

Civil Society



IN ANOTHER WORLD

*From Musharraf Espresso to Kokum vs Cola
people find space to seek alternatives*

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

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COVER STORY



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Civil Society

Two deaths in Gaya and another world

EVEN as the World Social Forum and the Mumbai Resistance were coming to a close with emotional appeals for a better world, the deaths of two exceptional individuals were being scripted in Bihar. Sarita and Mahesh had succeeded in making a difference in 140 villages in Gaya, a district long overrun by violence and exploitation. They did apparently harmless things such as reviving a water harvesting system and nourishing community efforts. But such was the effect of their work that entrenched interests felt sufficiently insecure to shoot them in cold blood.

Individuals who pledge themselves to making another world possible increasingly live with great personal danger. Society mostly does not realise this. People who glibly criticise activists don't have any understanding of the contribution that a Sarita and a Mahesh are making across the country in their own small ways. They are each anonymous links in a process of change which requires courage and a belief that we must leave behind a better world for future generations. Increasingly, these individuals are running into elements which have long thrived on corruption and bad governance.

In years gone by, Sanjoy Ghose and Safdar Hashmi similarly died because they dared. They are most certainly innumerable others who suffer the same fate but never make it to the headlines of the big newspapers. Many activists we know live under the shadow of physical harm. Such are the levels of corruption and filth that any change necessarily meets with confrontation. It does not matter whether you are working in the cities or in the countryside.

It is important to value these change leaders and the challenge for civil society as a whole is to ensure that they are sufficiently networked and protected when harm comes their way. Our visit to Mumbai taught us that both the World Social Forum and the rival Mumbai Resistance have an important role to play in this regard. Whatever the ideological differences between the two, they served as open space for thousands of individuals who came together to assert their beliefs. When one is a small NGO or an independent activist it can be very lonesome. Events like WSF and MR bring people together from across the world.

Both events were also important for getting a sense of globalisation and using it to everyone's advantage. Among the thousands of slogans I must have read in those eight days in Mumbai, the one that I would like to remember most is 'Globalise Protest'. If movements are to succeed and a new order is to be crafted, it is important to draw on all the strengths of a smaller world and in particular use technology to magnify the new voices of new causes. There is much to be gained from globalisation for fighting poverty and improving living standards. The task is to do so in a just and equitable manner and it is important to bring pressure to bear on governments to have the right focus.

With this issue we carry forward our debate on electoral reforms with contributions by Aruna Roy and Nikhil Dey in Rajasthan and Ram Gidoomal in London. We plan to keep this debate going because changes are long overdue and there must be some record of individual experience and viewpoints in this regard. Finally, a big thank you to Ashok Khosla for finding the time to pen this month's essay. He has called many bluffs on the question of big industry and employment. The big future, most certainly, is in thinking small.

Umesh Anand

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CAUSE & EFFECT

Court tells Delhi to track air pollution

Civil Society News
New Delhi

THE Chief Justice of the Supreme Court has expressed concern at the growing number of cars in Delhi and told the state government to take serious note of the situation as it is threatening to undo important gains made by the city in cleaning up air pollution.

The Chief Justice said there were several cars per family even when there wasn't the space to park. There was a need to look at the problem and examine global best practice, he said.

The Supreme Court was hearing an ongoing case on air pollution. The Chief Justice was commenting on a statement of concern expressed by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE).

CSE has pointed out that despite the enormous efforts and substantial gains following the Court's initiatives to combat air pollution, the city's air remains polluted. The average PM10 level is around 255 µg/cum, which is still substantially above the national ambient air quality standard of 60 µg/cum. Pollution levels, though lower, have begun to increase once again, according to the data provided by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB).

It was pointed out that Delhi had made serious gains with the introduction of CNG for public transport. But these gains would be rapidly lost if the absence of a plan for controlling future pollution. There is need to lower emissions from the increasing number of vehicles in the city.

Many examples featured in the discussion, including the Singapore model of transport management, traffic time zone management, and London's congestion tax policy.

The problems in Delhi were listed as:

- Rapidly growing numbers of private vehicles, and increased pollution from slow and congested traffic. The city already has more than 4 million registered vehicles and is adding more than 200,000 vehicles each year. If not checked, the gains from small improvements in vehicle technology and fuels will be lost.
- Inadequate public transport, which increases the dependence on private transport
- Distorted tax policy which taxes public transport at higher rates and makes ownership and usage of private cars and two-wheelers attractive.

CSE, through Harish Salve, presented data to show how growing numbers, crippling congestion and slow traffic is aggravating the haze of pollution. Evidence from global experience proves that slow moving vehicular traffic increases emissions dramatically -- by as much as 70 per cent.

Delhi RWAs get taste of real consumer power

Neha Kohli
New Delhi

THE Union government's plan to introduce the Conditional Access System (CAS) for satellite television programmes in south Delhi is likely to be given a burial. This would be the first assertion of people's power by Delhi's Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs), 70 of whom have formed a joint front.

It was New Delhi's chief minister, Sheila Dikshit, who started involving citizens in governance through the Bhagidari shared governance scheme. RWAs were approached to be partners in activities such as waste management, park maintenance and water harvesting. The RWAs were given an opportunity to take on government babus. They later became Dikshit's key to a resounding victory in Delhi's recent Assembly election-she is the first chief minister of Delhi to win a second consecutive term.

Having got a sense of the force they represent, the RWAs have begun asserting themselves. On the television issue in particular, they have acted as an effective consumer lobby, challenging both the Union government and cable television operators.

The CAS scheme proposed to segregate pay channels from free-to-air (FTA) channels. Subscribers would pay for only what they chose to see. Indian broadcasters would decide which of their channels would be FTA and which would be pay. Each channel would determine its own subscription rates. But under CAS, apart from paying much more for watching their favourite TV channels, consumers would have also had to pay roughly Rs 4,000 to install set-top boxes. While operators were sure to gain from the new system, Delhi's residents felt they were getting nothing. In an interview to *Civil Society*, V C Tandon, secretary general of the Joint Front of Residents' Welfare Associations of Delhi, explains why they went to battle. More significantly, he pleads for RWAs to be given the status of urban panchayats to ensure greater involvement of the residents in any activity which pertains to them.

Has the Bhagidari scheme made RWAs more conscious of their rights?

Yes, now we are trying to make them conscious of their obligations. People

have become reconciled to a certain type of bureaucratic situation, which has existed for years. That is changing. The RWAs are being identified with getting things done.

Everyone requires some level of empowerment. The Joint Front has given direction where no direction existed earlier. We have to build up unity, consensus on issues. CAS is an example of what this unity can achieve. If the RWAs are granted recognition, they will get institutionalised.



V C Tandon

'Broadcasters earn crores of rupees on the strength of the numbers that view these advertisements. We have become instruments for the broadcasters to get huge returns. Our demand is to regulate advertising time...'

The Joint Front can take up common problems, while the RWAs tackle local problems.

Does Bhagidari meet the needs of Delhi's citizens?

Bhagidari is a wonderful concept. The problem arises with the functionaries. They are afraid of RWAs and do not want to share power with them. Therefore, the problems are caused by bureaucratic hassles. If the concept is implemented properly - for example, through establishing urban panchayats

- no one will neglect the people.

What has been the state government's response to the formation of the Joint Front?

We have had a very good response from the chief minister and the government. In fact, we recently organised a workshop on the water crisis, which was attended by the chief minister, various RWAs and water experts. We want to help the functionaries work for our benefit. The media has helped a lot, especially with regard to CAS, by projecting the consumer point of view.

What is your present stand on CAS?

The cable industry has been in India for the last eight years, but has been functioning without any regulation. Broadcasters have taken full advantage of this situation in collaboration with the multi-system operators (MSOs) and cable operators. The broadcasters and MSOs are linked - STAR has 26 per cent stake in Hathway and Zee has a stake in Siti Cable. The broadcasters and MSOs increase rates arbitrarily. The government cannot remain a silent spectator. Till recently, it had not been consulting the consumers, only the cable industry. Our demand is that the government consult consumers on this issue. A second demand is that there be no advertising on pay channels. Broadcasters earn crores of rupees on the strength of the numbers that view these advertisements. We have become instruments for the broadcasters to get huge returns on advertisements. Our demand is to regulate advertising time. If they want advertising, make the channels free-to-air. Otherwise, no advertisements. This is the first time this issue has been raised. If the advertisement problem is tackled, the three major entertainment channels - STAR Plus, Sony and Zee - will probably become free-to-air. We do not want restrictions on mass programming.

Sony and Zee - will probably become free-to-air. We do not want restrictions on mass programming.

Cable payments are being hiked arbitrarily even in non-CAS areas. Will this lead to a consumer backlash?

Of course. At a recent meeting of our member RWAs, we advised them not to purchase set-top boxes till the logistics had been decided. In fact, we now have MSOs and broadcasters coming to talk to us. Earlier, this was not the case. Our stand has had effect.

Killed for making a difference

Civil Society News
New Delhi

THE murder of activists Sarita and Mahesh in Gaya on 24 January, is a national loss. They brought water to 40 villages and accomplished a social revolution. The villages they worked in were on the threshold of an economic transformation.

It is said that Bihar's infamous mafia or perhaps the MCC shot them dead because empowered people don't bow and scrape before hoodlums. The state of Bihar can offer no protection to those who work truly for the people.

Sarita was the daughter of a railway driver, sympathetic to the Naxalite movement. He died in a Bhagalpur jail break. Her mother worked through menial jobs so that Sarita could have an education. Sarita joined the CPI (M-L) and headed their cultural wing, for a while. But she left, because she began to believe people should act for themselves. For a while, she became a researcher at the National Academy for Public Administration in Mussoorie, studying primary education and juvenile homes.

In 1999, she stumbled on a water-harvesting system, dating to 4BC in Gaya, Bihar, India's poorest state. Called the ahar-paine or tank canal system, it connects village tanks to a river or a stream, through a canal. During the monsoon, excess flow from the river flows into the tanks and is stored for use, a perfect system for Bihar, which floods every year. Sarita decided to work from here.

Mahesh came to Patna from Haryana in 1979. He started life as a small-time builder, often carrying the cement mix himself. He became wealthy and contributed to charity. But when a hospital he built for the people, at the cost of some Rs 20 lakhs, was criticised by them, he was taken aback. "Unless people want it you can't force something on them," he said.



Relatives grieve for Sarita and Mahesh

Sarita and Mahesh began to work together from Shabdo village. The local police thought they were Naxalites and the villagers were sure they were state agents. But they overcame suspicions and inspired 40 villages to revive the ahar-paine system. It is 45 kms long and has 170 branches. The experience of working together for a common cause forged Rajputs, Dalits and the Musahar into a single community. Caste and class barriers crashed.

Thanks to the water, farming improved. Fences between fields came down. Collective farming increased wheat production by 25%. In Shabdo, children are going to school, the lanes are clean, and alcohol is no longer consumed. A community centre, a playground and an anganwadi have been built from money given by the Zilla Parishad.

Sarita and Mahesh's immense contribution to the nation is hard to calculate.

Land First, says Ekta Parishad

Civil Society News
New Delhi

EKTA Parishad's Land First Mela was at a safe distance from the World Social Forum.

About 2000 people met here to discuss the struggle for land rights. Canadians, Brazilians, Cambodians and others shared space with adivasis and tribal groups. Digvijay Singh, former chief minister of Madhya Pradesh, dropped by.

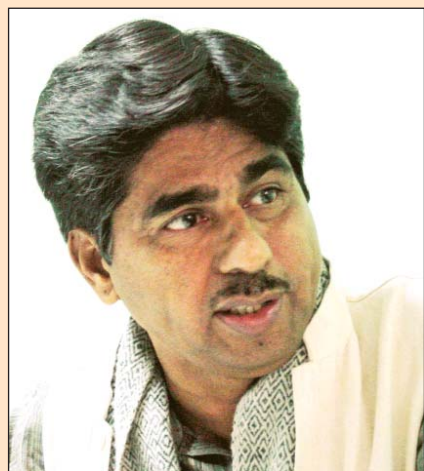
PV Rajgopal convenor of Ekta Parishad said they were not at WSF, because of logistics. It was hard to find space for so many. Excerpts from an interview Rajgopal and Jill Carr-Harris gave Civil Society:

Why are you not in the WSF?

It's a matter of logistics. They could not give us space for 2000 people.

People from Brazil, Canada, Cambodia and other countries were interested in knowing different aspects of our struggle, how we get the land and what do we do after that. We organised a field trip for them to Chattisgarh after the WSF, to educate them.

Then we thought about our own people. So many people, from Kashmir to Kanyakumari, are waging struggles for land in India, so why don't we give them an opportunity to listen to these struggles. So we invited all of them to



Mumbai. We raised the money and put up this tent. In this way we have linked the global with the local.

Right now we are calling it Land First India. We hope later to be able to call it Land First International.

People need to circulate to be together.

er. This is our ground, not that of an international mela.

Do you think the WSF is relevant?

WSF is drawing more and more people. Larger numbers understand the ill

The WSF has become a non-political forum of trade unions, NGOs and left political parties, though it has an NGO genesis

effects of globalisation and that it is going to be a disaster in the coming years, so its time to stand up and fight.

Fighting is one thing. Creating another world is different. We Gandhians are always questioned. Are we wearing khadi, drinking Pepsi, do we brush our

teeth with Colgate? Some of us do, and then we are fighting the multinationals.

