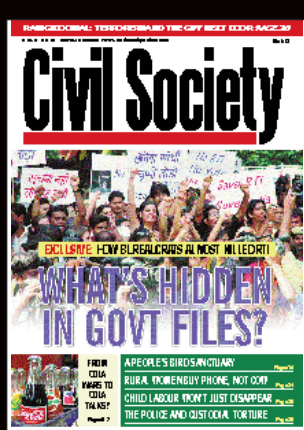
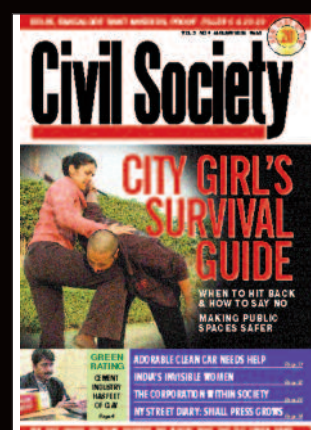
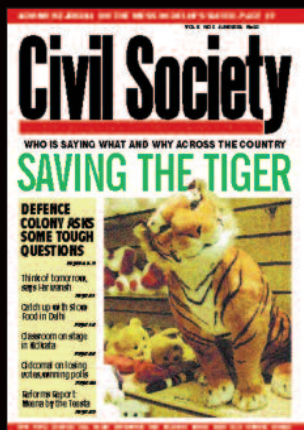
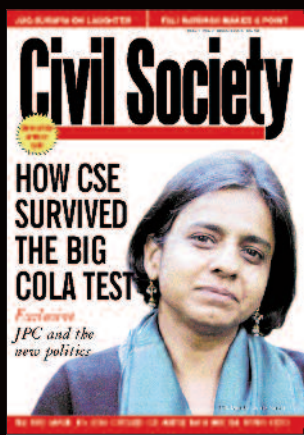
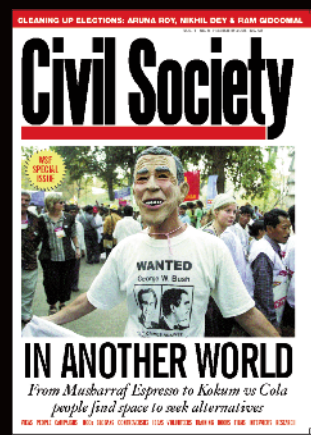
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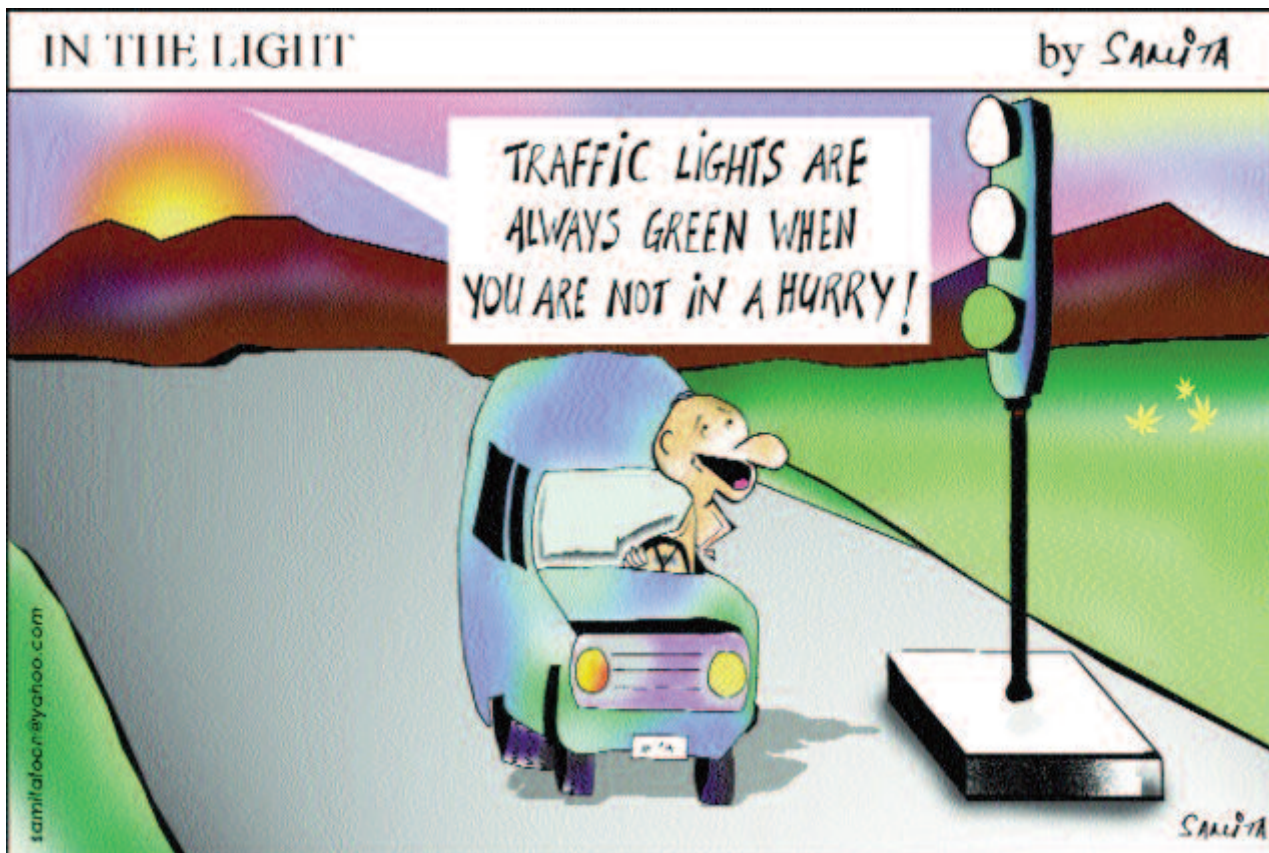
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Water Guru

I would like to congratulate you on your cover story "Water Guru: The Gandhigiri of Anupam Mishra."

Anupamji's work is truly outstanding. It is sad that he has received so little attention from policy makers and Indians in general. By breaking with current trends in the media and putting him on your cover, you have shown courage. It is the kind of journalism that is needed.

I remember first meeting Anupamji when I visited his father, the brilliant and insightful but self-effacing poet, Bhawani Prasad Mishra. That was many years ago. I remember him as being extremely courteous and gentle.

By preferring to be a quiet and low-profile change leader Anupamji has gone after his father. The connection you have drawn with the poem *Geet Farosh* says it all.

I would also like to make mention of Riaz Quadir's "Demise of western journalism" in the same issue. The media is facing a crisis all over the developed world. We in India need to learn from this. A vibrant democracy needs a vibrant and relevant media.

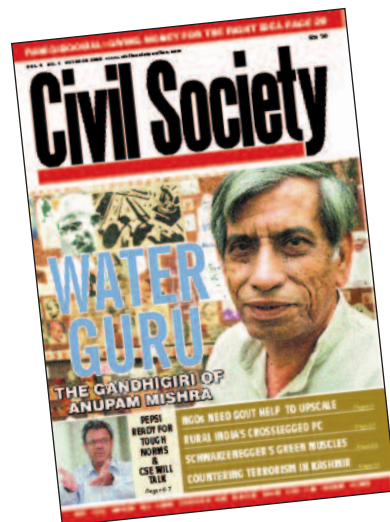
More power to your magazine and may it be the example that several others follow.

**Harivansh, Chief Editor
Prabhat Khabar**

Boost civil society

I read the September issue of *Civil Society* recently. My first reaction: Impressive! The title, the format and the contents all three impress at the very first encounter. *Civil Society* fills a niche, which was missing link in the colorful mosaic of print journalism. The time is ripe for India to give due space to civil society. Strengthening this section of society vis-à-vis the state and market forces should be the most important agenda for the 21st century. The well

LETTERS



being of the people as the driving force of civil society can counterbalance the state's power and the profiteering of market forces. Ultimately, what good is money and power if the country has a weak and worthless civil society?

Rajesh Bhat, Ahmedabad

Police and torture

This has reference to the article 'Police leaders can stop custodial torture, if they really want to,' in the September issue of your magazine, by Yateender Singh. Today, the *dadagiri* of the police is increasing. The police can easily torture a prisoner if he is poor or of lower caste, just because he is not aware of his rights. But they will not torture any politician.

Third degree methods absolutely violate the right to life and personal liberty. Many under trials are still in custody even after their term of punishment is over. A poster explaining the rights of prisoners should be displayed in every police station in their own state language and national language, so that

persons taken into custody can know their rights.

Today, police leaders need training in human rights and value-based education, so that they understand that every prisoner is first a person and then criminal.

Sanket S. Kashid, Justice Corps

NGOs and govt

I read the story, "NGOs need government help to upscale" with interest. I agree that NGOs do implement small innovative projects that should be replicated on a larger scale. But two points need to be noted. One, that copying projects is not easy because India is a very diverse country. So, every project has to adjust to the soil it is planted in. Secondly, why don't NGOs examine the feasibility of using the cooperative model? Form a network, examine an innovative model and then see how you can upscale those ideas. The network should include NGOs, the government, the private sector, college students and grassroots institutions. Bring in schoolteachers and doctors too.

Gayatri Iyer, Chennai

Harried maids

I am glad to note that Sister Youna and her Domestic Workers Forum have relocated to Delhi. They can get their voice heard nationally now. The forum needs to sensitise the middle-class to domestic workers. I personally know that people treat their domestic workers very badly. The police should also be sensitised. They think all domestic help are murderers and thieves. Actually, the truth is many times it is middle-class families who murder and cheat their domestic help. Maybe the antecedents of middle-class families should first be checked out by the police to find out if it is safe for a woman domestic to work there.

Ganesh Singh, Gurgaon

“ Everyone who lives will have to die. God is with me. He protects me. I too will die. But I will not back-out until the truth is revealed. The truth of justice. If the loss of one life can help others live without fear, then it is worth it. ”

Irom Chanu Sharmila
on fast against the AFPSA
outside Jantar Mantar

“ The idea is not to provide a connection so that somebody can talk to somebody distant. They should be able to communicate within the community. The government should create a telephone backbone with its own money just like it created post offices. ”

Ashok Desai
on India's telecom policy

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COVER STORY



THE NEW MADARSAS OF KUTCH

Madarsas are meant to teach the Quran. But in Gujarat's backward region of Kutch, maulanas have agreed to teach maths, language and science as well to girls and boys

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COVER PHOTOGRAPH BY LAKSHMAN ANAND

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Civil Society

Pepsi, CSE and standards

THE importance of standards for soft drinks is often not properly understood. It is not merely a question of getting miniscule amounts of pesticide residue out of the drinks, but of creating a culture of accountability that will apply across the booming processed foods market.

Public health is today in the hands of companies in the foods business. The huge sums spent on advertising and brand-building make it difficult to ascertain quality and the truth about what actually goes into products.

The way forward is through strict and independent regulation. It is only through this that the interests of the consumer can be protected. It is not enough for companies to say that their products are safe. They must open themselves up for scrutiny and be truly accountable.

It is a fact of life that Coca-Cola and PepsiCo are in the Indian market. The practical thing to do is to work with these companies to ensure that they deliver quality in their products and don't mess up the environment.

We feel that PepsiCo India's chairman, Rajeev Bakshi, wants to end the dispute over the quality of his soft drinks. He has said that he will accept a standard if it can be scientifically arrived at and validated. He has pledged himself in favour of regulation and consumer safety. Most importantly, he has said that he will talk to anyone, including his trenchant critic, the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE).

For its part CSE has always said that it is open to talks if standards are on the agenda. It has welcomed Pepsi's initiative and said that it is ready for a dialogue. This is the right way to go on a dispute that seems to be getting no one anywhere.

If there is one lesson to be learnt from CSE it is that you have to build expertise on issues that worry you. Emotional outbursts and old-style rabble rousing, though it may be prompted by genuine distress caused by irresponsible behaviour by industry, will no longer do.

Pepsi will today take CSE seriously because it speaks from a scientific position and does its homework. CSE has fought a long and hard battle with the cola companies. We in this magazine will take Pepsi seriously because Rajeev Bakshi is putting his cards on the table.

Anupam Mishra of the Gandhi Peace Foundation, who features on our cover this month, is perhaps the best example of an activist who has achieved through modest forays more than what others have sought to do in grand sweeps.

His work with water is unique. He has shown modern India and now the world how water should be managed and integrated with the lives of people. Without any fuss, he has promoted traditional water systems among ordinary folk. He has done so with simplicity and a sense of humour. His great strength is that he does not take himself too seriously. His approach is really Gandhigiri, the now popular expression for demystification of what Gandhi stood for. Long before the movie *Lage Raho Munnabhai*, Anupam was practising Gandhigiri in his own special way.

For those who want to understand Anupam and his work a little better we suggest they read his lucid books and hear him speak on water. It is a sheer delight. We would like to thank the inspired French photographer Antonie Alesieur for his wonderful pictures of traditional water structures.

Umesh Anand

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Farmers bring Ranbaxy to



Villagers of Batamandi celebrate their victory outside Ranbaxy's factory

Rajendra Bansal and Ayan Biswas
Paonta Sahib (HP)

FERMENTATION is just like making curd, explained Ramesh Parekh, then Vice-President (Manufacturing) at Ranbaxy Laboratories Limited, when local villagers met him in June 2004 to express their concern about the expansion of Ranbaxy's fermentation plant in Ganguwala village of Paonta Sahib tehsil in Himachal Pradesh. The villagers felt that the new unit would cause serious environmental pollution that would threaten their health, crops, livelihoods and the area's scenic beauty. They were not convinced by Parekh's reassurances.

On July 21, 2004 four local citizens filed a public interest petition in the Himachal Pradesh High Court against the construction of Ranbaxy's fermentation plant at Ganguwala and a formulation unit in the neighbouring Batamandi village. They achieved a major success recently when a division bench of the Himachal Pradesh High Court, headed by Chief Justice, VK Gupta, ordered Ranbaxy to stop construction activities for expanding its fermentation unit.

Ranbaxy Laboratories Limited is India's largest pharmaceutical company, ranking among the world's top 100 pharmaceutical makers. In 1994, it established a bulk drugs manufacturing plant near the town of Paonta Sahib, a pilgrimage place for Sikhs, on the banks of a pristine Yamuna river emerging from the Himalayan range. Here it manufactures Lovastatin and Pravastatin, which are prescribed for the control of cholesterol. In February 2004, Ranbaxy sought permission from the Himachal Pradesh State Environment and Pollution Board (HPSEP and PCB) to expand the capacity of its fermentation plant in Ganguwala from 8 TPA to 120 TPA. The expansion is a part of the company's strategy to gain a major share of the lucrative international market for statins.

Environmental impact: "It was the 15 times expansion proposed by Ranbaxy that first rang warning bells in the minds of local people who expressed fears of a Bhopal-like situation developing in the area," said Subodh Abbhi, an IIT-Mumbai educated engineer and a small entrepreneur-turned-organic farmer based in Batamandi. Abbhi and the petitioners contended that Ranbaxy's expansion activi-

ties were in violation of the HP Tenancy & Land Reforms Act (1972) and HP Ceiling on Land Holdings Act (1972), the Factories Act, the Explosives Act, the Development Plan of Paonta Sahib and the Pollution Control Board's Zoning Atlas guidelines. They feared that extraction of over one million litres of water per day by the new units would deplete the groundwater table, release poisonous effluents into the Yamuna river, leach toxins into the groundwater and affect local agriculture.

On April 1, 2005 after several detailed hearings the Court established a three-member Committee of senior state officials to study the various charges relating to the violation of environmental and other laws in setting up the two units by Ranbaxy, and to assess the potential pollution impact of the proposed plants as well as the availability of remedial measures for them. It also allowed Ranbaxy to resume its construction activities at its own risk and responsibility.

Realising that the case against Ranbaxy could be a long one, involving hard scientific data and analysis, Subodh Abbhi contacted IIT-Mumbai acquaintances, Dunu Roy, director of the Hazards Centre in

book in Himachal Pradesh

New Delhi, and Dr Ravi Chopra, director, Peoples' Science Institute (PSI), for technical support. The Hazards Centre and PSI are sister public-interest research organisations.

PSI's scientists analysed the Rapid EIA Report submitted by Ranbaxy. They realised that Ranbaxy had not prepared a comprehensive EIA Report for the new plants as required for pharmaceutical units by the EIA Notification (1994). "A comprehensive EIA Report had been prepared in 1994 for the existing plant. But that was for making Cephalosporins whereas the company was mainly manufacturing statins. Thus, even the existing plant is illegal. The Rapid EIA Report for the new plants was also seriously flawed," explained Dr Chopra.

Attempts made by PSI's scientists to seek permission from Ranbaxy to inspect the plant and collect samples of effluents and solid-wastes for analysis were turned down. Consequently they collected a few water samples from storm water outlets of the Ranbaxy plant and the adjacent Yamuna and Bata rivers. Tests conducted at PSI's environmental quality monitoring laboratory showed that the effluents from Ranbaxy and the Yamuna river samples downstream from the Ranbaxy plant were highly polluted. Toxicity tests revealed that they were also toxic for rice, the main crop of the area. "The results of the different tests performed by PSI were consistent. They lent credence to the local people's apprehensions that the Ranbaxy plant was discharging toxic, non-biodegradable chemicals into the rivers and the surrounding environment," said Dunu Roy.

The petitioners forwarded these results to the High Court Committee. The latter did not formally accept them, claiming that PSI's lab was not a certified one. The Committee then commissioned three certified laboratories – Industrial Toxicology Research Centre (ITRC), Lucknow, Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), New Delhi and National Productivity Council (NPC), New Delhi – to examine pollution caused by the Ranbaxy plant.

Their results, however, varied significantly from each other. ITRC and NPC reported high values of chromium, copper, nickel, lead and zinc in different soil samples and in the Yamuna river downstream from the plant. Samples of the incinerator emissions were sent to SGS Laboratories in Belgium for analysis. The analyses revealed carcinogenic dioxins and furans 2.69 times above the standard set by CPCB. Based on these findings and its deliberations, the Committee submitted its report to the High Court in January 2006.

A review of the Committee's report written by Dr GD Agrawal, a former member-secretary of the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) and one of India's most respected pollution experts, forwarded to the Court by the petitioners, was very critical. Dr Agrawal wrote: "At no point whatsoever the Committee attempts to even consider the likely impact on environment (degradation of water/air quality), damage to crops (direct damage as also the

impoverishment of soil productivity and suitability for agriculture) on health of plants, birds, animals and human beings....It acted essentially as a Government Departmental Enquiry trying to regularise and legalise any violations rather than as a court committee examining environmental issues with the Precautionary Principle laid down by the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India in mind."

The verdict: In its judgment, the Court held that since the fermentation plant at Ganguwala had not been approved by a Site Appraisals Committee, in violation of Section 41 of the Factories Act, Ranbaxy should "be dealt with strictly in accordance with

The Case Ranbaxy sought to expand its fermentation unit without an adequate EIA. Farmers were worried about the effects Ranbaxy's effluents would have on water bodies and farm lands.



