

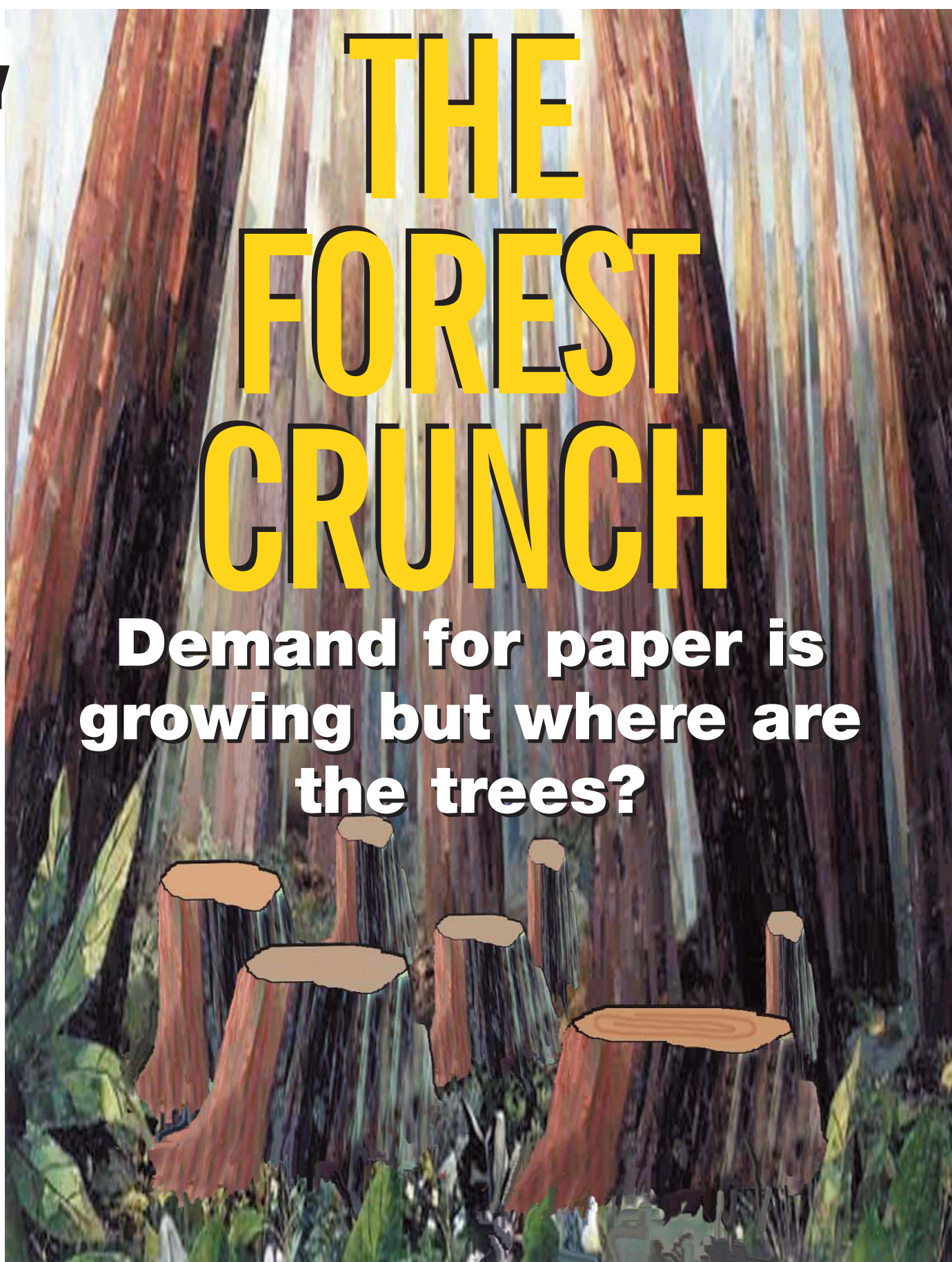
Civil Society

**GURGAON RWAS
HAVE THEIR WAY
NAMES FINALLY
PUT ON POLL
LISTS** Page 4

**PROJECT WHY
HAS ANSWERS
SWEEPERS CAN
BE MADE INTO
TEACHERS** PAGE 6

**WINDOW ON
VILLAGES
MILK DEFEATS
LIQUOR IN
GAJIPUR** Page 8

**CLEANING UP
ELECTIONS
DP YADAV AND
OTHER HOT
POTATOES** Page 20



THE FOREST CRUNCH

**Demand for paper is
growing but where are
the trees?**



COVER STORY

THE MISSING WOOD

The government hangs onto forests, shutting out communities and industry alike. Is the rural economy being deprived of a windfall as demand for wood and paper spirals

10

- Spy camera makes poll wish come true in Gurgaon** 4
- 'Fake NGOs are a cause for concern', says Ashok Angurana** 5



- Project Why has some answers. An encounter with Anuradha Bakshi** 6
- In Mumbai, Manavta becomes a helpline for railway mishap victims** 7

- Munda tribals bring a stream back to life at virtually no cost** 8
- Suman Sahai explains why Gene Campaign popped the PIL** 23



- Rickshaw ride, pollution fight: An exhibition on sustainable transport** ... 25
- Essay: Nanni Singh on the magic and madness of Delhi** 26

Civil Society

The paper tiger

THE Indian paper industry is once again asking for degraded forest land to grow captive plantations. But this time around there is a difference: the country has more to lose than the industry if the request is rejected. As the economy grows, paper consumption is rising rapidly in India. Wood, however, is in short supply because the government's attitude to forests has been one of conservation. It has not thought of them as a resource. Farm forestry projects exist but the demand for good quality wood is not met. The result is that the current annual shortfall is five million tonnes, which is made up through imports. In 10 years the shortfall will be 20 million tonnes. The annual foreign exchange bill for paper products will then be \$ 2.5 billion.

Even if India can afford to pay for this, what does the country do with the paper industry, which has a turnover of Rs 14,000 crores and is a major employer?