Violence and consumerism are related. If we want to create another world we should start living that world, which means a radical change in lifestyle.

What purpose does the WSF serve?

WSF has become a non-political forum of trade unions, NGOs and left political parties, though it has an NGO genesis. It is bringing together a lot of actors and providing a democratic space for us to articulate our views. This is important because in India, the BJP is gradually reducing that space. With the rise of consumerism the market is also intruding in.

What do you recommend?

We have to have an action plan and commitment. India has a good chance and can be the Waterloo of the multinationals. We have Gandhian traditions like swadeshi and boycott.

This is a country where village produce is available, where another lifestyle is possible.

How do we use this? If we can wage a successful war in India, it can be replicated elsewhere.

IITians keep Dubey alive

Civil Society News
New Delhi

PEOPLE from all walks of life marched in silence on January 10 to Raj Ghat from the Gandhi Peace Foundation in New Delhi, as a mark of respect to Satyendra Dubey, the young engineer from the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) in Kanpur, who was murdered in Gaya on November 27, 2003.

Dubey was employed by the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) for the Golden Quadrilateral Project, a roadway linking the extremities of the country. He wrote a confidential letter to Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, exposing rampant corruption between NHAI officials and contractors in the construction of a stretch of road he was working on in Bihar.

Instead of prompt action, Dubey's letter was bounced to various officials and ministries. His murder is now being investigated by the CBI, after concerned citizens, including IITians, vehemently protested and approached the courts of law.

"We think the Prime Minister should answer, since the letter was leaked from his office," said a group of IIT students, who took part in the march.

Students, NGOs, IIT alumni associations, journalists and slum-dwellers walked in solidarity, carrying banners and pictures of Dubey. Activist Aruna Roy of the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) told the marchers that so far, the middle class believed that only Adivasis or Dalits got killed for protesting against corruption, but today, doctors, engineers, lawyers-everybody was vulnerable.

"Dubey's death is the tip of the iceberg," said Roy. Nobody really knows the extent of corruption taking place in the Golden Quadrilateral Project. "Behind every corrupt politician, there are officials who are equally to blame." She urged people to speak out against injustice, to ask questions. "We cannot pick up a gun, so the right to information is the only weapon we have. There are many other unsung Dubey's who have died for exposing corruption," she reminded the gathering.

Commander Jaitly of the Pan IIT Alumni Association said all citizens should join this fight. "How many people will the mafia kill? They can't murder all of us," he said. People can refuse to give or take bribes. Jaitly listed some situations in which the middle class takes the easier option. "We can also spread the word. After all, govern-



A march in Dubey's memory taken out in Delhi

ment officials and contractors are often our friends and relatives."

A resolution was passed, asking the Union government to make public the terms of reference of the CBI inquiry into Dubey's death, to implement the Whistleblowers Act and notify the Right to Information Act. The resolution also called for the institution of an autonomous and independent authority like the Lokpal, which would be duty-bound to take action within a specific time frame against corruption cases brought before it by concerned citizens.

People from IITs and the Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) have formed a group called Jago India; the group intends collecting 250,000 signatures from influential members in the US.

"This group is not for the chicken hearted. When you join, we will assume you mean business. Besides fighting

corruption, which is a very ambitious objective, we will be striving to find Dubey's killers and every man and woman who was involved in instigating his cold-blooded murder. This group will do everything possible to save the IITs and IIMs from destruction," says the group's website.

The SK Dubey Foundation set up by IITians in the US has started an anti-corruption network with Parivartan, Prajanet, Lok Satta and others. A whistleblowers' site for people wishing to report corruption confidentially has also been pasted.

"Let's honour Dubeyji's memory with his own words, which he put so eloquently: Don't remember me or my work, just one request, remember my message," said Arvind Kejriwal of Parivartan, which helped to organise the march.

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www.skubeyfoundation.org

The promise of peace is in talking

Civil Society News
New Delhi

PROMISE of India is a movement started by people of Indian origin in San Francisco. Perturbed by the violence in Gujarat, they decided to link with those in India, to draw up an action plan for peace. "We want to reaffirm our faith in democracy, pluralism, secularism and a united India, said Raju Rajagopal, chairperson.

A conference to talk peace was organised with Anhad in Delhi in January. In a message, economist Amartya Sen said India has a tradition of democracy and secularism. Citing examples from history, he said Indians have always talked their way through disputes. Jews, Muslims and Parsis sought refuge in India.

Aruna Roy of the MKSS said there would be less conflict if politics fulfilled the aspirations of the people. Because of unemployment, youth are depressed and fall prey to communal propaganda. "The government needs to fulfil basic needs, otherwise movements can become volatile."

Sandeep Pandey of Asha has been working in Ayodhya since two years. He organised a Shanti Yagna for peace in a temple and an Iftar party to which many Muslims

came. "For the first time, the grip of communal force loosened in Ayodhya," he said. But he was arrested under Section 144.

Sushma Iyengar from the Kutch Mahila Vikas Sanghatana questioned whether development should only be about the quality of life. Collectives of

Indians have always talked their way through disputes. Jews, Muslims and Parsis sought refuge in India

marginalised people are religious and "we have shunned any engagement with the tenets of religion." Swami Agnivesh said if we want to change society we have to find the strength to use religious energy and mobilise people to act against injustice.

In Gujarat, the state permitted genocide to go unchecked. Julio Rebeiro, ex-Police Commissioner of Mumbai, recommended communal propaganda be

curbed and citizens ensure officials act for the greater good.

Anu Aga, chairperson Thermax Group, urged NRIs to insist on a safety index while investing and ensure funds were not used for communal purposes.

Jayaprakash Narayan of Lok Satta said candidates for political office have to tell more to the voter, because of a Supreme Court verdict. By mobilising the people, Lok Satta persuaded the Andhra Pradesh government to transfer power to the panchayats.

According to Gurcharan Das, who has been a part of the corporate world and is now a columnist, better governance and a faster pace of reforms would decrease poverty further. "Reforms have led to a better mindset," he said.

But Professor Sukhdeo Thorat of the Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, said economic growth must percolate to the marginalised to avoid conflict. "The market is not neutral in India. Ethnicity, not purchasing power matters," he said.

Professor Imtiaz Ahmed from JNU, spoke about state policies which shrank public space for certain communities and led to ghettoisation. Even in trade, communities are being pushed out.

BREAD, PEACE, AND FREEDOM GROW ON SAME STALK ● FORCEFUL EVICTION OF DALIT PEOPLE IS A CRIME



ANOTHER WORLD AT WSF

Civil Society News

Mumbai

EVER tried Musharraf Espresso. Or perhaps you would prefer Mr Vajpayee's Cup of Coffee. May be a refreshing glass of Pak-Bharat Dosti juice is really what you need. Well, just drop in at Civil Junction in Islamabad and Arshad Bhatti promises you will get enough food for thought.

Bhatti was at the World Social Forum (WSF) in Mumbai in search of alternatives that could make South Asia a friendlier place to live in. In coming months he hopes to invite Indian cultural icons to Islamabad to break stereotypes and encourage dialogue. Civil Junction is not just his freaky café but his website as well (civiljunction.org) and through it he hopes to make people in India and Pakistan rethink trenchant positions.

As the curtain went down on the WSF to the unique music of Indian Ocean, more than 100,000 individuals like Bhatti headed home, their idealism spent and strengthened. If globalisation was everyone's problem, everyone had also learnt to globalise protest.

The WSF owes its origins to the successful protests against the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in Seattle in 1999. The first WSF was held in 2001 at Porto Alegre in Brazil to be a counter to the World Economic Forum (WEF). Heads of corporations and governments go to the WEF. The WSF, by contrast, is held to give the rest of the world a voice.

So if you wanted to be heard against multinationals, war, WTO, the World Bank or corporate science, this was the place to be.

The whole world, it seemed, had turned up at the Nesco grounds at Goregaon in the

suburbs of Mumbai. From Brazil to Bihar, Japan to Jharkhand, Kolkata to Canada, the anonymous activist met anonymous activist in a bonding of the marginalised. In the emotional, surcharged atmosphere, another world not only seemed possible, but just around the corner.

Just like it was for the Kokum juice activist who came from Maharashtra's Thane district where Coca-Cola has been extracting ground water. His alternative to Coke was the juice of the local fruit Kokum, 'best in taste'. Crowds flocked to his stall to quench their thirst and express solidarity.

There was also Solomon from Sahibganj, taking a team of young Santhalis from stall to stall, poster to poster explaining issues as diverse as global warming and unfair trade. There were women activists who had literally stepped out of a forest. There was the underground group of courageous Afghan women who told their story. The Bhopal gas victims, too, turned up.

For those who believed that the WSF does not go far enough, the Mumbai Resistance existed across the road. A network of 300 organisations, 40 of which were not from India, the Mumbai Resistance lay claim to being the genuine anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist hub of peoples' movements. The hard core of Maoists, Socialists and Marxists belonged here. (See interview.)

The WSF's call to governments was to reinvent policies so that they benefit people and promote peace and friendship. "People are fed up of listening. We want to be heard. We want action. We want to tell leaders of the world that this diverse gathering of every religion, colour and creed wants a world of compassion, humanity, people," declared Asma Jehangir, the fiery human rights activist from Pakistan.

NO HUMAN RIGHTS IN TIBET. NO OLYMPICS IN BEIJING ● PEOPLE'S POWER IS THE OTHER SUPER POWER

Dr Zafrullah Chaudhury, famous for Bangladesh's rational drug policy, summed up the mood well when he called for a lowering of borders and fences so that people meet more often in South Asia. "Allow people to trade freely. Why can't Bangladeshis go to India and sell their labour. Don't stop them."

When Pakistani music band Junoon, appeared on stage, there was already electricity in the air. Clad in black, their lead singer sang of "dosti" to the people from 130 countries. "When we go back to Karachi, we will say all these people are our people," said the band to loud cheers from the audience.

From the start, it was an expression of protest against cultural imperialism. Junoon's rhythmic mix of South Asian sounds and western beats, mingled with African drums, the Ethiopian harp, the Brazilian samba and Indian Ocean's Indian folk music.

The Siwela Sonke group from South Africa danced as exuberantly as the Adivasi troupe from Madhya Pradesh.

Theatre, too, went global. On a Safdar Hashmi Nukkad, to honour one of India's greatest exponents of protest theatre, people enacted plays which denounced fundamentalism. There were other corners at which groups sang, danced and acted out spoofs and plays for child rights, women's rights, the rights of the dalits, adivasis and other marginalised people of the world and thumbed their noses at America-dominated globalisation and imperial might.

In the frenzied creative outpouring, most of it rough instant theatre, 150 plays were staged in five days.

Endless processions trooped in and out gathering people as they moved noisily. The Dalit processions from four corners of India came marching in with headbands that said: "Cast out Caste". The Tibetan procession was different. They made a dramatic entry with candles and the hum of prayers.

As if to mock the French government, which had tried to ban the hijab, people wore headgear of all shapes and hues. There were turbans, bandanas, scarves and topis. Fashion turned upside down. Salwars, kurtas and dupattas vied with jeans, sarongs, skirts and sarees.

At centre-stage was the protest against imperialism, globalisation, neo-liberalism and fundamentalism. The United States and George W Bush were denounced in lecture halls,

workshops, street theatre, wall graffiti, leaflets and peace marches. WSF expressed its anger against the US invasion of Iraq in no uncertain terms. "We have to drive the US out of Iraq and Afghanistan. We must stop Israel from destroying the Palestinian people. We must impose the rule of law on rogue states like the US, Britain and Israel," said Walden Bello, Director of Focus on the Global South.

"No to war," said Asma Jehangir. "No more war. The US must leave Iraq. We want accountability. No more US bases."

"There are two bullets produced for every man, woman, and child. Who benefits from this? The arms-producing countries are the major super-powers. They are responsible for

shedding the blood of men, women and children the world over," said Irene Khan, Amnesty International, Bangladesh

"The other super power is the power of world public opinion which is based on peace, justice, humanity and shared prosperity," said Jeremy Corbyn, British Labor Party MP and anti-war campaigner.



When Pakistani music band Junoon, appeared on stage, there was already electricity in the air. Clad in black, their lead singer sang of "dosti" to the people from 130 countries. "When we go back to Karachi, we will say all these people are our people."

"If you want peace, don't participate in war," said Amir Rekaby of the Iraqi National Democratic Coalition. "Let's go together to Baghdad." And the western term Middle East was scoffed at. "I am from Egypt and they call us the Middle East, but I am middle to whom? The Middle East was a name given to us by the British. I am from North Africa," said Dr. Naval El Saddawi a writer.

Feminists expressed their anger at the effects of war on women. "I am not a post-feminist. Women are not liberated. . .Afghanistani women cannot be liberated by America. We should not separate between women's liberation and the liberation of land and oil," said Dr. Saddawi.

WSF: How, why, when and where

THE birth of the WSF took place in November 1999, during the conference of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) at Seattle in the US. About 50,000 marchers including anti-capitalist propagandists, anarchists, campaigners for the abolition of third world debt and US organised labour, forced the conference to end in a fiasco.

Seattle ended in victory. For the next one and a half years every major gathering of international powers and institutions was broken up by militant protests: whether it was the World

Economic Forum (WEF) the IMF-World Bank, the G-8 or the European Union. Protestors blocked the streets and prevented the delegates from gathering. The police pounced on them, but their numbers continued to swell.