Subodh Abbhi, organic farmer

The Verdict Expansion put on hold. High Court said Ranbaxy violated Section 41 of the Factories Act. Development plan also violated. Expansion of Ranbaxy's units required a comprehensive EIA. The company would have to identify the pollutants to which the local people would be exposed and spell out remedial steps.

the provisions of the Factories Act." Under this Act, the occupier and manager of the factory can be punished with "imprisonment for a term which may extend to two years or with fine which may extend to one lakh rupees or with both." The Judges ruled that Ranbaxy had violated the Development Plan which clearly mentioned that Ranbaxy could not expand its plant. They also found that Ranbaxy had violated land laws in letter and in spirit, the TCP Act and the Explosives Act, but did not consider them to be serious violations.

The Court agreed with the petitioners that Ranbaxy had to get a comprehensive EIA prepared and approved before further construction could be permitted. It said that the new EIA report would have to give details regarding the expected effects of environmental pollution and the remedial measures to be taken by Ranbaxy. The judges took note of the toxicity tests performed by People's Science Institute and directed that bioassay tests be done to show the effects of the effluents on the aquatic life and agriculture of the surrounding area. They also ordered the company to make adequate provisions for safe disposal of its solid wastes for a period of at least 35 years.

The Court, relying on arguments presented by the Central Ground Water Board before the High Court Committee, did not accept the petitioners' contention that the extraction of over one million litres of water per day would severely affect the groundwater table in the neighbourhood of the plant. It, however, ordered Ranbaxy to install two stage reverse osmosis plants with at least 80 per cent efficiency in the units at Ganguwala and Batamandi to prevent the release of contaminated effluents.

The judges expressed serious concern about the presence of dioxins and furans above permissible limits in the incinerator emissions. They directed the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests to prescribe norms for these gases within eight weeks. They ruled that their levels be reduced below the limits recommended by the Central Pollution Control Board before the plant is set up. Scientific data would have to be cited in the EIA to show how the emissions of dioxins and furans would be brought within the specified limits.

Public Pressure: The Ranbaxy example shows that governments, their agencies and industrial enterprises cannot be trusted to ensure compliance with environmental regulations and guidelines. Fortunately, there are people who care about the environment. Their pressure forces governments and state agencies to publish documents like the Development Plan of Paonta Sahib or the Zoning Atlas and even notify them. It is also true that corrupt *netas* and officials often use the regulatory frameworks to harass entrepreneurs and enrich themselves in the bargain. Environmentally conscious citizens and their organisations, therefore, have to remain vigilant to ensure that the environmental safeguards highlighted in these documents are adhered to.

Two years ago, when a few villages in Paonta Sahib tehsil decided to oppose Ranbaxy's expansion plans, nobody thought that they would bring the pharmaceutical giant to its knees. Their struggle is reminiscent of earlier battles in the 1980s when ordinary villagers supported by Samaj Parivartana Samudaya ensured that the Harihar Polyfibres factory stopped polluting the Tungabhadra river, or the Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad compelled Grasim to treat its effluents before releasing them into the Chaliyar river, or the successful fight against limestone mining in the Doon valley by Rural Litigation and Entitlement Kendra.

Even if Ranbaxy does eventually expand its fermentation unit, its operation will be safer because of the people's campaign. If they can maintain their vigilance, it is quite possible that Ranbaxy will be forced to control its damage to the environment and that the Yamuna will flow cleaner. As Bhima Nand, a local villager who has been in the forefront of the movement says: "Following the court's verdict, other pharmaceutical projects coming up in the area will also be forced to behave themselves so that Bata river and the sacred Yamuna are not heavily polluted."

Sharmila's epic fast against pow



Irom Chanu Sharmila on fast outside Jantar Mantar in New Delhi

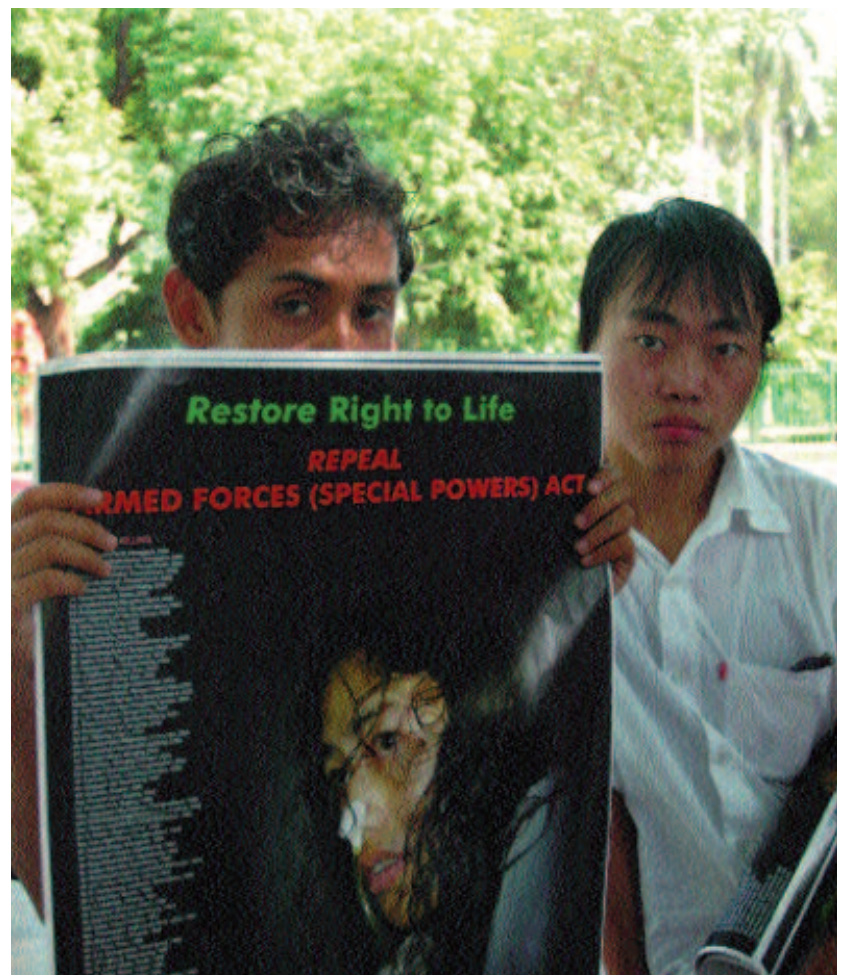
Amit Sengupta
New Delhi

Irom Chanu Sharmila has iron in her soul. She is serene, her body still, covered by a thick blanket with ice packs on her head, as she lies under the scorching sun at Jantar Mantar in Delhi. She opens her eyes and looks straight at you. She is coherent and lucid, her Manipuri diction perfect, her vision impeccably transparent. "Everyone who lives will have to die. God is with me. He protects me. I too will die. But I will not back-out until the truth is revealed. The truth of justice. If the loss of one life can help others live without fear, then it is worth it."

Sharmila knows that she can be picked up by the police any time. She knows that she is on her fourth day of fast without water, that her life hangs on a precarious thread, and the Union home ministry and the Manipur government are on high alert. The police is all over the place, waiting. She is, after all, a great symbol of sustained resistance in India's northeast, a living legend, an epic narrative of Mahatma Gandhi's Satyagraha – and if something happens to her, and that too in New Delhi, Manipur might burn.

One of the Nobel Peace Prize nominee's for 2005, Sharmila has been on non-stop fast without water since the last six years demanding the repeal of the notorious Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 (AFSPA), which grants extraordinary powers and impunity to the security and para-military forces, especially in the northeast, to arrest, detain, interrogate or even kill any person on mere suspicion. Sharmila has refused to take food or water under perpetual custody, and she is force-fed nasally. She is charged under 'attempt to suicide' and is repeatedly arrested after her 'prison-term' technically gets over, even while she renews her marathon fast.

In early October this year, she was released for a brief period and that is how she made her dramatic escape and suddenly appeared amidst huge media glare at Rajghat in Delhi, where she paid her homage to Gandhi, and



ers for forces

then renewed her fast at Jantar Mantar. And yet again, she has brought the relentless narrative of human rights violations in the northeast, and in Manipur, to national attention.

Sharmila was an ordinary girl, outside the realm of politics, who did not apparently even know about the brutish character of the AFSPA. Old-timers remember that she used to cycle and come to meetings. She was as innocent and carefree as girls of her age. However, November 2, 2000, changed her life forever. In retaliation to an insurgent attack, the security forces went on a bloody rampage – they killed 10 civilians standing in a bus stop at Malom, close to where Sharmila, then 28, lived. That changed her life. "I will fast, I will protest non-violently, and I will refuse food till this bloodshed is stopped and the draconian Act is scrapped," she said, and went on indefinite fast. She was imprisoned but she refused to succumb – hence no bail, no food, no family, no youth, no normality, no freedom for her since the last six years.

Scores of men and women have been picked up, tortured and killed under this Act in areas declared 'disturbed' in the northeast, say human rights activists. Almost all cases of extra judicial killings and disappearances have been recorded under the AFSPA. The latest infamous case which shook Manipur for months and shocked the nation was that of Manorama Devi, 29, who was picked up from her house by Assam Rifles' men in the early hours of July 11, 2004. Her dead body was found abandoned in the fields later.

Scores of men and women have been picked up, tortured and killed under the AFSPA in areas declared 'disturbed' in the northeast, say human rights activists. Almost all cases of extra judicial killings and disappearances have been recorded under this Act.

Manipur was inflamed even as New Delhi turned blank. In an unprecedented form of protest, the mothers of Manipur stripped themselves naked in front of the Assam Rifles Headquarters in Imphal, holding banners, 'Indian Army, Come Rape Us'. Old wounds were resurrected, old nightmares, tragedies, injustices, resurfaced yet again. Women and the young came out on the streets. Sharmila joined the movement even while in custody – she was after all a living flame which had never died.

She is still a flame which refuses to die, even while the rapists of Manorama are free despite an enquiry report which has been buried by the UPA government's remarkably judicious Home Minister, Shivraj Patil. Sharmila was picked up on the night of October 6, by the Delhi Police and taken into custody. Post-midnight they tried to nasally force feed her at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences – she started bleeding and cried out in pain. Senior lawyer Colin Gonsalves protested, and so did JNU Students' Union president Mona Das. And that is when the doctors realised that this was no ordinary woman. They were face-to-face with stoic greatness.

This is Irom Sharmila, with a brutalised civilisation inside her soul, Gandhi's follower, believer in God, amazingly strong, beyond life's trivial pursuits, unafraid of death, searching for justice and dignity for her people, a new world of freedom, with her emaciated, starving body as the scaffolding, and not a drop of water in her mouth. "We will all die. But truth will have to arrive one day," she said. "The truth of justice."

She was allegedly raped and shot on her chest, back and genitals – to hide signs of rape – and predictably branded as an 'extremist' who was trying to escape. Trying to run and escape from a group of trained male security men, wearing a Manipuri skirt, all alone, in a desolate place, unarmed? Human rights groups say that the men pumped six bullets into her body after allegedly raping her.

Manipur was inflamed even as New Delhi turned blank. In an unprecedented form of protest, the mothers of Manipur stripped themselves naked in front of the Assam Rifles Headquarters



Kuldeep Nayyar and Sandeep Pandey at anti-cola protest outside Jantar Mantar

Anti-cola march ends in Delhi

Jauymini Barkatakya
New Delhi

ON September 10, a Jal Adhikar Yatra started from the Coca-Cola factory in Mehdiganj near Varanasi. It went to 10 Pepsi and Coca-Cola factories in UP and Rajasthan before arriving in New Delhi on October 3.

The purpose of this long march was to protest extraction of groundwater by the two soft drinks giants. The yatrias held a demonstration outside the Coca-Cola headquarters in Gurgaon and then assembled at Jantar Mantar.

They organised a press conference on the pavement outside the historic monument. Villagers and activists poured out a long list of complaints. The soft drinks companies were depleting groundwater, dumping toxic waste on farmers' fields, ruining crops and encroaching on gram sabha land, said the protestors. They asserted that people had the first right over their water.

The demonstrators alleged the companies were drawing 1.5 to 2.5 million litres of groundwater every day for each of their bottling units.

"The companies not only draw huge amounts of water but the sludge they release has caused water pollution and ruined agricultural fields," said Nandlal, a local leader of the uprising against Coca-Cola in Mehdiganj. "Twenty-five per cent of our bore wells have dried up and 14 per cent of existing wells have dangerously low water levels."

He said not just Mehdiganj but

nearby villages are also being ruined. "When we brought the issue of water level depletion to the notice of Coca-Cola, they denied it. Later, they claimed that they draw only 500,000 litres per day. Subsequently they brought that figure down to 150,000 litres."

"Our primary crops are paddy and millet and we have mango groves," he said.

"But for the last few years the trees have failed to bear fruit. The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) had conducted a test in 2003 on the toxic sludge and the report has indicated significant presence of lead and chromium which has robbed the soil of its nutrients."

Sandeep Pandey, a Magsaysay awardee who led the long march said: "We were not even aware that such a test had been conducted. We came to know after we read an article about it in *Frontline* in June. It was only through filing an application under the right to information law that we managed to get the results of the survey in July."

According to Nandlal, Coke refused to acknowledge that it had been dumping toxic sludge and asked the activists where it was. "So we filled two tractor lorries with the sludge and showed it to them. They made no comment."

Several social activists like Medha Patkar, Ajay Singh of Jan Sanskriti Manch, journalist Kuldeep Nayyar and Vandana Shiva of Navdanya were part of the protest. They urged the villagers to unite against the soft drinks companies and force the government to act.

Change looms with the young

Vidya Viswanathan
New Delhi

THE voluntary sector has its gurus. But it needs young leaders. Where do you find them? Pravah and the Ashoka Foundation decided to go out and look. This year's Change Looms Award goes to five organisations of young people from across the country. They have worked for communal peace, helped save tigers and forest dwellers, resolved tribal conflicts in the northeast and sponsored entrepreneurship among children.

"In our experience youth can lead change but they work in isolation and get no support," says Meenu Venkateswaran, CEO of Pravah. "This award is an endorsement that they are on the right track."

SAHER: Amity in Mumbai

Having grown up in Jogeshwari East in Mumbai, Masood Akhtar was no stranger to communal hatred. He had seen its ugly face many times. But when the 1993 bomb blasts shook Mumbai, it was quite a different thing.

Like many Muslim young men he was picked up by the police and beaten and thrown back bruised and battered. He was 19 then and there were hundreds of others like him who carried the scars of the aftermath of the blasts.

Akhtar went to Delhi to recover from his bitter experience. He returned to find Jogeshwari East more divided than ever. The aged shook with grief, the young seethed with anger.

Akhtar wanted to heal these wounds and he chose the balm of sport. He and his friends started a cricket team which went here and there to play matches. Young boys who would normally brood now had a wholesome way of spending their time.

The team then began to help children who were badly off. It collected money for books and school bags. In 1997, the cricketers formed the Navjawan Ekta Committee. Its youngest member was 14 years old. They staged street plays on communal harmony, drug addiction, education and dirty drains.

In 2002, Rama Syam then a second year student at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) arrived as an intern through the Mohalla Committee Movement Trust. The Navjawan Ekta Committee decided to work more systematically and re-named itself SAHER. It identified the divide between police and youth and started police-public interactions. For Eid and Diwali it set up a community kitchen and invited the police to join the celebrations.

In 2004, SAHER formed the Jogeshwari Sports Association and brought together all the youth groups including social work groups, Navaratri committees, Waz committees and Ganapati mandals in Jogeshwari. A three-day sports meet was held for the 20-odd schools in Jogeshwari. There were both Muslim schools and Marathi medium schools. "Sports promote brotherhood," says Akhtar.

"Today there are at least 50 or 60 young people of both communities who are willing to put their own lives at stake to prevent communal riots at any cost

in Jogeshwari," says Akhtar.

After the Godhra incident in Gujarat, it was SAHER that stopped rumours from floating and worked with the police to prevent communal conflagration. This July, when serial bomb blasts devastated Mumbai, Akhtar got off the train at the Jogeshwari East station and immediately phoned his friends. They arrived at the station and helped with first aid till the police and ambulances turned up.

"We pacified people and asked them to go back," says Akhtar. Soon after, representatives of SAHER's youth groups met the police at the Meghwadi and Jogeshwari police stations. They informed them about their plans to reduce rumour mongering. They also left a list of names and phone numbers of all their youth members offering help for information gathering, investigations and first aid or blood donation.

Save Satpura: Tigers and tribals in Melghat

Vishal Bansod was in school when he went on a bird-watching trip into the Melghat forest in Maharashtra. That excursion converted him into a passionate wildlife conservationist. The National Conservation Society of Amravati (NCSA), an organisation started by Kishore Rithe, an Ashoka fellow, to save tigers in the Satpura Range, had organised that trip. Bansod now works for NCSA.

A year and a half ago he and Pratap Khare started a movement called Save Satpura. The movement is aligned with the NCSA and has 50 young volunteers.

The young conservationist ardently believes that saving tigers means saving the entire ecosystem. He devotes two-thirds of his time to projects for improving the lives of people in 39 villages bordering the Melghat Tiger Reserve. This is a difficult terrain where there is no infrastructure. Nineteen villages are asking to be settled elsewhere.

The Save Satpura movement has sought the resettling of these villages. In 1990, the villagers around Melghat, sick of the tension of living in a Project Tiger protected area where grazing land had vanished and very few owned land, started a dialogue with Praveen Pardeshi, an IAS officer who headed the Amravati Zilla Parishad. The villagers were willing to resettle if they were provided good facilities.

Bansod explains that a committee was formed to resettle 22 villages in 2000 on Pardeshi's request. But only three were resettled. On March 26, 2001, the villagers of Bori finally left their old homes to build a new life at Rajura Girwarpur. The Maharashtra State Electricity Board and the agriculture department started providing services to the village. Two more villages, Koha and Kund, were also resettled in 2003.

The resettlement package consisted of some cash for building a house, a school, a hospital, drainage,

a playground and a temple. The landless were also given land. The three villages that moved are now relatively prosperous. But after that resettlement, the collector and his team were disbanded.

The other 19 villages now saw what could be done for them. They also want resettlement.

Bansod believes that saving tigers means saving the entire ecosystem. He devotes his time to improving the lives of 39 Melghat villages.

Bansod has identified four needs of the villagers: employment, health, education and legal help. At first he got engineering companies and hotels from the nearest city to recruit youth. "But tribal youth are not happy living far from their roots," says Bansod.

He is now examining self-employment opportunities and government schemes.

According to Bansod, the Chikaldhara hill station has enough tourists for five photographers to earn a living. Some boys have been trained in screen-printing. Bansod is working with the tribal department and Project Tiger to see if any funds are available for other cottage industries. So far 40 boys have found employment.

The Born Free Foundation has funded a healthcare programme which is being managed by Bansod. The project has an ambulance and Ayurvedic doctors from a network of doctors called Nima (National Integrated Medical Association). "We maintain health files on every villager," says Bansod.

Bansod has roped in the mechanical engineering department in the Badnera Engineering College to generate electricity for Kandha village using biodiesel extracted from mahua seeds. "There are 45 families in the village. The college is designing the generator," he says.