We are clearly in a situation where policy and environmental concerns fall way short of the reality of demand and economic growth. Industry must take its share of the blame. It has only belatedly modernised itself under younger and more enlightened ownership. Today it is contending with global competition, which requires it not only to be efficient in its manufacturing processes, but also sustainable in the sourcing of wood. A certificate of sustainable forestry is currently much more valuable to an Indian manufacturer of paper than it ever was before.

But had industry's realisations come somewhat earlier and had environmentalists shown greater respect for market realities the economic opportunity emanating from the demand for paper could have been anticipated and exploited. The government on its part could have used communities and industry creatively to develop sustainable markets in wood and thereby not only brought back green cover, but also provided the trigger for greater prosperity.

Industry is now asking for around 1.2 million hectares of degraded forest land which can be regreened within a reasonable time. It is seeking only user rights whereas it had earlier asked for leases. It is ready for any kind of social audit. But without these captive plantations, which will involve investments as high as Rs 900 crores, meeting India's paper needs will be more than ordinarily complex. Few environmental questions get quite as engaging and therefore the forest crunch is our cover story this month.

From this issue we introduce stories from rural India in partnership with Charkha Development Communications, an NGO founded by Sanjoy Ghosh, an activist who was killed by ULFA extremists when he was working at Majuli islands in Assam. Sanjoy was keen that voices from the grassroots be heard. Civil Society is happy to provide that space.

The cover story in our last issue told readers about how new residents of Gurgaon were battling for the right to vote. We revisited that story and are happy to inform readers that resident welfare associations and People's Action achieved a major victory. As a result, Gurgaon now has many more voters on its electoral rolls.