The effects of globalisation, of leaving the poor behind, harming the environment, profits over people, unleashing genetically modified foods were issues which evoked sympathy among the people.

In February 2000, Bernard Cassen, of a French NGO platform called ATTAC,

Odedo Grajew, head of a Brazilian employers' organisation and Francisco Whitaker from an association of Brazilian NGOs, mooted the idea of a "world civil society meet".

The municipal government of Porto Alegre in Brazil, agreed to play host and the first WSF took place in January 2001.

The emergence of the WSF also owes its origins to peoples' struggles against liberalisation and globalisation sweeping Latin America.

"The Third World War has already

started. This war is tearing down Brazil, Latin America and practically the entire Third World. Instead of soldiers dying there are children, instead of millions of wounded there are millions of unemployed. . . .It is a war by the US against Latin America and the Third World. It is a war over the foreign debt, its main weapon is interest, a weapon more deadly than the atom bomb," remarked Luis Ignacio Silva, president of Brazil as early as 1985.

The WSF is timed to coincide with the WEF and to counter their views.

GEORGE W. BUSH SUFFERS FROM DELUSION THAT HE IS THE PRESIDENT OF THE WORLD ● JUNK WTO



"Why are wars fought against women? Why have women's bodies become battlefields? It is because women have become symbols of honour, caste, and community. To attack her is to attack the community," said another feminist.

Academics dissected the ill effects of globalisation and the misconception that globalisation entails the retreat of the state. "A regime of globalisation entails as much intervention by the State ... It entails a change in class priorities of State away from labour to capital... Globalisation is not a retreat of the State, but a different kind of intervention for different interests," said economist Prabhat Patnaik.

"We want fair trade not free trade," said activists. From Africa came the view that governments should not pay the hefty external debts owed to donor organisations. Instead the money should be used to develop agriculture, where 70% of the population in Africa is employed. "Africa must think of withdrawing from the WTO if it continues messing with the continent," said Dot Keet of the Africa Trade Network.

"A much more broader agenda is needed at the next round of trade negotiations," said Joseph Stiglitz, "and there should not be a push for privatisation without first setting up a safety net. The emphasis should be on social security and linking economic issues with social ones."

Stiglitz said globalisation was a reality. The challenge was to use it to the advantage of the developing world. A huge responsibility therefore rested on people to force their governments to act in the interests of meaningful growth and not just to benefit corporations.

"The challenge is not to stop expansion of global markets but to develop institutions and policies which will provide appropriate governance and human rights, locally, nationally and internationally," said Mary Robinson, of the Ethical Globalisation Initiative.

"Corporation is a legal fiction that is given the false personality of a propertied man," said Vandana Shiva, of the Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology. She condemned the Doha round for supporting total liberation of trade in environmental resources so that "no country has control over delivering water to its people."

Said Esther Penunia of the South-east Asian Coalition for Advocacy (SEA): "Our government (the Philippines) has reduced subsidies to farmers. Cheaper products are flooding the market. Farming is no longer a viable profession. Although our government is trying to protect farmers rights to their seeds, the MNCs are stronger and put pressure. They are asking farmers to lease their lands for contract farming.

We are here to forge international links so that we can exert more pressure than the multinationals on our government."

Myths about transvestites, gays and lesbians were discussed along with human rights violations against sexuality minorities. Lesbians and gays from South Korea said they face tremendous opposition from the Protestant church and Korean youth are not allowed to even access websites to learn about sexuality. US delegates said they had to fight their battles through medical societies. Aparna Satal, a filmmaker, showed Terhi Lakir (Crooked Line), which dealt with homosexuality. "I found them normal, mostly married with no compunctions about extra marital relationships."

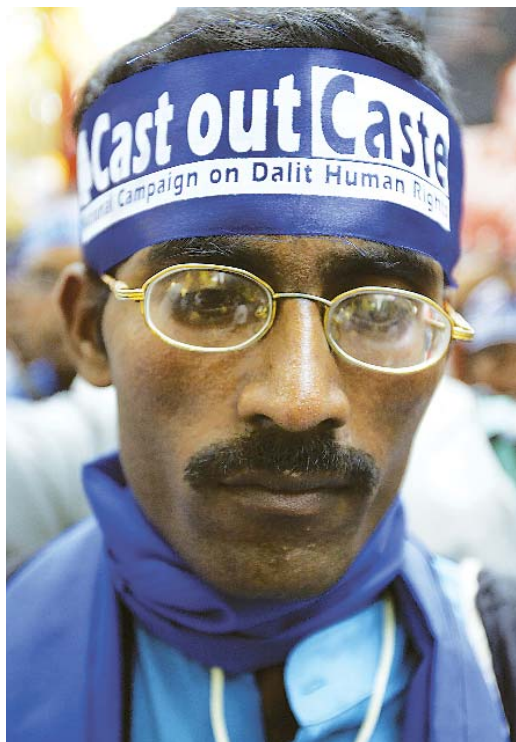
For the first time the issue of disability was on the agenda but the organisers of Why Are You Ignoring Disability were disappointed. Instead of 2000 people only 300 turned up. Anita Ghai, an activist, said there was no provision for sign language and none of the presentations, newspapers and reports was available in Braille.

The media was roundly criticised. "The media acts on behalf of special interests and this is because they say they believe in free enterprise," said an activist of Media Watch Global which is trying to organise citizens to monitor what the media is publishing. Nikhil Wagle, Editor of Mahanagar launched a vituperative attack against English or "linguistic imperialism." He spoke in Hindi. "Because of globalisation, the media is interested only in advertisements and is a propaganda for ministers and corporations."

Fernando Martinez Heredia from Cuba said: "We have to liberate language and thinking. Analyse the cultural war, find its weak points and develop an alternative media with adequate tools, values and tenaciousness."

The WSF's slogan was: Another world is possible. But what should that world be? Do the people who come together at the WSF really live the change they want to see? Is there an agenda, are there real contours to the outpouring of ideas and emotions? Writer Arundhati Roy suggested forcing two American multinationals to close shop.

Probir Purkayastha, member of the organising committee, answers that by saying the WSF does not believe in setting an agenda. It is for movements to do that for themselves. The WSF provides the space within which people can express themselves. This isn't an age of single, hierarchical solutions. It isn't an age where leaders arrive as messiahs. The WSF was proof of the many voices eager to be listened to. Another round of Musharraf Espresso anyone?



QUICKLY....

100,000 people from 132 countries participated.

800 volunteers from 20 countries.

2,300 journalists registered for the WSF.

150 streets were staged.

85 films were shown

200 workshops were held

WHEN BUSH COMES TO SHOVE RESIST • NO BLOOD FOR OIL • WATER IS NEEDED FOR LIFE NOT PROFIT

WSF AND THE MUMBAI RESISTANCE

'I'm tired of claims of real warriors...'

AMID the beating drums and swirling clouds of dust at the World Social Forum (WSF) **Probir Purkayastha's** was an unflappable presence. Not one for high-voltage statements, Purkayastha, a member of the WSF organising committee, offered evenness and humour in the cool confines of the media centre even as emotions stayed at a boil outside.

What do you think has been achieved by the WSF?

In the past ten years or so there has been a growing feeling that there is no alternative to corporate entities taking over and dominating the world. In that sense it is important to realise that a whole mass of people do not agree. Protests made by individuals or groups in isolation can be ignored and dismissed as being marginal. But when people from different backgrounds come together to make this statement it is difficult to say that they are marginal.

What we see at WSF is people coming together in a vibrant energetic movement. Quite often politics is about symbols. It is important to come together to assert and seek reassurance from each other that another world is possible.

WSF provides the space for individual activists, social movements and alliances to come together on issues as diverse as Enron, Iraq, water, forests, public health, gender and so on.

There is also a growing need to share information. Stories of privatisation, for instance, are often given wide circulation, but when the railways are handed back to the government in Britain all you get is two paragraphs in the newspapers. WSF does not just bring people together it facilitates sharing of information on alternative views of the world.

But critics of the WSF say there is little internal conviction, that this is a tamasha, a jamboree... That this is all fluff and that the hard ball of conviction and commitment is across the road at the Mumbai Resistance.

I'm a little tired of hearing claims of real warriors and false ones. If there is little conviction in what we are doing why are they protesting? If we are irrelevant, then we should be irrelevant to them as well. So, why bother to protest.

But, on a more serious note, I think there is a misunderstanding about the role that the WSF is supposed to play. The WSF does not intend to create the agenda for struggle. It is the movements which will do that in their independent ways. We merely provide movement-friendly space.

It is also interesting that those who are criticising WSF and accusing it of being irrelevant decided their course of action in Amsterdam.

Funding is a specific complaint. WSF's sources of funds are seen as being suspect. So for all the protests about imperialism and big business, WSF is seen as lacking genuine foundations.

WSF India has not taken money from any corporate entity, the Ford Foundation or the World Bank. WSF took money from the Ford Foundation and we said that we disagreed with that. As for foreign delegates using foreign funding, I don't see why India should subsidise an international event.

You say WSF is space available to everyone. There is, however, a grievance over groups which believe in armed struggle being kept out.

All groups are welcome as long as they believe in dialogue. I frankly do not see how this is a problem because even armed groups say they take to arms since other avenues are closed. But within the WSF this is a contested issue. As things stand, armed groups which stand for armed insurrection, political parties and governments are excluded from the space the WSF provides.

WSF says another world is possible. But there seems to be no WSF definition of what this world should be..

To a lot of people fighting multinationals could mean rejecting their products. To others it could mean nationalising them. There could be others who believe in some other form of protest. This is a century which will have to seek solutions through competition of ideas. Any political movement is unlikely to find a messiah.

'WSF is not a solution. It is too passive'

THE distance between Mumbai Resistance and the World Social forum was hard to traverse. There was a busy road in between and deep dangerous ditches. Outside, activists distributed pamphlets, denouncing WSF with funny spoofs, cartoons and Marxist literature. Painted on the road at the gate was the slogan: "Don't be at the crossroads. Come to MR." The crowd was thinner, but loudspeakers blasted fiery speeches and revolutionary songs to a dedicated audience sitting quietly on the floor.

Shiv Sundar, Convenor of Mumbai Resistance, spoke to *Civil Society* about why they chose to keep a distance from the WSF.

Why are you opposed to the World Social Forum?

We are not against the WSF. We just have a different point of view. We both have a larger context that of fighting imperialism. But we differ in our understanding of the forces of imperialism and globalisation and in our responses to it.

Since the early 1990s imperialism is becoming more aggressive. There is both territorial aggression and economic aggression.

But the resistance to it is passive and the WSF wants it that way. They think only a policy correction is needed. The reality is that a systemic correction is required. The process initiated at the WSF is being portrayed as offering solutions, which it is not.

How are you different?

Mumbai Resistance is a conglomeration of 300 different organisations, which are struggling with their own vision. We have people with varying ideologies, who are fighting for a self-reliant economy to a resurgence in socialism. People like Dr BD Sharma, who is with us bring in a different kind of socialism. Mahendra Singh Tikait is also with us. People who believe in armed struggle are here. Even sympathetic bureaucrats can join.

We want to concretely define an alternative socio-economic structure, as one built on a basis of self-reliance, with a total break from all controls, domination and subjugation by imperialism and the institutions of the world capitalist system - such as the World Bank, IMF, WTO, TNCs, etc. We believe that prosperity and growth in India, as with all other underdeveloped countries, can be achieved only through a self-reliant economy, moving towards a genuine socialist order. We are of the opinion that this can be achieved through struggle, not endless and often not so meaningful debates

Hasn't communism failed or become largely irrelevant?

Communism has not failed. It has intensified and sharpened. There are many complexities to Marxism but it is a science. Many movements are resurging. You can see it in Nepal, in the Philippines, Turkey, Peru and Columbia. We are trying to consolidate this process and discuss a joint plan of action.

One reason you opposed the WSF was because it had been funded by certain international development agencies. How are you funded?

Funding from imperialist and capitalist governments, corporates or foreign institutional sources can never help the peoples' movements. Our funding has come from the people. Farmers groups from Punjab contributed Rs 3 lakhs. Our volunteers went out and raised Rs 50,000. Each grassroots organisation gave Rs 5000.

Do you think foreign funding to NGOs should be stopped?

We know it has actually increased since 1993.

The reality is that a systemic correction is required. The process initiated at the WSF is being portrayed as offering solutions, which it is not

WE NEED FAIR TRADE NOT FREE TRADE • CHILDREN CHANGE THE WORLD WHEN ADULTS LISTEN TO THEM

Kokum vs Coke. And the winner is...

Civil Society News
Mumbai

A jaunty cap perched on his head, Mr Bawaskar yells like a hawker on the busy street: "Drink Kokum, not Coke. Good for you." His stall-the S M Joshi Memorial Juice Stall-sells lime juice and Kokum for half the price of a Coke. And the crowds are rolling in. "We are doing very brisk business, thank you. Many foreigners are coming, but so are Indians," Bawaskar says, stopping to catch his breath.

Kokum juice looks like Coke, but is actually a traditional fruit found in western India. Bawaskar says Kokum fruit growers are finally reaping a rich harvest. Small industries to process the fruit and make concentrates have come up all over Goa and Maharashtra, increasing demand.