Chamna Thuptep: Peace cells in Manipur

Rebecca Haokip has started a peace programme in Manipur called Chamna Thuptep, which in Thadou dialect means Promises of Peace.

She trained as a schoolteacher in Churachandpur district, but the Kuki - Paite conflict turned her family into refugees. The experience left her with a resolve to bring peace to her strife torn state.

"It is hard for an outsider to understand what is really happening," says Haokip.

"For us culture is very important. In Churachandpur, people speak eight dialects. There are 61 denominations, some with just five households. There are clashes. Each of these ethnic factions wants to dominate and have security forces of their own. As a result, drug dealing and addiction have become big issues."

In 2002, the NERYC (North Eastern Regional Youth Commission) identified peace building as an issue to be tackled by the youth. Rebecca was identified by the NERYC as a facilitator. She was sent for training in conflict management. That helped her understand how to work for peace.

She and other youth volunteers started bringing ethnic tribes together. They got some of them to talk. "I have gained the confidence of most of the tribes over the years," says Rebecca.

Rebecca has also succeeded in including the need for dialogue and understanding in the curriculum for young school children. The NERYC works with

"There are at least 50 or 60 youngsters of both communities who are willing to put their lives at stake to prevent communal riots," says Akhtar.



Nidhi Arora and Anirban Gupta of Dhriiti



Rebecca Haokip of Chamna Thuptep



Abhishek Bharadwaj of Alternative



Masood Akhtar and Rama Syam of SAHER

This year's Change Looms Award goes to five organisations of young people. They have worked for communal peace, helped save tigers and tribals, set up peace cells and sponsored entrepreneurship among children.



Vishal Bansod of Save Satpura

schools and churches of all denominations.

After a year's research, Hoakip is setting up peace cells at locations where there is a lot of conflict. Each peace cell has 10 to 30 members. "We want to empower the cells to raise their voices for peace," she says. So far there are eight peace cells – five of Kuki tribes and three others.

Dhriiti: Early entrepreneurship

"The right time to foster the spirit of entrepreneurship is in childhood itself," says Nidhi Arora.

She is one of the founders of Dhriiti, which means inner courage. Dhriiti was started by Anirban Gupta, Arindam Dasgupta and Arora in 2005.

"The only way to tackle underemployment, unemployment and frustration is to get the youth to dream. Provide a support system to help them start-up on their own," says Arora who graduated along with Gupta from the Xavier Institute of Management, Bhubaneswar in 2004.

Dhriiti has an entrepreneurship development cell where opportunities for start-ups are identified and young people are assisted in launching their own businesses.

Dhriiti holds workshops of different durations for private schools, street children and rural youth. Dream-building exercises are in the first part of

the workshop. Participants play an exercise called Five Whys. Each time a child says something others ask 'Why?'

The Ideaslab workshop gets children to think up new business ideas. "They come up with the whackiest ideas," says Gupta. "One boy wanted to make clothes that grow organically as you grow up. Another wanted to start a business in killing mosquitoes. One child wanted to eliminate corruption in India in a day. His solution was an injection that would remove the corruption gene. We list these ideas and try to build a story around how to make the idea possible and the alternatives available."

For city schools Dhriiti uses a simulation game called Bandhustan. The game was first tried out at Ramjas School. Bandhustan is an imaginary country between Pakistan and India. There is a need for friendship bands. Over four days, children were encouraged to design, patent and start a mock general store.

Children have misconceptions about running a business, says Gupta.

They believe they need lots of money. For instance, one boy said he wanted to start an automobile business but since it would require lots of money, he would settle for a business in auto spare parts.

"Now how much is lots? If he spends time at an automobile workshop he might just like to design," says Gupta. Another child said she wanted to start an Internet café with 30 computers but that needed lots of cash. Dhriiti advised her to begin with an old computer from a street corner and then expand.

Parents and teachers wrongly believe only children in Class 12 taking commerce or arts should attend Dhriiti's workshops. Science students, they think, don't need to be entrepreneurial.

"We want to start with children in Class 2," says Arora. "That is when a mindset begins to take shape. We have now convinced some schools to hold workshops in Class 9."

Dhriiti's members believe most vocational courses run by NGOs are not helpful. "They are not market driven," says Gupta.

Alternative Realities: Shelter for the homeless

Abhishek Bharadwaj did not look for a job after he graduated from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) in 2004. Instead, he spends time with homeless people who sleep on Mahim beach, in Crawford market or at Santa Cruz. According to him, Mumbai has at least 100,000 homeless people.

"I imagined that the money capital of India is like New York or Shanghai, but that is not so," says Bharadwaj. "There is not a single night shelter in all of Mumbai for the homeless."

He has started a society called Alternative Realities to fight for the rights of those without shelter. Bharadwaj works with the police, the administration and companies. His goal is to create night shelters

for 10,000 people in the next one year. These shelters would be carpeted and equipped with bedding, sanitation facilities, drinking water and first aid. He wants to make sure that state policies provide for low cost living places within working distances. The homeless should also get healthcare and ration cards.

Who are the homeless? Bharadwaj says 50 per cent are from rural Maharashtra.

They are political orphans because the Shiva Sena's "Amchi Mumbai" campaign does not allow NGOs to make them comfortable.

The homeless get treated badly because they are often filthy. "They look filthy because they don't have a place to wash their clothes except the sea and no place to hang washed clothes," says Bharadwaj. They spend all the money they earn for fearing of losing it to pickpockets. Some save with local shopkeepers who charge them an interest for safe keeping and sometimes cheat them.

Once seven of them decided to save with Bharadwaj. They would deposit between Rs 100 to Rs 500 a day. "So you see these people can pay," says Bharadwaj.

If night shelters charged Rs 8 or Rs10 a day, there would be takers. It is profitable for banks to extend services to the homeless. What needs to be worked

Can iTEAM deliver 50,000 jobs?

Civil Society News
Gurgaon

YOU have heard this before. As the economy grows companies are desperately searching for people with the skills they need. On the other hand, young people with degrees from colleges, some of them doctors and engineers, are unsuccessfully looking for companies that will hire them.

The mismatch has proved to be quite a devil. In part, it has its origins in a badly designed education system, which doesn't tailor itself to opportunities in the marketplace. But those with degrees and no jobs are actually among the better off. Lower down the social ladder, youngsters either don't manage to get to go to school or simply drop out. Skill-oriented training for them is nowhere on the horizon.

The solution obviously is in providing training through courses so practical that industry can readily absorb people and put them to work. It is precisely with this idea that the restless and public-spirited Jerry Almeida devised iTEAM or institutionalised training, employment and advancement of the marginalised.

Almeida is an innovator and seeker and all of six feet four inches tall. He used to be in the entertainment business, but hopped off it to follow his heart and spend some time at Actionaid India. He soon left to set up iCongo, which stands for Indian Confederation of NGOs.

iCongo works as a hub for credible, accountable



Jerry Almeida and Indira Vardarajan

NGOs and helps them raise money. Since all its members are impartially audited, and must spend no more than 20 per cent of what they get on themselves, iCONGO ensures that donors don't waste their money.

Bringing donors and NGOs together in an efficient arrangement was a great idea. It led to iTEAM, which works on the same principle of bridging a gap. Like there are donors who can't find credible recipients for their money, there are employers who can't get the right people to hire.

For iTEAM, Almeida has joined forces with the SNS Foundation set up by the Anand Group of companies. Here he and the unflappable Indira Vardarajan are working together. USAID has prom-

ised progressive support.

iTEAM, however, is designed to achieve self-sufficiency. This will be partly possible because of the contribution that industries will make and also from each trained person who gets a job supporting two others with Rs 8,000.

The goal is to by 2010 provide 50,000 young people from marginalised and overlooked sections with the opportunity to earn by empowering them with training. The training will be industry specific and for this iTEAM will bond with industry bodies like NASSCOM and the Retailers' Association of India.

Through these bodies it will also go directly to companies so that finally training is customised. This will ensure that, based on merit and certification, people who are trained are ensured employment.

The requirements of industry are pretty huge. The retail trade alone will require some 200,000 people in the near future to work in all those departmental stores and shopping malls that are coming up. Ditto for telecom and automobile ancillary units. The requirements of the BPOs are also massive.

To begin with, iTEAM will draw on Jharkhand, Maharashtra and the National Capital Region (NCR). Here there are some 120 million people who can be described as non-working or not known to have any formal employment.

Empowering just 0.4 per cent of them will touch the lives of 50,000 and also improve the lot of their families.

Ruth Manorama wins award

Civil Society News
Bangalore

THIS year's Right Livelihood award has been awarded to Dr Ruth Manorama, a Dalit and a Christian, for her persistent struggle to gain justice for Dalit women.

Manorama has been honoured for "her commitment over decades to achieving equality for Dalit women, building effective and committed women's organisations and fighting for their rights at national and international levels." The message of this year's award is, "courage and hope in desperate times," according to the award's citation.

Manorama says she feels humbled by the honour. "Our struggles for minimum wages, food security, education, health, shelter, dignity of labour for domestic workers, construction workers, sweepers and other toiling masses, most of whom are Dalit women, has gained international visibility," says the 54-year-old activist.

Born into a large Dalit Christian family in Chennai, Manorama experienced the pain of being a Dalit. She could circumvent some problems as her parents had converted to Christianity. Her mother Dorothy Dhanraj was a schoolteacher and her father worked for the government. Manorama did a Masters in social work.

"The greatness of Ruth," says compatriot Jyoti, "has been to change the pain of Dalits to power."

Manorama's sojourn with Dalit struggles and the

women's movement dates back to the 1970's. "As students we fearlessly took up the concerns of slum-dwellers and other Dalit issues with great passion," she says. She also fought for the rights of agricultural workers to minimum wages.

The first court of the Asian Women's Human Rights Council in 1985 was held on Dalit women's issues in Bangalore on her insistence. Justice Mallimath then named her "Ruthless Ruth", recalls Donna Fervidness, an activist.

The rights of Dalit women were a marginal issue in the women's movement when Manorama started her struggle. Today those rights and concerns are central to the autonomous women's movement. Its seventh conference held in Kolkata last month dwelt at length on the rights and concerns of sex workers, devdasis, sweepers and other groups.

Manorama herself heads the National Alliance of Women that monitors the government's performance in protecting the rights of women. She also works with many other organisations like the National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights, the Karnataka Slum Dwellers Federation, the National Labour Centre and the National Federation of Dalit Women, which she helped found in 1995, among others.

"The state's abdication of its responsibilities has

worsened our economic status," she says. "We have to intensify our struggle for protectionism and implementation of reservation in politics, education and employment. Dalits are losing employment with increased privatisation. So far, the public sector was the largest employers of Dalits."

A second issue worrying her is the transfer of land from the poor to the rich. "We plan to intensify our struggle for land. MNCs and the corporate sector have become the biggest land grabbers in the country today. They are ruining the environment and depriving us of water and forest cover," says Manorama.

As a member of the task force on gender in the Eleventh

Five Year Plan she plans to propose that the government give two acres of wetland or five acres of dryland to poor families throughout the country.

"That would not only provide security to the poor but also protect our national wealth from the forces of globalisation," she says.

Manorama also plans to concentrate on ending the evils of manual scavenging and the devdasi system.

The prize money of \$ 275,000 (Rs 45 lakhs) will be donated to empower Dalit women. A stay home for women in distress is one priority.



Dr Ruth Manorama

NEW MADARSAS OF KUTCH

Maulanas teach Quran plus language, maths and science to girls and boys

Civil Society News
Khavda (Gujarat)

MAMAD Rahim Sama looks every inch a maulana. He has a flowing beard and teaches the Quran every morning to children who scamper into his madarsa at Nana Bandha village in Kutch, the dust bowl of Gujarat. But once the Quran is put away, Mamad Rahim turns to a different curriculum. He teaches his students Gujarati, mathematics and science. Then at 11 am, he escorts his class to a nearby government primary school. He even scolds the apathetic teachers who are mostly absent. "Don't ruin the lives of little children is what I tell them," he says.

That's not all. When people come together for namaaz on Fridays, Mamad Rahim has one steady message for them: send your children, especially girls, to school. The Quran does not differentiate between boys and girls, he tells them, quoting from the holy book. His class of 40 has more girls than boys.

The madarsa is primarily meant to impart religious teaching. That is its point of origin. But in poverty stricken Kutch, close to the border with Pakistan, the madarsa is becoming an instrument for opening windows on the big wide world. Young people now feel the need for a useful education, computers, phones and the Internet. There is a growing demand for learning English.

How has this happened? Pratham, an NGO that focuses on improving education, has used the madarsa to create a new awareness among the local community.

Pratham was working in Kutch and teamed up with Solaris Chemtech, which has a factory there producing bromine.

Pratham's approach has been two-pronged. First it created a band of barefoot teachers – all young men in their twenties – to provide basic and remedial education. Many of these young men are themselves dropouts from the formal school system. They teach from anywhere: under trees, in balwadis, community halls, empty classrooms and their own homes.

The second part of the Pratham strategy has been to win over maulanas and other religious teachers and thereby make the madarsa a centre for learning subjects also taught in school. As with the young barefoot teachers, the religious instructors have found a new relevance and even status in their expanded role.

The barefoot teachers and the religious teachers together make a potent force. They don't all have degrees, but they are better educated than others in the 52 villages of Kutch. They speak Kutchi and are driven by high levels of motivation. They are devout, but simultaneously secular and progressive and eager to find routes out of poverty that they and others in the community can take.

In the Pratham programme, there are five maulanas and eight mianjis. They are paid by the community to run the madarsa. A month's salary could be anywhere between Rs 1,200 and Rs 3,000.





A maulana is a fully qualified religious teacher who does a five to eight year course in Arabic from a big madarsa in Lucknow, Benares, Mumbai and Hyderabad. Bilal Umar, for instance, has gone to Mumbai and Hyderabad. He is the equivalent of a graduate.

A mianji on the other hand completes his education in Arabic in a local madarsa. He can read and write Urdu and the local language and is usually educated up to Class 8 in the formal school.

The barefoot teachers and the religious teachers are part of a network set up by the Pachham Rural Development Trust (PRDT). The trust was started by local young men after they saw the success of the Solaris-Pratham education initiative.

The core group of PRDT comprises 11 people, all local young men.

Vijay Wavare is the facilitator. He has a Masters degree from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences and works on corporate social responsibility for the Thapar Group, of which Solaris Chemtech is a part.

Some madarsas have been additionally designated Democratic Learning Centres (DLC), where children learn maths and science. Those who drop out of formal school are helped to catch up. There are coaching classes to pass Class 10. A Basti Information Management System has been put in place to track the educational performance of 3,500 children.

The programme covers 52 villages in the Pachham region of Kutch district. It has 25 teachers and five supervisors.

Status in taking the village forward and the salary seem to motivate the religious teachers to seek further improvement of their lot. It's the same for the Pratham force of teachers and supervisors.

Mir Mamad Sama, a supervisor from the village of Bara Dinara, for instance, has been eager to learn English. He has been reading newspapers and noting down words. "I want to be editor of your magazine," he tells the Civil Society team. What he means is that he wants to report for us. We appoint him instantly as our correspondent in Kutch.

Ninety per cent of the people who live in Khavda and the district of Kutch as a whole are poor Muslims who eke out a living as daily wage labourers, pastoralists and small farmers. Literacy figures are just 26 per cent for men and 10 per cent for women. The vast flatlands of Kutch offer little opportunity for anything else. The soil is suffused with salt. Farming of dry land crops like

jowar or bajra is only possible if it rains.

Solaris Chemtech manufactures bromine from seawater that enters the Rann of Kutch. "We are always on the right side of the law," says DV Kamath, Chief General Manager. "We produce no waste and pollution is limited to stack emissions which are within norms." The plant has ISO 9000 and 4000 certification.

Till 1998, the company's corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives were limited to charity. "Local people would ask us for drinking water or perhaps green fodder," says Kamath. Tankers would go to 14 villages.

Over time came the realisation that charity isn't the answer. A factory can't expect to exist like an island in the midst of a sea of poverty and backwardness. The important thing is to show people how to help themselves. So, the company began building check dams with the community contributing 15 per cent of the cost by volunteering their labour. Seven check dams have been made.

In 2000, a survey was done to find out what the nearby villages really needed. Kamath says it revealed that the villages had no medical facilities and education levels were very poor. So, mobile medical vans were introduced. These continue to provide medical services. Since there is no transport, the mobile clinics double up as ambulances taking pregnant women to hospitals or shifting patients from villages to hospitals.

The company was interested in hiring local people but it could not find skilled manpower. Solaris had a programme to sponsor students for technology institutes and diploma courses, but there were no takers because local students were weak in their studies and rarely

if ever made it through the Class 10 examination. Just three could enter a technology institute.

It was clear that the really important challenge lay in improving education and through it employment and entrepreneurial opportunities. In the villages around the factory it meant getting families to send their children to school and giving them the hope that from the ability to read and write would emerge a better future. In Kutch, long accustomed to being barren and hopeless, the point to begin from was this basic.

Solaris invited Pratham to work in the villages. The NGO's survey revealed



The Pratham strategy has been to rope in the maulanas. As with the young barefoot teachers, the maulanas have found a new relevance and even status in their expanded role.

that 80 per cent of children could not read. Pratham started looking for teachers for balwadis (nurseries). They trained unemployed young people who had passed Class 8 or Class 9 and were keen to be teachers to run balwadi classes for three to five-year-old children.

Ismail Sama, president and coordinator of PRDT, was one of those who joined Pratham as a teacher. He says the process of change has been slow, but steady. The Bhuj earthquake of 2002 speeded things up somewhat.

"Till the earthquake happened we did not know what an NGO was," says Ismail. "After the quake many of them came to Bhuj to provide relief. Some of us took part in their relief operations. The NGOs created awareness among us and we began to think how we could take our community forward."

Some of these youngsters offered their services to Pratham as teachers. The realisation began to dawn that at Solaris there would only be jobs for the skilled and educated. Pratham's teachers created awareness on the importance of education through cultural programmes and then homed in on the madarsa.

They knew that though parents did not send their children to the government-run schools, they made it a point to send them to the madarsa. As for girls, they were not sent to any school. It's easy to see why the madarsa is central to the lives of villages.



Abu Bakr with his students outside his madarsa



Vijay Wavare

The barefoot teachers too have uncommon commitment. So it is that 19-year-old Abdul Karim walks three km every day to take classes.

"According to me the madarsa is like a playschool," says Vijay Wavare. "If parents take the cattle for grazing they leave the child in the madarsa. The maulana or mianji takes care of them. There is an emotional attachment with the madarsa."

Children float in and out of the religious teacher's shack. They are always welcome.

The teacher lives in the village. For the children, he is a familiar figure, a member of the extended village family, who speaks their language, the Kutchi dialect and dresses as one of them. He interprets the Quran and sorts out local disputes. He knows each child's family.

In contrast, teachers in government primary schools speak Gujarati – a language not understood by the children. They dress in a style unfamiliar to the children. Their manner is distant, even daunting and the cause of fear.

The madarsa is an informal classroom. There are no strict rules. Since children of different age groups come to learn, the maulana has to give individual attention to each child.