Every city discovers its heart, even a particularly tough city like Mumbai. Well, we know that at least nine people care for others there. They run an NGO called Manavta, which picks up victims of railway accidents and admits them to hospitals. Manavta's getting its act together and we will be tracking it so that people in other cities can learn how an SOS service works.

Our Perspectives section continues with the debate on how elections can be made cleaner in India. Arvind Kejriwal of Parivartan says correct electoral rolls are a good starting point. Sanjay Kaul the right to reject all candidates will lead nowhere and actually weaken democracy. Maja Daruwalla and Aditi Datta write about how Election Watch committees are giving politicians with criminal backgrounds cold feet.

Finally, India has many places which get left out of holiday plans. To introduce our readers to some of these lesser known destinations, we begin Rucksack. Our first stop is at a water harvesting structure in Rajasthan.

Printed and published by Umesh Anand on behalf of Rita Anand of C-1, Main Shopping Centre, Vasant Vihar New Delhi 110057. Printed at Maximus Packers, 49, DSIDC Sheds, Okhla Industrial Area, Phase-1, New Delhi.

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RNI No.: DELENG/03/11607

SPY CAMERA MAKES POLL WISH COME

Civil Society News
New Delhi

PEOPLE'S Action, through resident welfare associations, had collected 8,500 names to be included in the electoral rolls. In a second drive another 5,000 forms were filled. The RWAs had been empowered by the EC to undertake this drive because residents had complained of difficulties in getting their names on the electoral rolls in the normal course.

The first 8,500 forms were accepted by the state election authorities. But the second batch of 5,000 forms were turned down. Repeated appeals fell on deaf ears. No valid reasons were given. Sanjay Kaul, president of People's Action drove around with the forms in the back of his car.

Finally TV reporters using a hidden camera filmed the local election office refusing a form to two residents. People's Action held a press conference and sent a CD of the film to the Chief Election Commissioner.

"The lesson to be learnt is that resident welfare associations (RWAs) can get things done if they unite as one entity and draw up a common agenda. Individually, they may find it hard to do so," says Kaul.

Gurgaon now has about 15,000 new voters, mostly middle-class people who are recent settlers. They were facing Herculean problems getting on to the electoral rolls. Form 6, to register, were never available at the local Election office. An affidavit from the court was required. There were long queues. Finally, voter identity cards would arrive with names misspelt and addresses written wrongly.

People's Action along with 60 Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) met the Election Commissioner, TS Krishna Murty, in January and got the process of regis-

SAAB PICTURES



The lesson to be learnt is that resident welfare associations (RWAs) can get things done if they unite as one entity and draw up a common agenda.

—Sanjay Kaul, President, People's Action



Hamilton Court in Gurgaon where residents of high-rise apartments came together

The EC was informed that their local office was supposed to draw up a supplementary list of 8,500 voters submitted earlier. Instead it was sitting pretty. People's Action asked the EC to replace the Chief Electoral Officer of Haryana with any impartial official from outside the state.

tration simplified. The EC agreed that RWAs could authenticate forms and a court affidavit was not necessary. People's Action photo-copied forms for registration or to change wrong cards, and distributed them to the RWAs. A three-day vigorous campaign yielded 8,500 new voters. Citizens were enthusiastic.

Since forms continued to pour in, the RWAs and People's Action approached the EC again and got permission to launch a second drive in March. About 1,500 citizens submitted forms. Another 5000 followed in an ongoing drive. But this time, the local Election office refused to accept forms in bulk.

"We consulted a lawyer. We were preparing to approach the law courts and get the poll results countermanded, once elections were over, since so many people were being deliberately kept out," says Kaul.

They wrote an Open Letter to the EC, protesting the local Election office's refusal to accept bona fide applications. The EC was informed that their local office was supposed to draw up a supplementary list of 8,500 voters submitted earlier. Instead it was sitting pretty. People's Action asked the EC to replace the Chief Electoral Officer of Haryana with any impartial official from outside the state, so that new voters could register with ease.