"See, we can't tell our children to drink Coke. Coke contains phosphoric acid which thins our bones and causes acidity. Kokum, on the other hand, removes acidity," says Bawaskar. Ever since the Centre for Science and Environment revealed Coke's dark toxic secrets, more skeletons are jumping out of the multinational's closet. People in Plachimada in Kerala, Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh and Kudus in Maharashtra are protesting against Coke's huge extraction of precious groundwater and its dumping of toxic waste on their fields.

A Quit India movement against Coke is gathering steam. In a historic move, the Perumatty panchayat in Plachimada cancelled the licence they had given to Hindustan Coca-Cola Beverages Pvt. Ltd (HCBPL) to run a bottling plant. The panchayat preferred to forego the money they were getting from HCBPL to "protect public interest". HCBPL set up the bottling plant in 2000. It extracted 8-15 lakh litres of groundwater every day. Soon villagers noticed their water was becoming scarce and unfit for use. Then the company began dumping toxic waste on their fields claiming it was fertiliser. Later when the "fertiliser" was scientifically analysed, it was found to contain lead, cadmium and other dangerous heavy metals.

Naturally, the people began to suffer from health problems. Agriculture declined and the people, mostly scheduled tribes, were forced to migrate for work.

The Perumatty panchayat's decision was based on these facts. But HCBPL refused to accept the people's



The Kokum stall at WSF

verdict and instead went to court. In December 2003, the Kerala high court asked the Perumatty panchayat to ensure that the company withdrew only groundwater equal to that used by a landowner with 34 acres of land. In a significant judgement, the court said groundwater belonged to the people and the government had no right to allow a private party to extract groundwater which was a "property held by it in trust".

In Mehndiganj, Varanasi, too, Coke is draining groundwater and throwing off its toxic waste. People are agitating, asking for the plant to be closed. Part of the land on which the plant is located belongs to the village panchayat. The company has not paid a big amount of stamp duty. Neither has it provided any employment to local people. Only 400 people have been given jobs as

daily wagers. In December, 2003 nine activists of the anti Coca-Cola movement went on a five-day fast, demanding the plant's closure.

In Kudus village in Maharashtra's Thane district, villagers are travelling to and fro in search of water, ever since a Coke bottling plant came up. They are questioning the subsidised land, water, electricity and tax breaks the multinational gets from the government.

Bawaskar works for the Samata Vichar Prasarak Sanstha in Thane. He says they can't expect Aamir Khan to dance to their tune. But activist Medha Patkar is the spirit behind the anti-Coke movement and writer Arundhati Roy liked the Kokum juice. So will his stall succeed in making the mighty multinational bite the dust? Bawaskar fumbles for a reply. "I am only a small man," he says.

Lankan tea lands in MNC hot water

Civil Society News
Mumbai

SRI Lanka has a fine social welfare record, but in recent years, multinationals are invading the island, casting a shadow of doubt on its future human development indicators.

Multinationals are buying up tea and rubber plantations in pristine areas, says P Logeswary, programme officer, Human Development Organisation (HDO), Kandy. The government nationalised plantations several years ago and is now selling them, sometimes dividing one estate into two.

The trade unions are backing the government because they perceive an increase in jobs. "The multinationals want to replace plantations with factories," says Logeswary. "Since these regions are unspoilt, some are keen to mine groundwater. Bottling plants, linked to Coca-Cola and Pepsi, are being set up."

"We believe about 4.5 million tea pluckers are likely to lose their jobs," she says. The new owners, who have

opted to grow tea, are promoting machines to pluck tea leaves. New methods of cultivation, decidedly western, are being introduced. Plantation workers who have lived on these estates for centuries are being told to pack up and leave. About 52 per cent of them are women. "They have no land, money or citizenship rights," says Logeswary.

She says population figures have gone down because the women were forcibly sterilised to keep their population under check.

The plantation workers are mostly Tamils of Indian origin, and comprise 6 per cent of Sri Lanka's population. They were brought to the island by the British to slave on the tea plantations around 1820. While many continue to work on the estates, some are sweepers, toilet cleaners and cobblers in the cities. Literacy levels are lower among this group than the rest of the population.

According to HDO, about 250,000 thousand Tamils of Indian origin are stateless. Sri Lanka has two types of citizenship-by birth or by descent. The Citizenship Act of 1948 conferred citizenship by descent on all persons born

in Sri Lanka and whose father is Sri Lankan. Applications for citizenship for registration were confined to persons born of mixed marriages whose mother was Sri Lankan. Tamilians became stateless by default. They had to prove their fathers were born on the island and obtain birth certificates. This task proved difficult because birth registration is a recent phenomenon in Sri Lanka.

The government of India repatriated 337,066 Tamils and gave passports to 84,000. But another 85,000, who had applied for Indian passports, did not receive them because the Indian government decided not to issue any more passports. Their children continue to live on the estates and their numbers have swelled to 2.5 million. They don't want to leave the island, but do not enjoy any rights as citizens.

HDO has taken up this issue with the UN and the European Union. Recently, the Sri Lankan government liberalised the Citizenship Act, and Logeswary says rules are now simpler. But there is a catch. "250,000 thousand Tamils have to get their citizenship registered in three months' time. This is impossible," she says.

RICKSHAW RIDE, POLLUTION FIGHT ● THE VIRUS DOES NOT DISCRIMINATE. HIV AFFECTS US ALL

Will someone listen to Afghan women?

RAWA filmed an execution, BBC, CNN didn't want to telecast it

Civil Society News
Mumbai

THE tent is tucked away in an obscure corner. Inside, Sahar Saba, spokesperson for the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), competes with the din outside to be heard. There are many in the room. "I thought we'd just be talking to ourselves," said a relieved organiser.

After September 11, TV watchers across the globe watched a chilling documentary on CNN and BBC. It showed the execution of women in a stadium in Afghanistan by the Taliban. It was RAWA which smuggled a camera into the stadium and shot that film, much before September 11, at great risk to their lives. They travelled to Pakistan and approached CNN and BBC. Both TV channels refused. "They said the film was too chilling for a western audience," says Sahar. "But after September 11, the film was shown repeatedly."

RAWA is an underground social and political organisation of women, founded in 1977. It runs schools, orphanages, literacy classes, health services and income generating programmes in Afghanistan and along areas bordering Pakistan. Its main focus is on the struggle

against fundamentalism and crimes against women.

RAWA continues to remain underground. The US has replaced the Taliban with warlords, flattened the country's meagre infrastructure, littered it with landmines and encouraged a lucrative drug trade.

There is no security or political stability. "We have to keep changing houses and taking security measures. Our demonstration was attacked in Pakistan, our leader killed in Quetta, we receive threatening e-mail, face fundamentalists in Pakistan, Afghanistan and from the Northern Alliance," says Sahar.

The people continue to struggle and Sahar says the image of her country as a "terrorist" one pains them deeply. Afghans, too, want peace, democracy, development and prosperity. "Look at their continued resistance to fundamentalism, brutality and repression," she says.

Sahar was seven when her family took refuge in a camp in a tribal area near Pakistan. Her father, a Pushtoon, took the courageous decision of sending her to a school run by RAWA in Quetta. "These are different schools," she says. "I learnt early my responsibilities and what I can do for others."

In 1979, RAWA resisted the Soviet occupation of

Afghanistan. RAWA members distributed pamphlets telling people about the crimes being committed by the Soviets. RAWA's founder, Meena, was assassinated. When the Taliban arrived, RAWA warned the people they were worse than the Soviets. Years of brutality followed.

It was only after 1997, when RAWA got access to the Internet, that its members began to contact groups in the US, India and elsewhere. Mostly individuals, students, even children, supported them.

The bigger development agencies shied away. "They say they will not support a political organisation. One UN agency even asked us to remove the word "revolutionary" from our name."

"You have to be radical. It has to be a strong message that we send out to the fundamentalists. We will not compromise, we will always tell the truth. Education is the only key to empowerment," she says.

"We need to provide people with the basics to fight terrorism," says Sahar. "We are providing people with a different mentality and promoting a culture of peace. We teach history, tell people about the Resistance, how we fought the occupation of the country by the Soviets."

"As long as the warlords are in power, the Loya Jirga or the Constitution will have no meaning," says Sahar.



Adivasis want their forests back

Civil Society News
Mumbai

THE Adivasi groups made people stop in their tracks as they danced and sang at the WSF. They stood apart with their headbands and eye-catching clothes. "For the first time, women are getting a chance to express themselves," says K Krishnan, convenor of the Adivasi Solidarity Council (ASC). "This is a great forum for us because we can talk to a sympathetic audience."

Krishnan has reason to be upbeat. The ASC has issued a proclamation after discussions with Adivasi groups from 12 states in India. "The Adivasi world is another world," he says. "Governments, multinationals and political parties who thought we were voiceless should understand we are not. Many people are with us."

The ASC proclamation reaffirms the Adivasis' traditional rights over their forests, land and water. "Before the British came, the forests belonged to us. We are merely reclaiming our heritage," says Krishnan.

The proclamation asks that development be built on indigenous knowledge and not on "life threatening industry". It rejects the government's plans to continually declare forested areas as sanctuaries for eco-tourism or parcel off forests for plantations and entertainment centres, under the influence of globalisation and liberalisation.

The Adivasis declare that nomadic groups like the Banjaras, Kurumbar, Pulayar and others belonged to their community. Non-Adivasis like the Badugas of the Nilgiri region or the Parivara Naikars should not come under the ST list because they don't belong to the Adivasi community, says the proclamation.

Krishnan says they will also raise awareness among the middle class about the Adivasi cause. "The city lives off rural areas. If we decline, so will they."

"The government belongs to us, since we are the people who elect it," he says. To have a bigger say in politics, Adivasi groups are raising good political leaders and rejecting past ones who deserted the cause. "Certainly our vote-bank is small in many states, but we can spark international attention," says Krishnan. The Adivasis are also forming alliances with Dalits, trade unions and the unorganised sector. International links are being forged with groups in the Philippines, Latin America and Japan.

WHY ARE YOU ALSO IGNORING DISABILITY? ● LINKING UP THE RIVERS: A MILLENNIUM FOLLY?

Building democratic childhoods in Kenya

Aashti Bhartia
Mumbai

HITLER was a result of his childhood experiences, posit child rights advocates Betty Mwalelenu and Jeff Murithi. To the two activists, who were in Mumbai to attend the World Social Forum (WSF), organised participation is an important means of instilling democratic values in a child. To become responsible citizens, Betty explains, children need to be treated as resourceful people right from the beginning. "Hoping to see a world free of people like (George W.) Bush", she works to increase children's participation in Kenya's nascent democracy. Child Rights Clubs all over Kenya are the main forum to increase participation of children. At the moment, the government's policy on AIDS is a key issue being debated in Kenya, and in the Child Rights Clubs. Betty explains that as per government policy on HIV testing, parents reserve the right to determine whether or not children below the age of 18 should be tested for the HIV virus. The Clubs argue that this right should be transferred to the children so that they can exercise their right to be tested, independent of their parents' decision. The policy on AIDS is only one aspect of the larger rewriting of the Constitution taking place in Kenya at the moment. Child rights advocates are agitating for provisions that grant children the right to participate in policies affecting them. Thus, the Clubs work not only to educate children on their rights, but also to build a more democratic society by including their inputs. On the larger effects of globalisation in Kenya, Jeff says, "We feel the effects, but we don't understand them." The breakdown of the social fabric, as Kenya moves from a community based economy towards globalisation, seems to him the most glaring effect. For instance, he cites the increase in child-led households, as AIDS kills increasing numbers and HIV orphans are left to fend for themselves by the community, as a potent effect of this breakdown.

Privatisation makes life on the road tougher

TRUCK drivers lead a hard life. Spending long hours in a monotonous and hazardous job, away from home for days on end, they end up relying on alcohol and sex workers. All these factors impact their health.

It is to address such issues that the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) brought its worldwide campaign, Fatigue, to India at the WSF. ITF deputy regional secretary Mahendra Sharma said Fatigue aims to limit road transport drivers' workdays to eight hours, with a break every four hours. "Tired drivers fall asleep at the wheel and drink alcohol," Sharma explained. The prevailing lack of standards is harmful to the driver's health and a danger to road safety.

An important part of ITF's work is its campaign against HIV/AIDS. Sharma said that the nature of their work keeps drivers away from home and they engage in sexual encounters with women en route. If found to be HIV positive, the drivers are subject to social stigma and often even lose their jobs. ITF campaigns currently under way in Bangladesh, aim to increase awareness about HIV issues amongst drivers and employers. The campaigns use roadside dhabas, which also serve as brothels, as their focal points because the dhabas are the drivers' "home away from home".

Under the World Bank fiscal adjustment programme and the WTO policy on pushing liberalisation in the service sector, India is under pressure to stop spending on public sector transport. No new public buses are being added as the transport sector is becoming increasingly privatised. Privatisation affects transport workers, as Sharma explained, because "when it was a state service, the state provided rest services, but the private sector does not."

Regulating work hours in the private sector is extremely difficult. "Big companies can be made to follow standards," Sharma said, "but not smaller private companies." He added that the competition usually transfers to pressure on drivers to deliver faster.

Citizen Pierre on America

Civil Society News
Mumbai

FOR three months in a year, 21-year-old Pierre-Olivier Lamontagne plants trees in Canada and for the remaining nine months he works as a global volunteer.