"The maulanas and mianjis are more educated than the rest of the villagers," says Wavare. "We simply told them if you are providing religious education for two hours just extend your madarsa by another hour and teach a few more subjects."

The religious teachers were very receptive to the idea. "They are close to the

community," says Wavare. "They sensed that there was an incipient demand for more education. The religious teachers would not oppose a request from local young people and the community at large."

Pratham's barefoot teachers and the maulanas and mianjis did their best and got children including girls into madarsas and schools. "We went from house to house and talked to each family," says Maulana Abdul Aziz of Khavada Navawas village.

The barefoot teachers too have uncommon commitment. So it is that 19-year-old Abdul Karim walks three km every day from his village Tugga to Jam Kunaria to hold classes. He teaches from 7 am till 5 pm and even takes the children on picnics, plays cricket with them and helps them learn painting. When he gets up to explain something you realise that he is a born teacher. He may not have any degrees, but he is a gifted communicator.

If Mamad Rashid's madarsa has more girls than boys, at Abu Bakr's madarsa at least half the children are girls.

Pratham put the religious teachers through a three-month training course. The NGO's educational programmes teach children to read and write Gujarati quickly. A three-month Learn to Read course teaches children to recognise words and then the alphabet. A seven-month Read to Learn course teaches

grammar, sentence construction, paragraph writing etc.

Children learn maths and science at the Democratic Learning Centres through experiments and real life examples. Nearly 1,400 children have access to well-stocked libraries. They can take the books home. Remedial classes help children get through government schools. Pratham has introduced coaching classes at the high school in Khavda for students to pass Class 10.

The Basti Management Information System has been effective in tracking the children on an individual basis.

Children of small farmers, daily labourers, pastoralists are finally going to school accompanied by a teacher from their community.

"We encourage the children to read," says Abul Aziz, whose madarsa is located cheek by jowl with the mosque at Navawas Khavda. "One child took a story on Mullah Nasruddin home and read it to her happy parents. They told me you are just like Nasruddin," he says smiling.

His madarsa is also a Democratic Learning Centre. Twenty-four-year-old Harun Sumra, a trained teacher from Pratham, conducts the DLC course. Harun studied at the Maulana Azad Uttar Buniyadi High School at Korewal. He volunteered with the International Red Cross for a year after the Bhuj earthquake and then joined Pratham through Ismail.

He teaches children in two batches of 22. Most are in Class 3 and Class 4. He points to a small boy, Abdul Karim. "He used to graze cows. Then he told his father I want to study," says Harun. Abdul vigorously nods his head.

Aziz escorts the children to the government school at 11 am. He lives in the madarsa and since it is the holy month of Ramzan children start trooping in as early as 7 am.

At 20-year-old Abu Bakr's madarsa at Drobana village half the children in his class of 20 are girls. "The community tells us to teach them well," he says.

What is the impact of this coaching on government schools? Dayaram Thakkar, a primary schoolteacher at the Nana Dinara government school, says it is easier to teach the children because they now understand Gujarati. Earlier they would drop out of school since they knew only Kutchi and found it hard to understand what was being taught.

He says enrolment of girls has gone up. His primary school of 147 children has 67 girls. On average, 50 per cent of them clear their exams.

The problem, he says, is the government appoints teachers who are unfamiliar with local language and culture. The sole exception is Issa Sama, the first graduate in history from the Sama community who now teaches children in primary school.

Secondly, his school has only two teachers for 147 students. There should be a third teacher but the government has not appointed any.

Thirdly, after the children pass Class 5 they have to go to another government school for Class 7, which is located at a distance. But there is no transport. If children want to complete Class 10 they have to travel all the way to the Khavda High School, which is seven km away. And if they want to pass Class 12 they have to join a third school in Bhuj. Parents will have to take the children to Bhuj and get them admitted in a hostel. It is costly, he says, and girls will never be sent.



Maulanas and teachers at a PRDT meeting



Mir Mamad Sama



Abdul Aziz outside his madarsa

Dayaram Thakkar, a primary schoolteacher at the govt school, says it is easier to teach the children because they now understand Gujarati.

Solaris is stepping in. Wavare says the company will be organising transport so that children, especially the girls, can safely travel to Khavda to study for Class 10.

"If the percentage of children appearing for the Class 10 exam goes up, we can ask for a Class 12 school here so children won't need to travel to Bhuj," says Ismail. Right now the numbers are not so high.

Recently Solaris helped Ilyas, son of Sadiq, a daily wage earner, to do a technical course at Bhuj. He now works at the Welspun factory as a fitter earning Rs 3,000 a day. "If it wasn't for the company where would a daily labourer like me get his son educated and a job?" says his father.

Solaris eventually wants to hand over development programmes to the Paccham Rural Development Trust. The group has matured. Every month they have a meeting at Pratham's office to take stock of the activities of the month.

"We work for our community," says Ismail. "Some of us could earn Rs 7,000 per month. Yet we settle for Rs 2,000 or Rs 3,000 because it is for the community. Health and sanitation are also on our agenda."

Although the teachers have succeeded in reducing the dropout rate and getting children to school, the government schools don't always work. The PRDT is taking this up. For instance, at a function to celebrate August 15 many schoolteachers did not come. The barefoot teachers complained to the Zilla Shiksha Adhikari and the government teachers were reprimanded. The maulanas and mianjis also scold government teachers. If parents begin to object, teachers will be forced to perform, says Ismail.

Khavda has begun to live in the hope of a new future for its children. Parents, who hadn't believed that anything could come out of an education, now want their children to learn and look for a life outside the poverty of this backward area. "We have seen tears in the eyes of parents when their child writes their names or reads out a story from a book to them," says Mir Mamad Sama.

Madarsas, however, remain primarily religious entities. When Solaris wanted to begin working with the local community around its factory, it had to go through the religious leaders of the areas, recalls Yashashree Gurjar, General Manager in charge of the Thapar Group's social initiatives.

The points of entry were narrow and embedded with parochial subtleties. But the world of the madarsa in a village is simultaneously several times removed from institutionalised religious authority. It relates to everyday concerns of bringing up children, keeping them safe for some hours of the day outside the home, giving them an education and making them productive.

Till Pratham and Solaris stepped in there was a sense of helplessness. Children went to school and dropped out. Parents accepted such a situation because from the perspective of Kutch's poverty a school degree did not mean anything.

There continues to be helplessness. But there is also some awareness of the world at large, the need for computers and Internet, the joy of being counted



Isha Sama, Pratham supervisor of Dinara Block, teaching a student

for something other than a living earned by scratching around as a farmer in an arid zone.

This year in Kutch, the rains have been heavy and water bodies of all kinds have sprung to life. It has been a good year. For Ismail and the enthusiastic young men of the PRDT, there is much to be happy about as their efforts have begun to give results that can be seen in the schools of the villages.

But the future requires consolidation. Like those water bodies that need to be preserved, Ismail's bunch have to build on what they have done so that there can be continuity. It is important for them to become self-sustaining.

The PRDT mandate extends beyond education. "We want to begin watershed, livelihood and livestock management programmes for the people here with help from the NGOs, VIKSAT and BAIF," says Ismail.

It worries them that Solaris and Pratham will not be around for all time to come to hold their hand and provide money. They need to learn to manage their own systems and ensure accountability among themselves. Above all they must get their due out of the government, which needs to improve schools, make them more accessible and so on.

The PRDT office is located like it should be in the core one of the congested villages. It consists of two rooms with a tiled roof. We are invited to a review meeting at which the young men who serve the trust sit in a circle and take stock of the week. Before the meeting begins we shake hands all round.

Wavare tells them about a Solaris scheme for transporting children from one village to another to attend school. The emphasis is on it being sustainable in terms of the cost and supervision. The company won't be able to help beyond a point, he reminds them.

Accountancy is another area where they will have to build their competence. Currently, an accountant journeys down to Khavda from Bhuj each week. But the young men will have to learn how to keep the books.

Will they be able to measure up? It seems likely. A strong streak of pragmatism runs through the group and the village families. They want to get on with things and embrace a life beyond the salt-suffused soil on which they have grown up. Education is one route out of the mess.

‘People are more aware so teachers are teaching’

Civil Society News
Khavda (Gujarat)

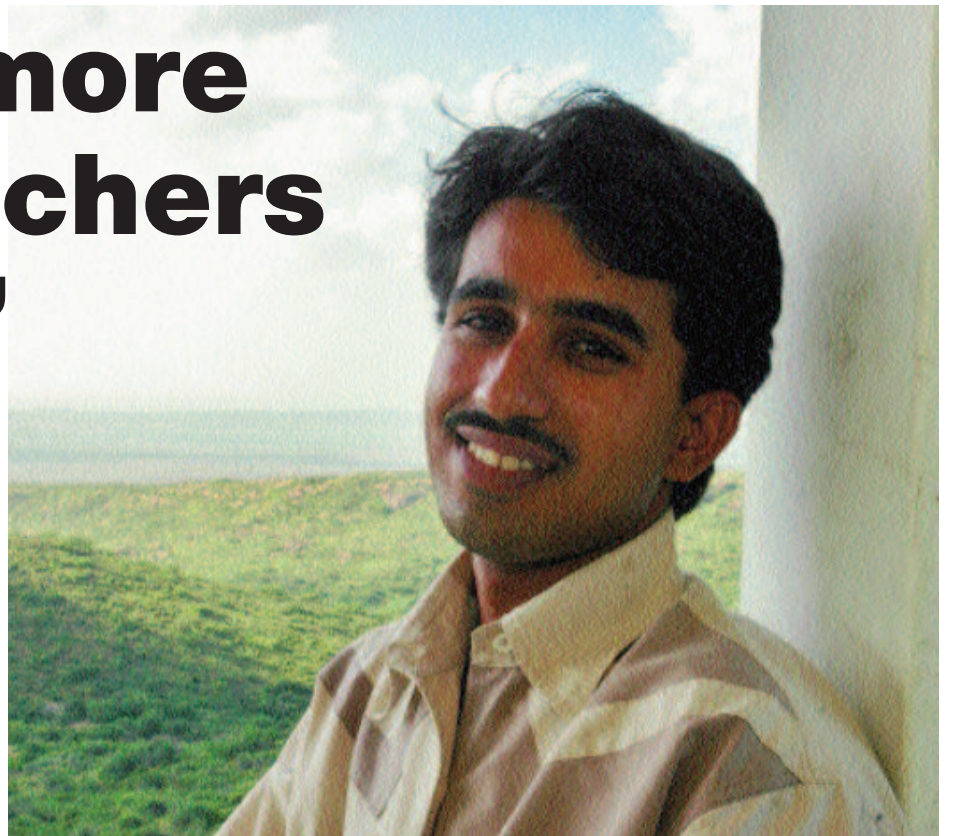
Twenty-two-year old **Ismail Sama** is president and coordinator of the Paccham Rural Development Trust (PRDT), a group of seven local Muslim young men.

PRDT has come to represent people in 52 villages in Kutch. It owes its origins to Pratham's education programme in partnership with Solaris Chemtech's CSR team. PRDT has plans that go beyond education for the region. Ismail Sama spoke to Civil Society about his group and its vision.

How did you get involved with Pratham and Solaris Chemtech?

During the Bhuj earthquake some of us took part in relief operations for NGOs. That experience made us aware of the lack of development in Kutch. We were already thinking and discussing what we should do. Then Pratham came along. They needed teachers for balwadis. I immediately offered my services. The others joined too as the programme kept expanding and they needed more teachers. I became a supervisor and was given group responsibility.

I travelled to Ahmedabad for training, too, and learnt how to work. I think the Pratham method of teaching, for instance, their Read to Learn and Learn to Read programmes, the libraries, the Democratic Learning Centres etc are very



Ismail Sama, president and coordinator of the PRDT

effective teaching tools. Children learn fast. All our Bharuch schools are using techniques which have been invented originally by Dr Jalaluddin of Bangladesh.

Was it very difficult to get the community to send their children, especially the girls, to school?

We created awareness by doing cultural programmes. We called people to masjids and told them to send children to school. We said at least their children would be able to read letters and fill out application forms if nothing else.

About 14 girls were studying with Pratham. They came out. We also held a function on Republic Day last year where we gave prizes to some of the girls and honoured Issa Sama the only graduate from the Sama community.

How did the madarsas get involved?

We knew, as locals, that the madarsas were critical. Parents approve of religious learning and always send their children to the maulana. The maulanas too realised that a demand for education was being built up within the community. So when we approached them they were very receptive. We now supervise teaching techniques at 15 madarsas and several small schools run by local youth in their homes, community centres, government schools etc. It's very important to expand and strengthen basic education. We closely monitor the progress of children through our Basti Management Information System through meetings and networking.

The government schools don't really teach with sincerity.

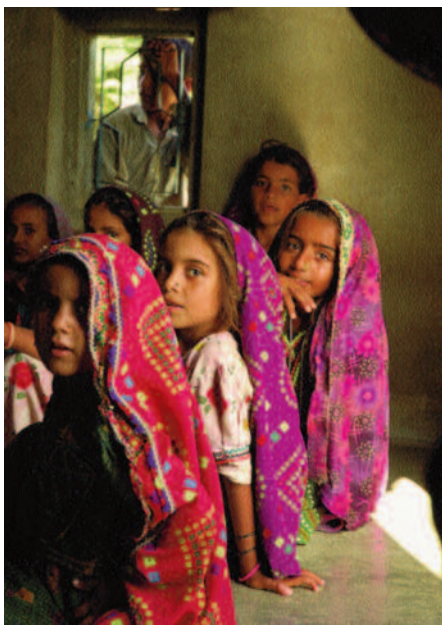
We are working on it. Last year when we complained to the Zilla Shiksha Adhikari when teachers did not turn up for 15 August celebrations, those teachers were reprimanded. If parents get together and protest it can be an effective remedy. See, people are getting more aware. So teachers are getting more regular. Parents are beginning to see the impact of education. When a child comes home from school and reads them a story, or writes their names or fills up a form, it really moves them. The Pratham programme has affected me too. I am studying for my BA degree in history.

Your group has many more plans for this region.

Yes. We want to begin watershed and livelihood programmes for the people here with help from the NGOs VIKSAT and BAIF. Health and sanitation are very much on our agenda.

Solaris Chemtech and Pratham may not always be around to support your group.

In fact we are now confident we can carry on. Everywhere in the programme locals are working. Our group meets every month to plan activities. We have talented people who could earn Rs 7,000 per month. Yet we work for less because this work is for our community. Finally, Solaris Chemtech wants to hand over development programmes to us.



We created awareness by doing cultural programmes. We called people to masjids and told them to send children to school. We said at least their children would be able to read letters and fill out application forms.



'We believe in handing over'

Few groups in Indian industry give as much serious attention to corporate social responsibility (CSR) as the Thapars. The group's flagship BILT is the country's largest manufacturer of paper. Solaris Chemtech was formerly a BILT division, but is now a group company. **Yashashree Gurjar**, who comes from the social sector, is general manager in charge of CSR initiatives. She reports directly to Chairman Gautam Thapar. Extracts from an interview with Civil Society:

What is the Thapar Group's approach to communities around its factories?

Communities around our factories are typically the most marginalised of our stakeholders. We believe that the communities need to grow along with us. They need to see the advantage of having us in their area. Over the last five years we have partnered with communities on development issues that were prioritised by them. The impact of the projects has to be felt by the community. Continuous dialogue is held with the community to understand these impacts and modify or add projects accordingly.

How was the strategy for Khavda devised?

Khavda was different from our other sites, in the sense that there are strong religious beliefs prevalent there. Combined with that there are a multitude of development issues that had never been addressed. Locationally too it is remote and on the border with Pakistan.

It was a challenge since initially people did not trust us at all. They did not want us there. Establishing trust and making them understand that we would like to partner them in the development process was our biggest challenge.

The advantage was that the majority of people in the area who are Muslims held their religious leaders in great respect. We initiated dialogue with the religious leaders and established a rapport with them. We got into the community with their blessings. We involved them in our programmes.

The local political leaders like the sarpanch and the panchayat were also approached. In most cases the panchayat and the religious leaders were close. The next important step was to move the community out of the predominantly charity mindset. Even though the community showed its displeasure initially, we insisted they contribute to the projects. I believe they have slowly begun to realise that we want to create empowered people, and not just beneficiaries who are dependant on the next dole.

How important has been the NGO interface?

We partner with 12 NGO's around the county. All our projects with communities around our factories are implemented by NGOs. For us NGOs form an integral part of our relationship with the community. We believe in working with local NGOs since they can understand the issues of the area better. We have been working with Pratham in other areas too and believe in the model they have developed. We knew that they would be the right people to take on the project in this area too.

Initially when we invited them they too were sceptical about the success in this area given its challenges and the overall low importance for formal education.

We are now in the process of setting up similar partnerships with VIKSAT and BAIF for working on issues like health, natural resource



The President of India giving the TERI-CSR award for the Khavda project to Yashashree Gurjar

management and livestock in the Khavda area.

How do you identify local leadership?

We start our projects in the community by developing community-based organisations (CBOs). Through these organisations, local leadership starts to emerge. We encourage the youth to take on leadership roles. We sensitise them to the development issues of their area and help them understand how important multi-stakeholder partnerships are to the development of their area.

In some of our projects, women have emerged as natural frontrunners. Some have stood for and won local panchayat elections.

In Khavda too the process has been slow, but today we have a youth group that has come forward to take the initiative. They are asking the right questions and seeking answers. We want to empower them to take on a larger role in the years to come in the development of Paccham. We have given them a taste of independence this year by supporting a small project with them in the area. They have begun to realise the immense responsibility that comes with a leadership role.

At which point do you see yourself handing over development work to the community?

All our projects are built on the understanding of handing over. We believe that we cannot continue to work on an issue endlessly. This has two advantages. If we plan to hand over from the inception stage itself then we ensure that the community not only participates but takes on added responsibility every year, till it does not need us anymore.

The other advantage is that within the same resources we can then reach out to

either more people or take on another pressing issue once we have weaned off one. By resources I don't mean only money. I also mean the people needed to work on it.

We have seen some success where we are no more involved in hand holding the community on certain issues. For example, the service and credit cooperatives that have been formed in the remote district of Gadchiroli in Maharashtra are running independently. In our Pratham projects around other factory sites the libraries are funded and run by the community.

In Khavda I think its still early days, but our success has been in creating the need for development in the minds of people. I believe that once people want development they will want to drive it too. I am positive we will be able to hand over the projects in the area to the people one day.



Today we have a youth group that has come forward. They are asking the right questions and seeking answers. We want to empower them.

Business

BEYOND PROFIT

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

Urakawa will read for everyone

Vidya Viswanathan
New Delhi

THIRTY-nine-year-old Dipendra Minocha is project manager for an international virtual software team in cyberspace that is working on an open source project codenamed Urakawa. Everything about the project, including programme code, project plan and meeting minutes, can be seen on www.sourceforge.net, a website where thousands of open source projects are published. Conference calls are made by the team on Skype, the free telephone software.

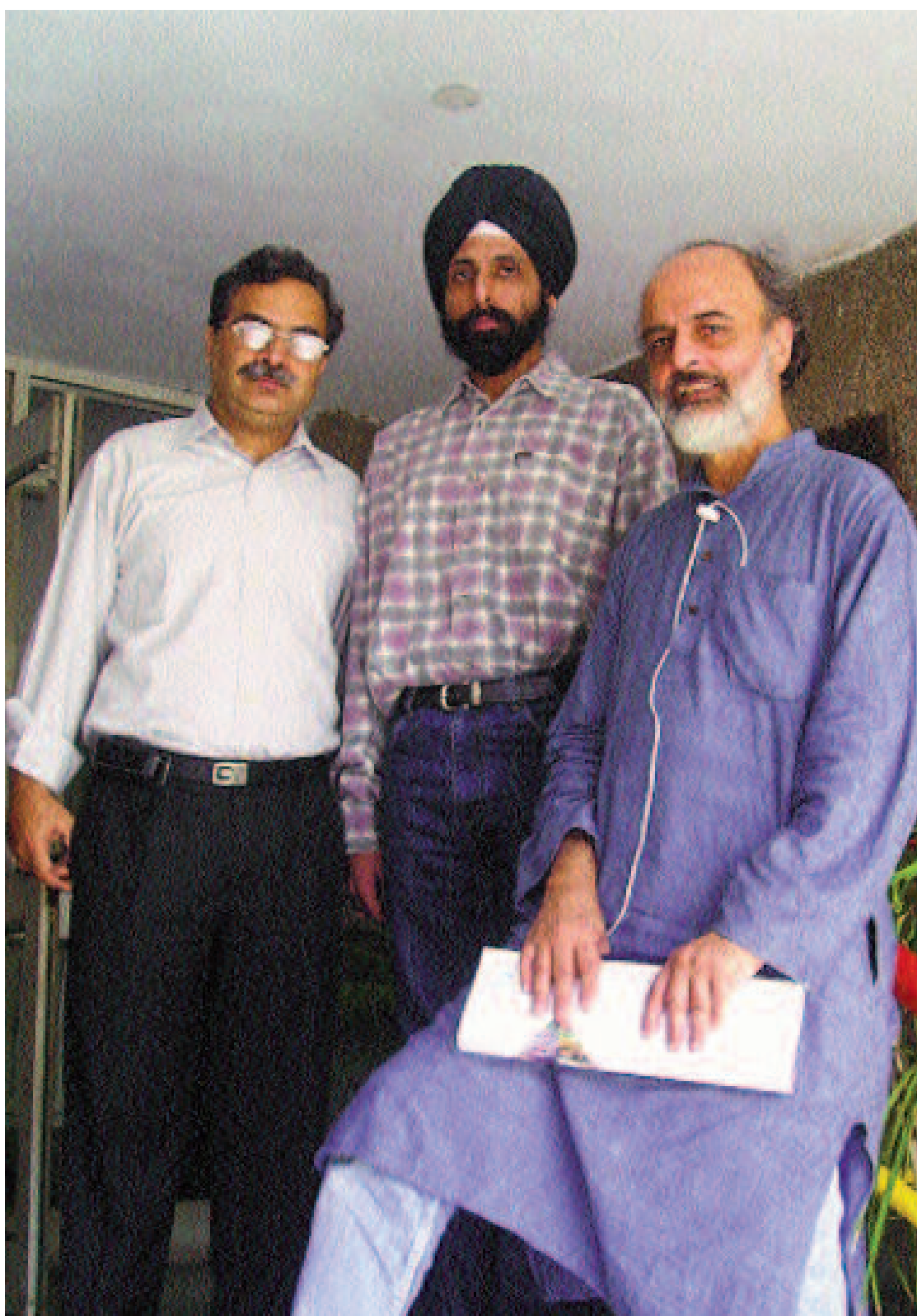
What is so new about this you might ask? Many international teams work just like this. Well, for one, Minocha has special abilities. He is blind and working on a project to make the computer and the Internet accessible to visually impaired people who navigate using audio.

The Urakawa project was started to develop software tool kits according to DAISY standards so that anybody can make multimedia presentations accessible to people with different abilities. DAISY (Digital Audio Information Systems) is a set of open source standards being developed by the DAISY consortium. You can search and jump to a certain page after looking up an index in a digital talking book.

Technology has changed Minocha's life. He began losing vision at the age of one because of Retinitis Pigmentosa and by the time he was 12, he could not read. That did not stop him from studying. He did an M.Phil in Indian classical music from Delhi University. He was studying for a PhD when he chanced upon a computer.

"It was very frustrating. The system is geared to reading. It was very limiting. Even in music, 50 per cent was theoretical. We always had to wait for a reader. Sometimes I went to camps organised by colleges where volunteers offered to read. We just did not have the time flexibilities that normal students had," recalls Minocha.

Minocha was the first student at the technology centre started at National Association for the Blind (NAB) in 1993. He initially learnt the usual office productivity tools like Wordstar. "We did not even know the potential of the computer then," laughs Minocha. He then set up the Braille printer consulting a manual in Braille. He realised the power of technology while testing out a screen reading hardware developed by the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore. As processors have become more pow-



Dipendra Minocha, Avnish Singh and Arun Mehta

erful, the hardware pieces have been phased out and there are now several readers which convert both command and content into speech.

Minocha, who works on his laptop as deftly as people who read off screen, demonstrates his screen reader. All *The Hindu's* editorial page articles have arrived in his inbox and his laptop reads them out.

"The best screen readers in the world have been written by blind people," says Arun Mehta, a computer science professor and a consultant who has been helping NAB with software project management and training. "The Jaws screen reader that works on Windows was written by Ted Hunter. Emacspeak, an extension of the free software Emacs, was written by Dr TV Raman who went to the US after completing his Masters from IIT, Mumbai. Raman is now working for Google research to make it an audio desktop," he says.

Mehta realised how much technology could help the disabled when he was writing a new version of the single button activated speech software for Stephen Hawking. The older version is in Dos. That hardware could pack up anytime and the source code has been lost.

Till recently NAB's technology centre was running programmes to teach people personal tools. It was also creating a digital talking library. Two years ago NAB decided to launch a programming course. "We taught Visual Basic 6. That is the most accessible development environment. Unfortunately, Microsoft development tools are getting increasingly inaccessible," says Mehta. "Mr Gates should donate some money to Microsoft to research accessibility," he quips.

Mehta helps Avnish Singh and Suman Sharma, the two Indian team members in Minocha's Urakawa project. "Even though the best screen readers are written by the blind, there is no one who is systematically training them. They have all got there by overcoming all odds," explains Mehta.

Avnish who had been dreaming about planes and cars all his life began to lose his vision during his B.Tech course in mechanical engineering. He started to trip and fall at his father's factory. His professor advised him not to work with machines any more. So he completed his B.Tech in computer science. Suman began losing her vision after a B.Tech in telecommunications engineering.

"These two are among the best students that I have taught," says Mehta.

Avnish and Suman are the only blind members of the team. They also serve

Dipendra Minocha is working on a project to make the computer and the Internet accessible to visually impaired people who navigate using audio.

as subject matter experts for the user interface. Other team members come from three organisations participating in the Urakawa project. These are INRIA, the French national institute for research in computer science and control, CWI, a centre for research in mathematics and computer science in the Netherlands and NRCND (National Research Centre for Persons with Disabilities) in Japan.

The NAB centre in Delhi is the only place where there is serious software development for the visually impaired. Minocha credits Mehta's ability to teach innovatively for that. "He first recognises the problem and then figures out what and how to teach," says Minocha. He explains that the strategy in the US and the UK is to mainstream blind students.

Minocha is also an activist for the blind. "Recently NIIT offered scholarships for their GNIIT courses. But when they realised that one of the students who had won was blind they did not know how to react," he says. None of the engineering colleges, including the IITs, offer admission to the visually impaired.

Minocha cites a case as an example. One of their colleagues was studying at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS). He lost his vision two months before his final exams. He was not allowed to complete the course. He fought a case for nine years before he was given permission to finish the course. "There are so many avenues for a blind person," says Minocha. "He could interpret lab reports. Anything done on a computer can be done by a blind person. We have to get this country to recognise this. There are anywhere between 2.8 million to 10 million blind people in this country based on different surveys."

The NAB centre wants all software to be accessible. They have been asking Microsoft to provide soft copies of all manuals. Pranay Gadoria, is a qualified chartered accountant. He is an office manager and wants to read accounts that are in Tally. The centre has been asking Reliance to make that software more accessible or give them the source code.

Minocha and Mehta are also working on an Indo-Pak programme under the Urakawa project. They are collaborating with Shazia Hassan, a girl who lost her sight when she was eight and now teaches computing. The three have put together a programme under the aegis of PASHA (Pakistan Software Houses Association).

Bhatt joins child labour campaign

Jauymini Barkatky
New Delhi

EVERYBODY knows Mahesh Bhatt. He has many avatars: as a maverick filmmaker, a spokesman for Bollywood and a writer who always has an honest opinion about the great Indian middle-class.

Bhatt is also an activist. He has been associated with the Bachpan Bachao Andolan (BBA) for many years. The government's ban on child labour came into effect this month and there is an urgent need to sensitise the middle-class. Bhatt has plunged in.

He is backing BBA and PVR Cinemas in their 'From Work to School' campaign, which was formally launched on October 6 at the PVR Priya in Vasant Vihar, New Delhi. Apart from Bhatt, the lovely Gul Penag, former Miss India, has joined the campaign.

PVR Cinemas has a programme for providing education and other facilities to street children around their cinema halls and multiplexes. It is part of PVR's corporate social responsibility.

The new campaign, "From Work to School" will create awareness among the middle-class on the evils of child labour for a month. PVR Cinemas will screen a film on child labour in nine cities in each of their 76 screens.

BBA is leading a Mukti (Liberation) Caravan from Delhi to Mumbai to tell people about child labour. There will be a door-to-door survey too and middle-class families who don't employ children will be given a sticker to put up outside their homes saying, 'My home is child labour free'. Roadside eateries (*dhabas*) will also be educated on the ban.

"I sincerely hope that through these we will be able to reach out to a more child supportive Delhi," said executive director of PVR Cinemas, Sanjeev Kumar Bijli.

Bhatt recalled his march with BBA some years ago. "Being a democracy and being free are two totally different concepts. It is imperative that we know how to differentiate and value them. A society which cannot protect its women and



Mahesh Bhatt, film maker, at the launch of the PVR-BBA campaign against child labour

children should not boast about being ancient and wise," he said.

While banning child labour is a noteworthy cause, rehabilitation of working children has been worrying activists.

"We have programmes in Bihar, Jharkhand and Bhopal where children freed from labour can go back to their respective homes for rehabilitation," said Kailash Satyarthi of BBA.

During the campaign Satyarthi said they would collect complaints about child labour rules being violated and also check on enforcing agencies. "If any agent is found falsifying his/her report we will ensure that strict action is against that person. If enforcing the law doesn't work efficiently we intend to go to Parliament or file a Public Interest Litigation."

Ramsay's Ramble through Binsar Sanctuary

Rakesh Agrawal
Almora

STAY in a cosy village hut, enjoy rural company, experience local culture and don't forget to walk. The more you walk the more you will see as you go across five remote villages through a dense forest with snow capped peaks. You have a choice of four paths. There is Ramsay's Ramble, Beyond Zero Point, Ways and Culture and Walking the Hills. A 'walking holiday' in the Himalayas is a great idea. It is being promoted by a new tourism company called Himalayan Village Ways.

Himanshu Pande launched this company two years ago. Pande was working for his family hotel business near Binsar Sanctuary in Almora district of Uttarakhand. He was concerned about impoverished villages around the forest. What could he do for them, he wondered. Pande spoke to friends in India and the UK who had experience in rural development.

They launched Himalayan Village Ways (HVW), which promotes eco-tourism with people's participation. Villagers were invited to contribute money. Shares were allotted to them. They were also trained to handle guests.

Apart from Pande, the group of people who launched HVW include a social worker, an academic, an exporter and a handicraft manufacturer.

"We realised that promoting tourism is the ideal way to keep not just the culture of the area intact but also make people happy as they are the ones who will benefit," says social worker Keith Virgo.

"Only if people had a direct stake in the venture could it succeed," says Graham Edgeley, a rural development expert.

Ratnamala Kapur, from Delhi with expertise in handicrafts, sees immense possibilities in this venture. "Peoples' creativity will reach the world from this little part of the Himalayas," she says.

It was not easy to get the venture off the ground. The promoters first scouted around for interested villagers around the Binsar Sanctuary. People were apprehensive.

"It was breathtakingly hard work," says Dinesh Pande, Community Tourism Organiser, HVW. "We wanted people to provide their homes so that we could convert them into hotels. But nobody agreed even after repeated visits. We were on the verge of calling it off. Then we decided to build our own structures."

The villagers finally thought why not give it a try. They donated some land to make a few guesthouses. HVW provided construction materials and funded the building of five guesthouses or hotels in five mountain villages. Each guesthouse was built as a replica of a village home.

Local craftsmen were employed. They used traditional materials. Walls are made of stone with mud mortar. Minimal cement has been used. The houses are simple, comfortable and have local flavour.

Each guesthouse cost between Rs 1.7 lakh and Rs 2.7 lakh, a fraction of what similar houses would have cost. "Here too we used some ingenuity," explains Himanshu Pande. "Stones and wood lying in abandoned homes were used to build new structures. Therefore the cost of construction came down, thanks to this recycling."

The villagers who worked to build these houses were paid full-time wages, "The so-called *shramdaan* is a ruse to deprive people of their rightful earnings," says Dinesh who has a lot of experience working for the social sector.

In each of the five villages, HVW set up a Gram Paryatan Samiti (GPS). Two persons from each household are members. Half of its members are women.



A bedroom in the village guest house.

The guesthouses belong to the Gram Paryatan Samiti. Another village level institution called the Paryatan Vikas Samit (PVS) is the apex body.

Two persons from each GPS are represented in the PVS that elects its own office-bearers. "We decide how to run this venture and meet at least once a month to discuss all issues," says Basanti Devi, Dalar village, vice-president PVS.

Forty percent of the construction cost of each guesthouse was paid by HVW as a grant. The rest is a loan. Each Gram Paryatan Samiti is expected to repay the money to HVW once it makes a profit. Furniture and other equipment have been provided by HVW. Rs. 500 per day per person goes to the villages who don't have to spend anything.

Members of the Gram Paryatan Samiti have been trained by the HVW in tourism, business skills, environment awareness, catering as well as health and safety. A qualified doctor has been training the villagers in first aid.

Local villagers are being employed as guides and porters and they will earn more than the minimum daily wage. Bachi Singh, a professional tourist guide who works at the famous Jim Corbett National Park is training a team of guides in the basics of courtesy and hospitality.

The PVS has decided that no individual will personally accept tips and gifts from tourists. Instead, the money will be deposited with the respective GPS that will decide its distribution. "It was necessary to discourage a begging mentality and also accept the gratitude of the tourists," says Raghuvar Dutt, Risal village, president PVS.

Before the company rushed to open its doors to tourists, it decided to do a test run. It invited six people out of whom two were journalists from Britain to experience their holiday package. "We call them test guests as we wanted to test the concept and evaluate their feedback," says Dinesh.

The response they got encouraged them. "This is really a praiseworthy concept that would yield benefits to villagers," says Viju James, 38, a 'test guest' who immensely enjoyed the package. Another test guest is arriving in winter.

The walks are proving to be a big draw. Ramsay's Ramble, named after Henry Ramsay, Kumaon's first commissioner in 1875 takes you to three villages in eight days. You can walk leisurely for four hours every day. The holiday package includes a stay at Ramsay's historic Khali Estate.

In Beyond Zero Point the tourist walks through Binsar Wildlife Sanctuary from village to village along age-old tracks. "We stretched our legs and delighted our eyes by walking all over the ridges and high points of the

Sanctuary," says Josephine Hartley, 31, from the UK. She had just returned from Satri, the farthest and smallest village with only three households.

In Ways and Culture the delight of walking is combined with an insight into village culture. Walking the Hills is a laid back stroll across the terrain for four hours every day. "We enjoyed our stay in all five villages, with two nights in three of them. We learnt about Himalayan culture especially in Katghara village," says Peter Alfred Woodford from Cambridge UK who liked gazing at the awesome Pancha Chuli range.

The villagers are now thrilled about their venture. "Our little known region will soon be world famous," says Sobha Joshi of Dalar village, deputy-secretary, PVS.

Tariff: Twin room at Khali Estate: Rs 3,600 per room per night

Stay in village: Rs 2,000 per person per night

For further information e-mail: info@villageways.com.



Himanshu Pande, managing director

Each guesthouse was built as a replica of a village home. Local craftsmen were employed. Walls are made of stone with mud mortar.

Worldview

LATITUDE MATTERS

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

Banker for the Poor

Riaz Qadir
Versailles

LIKE many Bengalis (and one notable American, Bill Clinton) this correspondent has been waiting impatiently for many years for Dr Mohammed Yunus to be announced a Nobel Laureate. Not that the title will change anything or detract from his life's work but it will give recognition to the issue for which he has dedicated all of his adult life – that of providing financial access to those who were denied it in the traditional financial structures, except by criminal loan sharks who operate on the periphery of society. Although a man who is an economist by training it shouldn't come as a surprise that the Prize given to him was not for Economics but for Peace. The ramifications of his work extend far beyond the economic sphere and include the entire social fabric of the mass of humanity to whom it has been bringing relief for a few decades already. The clinical name given by the dismal science to this vast miracle is Microcredit.

It is also befitting that the Prize was given jointly to both him and his creation, The Grameen Bank (grameen meaning rural, an adjective from the Bengali gram meaning village). It is the village where 80 per cent of the population of Bangladesh reside and it is there that nothing of the trickle down of the development dollar ever reaches.

Dr Yunus decided to change all that by turning the financial lending system upside down on its head. It was accepted wisdom, and more importantly, practice, that money is given on the basis of collateral (i.e. some asset of not equal, but greater value than the money to be borrowed) which by definition would put it beyond the reach of the poor and disenfranchised. Therefore, the ability to create wealth lay in the hands of the wealthy. The 20th Century saw the rise of political systems like communism and socialism to address this inherent disparity among men. Dr Yunus was a practical man with little humour for grand political ideas. He found a more practical solution.

To challenge conventional wisdom requires great courage. To make it successful requires genius. Dr Yunus lacked neither. And the proof of his genius was the simplicity of his idea. He has proved that the poor are more reliable (no traditional bank has yet been able to match the default repayment rate of Grameen Bank) than the wealthy and the difference a small sum of money can make in taking a household from a state of poverty and destitution to one of survival and growth.

At a time when the world was locked between the capitalistic West and the Communist Bloc, Dr Yunus, by thinking out of the box, provided a way out for the world's poor. Yet this miraculous solution which took a long time to catch on (and is still a long way from having optimised on a worldwide basis) started with a sum of \$27 out of his pocket. This one time Boy Scout who had travelled across Europe at the age of 15 and spent time teaching in Tennessee, one of the poorest states in the USA, was confronted by the reality of the 1974 famine in Bangladesh which had reportedly killed millions. A gesture of solidarity with the village craftswomen who could not ply their craft and were being exploited by the local money-lenders became the beginning of this wondrous mechanism we call micro-financing. The rest is history!