"The major issue we see every day is destruction of the forest. Multinationals from the US have been felling trees, since years. Now 60% of our forests are gone," he says.

Pierre flew down from Quebec to help organise the WSF. So did 500 other volunteers from different parts of the world. They were all under 30. "There are older people here with knowledge they are willing to share. We have ideas and want to learn from them," he says. Pierre was in charge of setting up the innumerable stalls and allotting them. Dressed one day in a dhoti, mobile phone in hand, he made heads turn.

"People here think life is perfect in the West. I live in the American bubble and the Americans are still floating in it because of Hollywood. They don't

know what is happening in the south and they don't care. But in Quebec, we are French so we are unable to follow the Americans, because we have a language barrier." Pierre's father is a criminologist and his mother a welfare agent, with the government.

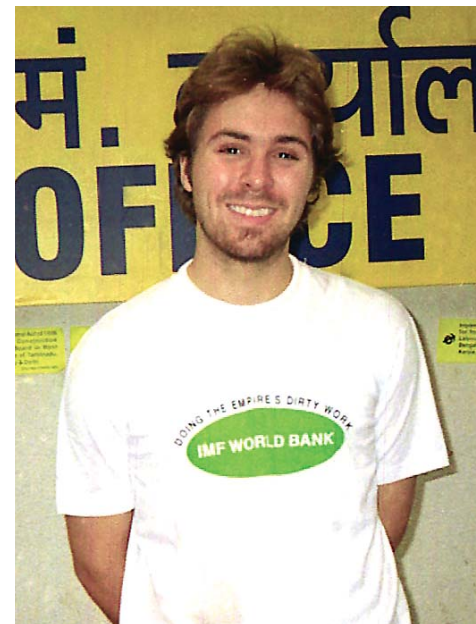
In Canada the suicide rate is becoming the highest in the world, says Pierre. People are suffering from depression and looking for a reason to live.

"Forty years ago we threw away religion because the Church was oppressive. Now people need to have roots, to hold on to something. New Age

spirituality, a throwback from the 60s, is witnessing a resurgence, mostly in cities."

Pierre wanted to understand what was happening in developing countries, so three years ago he spent time in Kerala working with an NGO on education and environment.

"I came back to India to get a deeper insight, to be part of the WSF and to participate in changes taking place." The WSF put Pierre in touch with several NGOs. He wants to build a network and a database of all these groups.



Pierre-Olivier Lamontagne

A shirt in 30 seconds

Civil Society News
Mumbai

AN abusive manager in a Bangalore garment unit reportedly ordered each woman worker to stitch one shirt every 30 seconds. Fifty women were to finish 120 jeans in one hour. He threatened to sack them if they didn't comply.

Ms Tewari, an IAS officer from the Women's Commission, stepped in. Quoting the Supreme Court's definition of sexual harassment, she threatened to act. The manager was removed. Working hours were reduced to nine. A canteen and a restroom have been added.

It was the Civil Initiatives for Development and Peace (Cividep) which informed the labour department and the Women's Commission about the plight of the garment workers.

The garment industry in Bangalore employs perhaps the largest number of women workers in the state, after the beedi industry. "The city has around 729 factories, which employ nearly 1,46,835 workers," says Mr Jayaram of Cividep. "Nearly 85 per cent are women below the age of 30."

Unlike Delhi, where orders for garments are sub-contracted several times, in Bangalore, Walmart, Nike and Gap deal directly with their contractors. Most manufacturers are exporters and a single factory employs more than 2,000 people. The percentage of home-based work is

small.

The women generally work 12 hours each day, with a half-hour break for lunch. Many come from rural areas about 120 kms from the city. Cividep found some women earned Rs 2,000 a month after six years of service. Helpers earned as little as Rs 800. Harassment-foul language, unreasonable workload and no overtime-is common. Employees are afraid to complain since their services can be terminated any minute.

But the inspector of factories under the Labour department is not sympathetic. "He says the factories are giving jobs and bringing in foreign direct investment. The manufacturers are paying the minimum wages, according to Supreme Court guidelines, so we cannot really complain," says Jayaram. What the inspector does not understand is that these factories can disappear quickly. "The machinery can be loaded in a truck and the factory can be relocated to a cheaper part of the globe any time" says Jayaram.

The solution, he says, is to organise workers in India and abroad. A South India Coalition has been formed. Textile union workers from Ahmedabad are also joining. "Once the Multifibre Trade Agreement expires in 2004, garment factories from Bangladesh are likely to be relocated in India," says Jayaram. Bangladesh buys thread and cloth from India and shifting the garment units would bring down costs for the multinationals.

1.1 BILLION PEOPLE DON'T HAVE SAFE WATER. WE CONSIDER IT AN ISSUE ● COAL LEADS TO FIRE

Bangladesh watches big brother India

Civil Society News
Mumbai

A large contingent of activists from Bangladesh, mostly women, came to the WSF. Bangladesh was vocal in its opposition to India's river linking plans and highlighted the adverse effects of these plans on Bangladesh.

One well-known activist was Dr Zafrullah Chowdhury, of the People's Health Centre. In 1982, when Bangladesh drew up its Essential Drugs Act, Dr Chowdhury helped ban 1,700 dangerous or useless drugs and set a unique example to other countries of how to control their market for therapeutic drugs.

In 1981, he started Gono Pharmaceuticals (GP) to make essential drugs of the highest quality at a low cost. It has been a great success and now supplies drugs at prices which are 60 per cent below those of the

multinationals. Half of GP's profits are reinvested, half go to its social projects.

In an interview with Civil Society, Dr Chowdhury touched on India's troubled relations with Bangladesh and the issues they were raising at the WSF.

On trade: India gets much more out of Bangladesh than we do. We make about half a billion dollars whereas India gets seven billion dollars out of us. India should open its borders with us and allow free trade.

We can sell to the north-east, to Bhutan, but all roads are blocked and we are being fenced in. We want India to open a corridor to Nepal as well. Where are the terrorist camps in Bangladesh which India keeps talking about? There are none. India should also allow Bangladeshis to work in their country. They form a small percentage of migrant workers. We can sell our labour.

ON NATURAL GAS: Now they say we are not selling gas

to them. First, how much gas do we really have? We get contradictory figures from everyone, so the estimates should be correct. Even so, we can sell gas, but tell us the business plans? We don't want the Americans coming in with the Indians. Talks should be bilateral. Why not let Bangladesh liquefy the gas and then sell it to India. But they are saying they want only raw gas.

On issues at the WSF: We want to highlight the occupation of Iraq and Palestine. WTO must stop agricultural subsidies and allow the free flow of agricultural commodities from the developing world.

We want patents banned except for innovation on process patents, for not more than 10 or 12 years. We oppose the privatisation of water. We also want a nuclear free world. But the developed world must first stop stockpiling nuclear weapons before telling the developing countries to do it.

Getting to be a Roma moderate is harder

Civil Society News
Mumbai

IN the serene surroundings of the Pius College, around the corner from the WSF, Valeriu Nicolae spoke to a room of Adivasi activists about how minorities could be involved in political decisions and get representation.

"Another revolution means another political class. We have to dialogue with the politicians rather than talk to the converted," he said. Valeriu is a Roma activist from Romania.

The late prime minister, Indira Gandhi, once called Roma "the lost children of India". Often called gypsies, many in the community trace their roots to India. Because of their darker skin and different culture, the Roma were historically never accepted by European society. They were not allowed to settle anywhere and were forced to move from one place to the next. About five million Roma were murdered in the Nazi camps during the Holocaust.

Eight to twelve million Roma live in Europe and continue to be a discriminated minority. In recent years, membership to the EU has been made conditional to eastern European countries improving their human rights record, but implementation is tardy. Most elites continue to harbour stereotypical views about the Roma. "The direct result is reluctance and in most cases refusal of important public personalities of Romani origin to declare their membership or links to Romania's Romani minority," says Valeriu.

Even worse were the derogatory remarks made recently by the Prime Minister of Romania about the Roma. As a result, other Romani politicians are also talking the same language to distance themselves from their own community. But then, the Roma, too, believe that interaction with the majority community is not good.

"There is lack of communication," Valeriu says. "Human rights activists and politicians speak a different language. The political class talks nationalism and majority history. The activists talk accusingly of human rights abuses."

Politicians don't want to listen to radicalism. An effective option is diplomacy. Valeriu says training for Roma activists in diplomacy and internship with the European Parliament and the European Commission can help them gain experience and insight.

"A minimum 8 per cent of the Romanian population is of Roma origin and not a single one of them is in the Foreign Services. How can we fight stereotypes and provide role models for the next generation of Roma diplomats and politicians if there is nobody in a position to do it?" he asks.

"The political class is in a powerful position. We need to have a well-qualified elite to change stereotypes," says Valeriu.

Zone Ahimsa under threat

Civil Society News
Mumbai

SOFT candlelight, the gentle hum of prayers and monks clothed in deep red—the Tibetan procession breezed into the World Social Forum (WSF) late in the evening. "We want moral support to carry on our work," says Lobsang Phuntsok, information officer, exiled government of Tibet. More than any other nation, the Tibetans rely on world public opinion, on dialogue and ahimsa.

There are six million Tibetans and 7.5 million Chinese in Tibet. The Chinese are rapidly colonising the country, building massive infrastructure there. Tibet's fragile environment with its lakes, wetlands, grasslands and biodiversity will soon be replaced by dams, railroads, highways and so on. River linking plans are afloat. The Brahmaputra is to be diverted to water China's cities and industries.

For several centuries, before the Chinese walked in, Tibet looked after Asia's water supply. The Yangtze, Brahmaputra, Indus, Yellow, Mekong, Salween, Sutlej, Arun and Karnali rivers all originate from the Tibetan plateau. Indians, Pakistanis, Chinese, Bangladeshis, Bhutanese,

Nepalese, Burmese, Vietnamese, Cambodians and Thais rely on the water of these rivers.

In 1987, the Dalai Lama proposed that Tibet be made a Zone of Ahimsa, "a refuge where humanity and nature can live in peace and harmony". He proposed that Tibet should be demilitarised and all nuclear weapons banned. The country should become the world's largest natural park or biosphere. Strict laws would be enforced to protect wildlife and plants and a policy of sustainable development adopted in populated areas. National resources and policy would promote peace and environmental protection.

"Because of international pressure, the Chinese government has initiated a dialogue. Our first delegation met with a good response. We want general autonomy for our country. We are willing to let the Chinese handle foreign policy and security," says Phuntsok.

The Tibetans always understood the subtle relationship between human beings, wildlife, plants, physical phenomena and spiritual realities. Today, Tibet's culture and traditions are under threat. "Culture is related to religion and the Chinese regard religion to be a poison," says Phuntsok.

"Our elders say that when the Chinese troops entered Tibet, they caused so much havoc, even the animals would shiver at the sight of their uniforms," says Tsering Yangchen, information officer.

Most of the Tibetans who fled to India were nomads. Their first settlement was in Karnataka. They were given work on construction sites. They tried their hand at farming and failed. "We cannot ask the Indian government for assistance," says Yangchen. But independent schools are functioning under the Ministry for Human Resource Development and are an important means of keeping Tibetan culture alive.



Tsering Yangchen

Animals know GM from organic food

Dr Mae-Wan Ho

HERE are many anecdotes about the length to which domestic and wild animals will go to avoid eating GM food. Science and Society reports the case of a high school student in the Netherlands who carried out an experiment to show that mice did prefer non-GM food. This confirmed a farmer's observation that mice in his barn ate a pile of non-GM maize but left a similar mound of GM maize untouched.

Scientists in Austria are examining animal food preferences as one way to assess food quality. Dr. Alberta Velimirov of the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Biological Agriculture and Applied Ecology in Vienna is a member of an interdisciplinary group of scientists using a combination of methods to assess the quality of food produced under diverse conditions.

They found that humans and animals tended to prefer organically grown carrots, beetroot and golden apples instead of conventionally grown produce.

But these are general trends. Velimirov readily admits that neither people nor animals always prefer organic, although some biologists believe that animals tend to eat food that's healthy to increase their biological 'fitness'. (If that were true, there would have been no alcoholics or drug addicts.)

Organic produce scores higher in "quality count". The tests they used are empirical and appear capable of distinguishing organic from conventional produce, and they are simple and relatively inexpensive to carry out.

This recent work confirms an earlier comprehensive review of 150 studies, carried out by researchers in the Federal Institute for Health Protection of Consumers and Veterinary Medicine in Berlin, Germany, which showed that animals do prefer organic produce.

Why not see if your pets and farm animals prefer organic?

For details about the tests: www.isis.org

Europe's second Enron shame

ENRON'S collapse in 2001 was an eye opener for those innocent about rampant white-collar crime that has become endemic in today's world of global corporations. The US pioneered the way, opening a Pandora's box that is still pouring forth. Now the wave has crossed the Atlantic and the giant Italian conglomerate, Parmalat has the honour of becoming the second European Enron. Conrad Black's Hollinger International of the UK has the dubious distinction being the first, late last year. As the gory details unfold, we are nauseated with the same plotlines of greed, power-mongering and evermore greed, the same cast of first rank Auditors and the usual clique of Euro-American Banks.