Dr Mohammed Yunus

Simultaneously striking at another social evil – repression of women in a male-dominated power structure – Dr Yunus ignited a revolution long awaiting a spark. Grameen Bank lends money only to women. Suddenly the power structure of rural Bangladesh was no longer the same. While a woman in corporate America still bangs her head against the glass ceiling, her sister in a mud hut in Bengal is the financial centre of her household – and increasingly of her community.

Not one to rest on his laurels – by now he has collected a few, 62 in all, from the Magsaysay Award (1984) to The UNESCO Simon Bolivar Prize (1996) – he embarked on the Grameen Phone which helped rural Bangladesh to leapfrog a generation of communication technology and go directly into the mobile era. A majority of the nine million subscribers are the very same women recipients of the Grameen loans.

If you have noticed Dr Yunus always wearing chequered fabric shirts, rest assured that they are Grameen checks, naturally dyed, cotton plaid made by Bangladeshi cottage-industry workers, becoming increasingly a fashion statement among the local population. It has been a long way from Gandhi's swadeshi khadi to Dr Yunus' Grameen Check.

More than anything Dr Yunus has proved to us that in the human sphere the functional is meaningless without a moral content, and reaches its peak only, and only when it serves the highest moral goal. And what higher moral goal can we have than serving the poorest and the disenfranchised. Unlike Mother Theresa, Dr Yunus took the sharpest instruments of the material world to serve the neglected; and in doing so created a paradoxical link between his two other Bengali compatriots Nobel Prize winners, Rabindra Nath Tagore (Literature, 1913) and Amartya Sen (Economics, 1998). Here is an economist who in his obeisance to the Creator "reached down to the depth where thy feet rest among the poorest, and lowliest and lost" (Gitanjali X – Tagore).

China NGOs under govt shadow

Sanjay Suri
Beijing

CIVIL society is growing rapidly in China – where the government will let it, according to a new civil society index report by the group Civicus. The civil society index (CSI) project in China was implemented by the Research Centre of the School of Public Policy and Management, an NGO, at Tsinghua University in Beijing. It was the 25th country report in a set of 50 being produced by the Johannesburg-based Civicus.

Civicus is an international alliance established in 1993 to nurture the foundation, growth and protection of citizen action throughout the world, especially in areas where participatory democracy and freedom of association are threatened.

The number and variety of civil society organisations has "significantly increased" since the 1990s, the Civicus report on China says. The report says Chinese civil society groups are "particularly well represented in the fields of environmental protection, poverty alleviation, trade promotion and community development."

But the project also identified weaknesses in Chinese civil society such as limited citizen participation in civil society activities, a number of legal constraints in the establishment of grassroots NGOs and umbrella bodies, and the limited prominence CSOs (civil society organisations) give to sensitive issues such as democracy and government transparency.

The last of these may not be the least of the problems with Chinese civil society. "You can't really find 'human rights groups' in China," says coordinator of the CSI in China Jia Xijin. Jia works in Tsinghua University in Beijing.

"There are CSOs that work on rights protection for the floating population, women, and other disadvantaged people. They don't work directly on 'human rights'. There is a human rights group established by the government that mainly works on the white paper of human rights or other general issues."

Much of civil society in China still has close links with the Chinese Communist Party, Jia said. "Most of the large civil organisations have a close relationship with the CCP, for instance, the Women's Federation and the Federation of Disabilities."

Many in China are still unfamiliar with the concept of civil society, Jia said. "The most broad concept of civil society in China includes CSOs which are

registered at the Bureau of Civil Affairs as a social group or civilian non-enterprise units or foundations.

Sometimes it also includes the village commission in a rural area and the residential commission in an urban area, and some institutions in transition. Democratic parties and religious groups are not considered as a part of civil society in general."

Officially there are three types of CSOs in China, the report says: social organisations that are membership based, foundations which are fund-based, and civilian non-enterprise units which have a public interest objective, such as private schools, non-profit hospitals and social service agencies.

CSOs play a strong role in promoting poverty eradication and environmental causes. They are much less prominent when it comes to democracy and government transparency.

At the end of 2005 there were 168,000 social organisations, 146,000 civilian non-enterprise units and 999 foundations in China, the CSI report says.

The report points out that Chinese civil society has achieved a medium or slightly above medium level in the areas of impact and values, but that its structure and environment remain weak.

This means among other things that CSOs might exert "stronger influence on society than their own organisational and sectoral structure and resources would suggest."

The values dimension suggests that many Chinese CSOs are driven by positive values, such as organisational membership and gender equitable practices. "CSOs play a strong role in promoting commitments to poverty eradication and environmental causes; however, they are much less prominent when it comes to sensitive areas, such as democracy and government transparency."

The CSI report recommends improvement in structure and the over-regulated environment within which Chinese CSOs work. It also calls for an extension of civil society role beyond well-educated urban residents. IPS

Afghans battle for land

Muhammad Tahir
Kunduz

RESIDENTS of Kunduz region in northern Afghanistan are concerned at a rising tide of land claims by incomers who say they used to live in the area. The disputes in Dasht-e-Owdan and neighbouring areas close to the northern border with Tajikistan highlight the lack of clarity about land tenure across Afghanistan as a result of conflict and population displacement over many years.

The incomers are Afghans from the south of the country, close to the border with Pakistan, who say they used to live in Kunduz province decades ago. They have documents to support their property claims, too – reportedly including one signed by Afghan president Hamed Karzai.

Locals say the lands are rightfully theirs, although they do not possess official documents to that effect. They argue that the newcomers could easily have bribed officials to get forged land ownership papers.

The wave of migration seems to have been prompted by the escalating conflict in southwest regions such as Helmand and Kandahar. Northern areas like Kunduz offer peace and good farmland.

Haji Arslan, a local government official in Dasht-e-Owdan, explained the complexity of the land ownership issue, in which both locals and incomers appear to have some valid arguments.

He said migrants from other parts of Afghanistan started moving in about 50 years ago, attracted by a government incentive scheme. Some failed to adjust and went back home, but others stayed on.

Of this latter group, a number were forced to leave as ethnic tensions rose during the wars of the Eighties and Nineties. Arslan said their lands were then appropriated by whichever local militia commander ruled the roost at the time, who then sold them on to people who built up homes and farms on the property. There was, of course, no paperwork involved in this kind of transaction.

As paperwork can be lost or forged, it is difficult to track which of the incomers did once own land here, or whether it was in the recent past – say the last 15 years or so – or much longer ago.

"There was indeed out-migration from these regions to other parts of Afghanistan in past decades, but current trends suggest that the number of people coming in here is rising and could be more than the original number of people who left," said Haji Muhammad Emin Kani, a member of parliament from Kunduz. "Given the lack of governance, no one now knows exactly how many forced migrants left these areas, especially Dasht-e-Owdan."

If some of the incomers' claims are deemed to be genuine, the logical conclusion is that the people now living on the disputed lands will be evicted.

That could prove an explosive solution. Nadir Turkmen, a Kabul-based journalist familiar with the area, warns that the result could be armed clashes between residents and outsiders.

"The real danger is that some of the locals will simply be ordered to leave their homes without being offered any other option or an alternative place to live. This is a risky approach, since the future of 10,000 or more local residents could be at stake here," he said.

Central government is unlikely to step in with a solution, since its reach and effectiveness remain weak. But instead of taking matters into their own hands, the people of Dasht-e-Owdan are trying to put pressure on the authorities to help them.

According to journalists in the capital, hundreds of people from Dasht-e-Owdan came to Kabul and staged a protest in mid-August calling for an end to "illegal settlement by outsiders". Later they had a chance to put their concerns to government officials.

As fighting in the south continues, there are reports of a similar influx of migrants to other northern regions such as Balkh and Shiberghan.

Muhammad Tahir is a Prague based journalist and writer specialising in Central Asian and Afghan affairs

www.iwpr.net

The Pope and Islamophobia

LETTER FROM EUROPE



Riaz Quadir in Versailles

"Given that Islam and Christianity worship the one God, Creator of heaven and earth, there is ample room for agreement and cooperation between them. A clash ensues only when Islam or Christianity is misconstrued or manipulated for political or ideological ends."

John Paul II. (December 2001)

"Show me just what Mohammed brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman,

such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached".

Benedict XVI (September 12, 2006)

Quoting the "erudite Byzantine emperor Manuel II Paleologus"

Historians, politicians and pundits may ponder long and deep into the clear departure in approach of the leadership of the Christian world in the 21st century but as the Papal controversy raged across the world and words of hand-wringing contrition followed in a highly dramatised version, a la hollywood, accompanied by the more than usual convoluted Vaticanese, we were made to believe that the poor fumbling Benedict XVI had made a faux pas and was now desperately trying to make amends with an intractable civilisation, Islam.

Here, we forget that we are dealing with the world's oldest continuing political institution, and in many ways, the precursor of modern globalisation, the Papacy. It, like Carl Rowe, has knowledge, resource and access to all the psychological tools currently employed in the battle for the hearts and minds that is being fought to retain their constituencies in the complex and growing tradition in the developed West with its semblance of democracy at home and whatever else abroad. Every move, every reaction had been anticipated with the most calculated attention. Alas, as in the case of the Iraq War the sheep have been led into the precise pen which had been configured for them.

While all this was happening on the front pages (as intended), Nicolas Sarkozy, France's right wing Presidential hopeful quietly slipped across to Washington to finesse the final draft of the Common Immigration Policy he would propose to the EU. And what is his stance on this most important of issues that will dog the 21st century? "We can't all continue to have our own immigration policies... We can only solve the problems of immigration through perfect coordination with our European partners..." he says, suggesting "the prohibition in future of any mass regularisation measures..." This is in response to Spain's Left wing Government offering amnesty to over half a million illegal immigrants last year and the continuous flow of desperate migrants across the short hop from Africa. Given the EU structure Sarkozy is afraid that many of them will spill across to France – given the fact that much of North Africa is francophone. History always catches up with you, doesn't it! Nevertheless, Sarkozy and other revisionists would like to push water uphill even if they have to get EU's Frontex border agency, charged with patrolling the African coast, to be bolstered by military and police forces "in case of massive influx".

All this brings us back to the biggest con game in modern history where, of the forces of economic production, only capital has free flow across the planet (guess who has the capital) and the other, labour, is 'cabined cribbed and confined' to its national borders (much of which was created by, guess again, who). This in historical terms is defying the economic laws of gravity and trying to push water uphill. With most of the world nations having willfully, ignorantly, or otherwise, become members of the global economic family (Boy! What a dis-functional family it is) and entered the WTO gameplan, this defiance of the nat-

All this brings us back to the biggest con game in modern history where, of the forces of economic production, only capital has free flow across the planet and the other, labour, is 'cabined, cribbed and confined' to its national borders.

ural economic forces has become not only commonly accepted practice but believed to be the obvious and moral one as well.

Considering that Islam has over 1.2 billions adherents across the world, a large number of whom are citizens of regions that were colonised by the European powers and therefore have become the source of major migrant / immigrant movements across the world. Islamophobia is the concurrent result.

Looking more closely, in the words of Gilbert Achcar (co-writer with Noam Chomsky of "Perilous Power"): "Islamophobia is based on fear... It grows in a specific and complex manure: the many anxieties created by neoliberal social and economic deregulation, seeking scapegoats through a well known psychological phenomenon, compounded by the fear instilled in Western public opinion by governments unwilling to give the true answer to the much-asked question: why do 'they' hate us?..."

The seams at the edge of this package of Kafkaesque explanations created by Western governments are coming apart as we speak, specially when they have tried to relate totally unrelated issues to carry out their real programs. Ironically, such tactics have been instrumental in exposing their true motives and gradually the thinking public is becoming aware of this. Security measure that involve ID Cards in the UK is a goods case in point. But not strangely – considering that the fear factor is predominant in our primal psychology – even when myriad government positions on this issue have been debunked they continue to hold sway on the public mind.

Therefore, when (without precedence it seems) the 97 per cent of the readers of the Daily Express in the UK agree that "a ban on the hijab would help safeguard racial harmony", is it something sparked by the government (in the person of the Honourable Jack Straw) who introduced the controversy or any real fear that resulted from real events? The answer is clear. And the phenomenon is sweeping across the continent.

It seems an unlikely coincidence that the Nobel Prize for Literature given to Orhan Pamuk (no doubt a venerable writer by any standards but a critic of Turkey's official position on the issue of the Armenian genocide) and the Lower House of the French Parliament okaying a Bill that makes it a crime to deny the Armenian genocide, should come on the same day.

The Dutch Parliament has voted for a ban on wearing burkas in public places. The Belgian municipalities had to first define the hijab to differentiate it from carnival masks before debating its demise. Baden-Wuerttemberg is the first among states in Germany to ban teachers from wearing the hijab in the schools.

The same people who would "defend to death" Salman Rushdie or the Danish cartoonists' right to free expression when vilifying Prophet Mohammed balk at Muslim women doing the same (and not as though the tradition of covering up came into fashion yesterday). In this day and age of glib hardsell, they have created a plethora of reasons for their intolerant positions, none of which stands up to reason on close scrutiny. Heaven forbid a straight couple complaining of their children being exposed to gay couples kissing in the liberal streets of Flanders or women walking around topless on their beaches.

In the constant attempt to gain, retain and control power – social man's eternal quest – the powers that be (and I don't mean just the governments) have unknowingly become a part of a complex choreograph that reflects a larger social malaise that is spreading globally. The social contract continues... but unlike in Rousseau's time, we the people seek assurance, nay guarantee, to be employed, buy cheap energy, continue satisfying our mundane material needs ad infinitum and in exchange, provide our unquestioned loyalty every time the government devises a questionable foreign policy or a questionable domestic policy concerning foreigners: the quid pro quo social contract of the age of market economy.

Considering that Islam has over 1.2 billions adherents across the world, a large number of whom are citizens of regions that were colonised by the European powers and therefore have become the source of major immigrants, Islamophobia is the concurrent result.

Perspectives

CATCHING TRENDS

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

Demolishing Delhi's small NGOs

SHANKAR VENKATESWARAN



NGO Watch

AND the great fish moved silently through the water". Many might remember the memorable words of Peter Benchley in his classic book *Jaws*. Well, folks, there is another great fish moving silently through the waters of Delhi thanks to whom 2006 will be remembered as the year when NGOs in Delhi died.

The great fish? The sealing drive directed by the Supreme Court in which NGOs by default are treated different from architects, lawyers and doctors who can operate from residential areas (completely understandable, perhaps) but are in the same bucket as traders, liquor shops and some others who are illegally plying their business from these same residential areas!

What is the legal position on NGOs operating out of residential areas? The short answer is, I don't

know! The laws relating to property tax allow NGOs doing specified tasks and operating from residential areas to pay tax at the same rate as residential property. And there is a Supreme Court ruling that extends this to administrative offices of NGOs. So, one would have thought that NGOs can indeed operate from residential areas. However, the Master Plan and the public notifications on it do not mention NGOs, which means – sadly for us NGO folks who take ourselves rather seriously – that NGOs are not that important.

So, why will NGOs die if they are forced to move out? Let us look at the cost structure of a hypothetical NGO – let's call it Fighting Poverty Foundation (FPF) that has an office in, say, Malviya Nagar in South Delhi. It has an office that seats a staff of 20 and pays a rent of Rs 15,000 per month. Its salary bill will be around Rs 3,00,000 per month and its other *kharcha* on utilities, telephones, stationery etc. would be another Rs 50,000 per month. Thus, its establishment fixed costs would be Rs. 3,65,000 per month. With these costs, it would typically run a programme of four or five times that amount (fixed costs as a percentage of total would be of the order of 20-25 per cent.)

Now, after the great fish moves in, guess what will happen? FPF will need to move into a commercial space and for the 2,000 sq. ft. of office space that it needs to seat 20 people, it will end up paying a rent of (now, hold your breath here!) Rs 2,00,000 per month – as much as its salary bill! So, its monthly expenses will shoot from Rs 3,65,000 to 5,50,000, and its rent bill by a factor of eight! On an annual basis, this works out to an increase of over Rs 22,00,000 – no kidding!

So, where is this additional money going to come from? One source is its individual donor – people like you and I who want to give back to society and who, after a search for a reliable and effective NGO, decide to fund FPF. You did

your due diligence and found that FPF used only 20 per cent of its funds on overheads and of this only four percent went towards rent. This meant that of the Rs 10,000 you gave them annually, only Rs 80 was used for rent. Now, of your Rs 10,000, FPF will end up spending (hold your breath again here!) Rs 1,100 just on rent! You might still support FPF but the chances are its other donors will not! The result: a board that says, "FPF – Rest In Peace"!

What is the second option for FPF? Go to its funding agencies – organisations like CRY or Oxfam or any of the ones you may have heard of. What will they do? First, they too will have to scurry around to find "legal" office space in commercial areas and will probably focus on this first before looking at their partners. And after having found the space and renegotiating their budgets, some would (and this is purely guesswork) continue to fund the FPF for a while (you don't abandon partners mid-stream) but after some time, their boards and their donors will start getting fidgety saying that a smaller portion of the money is going to communities and the core causes. Net result: "FPF – RIP"!

Is there a third option? Well, when a company (or indeed the government) ends up in a situation where its costs escalate (but rarely do they escalate eight times!), they simply pass it on to the customer. Perhaps, FPF can do the same but it depends on who its customer is, isn't it? If it were running an engineering

college or an MBA school (these too are called NGOs), they can simply increase fees but if FPF was running a microfinance programme or a vocational training programme for the poor, they cannot just raise interest rates or course fees simply because the market cannot bear it! Looks like it is "FPF – RIP" once again!

The good news is that not all NGOs will die! Since the law of the jungle prevails, the fittest will survive and the fittest in this case are a handpicked few. One, are those that have their own premises in the various institutional areas that dot Delhi's landscape. These have been fortunate or sensible enough to have invested in their own legal space and are safe but they constitute a small miniscule of Delhi's NGO population.

The other are the funding agencies – the ones named earlier and many others, including the one I work with – who have relatively deeper pockets, though they will have a tough time explaining their new cost structure to their board and donors. A third type are corporate foundations who, luckily, have use of their

company offices and don't pay rent. And fourth, and this is what makes it really weird, organisations that are classified as NGOs simply because there is no real legal difference between those that serve the poor and the marginalised and those that are simply registered as non-profits. These include organisations that run medical and engineering colleges and who do not want to be subject to quotas, industry associations like ASSOCHAM, most political parties and so on!

So, whose souls should we be mourning? Those thousands of small, unsung NGOs that work with Delhi's poor whether they end up living in slums or on the streets.



Since the law of the jungle prevails, the fittest will survive and the fittest in this case are a handpicked few.

We can be child labour free

KAILASH SATYARTHI



Child Rights

CHILD domestic labour is a widespread and growing global phenomenon that traps more than 10 million children, mostly girls, in hidden forms of exploitation, often involving abuse, health risks and violence. These children, working behind closed doors, are extremely vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. The practice of employing child domestics and the exploitative way in which they tend to be treated, are socially endorsed in most societies where they are employed. Changing this ingrained social acceptance is the greatest challenge with regard to advocacy on their behalf.

The recent prohibition on employment of children in the hospitality industry, including homes, is a significant and progressive intervention on the part of the central government. In an era of open markets and globalisation, coupled with the extension of the middle-class, there is an incredible expansion in child domestic labour in developing countries. In India, according to a report, nearly 20 per cent of all children working outside their own homes are employed as domestic help.

One can see children employed as domestic help in all parts of the country, from cosmopolitan cities to towns and villages, from traditional joint families to nuclear families. They are engaged in all kinds of chores, from washing clothes and utensils to looking after children of their own age. One often comes across incidents of their exploitation and harassment, including beating, burning, rape and even murder.

It is important to understand that the recent notification is just an extension of the Child Labour Prohibition & Regulation Act, 1986. The Child Labour Act prohibits employment of children below the age of 14 years in hazardous occupations and regulates employment of children in non-hazardous occupations.

In this respect, the Supreme Court's historic judgment made on 10 December 1996 happens to be most significant. In the *M.C. Mehta v/s Union of India* case, the bench of the honourable Justice Shri Kuldeep Singh declared child labour a horrible crime against humanity and directed the central government to conduct surveys in the country and hand over the state-wise list of children working in hazardous and non-hazardous establishments within six months.

This significant judgment proposed some measures towards solving a serious problem. The first one was to charge a fine of Rs 20,000 per child from the owners who employed children in prohibited industries and processes. The government was also asked to contribute Rs 5,000. The total amount of Rs 25,000 would be spent on the education and rehabilitation of the child.

It is important to mention the third legal intervention. The central government through a notification on 14 October 1999 amended the service rules of government officials. This affirms that no government official can employ a child as a domestic help or servant. It was the outcome of a verdict given by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) in the case of six-year-old Ashraf. The child was brutally beaten and burnt with a hot iron rod by an IAS officer in Delhi. Ashraf's only crime was that he drank milk leftover by the officer's son. BBA (Bachpan Bachao Andolan) rescued the child and raised the issue with the NHRC.

It is a positive sign that the government has started to realise the grievous and serious nature of child labour. Yet a lot more needs to be done for justice to be reclaimed. The enforcement machinery under the child labour regulation and prohibition act is not functioning. It is clear by law that employment of children under 14 in a range of sectors, including domestic work or in areas like hotels and restaurants is a prohibited offence. Violators can be jailed up to two years and fined. However, there is an abysmally low conviction rate, so low, that it is hardly a deterrent for employers.

If we analyse the reasons behind this failure, we cannot ignore the government's lack of urgency towards the nation's deprived children. This is caused by the government's dependency on its conventional, inadequate and untrained labour inspectorial system. Most importantly, there is no specific or clear legal provision that fixes accountability on the enforcement agencies. Moreover, in the absence of an independent, credible and proactive monitoring and evaluation mechanism, implementation remains a distant dream. Such an institutional mechanism could

have been much more effective if it were constituted by law with specific directions, a time-bound action plan and empowered with sufficient authority.

Education has a dual role to play in relation to child labour. It is, on one hand, a crucial element in the rehabilitation and social reintegration of child labourers and, on the other, a powerful tool to prevent children at risk from slipping into situations of child labour. Free quality education for all is the key to social justice, equity, protection of childhood and combating poverty. It is with this perspective that the government and civil society should revive the Right to Education Bill 2005 for the realisation of free, compulsory primary education for all children between 6-14 years of age.

With more than 60 million children engaged as child labourers and the world's largest pool of out-of-school children, it is time for India to not just bring about laws banning child labour but also put in place an effective machinery for strict implementation of the law.

Recommendations: A comprehensive approach to eliminating child labour and replacing it with universal education requires, first of all, a focus on bringing to justice those responsible for this crime. Secondly, effective measures to prevent it must be carried out while maintaining a humanitarian and compassionate approach to rendering assistance to its victims.

The primary responsibility of the government is to create trust and optimism in society that the elimination of child labour is achievable. The government ought to dispel the current feeling of despair, disillusion and hopelessness at the ineffective implementation of the Child Labour Law. Restoration of faith in

the governments' ability to address the plight of child labourers and to bring back their childhood is the most critical task of the government. Revival of the Right to Education Bill 2005 is another crucial task to guarantee children their fundamental right to education and development.

The government can do the following:

Use media effectively: There is need to create effective and efficient use of the media by the government to sensitise and create awareness on the latest notification. Till now only the private media has been active in disseminating information on the notification. It is important

that the government takes the Child Labour Law to the masses by making them aware of it, condemning employment of children below 14 years of age and issuing a warning to those engaged in employing child labourers.

Upgrade labour inspection: For the effective implementation of the law, the labour inspection machinery should be geared up through sensitisation and rigorous training. The action plan should be time bound.

Fix accountability: Social welfare mechanisms do not as yet have accountability systems built into them. It is imperative that there is accountability of state officials and a clear cut guideline of responsibility for the effective implementation of the law.

Involve RWAs, NGOs, students: Involvement of conscientious and voluntary citizens including Residential Welfare Associations, NGOs etc could be undertaken to build partnership with the masses. People vigilance committees on child labour could be initiated through honorary time bound monitors to function as official watchdogs and as support systems to labour inspectors and the official enforcement mechanism. This will extend the new notification into the Child Labour Law and create a child centric mechanism. The focus could be on partnership with college students and school students.

Rehabilitate released child labourers: The government should allocate adequate resources for the prompt statutory rehabilitation and repatriation of rescued and released child labourers under appropriate laws – Bonded Labour Law, Child Labour Law, etc.

Gear up existing school mechanism: Education is not just an isolated concern but a means of liberation and development. The rescued and released child labourers should be linked with available education schemes of the state without delay. Without this there will be large-scale disappointment, lack of opportunity to rescued children and their families and worse, recycling of child labourers. State-run child labour schemes such as the NCLP schools, INDUS project, etc. should gear up to provide free, quality, universal, primary education to rescued and released child labourers.

Tell us more about job guarantee

MILINDO CHAKRABARTI



Reforms Report

THE National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) has been in force for quite some time. How has it been doing? I have been quite optimistic about the scheme right from the start. I hope I am not expecting the moon, though some of my friends and colleagues have begun ridiculing me. And they, I feel, have every right to do so.

My enthusiasm about the scheme was not just due to its avowed objective of providing employment for a maximum of 100 days to all those willing to work at the minimum wage fixed for their region. I was more excited at the prospect of information technology being used to ensure transparency in the management of the scheme. If successful, it could provide new direction to the governance problem plaguing our society.

When the proposal for the NREGA was being discussed last year by the National Advisory Council, several arguments were made to scuttle it. Some raised the bogey of the huge expenditure it would entail, which according to them, India as a nation could ill-afford.

Others objected because they thought that resources would be misused and merely fatten the purses of individuals whom the scheme did not target.

I was not convinced. Maybe my priorities are different. Why was I not convinced? I knew that the management of the scheme was designed to make use of recent revolutionary advances in Information Technology and reduce misuse of financial resources as relevant information would be available on a government website to anyone who wanted to keep tabs on the programme.

I regularly visit the website at <http://nrega.nic.in> and I reported some of my initial findings with considerable enthusiasm earlier in this column. A recent visit helped me stick to my conviction. But I must confess that I am somewhat worried too.

A visit to <http://nrega.nic.in/Citizen/PhysicalPerf.asp> reveals that most NREGA activities are concentrated in districts of Orissa, though the first phase of the programme was introduced in 200 of the most backward districts in India.

To elaborate, out of 24 projects shown to have been completed on October 9, 22 are located in Orissa and 15 out of these are in Kalahandi district alone. Of the two other completed projects outside Orissa, one is located in the Villupuram district in Tamil Nadu, while the other has been carried out in the Bastar district of Chhattisgarh. Interestingly, most of these projects are linked to improving rural connectivity.

If you consider ongoing projects, the situation is not commendable either. Of the 7417 works in the pipeline, more than 93 per cent or 6943 to be specific are being carried out in Orissa. And the highest number of projects (883) are to be found in Kalahandi district, once again.

Let us quickly click <http://nrega.nic.in/muster.asp>. To find out what's hap-

pening in Atigaon GP in the Junagarh block of Kalahandi district, I tried to get some details about the completion of a road from Atigaon Sanatan Club to Tel river.

Villagers from two settlements, namely, Atigaon and Kandulguda, were employed for this work between 5 to 15 June. Of the 362 individuals provided employment, 329 were from Atigaon and 39 from Kandulguda. A total of Rs 19,8880 was disbursed as wages with the average payout per individual being Rs 549.39. Each worker was paid Rs 55 per day. All of them worked for ten days. Only one lady was absent for four days. Her name is Lalita Nayak as written on her job card registration.

The number of women employed on site is marginally higher than men. We are also informed on the website about the quantum of employment offered to people belonging to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes.

To what extent are we, members of civil society, using the information available on the Internet? If we do not use the information provided to improve governance then the website will lose its relevance and the incentive to update the information regularly will vanish.

I am extremely grateful to a reader of my column who suggested that if we "really want to uplift the poor (we should not) give them fish but teach them how to fish". Who will teach them how to fish?

There is some information on the employment guarantee scheme that won't be available to you unless you visit these two villages. You will never know from the website why Lalita Nayak could not come to work. Was she sick?

You will not know if the road constructed is still functional. Were the materials used of good quality? Were some of the materials siphoned? It is true that not all those who registered for employment were given work. Of the 1944 registered jobseekers from Atigaon, only 943 were given jobs. Why? How were they selected?

We don't have much information from other states about the scheme. Why? Is it because not much has been done to implement the scheme? We have every right to know the reasons.

The recent claim by the rural development ministry about datasets being maintained from panchayat level appears hollow. Try getting an idea of what's happening in West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Tripura, and you will understand what I mean.

Groups of action researchers have already taken the initiative to find answers to some of these questions. Their findings are available on www.righttofood-india.org. How about linking this website to the ministry of rural development's website? A recent update on the right to food website chronicles the repressive attitude of the state towards activists involved in sensitising the people about their right to claim employment.

The electronic media and even mainstream newspapers don't seem to be covering NREGA. Why has the media lost interest? When the Act was about to be introduced they raised a hue and cry. Where's the enthusiasm gone now?

Milindo Chakrabarti is director of CREATE (Centre for Studies in Rural Economy, Appropriate Technology and Environment) E-mail: milindo62@gmail.com Phone: 913542270555.

You will not know if the road constructed is still functional. Were the materials used of good quality? Were some of the materials siphoned? How were job seekers selected?

WHERE
ARE WE
BEING
READ?

Civil Society is going places...

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Civil Society
READ US. WE READ YOU

Reviewer

THE FINE PRINT

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

Niche or deadend?

Viveka braves heavy odds with its comics

Umesh Anand
New Delhi

COMICS are like chewing gum. Start on one and chances are that you won't stop flipping the pages till you get to the end – bonding with characters and becoming part of another world.

More than one generation of Indians has grown up with Archie, Ritchie Rich, Phantom, Sad Sack, Donald Duck, Dennis the Menace, Lone Ranger and so on. None of them was even remotely connected with the Indian situation. Nor were they all universal, some of them being rooted in suburban America. But they came, stayed and acquired a life of their own here.

Now how would it be if comics were used to capture fading Indian traditions and practices? Or, if they could be employed to create awareness on the problems of dwindling forest cover and child labour? What if the easy-paced format of a comic could become the vehicle for weighty matters that seem otherwise too big to handle?

Rukhmini Sekhar set out on such a mission in 2000 with the Viveka Foundation, hoping to achieve through a niche what big publishers caught up in a numbers game just didn't have time for.

In Rukhmini's vision folk tales and the lives of communities existing beyond the scope of the market deserved to be captured through illustrations and stories so that they are absorbed by the young whose exposure rarely went beyond the cities.

Comics as a medium were important because through them there would be colour and informality. Characters would have lives and personalities of their own and be remembered, somewhat like Jughead for his burgers, Sarge for his stripes and boots, Veronica for her miniskirts, Phantom for his cave.

Comics would invite people in by promising to be fun, an easy chew. Traditional costumes and emblems of a disappearing rural life would filter their way into the urban consciousness. The weighty and serious could then acquire some effervescence and be less daunting.

Six years on, Rukhmini has done much good work. The Viveka Foundation has Vivalok Comics with a mascot called Roama, who is on a never ending path of discovery with her dictaphone.

Comics have been created on the Santhals, desert communities, folk tales from the Godavari and so on. Production standards are good and one can see that lots of effort has gone into



Rukhmini Sekhar

The Viveka Foundation has Vivalok Comics with a mascot called Roama, who is on a never ending path of discovery with her dictaphone.

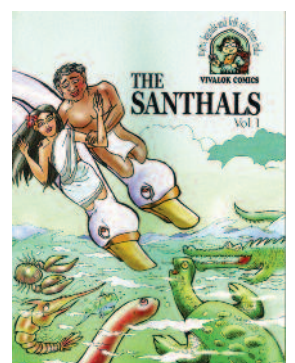
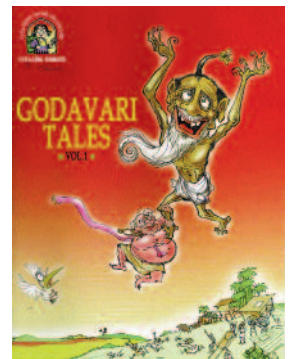
getting the research right.

But the sad truth also is that hardly anyone has heard of Vivalok Comics. If the idea was to capture the attention of the urban reader – bombarded as she is by TV, magazines, Internet and radio – then Rukhmini's mission is far from complete.

The question she should be asking herself is whether the niche she set out to grow with much passion is in fact a dead end. For a small publisher the road to the market and viable numbers is strewn with thorns, potholes, open manholes, an occasional landmine and several drivers trained in Delhi.

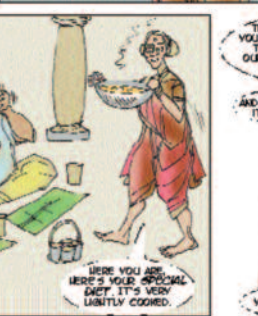
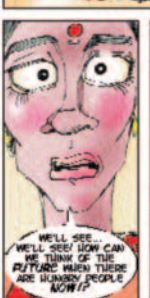
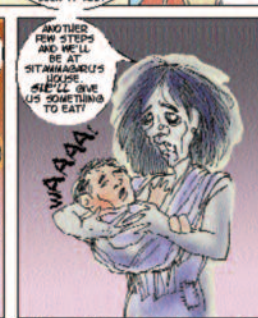
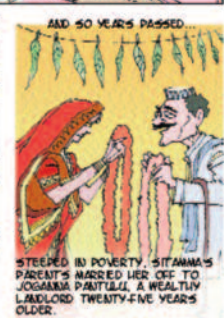
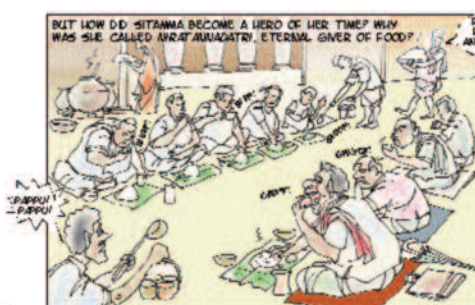
Survival for the garage publisher has little to do with being diligent. It is more a matter of chance, being, like most businessmen will tell you, in the right place at the right time.

The odds are stacked against you. Distributors won't touch you unless your print runs are big enough and even then your





HISTORY IS SELECTIVE ABOUT ITS HEROES. IN TODAY'S MEDIA DOMINATED SOCIETY, ONE DOESN'T EVEN HAVE TO BE A HERO TO BE CATALECTED TO FAME! BUT WHAT OF SO MANY HEROES WHO HAVE LIVED BEFORE THE PRESENT MEDIA BLITZ OR EVEN NOW LIVE BEYOND ITS PALE? WHO IS DOKKA SITAMMA TO WHOM THIS BRIDGE IS DEDICATED? HERE'S THE STORY...



publications will be dumped in stores where the owners have no literary inclinations. Naturally the titles don't sell and you are doomed a failure.

Rukhmini began with start-up funding from the Ford Foundation, which helped the idea along. Thereafter money has come from one source or the other. Collaboration with Label STEP of Belgium proved to be a useful lifeline with comics on the evils of child labour published in English and several European languages.

But the really tough nut that remains to be cracked is of commercial viability. Can the Viveka Foundation survive on what it earns? And if it doesn't does it mean that there isn't a market for its offerings?

A bigger question is whether there is a future for printed comics, however exquisitely produced. Is Viveka Foundation caught in a time warp? Shouldn't it be looking at other ways of bridging the urban-rural divide and passing on its message about traditions? Is this the right time to hitch a good idea to a new and more dynamic vehicle?

Rukhmini's approach thus far has not been to look at a large national canvas, but to focus instead on regions and even ecosystems. Such an approach is rich

in the depth it seeks. This has meant ferreting out experts with specialised knowledge on the community as a whole and on matters as intricate as tying saris right, defining flora and fauna and getting to the bottom of myths.

Rukhmini emphasises that comics are not the only thing that the Viveka Foundation does. It publishes books and has other involvements in the social sector.

But the creation of an Indian comic was clearly its big new idea. The foundation wanted to encourage an interest in comics as an art form and also to intellectualise comics. "We've looked at folklore because it is subaltern history. You are telling history bottom up. So our venturing into comics was not some casual attempt to tell stories of the *ek tha raja*, *ek thi rani* kind. We have used folklore because it is a means of delivering value added messages," says Rukhmini.

"If you look at our comics you will see that we have brought in gender issues, environment, the art of living. This morning I was reading about plans to create an Indian comic, but that is what we have been trying to do since the year 2000. We have really tried to create an Indian idiom in terms of subject matter, characters and so on. After all we have our own pictorial story-telling traditions."

"In the absence of the proverbial grandmother, I think comics are a way of reaching the mind of the modern child," says Rukhmini.

"We have seriously tried to look at comics as an art form. In 2002 we did an exhibition on Narrative Art: The World of Comics. Now, that kind of thing has not been done in

India before."

Rukhmini says the whole world wants to rediscover comics as an art form, for storytelling, messaging and so on.

What Vivalok Comics has not done is to rely on secondary sources when it comes to folklore. It has taken micro regions and gone to scholars who are working directly with communities. The micro regions are important because there is so much diversity. "Going from one micro region to another micro region is like going from one state to another," says Rukhmini. "It is not only living diversity, but visual diversity as well in terms of landscape and so on. So we have taken just the Sundarbans or the desert area around Jaisalmer. Then we have taken the Godavari or communities like the Santhals."

The emphasis is on small and deep and so the need for research and detail, which take the comics from Vivalok beyond the more superficial storytelling of the kind produced by Amar Chitra Katha and others.

All this work has certainly contributed to creating a foundation for the original Indian comic. The big question is whether the Viveka Foundation will be able to build on it.