As the disgraced CEOs are led away, the larger question remains: are the permitted structures of these global multinational corporations incongruous with the current democratic aspirations of the people of the world? Even a cursory examination shows how unsavoury its structure is. It thrives on the increasingly freer movement of goods and capital from and to disparate regions of the world, facilitated by the powerful arm-twisting of its patron governments under the guise of free market mantra. It thrives further on the enforced restriction of any reciprocal movement in the labour market, again facilitated by the immigration policies of these very same governments. What rationale, pray, dictates that capital and goods may move freely but labour may not? The irony is that even this lopsided structure that affords them so much gain is insufficient to satiate their greed. Moving Euro 800 million illegally as

Calisto Tanzi, the Boss of Parmalat is alleged to have done, defies reason. One could conclude that the capacity for greed is limitless and carries within it the very seeds of retribution.

★★★

THE veil or the voile as it is called here in France has once again grabbed headlines and is anything but a yard of innocent tissue. The way things are shaping up it might end up politically more controversial than the shroud of Turin. While the battle mushrooms in magnitude each passing day, the French

LETTER FROM EUROPE



Riaz Quadir in Versailles

politicians are discovering, much to their chagrin, that they may have bitten off more than they can chew, or at least more than they can rationally defend with any great logic. Now that the spotlight of the world's human rights and civil rights observers are on them, their original defence of Laïcité or secularism is beginning to look rather thin. India, the true home of secularism through the ages, implicitly understood its essence through the multiplicity of turbans and veils, bindis and kirpans that parade its public thoroughfares, even as politicians play havoc with religion.

The source of France's Laïcité is very different from that of India's. Historically, it derived from its struggle against the overwhelming power of the Catholic Church and its effort to reduce it and assert the primacy of the state. French schools became the means to turn its Catholic populace into republican citizens and France into a cohesive nation. Its tools were secularism and the French language. It was conceived in one set of historical circumstances, and is now being applied in another, vastly different one. The Christian faith receded at the onslaught of liberal thinking and meekly adapted to the changes, making way for the secular state. Now, once again, liberalism, defined by its rationality, is confronted by faith and has no answer, and is resorting to irrational behaviour itself. The end result of this may be disastrous - a generation of angry Muslims numbering about 5 million, the largest in Europe.

The present geopolitical climate where France has been perceived by the Muslim world as one of the few European governments not rallying around the American "Clash of Civilizations" circus may quickly change. France's powerful interior minister, Nicolas Sarkozy recognizing the gravity of the situation did not waste much time persuading the head of Egypt's Al-Azhar, shaikh Tantawi, one of the world's most influential Islamic leaders, to make a statement last Tuesday, saying France has the right to pass a law banning the hijab in public schools and offices. This time around clever politics might just save the day but may not buy that much time.

Community forestry builds new hope in Nepal

Barun Roy

A great wave of change is sweeping through Nepal's hills and plains as the government's highly successful community forestry project continues to spread to newer areas.

In the ten years it has been in operation, the project has given back thousands of hectares of degraded forests and denuded land to village communities to raise, nurture, protect, and manage forests. Under the Forest Act of 1993, a radical piece of legislation that reversed the government's earlier monopoly, the primary responsibility for the welfare and use of forests now rests with forest user groups, or FUGs, formed by the communities themselves. The government becomes only a facilitator, offering advice, training, and some funding from the district forest officers' budgets.

The project is perhaps the best thing that could have happened to the

environmentally fragile country. The worst thing had happened when the government nationalized forests in 1957. Villagers lost their rights and their age-old sense of belonging while the government was in no position to fully protect or manage the resources they had unilaterally acquired. A period of rampant deforestation followed, entire hills became barren, and flash floods and landslides became increasingly more frequent. Faced with a rapid deterioration of the environment and under pressure from international funding agencies and non-government organizations, the government finally accepted the futility of its nationalization policy and moved to right the wrong.

People have responded to the government's move with remarkable enthusiasm. They feel empowered and like the sense of freedom the project gives them. Already, some 13,000 FUGs have been formed around the country, with nearly

1.5 million households as members and 1.07 million hectares of forests under their management. That's 25% of the country's population and over 16% of its land area. And new FUGs are being formed at an average of two a day.

Under the 1993 Act, the land managed by the FUGs belongs to the state, but FUGs own the full right to use and manage the forests and their resources. Each FUG member is a co-owner with equal rights over resources. 'Outsiders' are strictly denied access.

Technically, district forest officers have to validate the user groups to make them official. However, once they are formed and allotted portions of forests to look after, FUGs are treated as independent corporate entities. It is they who decide what to plant and what to harvest, or how forest products should be marketed to maximize their returns. They set up their own funds raised from members' contributions. If any money is left over, they

can use it to develop such community assets as roads, bridges, and schools.

Many FUGs have even established credit schemes to provide grants or low-interest loans to villagers in need. It is reported that the combined balances of the FUGs have reached close to 100 million rupees, an amount that's almost equal to the annual budget the government provide to the districts for forestry development.

There are still six years to go before the current 20-year master plan guiding the community forestry project ends. But the benefits of the project are already discernible. Many of the once-barren hills have gained back their green cover, including those that surround the Kathmandu valley. While the overall forest cover is still a low 29% of Nepal's total land area - it used to be 45% in the early Sixties - the rate of its decline has fallen from more than 14% in the 1970s and 1980s to less than 7% now.

Civil Society

PERSPECTIVES

Can politics be cleaned up? Can elections be made fair? Tell us how in these pages every month.

Real alternatives are needed

ARUNA ROY & NIKHIL DEY

THERE is no doubt about the widespread disaffection with the current political process. Almost every segment on all sides of the political spectrum agrees that elections have been hijacked by vested interests. For the voter it is eventually a question of choosing between the lesser of two or more evils in an already manipulated system. Those who fight elections acknowledge the domination of black money and raw muscle power. The better individuals among them describe it as a Catch 22 situation in which if they don't flow with the tide they don't have a hope of winning and therefore become irrelevant.

The debate on elections in India has traditionally had members of parties participating in elections at one end and political activists calling for a boycott at the other. There have also been civil society groups that have consistently advocated staying out of political equations. But recent times have seen the emergence of two distinct groups in civil society that have begun flirting with the electoral process.

One pro-active set of intellectual-activists has concentrated on advocacy efforts, lobbying for various reform measures. They are backed by a number of individuals and groups in the middle class, some of whom are primarily email activists. Many of them see these proposals as a few easy steps towards sorting out the problem. Accustomed as they are to a corporate environment, they tend to believe that the whole thing can be dealt with as a management exercise.

The other group believes in mobilising "people's movements" so as to get the establishment to respond to the needs of the poor and the marginalised. This group also tries to exercise pressure during elections to force candidates and parties into supporting policies that benefit the poor. Without putting up their own candidates, they have on occasion supported or opposed particular candidates or parties. In the process they have come close to direct involvement in electoral politics. If they have stayed out of party politics it is because the current electoral system is so distorted that direct participation will involve too many basic compromises on ethics and ideology.

Both kinds of pressure groups have come together in recent times with the common objective of fighting the growing criminal, monetary and parochial manipulation of politics.

The Delhi High Court and subsequent Supreme Court decisions on the compulsory disclosure of the criminal records and financial assets of candidates were a ray of hope for these pressure groups. The sharp resistance from the whole political establishment seemed to prove how critical opaqueness is to the survival of a corrupt system. Conversely, the premise for some, particularly those who have great faith in the ability of the Indian system to deliver, is that if such changes are brought in the whole edifice of corrupt politics will collapse and a new era of "clean candidates fighting clean elections" will dawn.

The Supreme Court decisions, even holding the parliamentary enactments on non-disclosure as unconstitutional have been attractive to the middle class for yet another reason: their ideal battle is where someone else fights their fight. What can be better than a clinical victory like a Supreme Court decision. Nevertheless, some of their efforts have been remarkably useful and significant.

Unfortunately, as so many progressive Supreme Court decisions have shown, they will have a far-reaching impact only if they are accompanied by supportive political process-

es. It is clear to groups like the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) that court decisions have to be followed by extensive work to have them implemented in the right spirit. As the right to information campaign has shown, the process of implementing a radical measure is often more valuable and important than the measure itself. Also, struggle-based organisations work for results in the long term and not for instant success. MKSS was involved centrally in the Rajasthan Election Watch process during the recent state assembly elections and considers it worth reflecting on the experience and putting it in perspective. There have been misperceptions about what was expected from this intervention.

Election Watch efforts in India have probably never been as enthusiastic or popular as they were this time. Energised largely by the disclosure norms set out in the Supreme Court's order, small but enthusiastic groups of people put in a determined effort to help "clean up the electoral process". The idea was that these norms would help identify and target those candidates indulging in corrupt practices and that the electorate would give them the punishment they deserved by voting them out.

Election Watch campaigns, however, failed to affect the outcome of the elections. In fact, if one were to be ruthlessly honest, they did not even determine the outcome of a single seat. Fortunately, Election Watch does not have to be judged by the yardstick of winning or losing. Its impact lies in determining how the game was played.

Even here the results were mixed, but there is no doubt that a significant beginning has been made in giving citizens a meaningful role in demanding transparency and accountability from the electoral process.

The Election Watch effort showed it has the potential to involve large numbers of individual citizens who have so far been alienated from electoral processes. By offering such citizens an opportunity to give up their negativism and help correct what they have come to despise, an opportunity for

meaningful dialogue emerged. For another more important group who have been interested in political processes, but don't have a party they feel comfortable enough to be a part of, Election Watch presented a great opportunity for a kind of direct involvement they are comfortable with. For activists from people's movement and grassroots organisations, including some NGOs, Election Watch was another opportunity to fight and highlight corrupt practices. Critically, it offered a conventionally acceptable platform of the electoral code of conduct to fight communal and caste based campaigning. Given the grave threat posed during the elections to basic peace and security by communal and feudal interests, this is a space that needs to be widened.

Removed from the over-expectation of a magical transformation, the impact of the affidavits which candidates are now required to file has been noteworthy. People got involved in collecting, collating, analysing and publicising the contents of these affidavits. Candidates squirmed as they filled their forms. They squirmed more as they were analysed and publicised. The media gave the analysis lots of space and kept making visits to the Election Watch office for data and the contents of the specific affidavits. Some candidates answered questions in detail and many very specifically concealed as much as

(Continued on next page)



Aruna Roy during the MKSS campaign in Rajasthan

(Continued from previous page)

they could.

There has been a lot of debate about what can be done about those who have blatantly lied. It was clear that despite some of these cases being publicised by sections of the media, their electoral results were essentially unaffected by this information. Even the strict limits imposed on expenditure and the mandatory disclosure of candidates' bank accounts resulted in creative accounting and new forms of underground transfer of funds. The administration managed to insist on the required information being provided, but it had almost no answers to the dishonesty in disclosure that they revealed. The last hope was that the ordinary voter would give a fitting reply. But the crux of the matter was that the voter was faced with a multiple choice question with all the wrong answers and was not allowed the satisfaction of answering "none of the above".

The "Rajasthan Election Watch" processed this information into tables and prepared analysis sheets for each constituency. These were used by different groups in different ways. The MKSS took this information of the candidates to the people through public hearings in the Rajasmand, Beawar and Bhim constituencies. Candidates were invited and their information was read aloud and subjected to public scrutiny. Despite the fact that most of the leading contenders stayed away, people took a great deal of interest in the information and it was both a point of discussion and of opinion building.

MKSS worked in four different campaign modes during the run up to the elections. In the first phase the attempt was to work under the banner of the "Jan niti abhiyan" and formulate and popularise a "people's agenda" that would influence the discourse of the election campaign. This phase involved 35 people travelling by truck to different districts of Rajasthan and disseminating the message of the people's agenda through street meetings, through theatre, through the media and through seminars with prominent citizens. Pegged to counter the communal agenda with a people's demand, the campaign used the slogan of "Trishul nahin, talwar nahin, kaam ka adhikar chahiye", to promote the passage of an employment guarantee act. In the people's agenda were issues of tribal rights, minority rights, women's rights and a host of other democratic issues including ones related to modes of democratic governance. The second phase of the truck yatra involved a visit to schools and colleges in collaboration with a Spic Macay programme in different places in Rajasthan, with a focus on dialoguing with young people and getting them involved in wider socio-political issues. The third phase was a ten-day-long dharna presented as a "people's assembly" in Jaipur — which coincided with the last session of the Rajasthan State Assembly. The absence of seriousness of purpose and commitment to people's concerns of the State Assembly contrasted sharply with a people's march (platform) composed of people's movements and grassroots groups in Rajasthan. It showed up quite dramatically the diminishing role of the State Assembly in addressing such issues.

The last phase of the truck yatra took place during the assembly election using the truck for election watch purposes and adopting the mascot vehicle of the right to information campaign: the Ghotala Rath. An hour-long dialogue and pantomime evolved between the voters and the political leader of today speaking frankly and sarcastically with his electorate.

Election Watch campaigns, however, failed to affect the outcome of the elections. In fact, if one were to be ruthlessly honest, they did not even determine the outcome of a single seat. Fortunately, Election Watch does not have to be judged by the yardstick of winning or losing. Its impact lies in determining how the game was played.

All these four phases of the truck yatra received a response far beyond what we expected. The sarcasm of the last phase of the Ghotala Rath struck a chord with an electorate frustrated with politics and politicians. It seemed to find, at least temporarily, a satisfactory outlet for the energy generated by any election. People stood around in large numbers for the hour-long dialogue. In many places, people switched off the mikes of political parties in the vicinity so that the show would not be disturbed. The spoof targeted the people themselves. It pointed out how they were being used as fodder and they nodded and spoke up in agreement. They improvised, laughed, shouted, spoke out, and joined in to make it clear that they agreed with the message and wanted to do something about it. But at the end of almost every session came the most crucial question for which there was no answer. "We agree with everything that you say. Now you tell us whom should we vote for?" This was a question to which those campaigning for electoral reforms have no answer. For which people's movement have no answers. And for which those who appear as fringe candidates only at election time cannot provide an answer either.

It is clearly not enough to build a people's campaign or suggest theoretical systemic reform packages as alternatives. The problem is not just of electoral reform or political change but a combination of both. The reform itself must be put into political terms and political changes must go deep enough to encompass these measures, which would change the way electoral politics functions. People's movements have begun to realise that their significant gains through issue-based campaigns and organising people for their basic rights can be, and often is, quickly offset by other decisions controlled by the "elected establishment". There is a need for all those who concern themselves with the political process to understand that their critique of the electoral process must contain a political solution. People must be

offered a genuine alternative by demonstrating its viability. The risk is that while doing so they will get drowned in the quicksand of electoral politics.

Although quite different from each other in their approach, various non-party efforts have been marked by significant achievements in what they have taken up. They have protected their ideological and ethical purity and have done more than what most people thought was possible in a hostile environment. They have ambitious dreams and offer comprehensive alternatives. Despite their sharp critiques of current electoral politics, they have not even hinted at rejecting elections as a system. But they have consistently refrained from offering a political alternative in the sphere where it matters most today. Electoral politics presents the biggest challenge to all such groups because it is a sphere where theoretical answers are simply not enough. For the solutions to have any viability they have to be forged, tested, implemented and taken responsibility for by the proponents themselves. If the non-party political activists look around they will realise that if the aim is to influence people when they vote, for the voter at the polling booth they have as much relevance as a visitor from a distant planet.

The Rajasthan Election Watch was made possible because of the involvement of several organisations and people from all over Rajasthan. It attracted and involved citizens from the youth to the elderly in accessing, collating, and processing the information. It was a collective effort, which also gave space to, and involved people with, diverse backgrounds and skills. This article draws much from the experience of that campaign. However, the opinions expressed in this article are that of Aruna Roy and Nikhil Dey. Both are activists working with the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan and can be contacted at mkssra-jasthan@yahoo.com

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Diaspora can be common ground

RAM GIDOOMAL

NOBODY committed to the progress of democracy in India would quarrel with the systemic reforms proposed by Mr Jayaprakash Narayan in his January article. His three-pronged programme is one with which I readily concur, especially his persuasive argument for mixed compensatory proportional representation. But I do have some reservations, and something to add.

The three reforms proposed - mixed compensatory PR, direct election of head of government, and political party regulation by law - are all features of well-functioning democracies, and if implemented in India would certainly move the nation forward speedily. But there is a large gap between the practicality and the ideal, and it must be said that they are a counsel of perfection. They might even be open to the charge of some naivety: for example, 'no one can buy a whole state electorate' is true in the sense of vote-buying, but state electorates are still open to electoral manipulation, failure of electoral best practice, unfairly disproportionate media representation of candidates, and much else. The lessons of electorates as diverse as Zimbabwe and the State of Florida show us that even high-profile electorates can bungle electoral procedures, and that there are more ways of buying an electorate than simply buying an electorate.

However, I am substantially in agreement with Mr Narayan. My purpose here is to reflect further on the issues he has raised, and to do so particularly from the perspective of an NRI.

If there is one word that stands out for me above all others in Mr Narayan's article, it is 'accountability'. All his reforms are designed to achieve this; instruments of accountability are one of the vital requirements he identifies to ensure 'citizen-centred, competent, honest government'. Which prompts the question for me: how can the scattered members of one of the world's largest diasporas contribute to the process of accountability in our mother country?

That question led to a number of NRIs in Britain and elsewhere to organise a conference in London in August 2002 for the purpose of discussing the tragic events in Gujarat in early 2002. Hindu, Muslim and Christian leaders, representing the three communities in Gujarat that were affected by the violence, came together in the same place to talk, to grieve, sometimes to shout -- and sometimes to listen to each other.

I mention that conference because it highlights one characteristic of the NRI community that can be used to contribute to Indian political thinking: the fact that it is NRI; it lives outside India. And besides the objectivity that this allows (which can be considerable), it means that the NRI community can be a place where individuals and communities who in the subcontinent are involved in bitter conflict can, in a different geographical context, meet and engage with each other in a different way.

There are several desirable outcomes of such meetings, all of them major contributions to the fostering of accountability in the political process.

- On the personal level, encounter can often lead to a measure of understanding and a lessening of hatred. This is not just an Indian experience: it has for example been observed in Northern Ireland, in Eastern Europe and in South Africa. The recent launch of an Arab/Israeli polar expedition involving young people from both communities is only the latest example.

- On the national level, Conference initiatives can be later transferred to the mother country; by feeding back the Conference statement; by initiatives founded in the mother country by delegates who attended the NRI conference and returned to India; and by using such conferences as test runs for later conferences in the mother country. I am able to say that all of these have happened as a result of the London Conference: for example, the India Development Trust/ GESS/South Asian Development Partnership on Building Bridges: Towards an NRI- Civil Society Partnership was a direct result.

- On the international level, the diaspora has great economic and political power and has the ear of major players. If India has needs, the NRI community can be instrumental in helping meet them. And if India makes mistakes, the NRI network with its global economic and political links can be a channel of accountability to world opinion. The pro-



Ram Gidoomal, centre, with colleagues of the Christian People's Alliance

What is needed is a set of values to which all faiths and all India's diverse people-groups can assent. And here the long tradition of European and American Democracy has something to contribute. NRIs, consciously or unconsciously, bring these 'public square' values into the debates they engage in, whether in the diaspora or the mother country.

ceedings of the London conference were published: it was discussed in the US Congress, and now it is on the Internet and can be discussed by the whole world.

Where to Find Values ?

That leaves the further question: accountable to whom? India is the great pluralist experiment: pluralism is written into the Constitution by the wisdom of her founder fathers. So neither the State nor lesser instruments of governance can be held to account by the criteria of a single faith community. And rightly so.

But a question that Mr Narayan's article left for others to answer is: Quis custodiet ipsos custodes? Who watches the watchers? To whom are governments to be answerable?

What is needed is a set of values to which all faith communities and all India's diverse people-groups can assent. And here the long tradition of European and American Democracy has something to contribute. NRIs, consciously or unconsciously, bring these 'public square' values into the debates they engage in, whether in the diaspora or the mother country.

The Conference Recommendations of the Delhi conference in January affirmed the role of the diaspora community and commended the use, as benchmarks of policy, of the 'Six Principles of Political Action' which together form a convenient summary of those values: Social Justice, Compassion, Reconciliation, Empowerment, Respect for Life, Stewardship of Resources.

These values are not the sole preserve of any religion, but all major religions enshrine them. Around such values, India can and must unite: and against such values, the least educated villager and the most distinguished university professor can equally well assess the performance of those who govern them.

If NRIs as a community successfully commend those values, it may well come to be seen as the most significant of the many fruits of NRI/Indian co-operation.

RAM GIDOOMAL CBE ran for London Mayor in 2000 for the Christian People's Alliance and is again a prospective candidate for the 2004 election. He is an entrepreneur, and former UK Group Chief Executive of the Inlaks Group.

He can be contacted at ramgidoomal@blueyonder.co.uk

Chilsag Chillies takes a bow

THE maiden production of Chilsag Chillies, Celebration of Life, is a powerful and moving play in English.

It's a story of passion, self-reliance, a burning desire to excel and succeed in challenging times. Kanishka is an amazing dancer already at the top of her profession. She throws her life away by mixing with the wrong people and gets hooked onto drugs, smoking, alcohol, etc. And there is Chetna. A girl who has yet to achieve her big dreams, is so full of life, is a great dancer and yet is about to find out what life has in store for her. Chetna has just three months of her life left. Practising hard, nothing can stop Chetna from pursuing her dreams.

Although there is a strong parental and societal pull to have Chetna admitted to hospital, Chetna, strong from within, focused and passionate about her dreams, wants only to win the All-India Dance Competition. As Chetna emotionally puts it: "Please let me add life to my days and not days to my life".

Director Sachin Gupta is a trained software engineer by profession. He formed the Chilsag Chillies Theater Group in March 2003 to provide quality theatre.

The group is made up of over 35 people, drawn from all fields of life. No one is in it for money. The bonding, passion, dedication and teamwork is just amazing, says Suditi, who plays the lead role of Chetna.

"We take pride in being able to do those things which make a definite change for the betterment of society even if it's a small one through theatre --- a medium which has no barriers" says Sachin. What's next in store for Sachin?

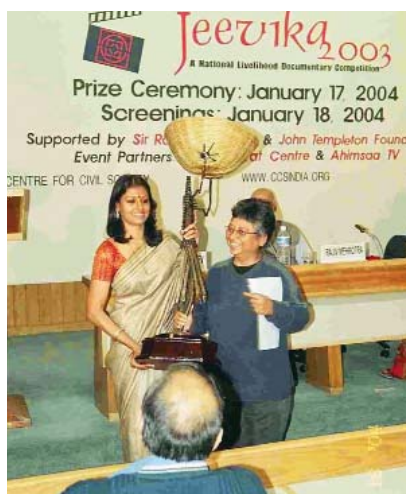
"Chilsag plans to take Celebration of Life to Mumbai, Europe and the US. Forthcoming efforts include the launch of India's first and only magazine dedicated to theatre.

More than just documentaries

DOCUMENTARIES are considered unexciting. But attending "Jeevika 2003: A National Livelihood Documentary Competition" changed all such perceptions and notions. Organised by the Centre for Civil Society, this event saw 38 independent documentary-makers entering the contest and the documentaries, most of them, were skillfully made and gave one food for thought.

The theme for the competition was livelihood or Jeevika. There are endless ways to earn: people catch fish, collect firewood, paint... And Jeevika, the contest, was a search for documentaries that focus on the many restrictions which prevent people from earning an honest livelihood.

Tales of the Night Fairies by Shohini Ghosh bagged the first prize. Five sex workers - four women and one man - along with the filmmaker - embark on a journey of story telling. The film brings forth the power of collective organising and resistance while reflecting upon contemporary debates around sex work. It is an attempt to represent the



Nandita Das presents the awards

struggles and aspirations of thousands of sex workers who constitute the DMSC (Durbar Mahila Samanyay Committee), an initiative that emerged from the Shonagachi HIV/AIDS Intervention project.

According to Shohini, "It wasn't easy to make this film. It's not like I just went to these sex workers one fine day and said lets make this film. One spent a considerable time getting to know them, gaining their trust and confidence and then we set forth. It was great fun to be with these people and learn about their lives. It was also traumatic to hear about their experiences and what they have gone through in life."

Most sex workers are forced into the profession either by people they know or by circumstances. But some go for it by choice, willingly. One of them, Shikha, represented the DMSC at Frankfurt and even Pakistan. She says, "My mother was a sex worker. I as a child was embarrassed about this fact and when my friends at school asked me who my father was, I didn't

know what to say. But today I tell my daughter not to be ashamed of me and be open and honest about everything."

Rahul Roy's The City Beautiful was awarded the second prize. The film is a story of two families struggling to make sense of a world which keeps pushing them to the margins. Through all the ups and downs of life, the protagonists retain their ability to laugh. Turf Wars, directed by Sanjay Barnela and Vasant Saberwal was the third award-winning entry. The film engages with a number of debates in nature conservation and bio-diversity.

—Manisha Sobhrajani

India Development Caucus gets is born

UDAY Khemka, the energetic, innovative president of Youthreach, has taken the initiative in putting together an India Development Caucus. The purpose of the caucus will be to serve as a catalyst for development strategies. Its members, through their special skills and abilities, will raise

resources to help other organisations achieve their goals with greater efficiency.

The first meeting of the caucus was held at the India Habitat Centre on January 24. The meeting was hosted by Peggy Rockefeller Dulany, chair of the Synergos Institute and daughter of David Rockefeller. The

Synergos Institute works globally to bring together partners in change, helping to direct money and skills towards causes.

The first meeting was a preliminary one in which a handful of change leaders got to know each other better.

Another meeting is planned a few months later when strategies will be worked out in greater detail.

Sukumar gets Khoshoo award

THE Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE), founded in 1996, is an effort to address the environmental challenges facing India. The Trust has established a Khoshoo Memorial Endowment Fund in memory of Dr T.N. Khoshoo, former Secretary, Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India. The objective of the fund is to honour and encourage the young in the field of conservation and sustainable development.

The first such award ceremony was held recently in the Capital to honour Dr R. Sukumar, an environmental scientist who is Professor at

the Centre for Ecological Sciences, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore. Dr Sukumar is one of the world's leaders in conservation of elephants, especially the Asian elephant.

Dr Khoshoo was a renowned

environmental scientist and an able administrator. He authored more than 250 research papers on plant genetics and evolution, biomass, energy, forestry, conservation and the utilization and management of natural resources.