'Telecom for public good'

Vidya Viswanathan
New Delhi

THE Congress government embarked on economic reforms in 1991 due to an economic crisis. One of the ideas in the reform package was to induct the private sector into infrastructure services like telecom and power. In 1994, the National Telecom policy was announced with the provision of a telecom regulator.

It is twelve years since then. Economist Ashok V Desai was in the finance ministry in 1991 as the Government of India's chief economic advisor. He quit the ministry, got into journalism and has been closely following developments in the telecom sector since then.

This book by Desai on India's telecom sector is the result of a study commissioned by NCAER where he once worked. It has been funded by an UNDP grant. The book makes dire predictions for the telecom industry. It says the sector is becoming a duopoly.

The licensing scheme of the government created private players from large business houses. They colluded with large Indian financial institutions resulting in an oligopoly.

The regulator was made toothless. In the last chapter of the book Desai has made suggestions. *Civil Society* interviewed him at his *Business World* office.

How long did you take to write this book?

Six months and it is written after researching publicly available documents. I have not interviewed anyone for the book.

We are led to believe that the Indian telecom industry is a miracle...

Yes, but in this miracle lie the seeds of catastrophe. You take the analogy of foreign trade. If countries impose import duties, it affects those countries that are the smallest. The bigger countries have a large domestic market.

Similarly, if you allow telephone companies to charge different rates for calls within their network and for calls coming from other networks, it is like import duties and favours the bigger companies. It works against the interests of smaller companies. That is why this industry started with 55 players and is now reduced to a dozen. Soon there will be only two players. It could become one but the government operator is very inefficient and cannot subdue anyone. The point is that the industry will get more and more concentrated and its profits will increase as a result.

You are saying that even though rates are very low and the sector is expanding rapidly, it won't take long for the situation to reverse.

Low rates have nothing to do with competition. They have more to do with technological change in the last 20 years. The operators have also realised economies of scale. Besides, our costs in general are low. The price levels of our costs are one fifth of the US whether it is labour or land.

The progressive fall in prices will stop when the industry becomes a duopoly and whoever survives will maximise profits. He will also become politically very powerful.

You are also suggesting that the current regulatory authority be overhauled?

I am saying it should be empowered. It has been eroded by the ministry. Abolish the ministry and give its powers to the regulatory authority. Take the ministry and the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) out because it is an interested party.

In most of your observations the judicial bodies have also not been making the right calls.

The courts have been stupid and biased. You cannot do anything about that. I have given an example of what the Delhi High Court did. It destroyed the regulator simply because it was headed by SS Sodhi, an ex-chief justice. It was

probably done out of jealousy. This was just an episode and that doesn't necessarily repeat itself.

Your solution to creating competition is to create a national backbone. This was recommended in a Mission 2007 workshop where they want a computer in every village.

I don't want to talk about a village. I am saying where there are three operators right here (in Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, a hub of newspaper offices) create 50,000 operators. An operator will serve a local community. All these operators can be connected by a national backbone which charges consumers equally.

So you are saying that the telecom industry is not a capital intensive industry which is naturally given to forming a monopoly?

No more. Not with current technologies.

You are saying open up local connections. Become technology agnostic. Allow the operator to do whatever he wants in a locality?

As long as he does not want to interconnect. A regulator will monitor interconnections. Supposing I want to set up a telephone service in my neighborhood. I should not need a license. Abolish licensing. Let there be competition at the local level and allocate spectrum for that. Spectrum is a scarce resource. There is a part of the spectrum where the range is limited. Accommodate all local players there. Do it in such a way that you could probably accommodate 10, 15, 20 maybe 50 local operators. When local operators want to give service over a large area, they should plug into a national backbone at minimum interconnection rates. This backbone will be a government non-profit body and will compete with the big fellows who cannot be abolished anymore.

Your assumption is that the national backbone will be efficient?

Yes. It will compete. The current private operators could also provide interconnection. If the NIA is not efficient, it will die.

Regarding rural telephony, you say don't look at one connection to a village.

Yes. The idea is not to provide a connection so that somebody can talk to somebody distant. They should be able to communicate within the community. In rural areas provide free interconnection. The government should create a telephone backbone with its own money just like it created post offices.

You are talking about telephony alone. Today the talk is about providing high-bandwidth services like distance learning...

The Internet does not need a policy. It rides on the current telephony system.

But the current spectrum policy prevents that.

The current spectrum policy is about giving x megabytes to so and so. The spectrum is a public good and has been rented. If you have to take back local spectrum from someone, take it back. If you have taken money from them, give it back. I am concerned about what should be done to reduce the cost of telephony and maximise its spread.

What you are suggesting is not in the incumbent's interest. Won't it be shot down?

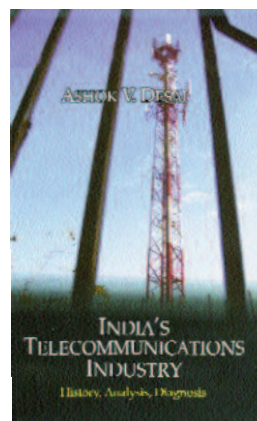
I don't care if the government agrees or not. This is my concept. How do reforms occur? Let things get into public discourse and compete with other ideas. Then some ideas win. The other model is to get close to a policy maker. I don't believe in that anymore.

Is this more effective?

Whispering into a minister's ear is less effective. You can get through an Act in Parliament banning child labour. But children will continue to work. It has to become public opinion.



Ashok Desai



**India's
Telecommunication's
Industry**

**Publisher
Sage**

**Author
Ashok V Desai**

**Price
Rs 395**

Smoke for good health

Dr G G GANGADHARAN



MEDICATED smoke has an important role in Ayurveda. It can be used to fumigate a room or it can carry to an individual the essence of herbs. Incense thus has healing properties. The smoke with its gandha or aroma activates the nasal system and through it makes changes in the body and mind of a person.

The literary meaning of dhoopa is smoke or fumes. Dhoopa is defined as dhoopah thape iti or that which comes out from fire.

The fumes from fragrant materials like chandana (santala album), aguru (aquarilla agurulocha), kumkum, ela (Eleterria cardomom), kustha (saussarria lepa) etc. give a soothing and pleasant sensation to the body and mind. Medicated fumes are used based on their dhosha predominance. In vata condition, a mild kind of smoke from guggulu, mustha, vilwa majja, sarjarasa etc are beneficial. In pitta condition, fumes from utpala, bark of nyagrodha, kamala, laksha etc are beneficial. In kapha condition, strong smoke from jyothishmati, nisha, triphala etc are useful.

During different seasons, different fumes are used. In the cold season fumes from ushna dravya like guggulu, aguru can be used to overcome the chill. During summer fumes from drugs of cold potency like lotus and chandhana can be used to minimise the heat.

Aromatherapy's benefits:

Soothing and aromatic smoke gives a pleasant sensation and energy to mind and body. Aromatherapy is highly beneficial for geriatric and post surgical care. For example, as a daiva vyapasraya chikitsa (divine treatment) conducting homa with sugandha (aromatic) dravyas like karpooora, (camphor), sandal, ghee and firewood made from aswatha (Ficus religiosa), aguru (Aquilaria agallocha), red sandal, vacha (Acorus calamus), sweta sarsapam (Brassica campestris), neem leaves and ajamodha will have a soothing effect.

Anti-bacterial properties: The fumes from drugs like sarsapa, deva dhoopam (kundrika-Boswellia serrata), haridra (Curcuma longa), neem, dhatura seeds (Datura innoxia), etc. will act against microbes present in our body and environment.

During childbirth fumes are used help the delivery in two ways:

The smoke helps during delayed and obstructed delivery and also as an anti-microbial drug. Fumes from the skin of snakes are beneficial.

Fumes protect the baby from evil spirits. Beneficial smoke is from drugs like vacha, hingu, vidhangha, saindava, patha, prativisha, vyosham, gaja pippali etc.



1. Ficus Religiosa 2. Aquilaria Agallocha 3. Curcuma Longa 4. Acorus Calamus

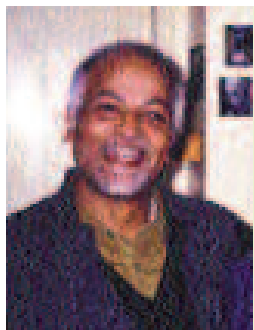
For good health: In Ayurveda, medicated dhoopa pana (smoking) is mainly advised for ENT (ear, nose and throat) diseases and as a post pancha karma therapy after nasya and vamanam to clear the obstructed channels.

Ingredients in incense and their effects: Sarva ghandha oushadhas like ela, guggulu, kustha, aguru, charala, sarja rasa, chandhana coral, parijatham, vilwam, khadiram, devadharam, etc. are generally used for incense.

By and large, drugs with hot potency alleviate kaphaja diseases. Those with cold potency alleviate pittaja diseases and mild potency alleviates vataja diseases.

Adulteration: Adulteration of hard wood and other medicinal products used in dhoopa result in a bad effect to the atmosphere and the body. So one has to be careful when a dhoopa dravya is selected for fumigation.

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



BE THE CHANGE!

NATURE | SPIRIT | COMMUNITY

NOVEMBER 18 AND 19, NEW DELHI

The real impetus for ecological sustainability and social justice stems from an ethical, aesthetic and spiritual vision. Social and political transformation is intricately linked with personal transformation. In order to achieve integrity between theory and practice, activists need to live their ideals and walk the talk. In doing so we can discover, through a lived experience, what is the most effective way to bring transformation at all levels. There is no contradiction between pragmatic campaigning and ones personal quest for meaning.

Sanskriti Pratishtan and The Viveka Foundation, two civil society organisations based in Delhi, have come together to create a dynamic weekend retreat with Satish Kumar in the beautiful, serene environs of Anandgram, Gurgaon. This retreat specially focuses on those who are, irrespective of age or field of work, engaged with social change in any way and wish to expand on the power, imagination, moral force and effectiveness that imbues such change. During the weekend Satish Kumar will explore how the ecological, spiritual and social dimensions are three legs of the same stool and must underpin all our work. We call on students, activists, writers, intellectuals, NGOs, journalists and trainers to attend this unique retreat.

**A WEEKEND
RETREAT WITH
SATISH KUMAR
MONK, ACTIVIST,
WRITER,
EDUCATOR,
EDITOR AND
TEACHER**

For details and registration contact:
margaret@vivekafoundation.org
Ph: 9871136621; 26497586, 26492417
or write to
The Viveka Foundation 25C DDA Flats
Shahpurjat, New Delhi 110049

A Diwali in Rajasthan

Purba Kalita
Jodhpur

BEING in Rajasthan during Diwali is a privilege. The festival is celebrated for five days in a carnival atmosphere.

The illuminations are splendid. But it is the Rajasthani sweets that are truly irresistible. The list of temptations is long.

There is laapsi, a sweet dish made of broken wheat. Then there are meethi mathri (shakkarpara) or deep fried wheat flour crispies, besan or gram flour laddoo, gond ke laddoo made of wheat flour and gum, kaju or cashew nut barfi, mawa kachori or stuffed patty dipped in sugar syrup, malpua or pancakes served with cream or rabdi (thickened-sweetened milk), jalebi, ghevar or cakes made of flour, soaked in ghee, milk and topped with sliced almonds...

Two days prior to Diwali, Dhanteras are celebrated. People splurge on gold, silver or steel utensils. On the same morning, homes are spruced up to welcome the Goddess Lakshmi.

The next day is celebrated as Rup Choudas when people bathe by adding sesame or til to the water. On Diwali evening, the third and most important day, Lakshmi Puja is performed. Rajasthanis offer bhog. Rice is cooked by frying it in ghee, aniseed and sugar. Dals (lentils) of moong and urad plus laapsi are offered to the Goddess.

A tradition in most households is to offer mahal-maliye or sugar puffs of various shapes (know as batashe

elsewhere in the country) during the puja. These are later consumed. Some people offer chane ki sabji or whole gram curry, cooked rice and laapsi on morning of Diwali to their family deity. The offering and consumption of rice, cereals, pulses and jaggery are regarded as auspicious during Diwali.



Malpua

Ingredients

Sugar: 1 cup
Wheat flour: 1 ½ cups
Yogurt: 4 tbsp
Whole peppercorns: 10-12
Milk: 1 cup
Water: ½ cup

Method: Mix ingredients to get thick but pouring consistency. Whip batter till smooth. Add peppercorns. Keep aside for two hours to let it rise. Heat oil. Drop large ladlefuls in oil to form circles of 6-8 inches. Fry till golden. Serve with cream or rabdi and garnished with pistachio.

Laapsi

Ingredients

Broken wheat (dalia): 1 cup
Powdered jaggery: 1 cup
Water: 2 cups
Ghee(clarified butter): 1 cup
For garnishing: Thin-sliced dry fruits, desiccated coconut powder, green cardamom powder

For a few days after Diwali, people observe Rama-shyama. This means they visit friends and relatives, a custom similar to Kolakuli observed by Bengalis during Durga Puja. Youngsters are blessed by their elders and given gifts of money. Adults embrace one another. There is also a custom of offering popcorn, puffed rice and sugar moulds during Ramashyama.

Diwali is also a time to celebrate the brother-sister bond in what is called Bhaiya-Duj. This happens on the fifth day. Unlike Raksha Bandhan where the brother comes to the sister's home, here the sister visits her brother who feeds her well and treats her like royalty.

Method: Fry the broken wheat in half a cup of ghee on slow flame till dark golden brown in colour. Add 1 cup of hot water to fried broken wheat. Cover and cook till dry. Cook jaggery in 1cup of water till it melts. Pour melted jaggery and remaining ghee to laapsi. Keep stirring till dry. Add garnishings. Enjoy hot.

Besan ke laddoo

Ingredients

Gram flour: 4 cups
Ghee: 1 cup
Cashew nuts: 12-16, chopped
Almonds: 12-16

Green cardamom powder: 1 tsp

Ground sugar: 2 cups

Pepper: 10-12, ground coarsely

Method: Sieve flour. Melt ghee in pan. Add flour and fry on low heat until mixture starts browning. Add cardamom and chopped cashew nuts and almonds. Remove from heat and let cool. Add sugar. Shape mixture into small balls.

Meethi mathri

Ingredients

Flour: 3 cups
Wheat flour/semolina: 2 cups
Sugar: 2 cups
Aniseed: 2 tsp
Ghee: 1 cup
Ghee for frying

Method: Mix ingredients. Knead into soft dough using little water. Divide dough into equal parts and roll out thick chappatis. Cut into small diamond shapes using sharp knife. Lift with spatula and keep aside on dry cloth for one hour. Heat ghee and deep fry pieces till golden brown. Drain well and let cool.

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Civil Society

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WHERE TO VOLUNTEER

CanSupport India

Kanak Durga Basti Vikas Kendra,
Sector 12, R.K. Puram,
Near DPS School, New Delhi-22
Tel: 26102851, 26102859, 26102869
E-mail: cansup_india@hotmail.com

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 the 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

The Arpana Trust

Arpana is a charitable, religious and spiritual organisation headquartered in Karnal, Haryana. They work with rural communities in Himachal Pradesh and with slum dwellers in Delhi. Arpana is well known for its work on health. They have helped organise women into self-help groups. These SHGs make beautiful and intricate items which are marketed by Arpana. For more details: Arpana Community Centre, NS-5, Munirka Marg Street F/9, Next to MTNL, Vasant Vihar, New Delhi-57.
Phone: (Office) 26151136 and (Resi) 26154964

HelpAge India

HelpAge India needs volunteers from doctors to lay people in all our locations. Older people love to talk to younger people and need emotional support. We require volunteers in Delhi and

Chennai to survey older people staying alone in homes, who could use our Helpline for senior citizens. If you wish to volunteer please email Pawan Solanki, manager at pawan.s@helpageindia.org or write to Vikas, volunteer coordinator, HelpAge India.

Hazards Centre

Hazards Centre is a support group involved in environment and urban issues. We seek to challenge all such processes (hazards) that undermine the rights of marginalised groups in the city. In alliance with these groups, we advocate for alternate planning frameworks that can counter the forces aiming to create sanitised and commercialised cities, devoid of the poor who build and run them. You can volunteer with us as per your time, interest and skills on issues such as Housing, Livelihoods, Pollution, Waste, Transport, Right to Information, Development Communication etc. Contact: Supriya Chotani
92-H, Third Floor, Pratap Market
Munirka Village, Delhi - 67
Ph: 26174244, 26184806,
9811503379 Haz_cen@vsnl.net

iVolunteer

iVolunteer is a non-profit promoting volunteerism since 2001. We have a presence in New Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai and Bangalore. We welcome individuals who wish to volunteer. We assess organisations that need volunteers. We match the skills of volunteers with the right organisation so that both benefit. Contact: Jamal or Seema,
D-134, East of Kailash,
New Delhi-65,
Phone: 01126217460
E-mail: delhi@ivolunteer.org.in

WHERE TO DONATE

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 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

CanSupport India

Kanak Durga Basti Vikas Kendra,
Sector 12 R.K. Puram
Near DPS School, New Delhi-110022
Tel: 26102851, 26102859, 26102869
E-mail: cansup_india@hotmail.com

HelpAge India

HelpAge India is involved in the care of the poor and disadvantaged elderly in 55 locations across the country. They organise primary health care at village and slum level through 53 mobile medical vans, care of the destitute elderly through Adopt a Gran programme with 222 voluntary agencies, Helplines and income generation for the elderly. Their recent programmes are in the tsunami affected regions and in Kashmir for the rehabilitation of the elderly affected by the earthquake disaster. HelpAge serve more than a million elderly in India. If you wish to donate or adopt a granny, please donate online on our site www.helpageindia.org or send an email to helpage@nde.vsnl.net.in
Address: HelpAge India, C-14 Qutub Institutional Area, New Delhi- 110016
Chief Executive: Mathew Cherian - mathew.cherian@helpageindia.org

Bharatiya Academy

The Eco Development Foundation and the Soni Foundation Trust have set up the Bharatiya Academy which runs a school for underprivileged children and for children of defence employees serving on the border who are victims of violence and war. The school is located in Tashipur, Roorkee, Haridwar district and has 115 children on its rolls. The school requires money for buildings and sponsors for the children. Temporary buildings have been made by the Bengal Sappers regiment. Teachers are also required. Contact: Soni Foundation Trust,
F-2655 Palam Vihar, Gurgaon,
Haryana-122017
E-mail: kcjecodev@rediffmail.com
Phone: 0124-2360422

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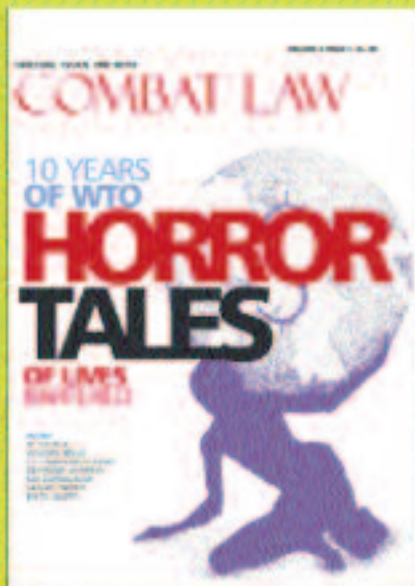
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