The awards ceremony was sponsored by ATREE, and co-sponsored by the Sehgal Family Foundation and the Ford Foundation. Among the many environmentalists, scientists, and other guests were present Dr Peter H. Raven and Dr M.G.K. Menon.

Dr Peter H Raven has been described by Time magazine as a "Hero for the Planet". He champions research around the world to preserve endangered plants and is a leading advocate for conservation and sustainable environment. He

said Dr Khoshoo deeply influenced the lives of those around him. Remembering his pioneering efforts to conserve bio-diversity, he said, "We must save it in time. It is vital to realize and believe in the greatness of bio-diversity."

Dr Menon is Dr. Vikram Sarabhai Distinguished Professor Indian Space Research Organization, Department of Space, Government of India. He very rightly said, "Mother nature has enough to satisfy everybody's needs but not our greed." President of ATREE, Kamal Bawa, said, "The T.N. Khoshoo Memorial Award to Prof Sukumar is a due recognition of outstanding efforts to conserve one of our flagship species and its natural habitats."

—Manisha Sobhrajani



Melinda Gates In Kolkata

MELINDA Gates was in Kolkata to visit Sonagachi, where a voluntary organisation has been hugely successful with a condom distribution effort among sex workers. Sonagachi is Kolkata's traditional red light area.

Melinda spoke to the sex workers in a small office on Nilmoni Mitra Street. A dance performance was held in her honour. Thousands



lined up to catch a glimpse of her.

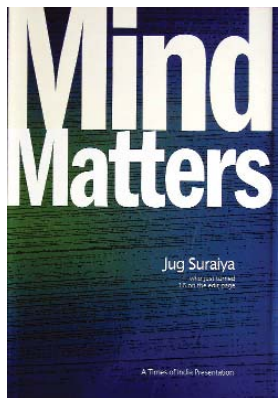
The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation was established in 2000 with a corpus of \$26 billion. It has committed \$200 million for the fight against AIDS in India.

When Bill Gates came to India a year ago, it was virtually treated as a visit by a head of state. Since then the foundation has been active in India, but primarily through the government.

Melinda carries with her the message of strong family values. From a middle-class American family she believes in inculcating in her children a sense of giving.

Jug Suraiya's mind matters

UMESH ANAND



Mind Matters
 Author: Jug Suraiya
 Publisher: Times Group Books
 Price: Rs 200

ON a visit to the Bishop Cotton School in Shimla, two years ago, when I was the Resident Editor of the Times of India in Delhi, I met by a group of youngsters who wanted to know about the paper. I, in turn, asked them what they liked reading the most, in the paper. Without exception, they said it was Jug Suraiya's *Dubyaman*. I asked them if they would like to talk to the creator of the comic strip and they gathered around to each say a breathless hello to him on my cell phone.

I have some idea of the problems associated with *Dubyaman*'s birth and the subsequent editorial midwifery that saw him through a troubled infancy. So Jug must have been a happy man to hear those cracked adolescent voices hailing him from the hills of Himachal. In the three decades that Jug has been a practising journalist, he has never been short of fans. Like most great creative spirits, he has always been many things to many people.

To the boys, he was the creator of *Dubyaman*.

Others only know him for his humorous writing, especially his middles. And there are those who read him for his serious stuff, like this collection called *Mind Matters*.

"He eats iron," I remember Anjan Dutt telling me in the India Coffee House across the road from *The Statesman* in Calcutta as we sucked on foul cigarettes. I can't remember why Anjan said this, but I clearly remember him saying it. Perhaps it was a reference to Jug's interest in exercising with weights. Or may be it was in the context of Jug's tough, serious, reclusive demeanour.

Anjan and I were young additions to the ranks of that paper, whose strongman, CR Irani, had just declared war on anything young. The popular *Junior Statesman* had been put to sleep. Its feisty editor Desmond Doig had been kicked out. And Jug, whose column, *Rear Window*, had made him some kind of cult figure in those days, had been slung into the mezzanine floor to look after features for the paper proper.

Anjan went on to become a film actor and much more. I stuck it out in the smoky, demoralised newsroom and then happily took my place among the flailing arms and legs that gave Calcutta *The Telegraph*, an effervescent, energetic rival to *The Statesman*. But in my brief stint at *The Statesman* I learnt hugely from Jug's editing of my feature stories. The first few were rewritten from top to their skinny bottoms. It was here that I first discovered Jug the wordsmith in his mezzanine abode and received important lessons in structure and style — all this without any words being exchanged.

Jug's middles and his column *Jugular Vein* have made him famous for being a methodically funny man. But that's hardly the complete Jug. So when, at *The Times of*

India, we were given the task of "repositioning content", it was thought to be a good idea to do a collection of Jug's serious pieces.

Mind Matters was thus born to celebrate some fine writing, which had appeared, mostly on the edit page of the Times of India, but had been lost in the relentless passage of headlines and events. A newspaper exists for the day. Edit pages of newspapers invariably get mentioned much more than they are actually read.

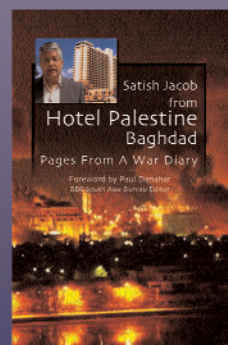
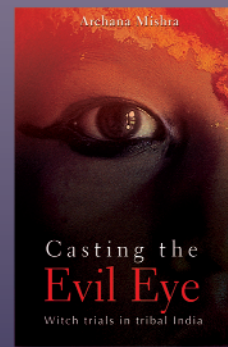
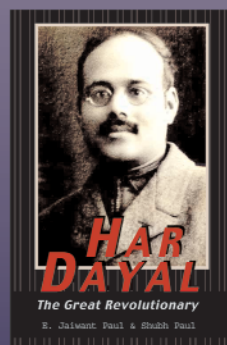
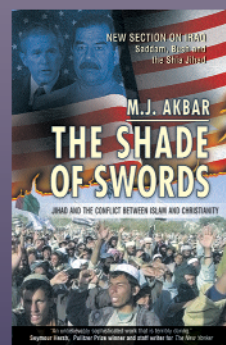
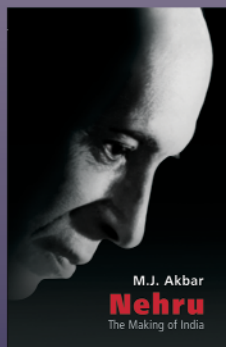
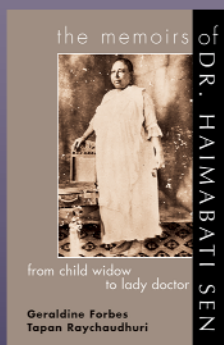


Each day's offerings are destined for the heap under the stairs, as they are in my house. Who cares? But what of gems that deserve to be rescued from that heap you flogged as trash? *Mind Matters* fishes out the brilliant, enduring Jug for you, long after he went off at less than Rs 4 a kg.

There are innumerable pieces here that show him to be an incisive commentator on events and trends. You could have read them when they mattered and appreciated them, but their true worth lies in the fact that they continue to be relevant even today.

The challenge for the writer of thought pieces in a newspaper is to seize the moment and explain it with an individual's perception of the larger context. Jug does this well time and again and proves that, as it has always been, journalism thrives because of the honest observer.

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The social enterprise

ASHOK KHOSLA

THE central goal for any developing country today, as for an industrialised one, is sustainable development. In India, as in many other countries, the key strategy to achieve this goal must be through the creation of jobs - and, in particular, jobs of a specific kind.

We need jobs that produce, at a minimum, the goods and services required to fulfil everyone's basic needs. Jobs that at the same time generate the widespread income - and therefore purchasing power - necessary to give people access to these goods and services. Jobs that regenerate, rather than destroy, the environment and its resources. Because of the contribution they can make to economic efficiency, social equity and environmental quality, such jobs are today called sustainable livelihoods - best created by very small, local, eco-efficient businesses: sustainable enterprises

Sustainable livelihoods are particularly suited to the needs of women, the poor and the marginalised. By providing people with income and some degree of financial security, they are an excellent means of empowering people within their communities. Most important, together with programmes for education of girls and women, sustainable livelihoods are probably the most effective stimuli for smaller families and lower birth rates.

India has to create sustainable livelihoods on a large scale. The capacity of agriculture to absorb more labour is rapidly reaching a plateau. To close the unemployment gap by the year 2015, India will need to create 12 to 15 million jobs off the farm - each year. "Modern", big industry is not capable of creating so many workplaces. Today, it can hardly create two million jobs per year.

The second, and not unrelated, goal for a country like India is to accelerate the rate of growth of the economy. While the nation's planners debate whether this rate should be 7% or 8% per year, eradication of poverty within a reasonable time frame will need growth rates in the double-digit region. China has demonstrated that such a growth rate is not only possible, but that it can be sustained over long periods.

The reasons for both failures lie, ironically, in the very structure of industrial production that has provided so many benefits for so many people all over the world: its emphasis on mechanisation, centralisation, large scale, and use of energy guzzling and material intensive technologies. The imperatives of competitiveness in the global economy encourage the choice of particular types of production systems. They are mostly complex and expensive. The technology used is generally capital intensive and labour displacing; the fossil fuels, raw materials and components are often imported and their availability uncertain; and the management systems required are sophisticated and costly. Such systems need large investments, have long start-up gestation periods and create few jobs.

In small and mini plants, the scarce capital is recovered in a much shorter time, making it possible to reinvest in further production and job creation. The capital cost of creating one workplace in India's modern industrial sector is over \$ 100,000 - often including a significant component of imported technology and equipment. At this rate, just the creation of 12 million jobs each year would by itself cost four to six times the GNP of the country. It simply cannot be done.

Clearly, a better mix of large, small and mini industries is now needed. Given the continued failure of policies to address the needs of the small, mini and micro sectors, a proper balance will require greatly enhanced encouragement and incentives to such industries.

There are, of course, sectors for which the economies of scale favour large, mechanised production units. These probably include steel making, oil refining, petrochemicals and automobile manufacture. But there are many sectors where economies of scale are not relevant. Most industries producing basic goods for rural populations are commercially viable even at quite small scales. And because of the low capital requirements, they can have high returns on investment - in some cases even double those for their larger counterparts.

Indeed, if the full economic and environmental costs of the processes and resources

used in manufacturing and delivering products is taken into account, and no "perverse" subsidies are allowed for energy, transportation, financial and other services, small scale production can become quite competitive.

As evidence of this, "small and medium enterprises" already form the backbone of the national economy. They account for more than 60% of the industrial production in India, and for more than 65% of industrial exports. They account for more than 70% of industrial employment. When adjusted for the vast subsidies and infrastructure that large-scale industry can take advantage of, their real contribution to the economy is even higher.

Sustainable enterprises are usually quite small. They have between one and 100 employees, with an average of around 20. They are generally informal and flexible and quite labour intensive. However, being small, dispersed and largely unregulated, mini enterprises can often have environmental and social impacts that are fairly negative. To overcome this, they need access to better technologies as well as other supports.

Many technologies for such enterprises already exist. So does the demand for their products. What prevents the poor from setting up such enterprises is their lack of access to these technologies and their inability to put together the financial capital required. What prevents them, once set up, from becoming profitable is the absence of entrepreneurial and management skills, infrastructure and marketing channels. Much more public investment is needed to provide these, but probably not nearly as much as is being made today for the benefit of large, urban industries.

Several mechanisms are now evolving to help enterprises overcome the barriers to obtaining technology, to using effective transport and communication facilities and to introducing modern management methods. But credit continues to be the key missing link. Currently, finance is fairly easily available to "small and medium enterprises" that have capital requirements of Rs. 10 lakhs (\$ 25,000) or more. Also increasingly available is finance to micro industries that need capital of less than Rs.10,000 (\$ 250).

However, it is precisely the mini enterprises that fall in the range between these two categories, with capital investment of Rs 10,000 to Rs. 10 lakhs, which optimise the twin objectives of sustainable livelihoods and returns on investment. They are small enough to be responsive to the local economy yet large enough to employ technologies and skilled workers and to maximise labour productivity. At the same time, they are big enough to take advantage of public infrastructure, credit facilities, technology support and marketing channels provided these are available. There are numerous technology based mini industries in this range that could be set up today and run profitably.

Such enterprises can create, directly, several workplaces, each at a capital investment of Rs.20,000 to 50,000. In addition, they indirectly lead to the creation of several more jobs, upstream or downstream, usually at an even

lower capital cost. Such workplaces, in the village or small town, yield incomes for workers whose purchasing power is comparable to, if not better than, those created at a hundred times the cost in large urban industries. At the same time, they permit very high returns on investment, sometimes with payback periods of less than a year.

The paradox of our economy is that there is virtually no source of funding today that can actually deliver adequate financial credit in this intermediate range where it has greatest potential impact, both on the generation of employment and on the national economy. Nor are there any support systems to provide technological, managerial or marketing inputs to help them become profitable. It is here that new kinds of civil society organisations are needed - "social enterprises" - that are themselves not-for-profit but have the purpose of creating widespread wealth through the creation and sustenance of large numbers of mini-enterprises.

Ashok Khosla is Director of Development Alternatives, New Delhi.



To close the unemployment gap by the year 2015, India will need to create 12 to 15 million jobs off the farm - each year. "Modern", big industry is not capable of creating so many workplaces. Today, it can hardly create two million jobs per year.