People's Action said the local Election office was getting

its arithmetic all wrong. It was claiming that 65,000 new voters had been added to the rolls in the past two years. Gurgaon is part of the Mahendragarh constituency. The truth is, in the 1996 assembly elections, the electoral population here was 184,880. In the 2000 elections, it was 190,931, registering an increase of only 6051 voters in five years. In fact, in 1999, the electoral population for the Lok Sabha elections declined marginally from 1,237,989 in 1996 to 1,236,918.

It's no secret that the administration is under the influence of rusty politicians, with a rural bent of mind. The influx of a large educated middle-class threatens old caste equations and upsets their political calculations. "The electoral apparatus under the influence of the state administration has tried to discourage voters to maintain the electoral balance in favour of the parties in command of the state machinery," says Kaul.

People's Action approached New Delhi Television (NDTV) reporters with the story. They decided to catch the misdeeds of the local Election office on camera. A plan was hatched.

On March 28, two citizens agreed to pose as people wanting to get registered as voters.

They entered the Election office with hidden cameras. Both approached one of the officials and asked for forms to

TRUE

LAKSHMAN



register as voters. They were told brusquely that forms were not available and that the time to register was over. They should forget about voting for the Lok Sabha polls. Instead, they could return in November before the Assembly elections.

This was patently wrong information. People can apply for registration till the last date of filing nominations that was some days away. There were eight officials in the room. Not one cared to give correct information.

But their lies were now on camera. NDTV aired the story on its channel. A copy of the CD was sent to the EC.

A red-faced Deputy Commissioner, Anurag Rastogi, hurriedly called a press conference. He announced that anybody left out could submit applications till April 23, the last date of filing nominations for the Lok Sabha polls. He assured people that the forms were available through 10 centres in the city and they could be filled up and submitted to the SDM's office. He said bulk forms would not be accepted from any RWA or People's Action since the summary revision period of electoral rolls was over.

Finally, the administration quietly accepted all 5000 forms. A supplementary list of the earlier 8,500 names are being included in the supplementary list after verification, said Inder Nath, convener of People's Action, Gurgaon.

'Fake NGOs are a cause for concern'

Civil Society News
New Delhi

If you are young and idealistic, you could build a career in social development. Remote and backward regions need dedicated leaders. Forget salary and perks. The joy of changing lives is the reward you receive.

The Council for Advancement of People's Action and Rural Technology (Capart) works to improve the quality of life for poor people in rural areas by introducing them to appropriate technologies.

Capart helps voluntary organisations (VOs) to implement projects. Last month, workshops were held to train community leaders. Some of the most outstanding work at the grassroots has been done by marginal farmers and people from scheduled castes and tribes says Capart's deputy director-general **Ashok Angurana**.

Earlier Capart implemented government schemes. Sometime in the mid-90s, they decided to carry out innovative projects with the participation of stakeholders, says Angurana. Till January, Capart had sanctioned 22, 595 projects involving Rs 764.14 crores. The community contributes about 10 to 20%.

In an interview to *Civil Society*, Angurana talked about Capart's progress in achieving its objectives.

How would you rate Capart's success?

Naturally, it is not possible to claim 100% success. But organisations that have the expertise and experi-



Ashok Angurana, deputy director-general of CAPART

ence to implement need-based innovative projects are in a better position to access funds from us.

We are concerned about small and inexperienced NGOs. That's why every year we hold about 50 workshops for them. They are taught how to make project reports, involve the community and understand the procedures of Capart. I am happy to say, in the last five years, nearly 2000 new voluntary organisations have come into Capart's fold.

Are there any projects which receive priority?

Yes. Our flagship programmes are watershed development and natural resource management. We have about 230 projects in the pipeline. In the next five to seven years we propose to cover 540,000 hectares under our watershed programme. This will give a fillip to recharging of

groundwater and bring about social mobilisation.

In rural technology, what gains has Capart made?

We have cleared 74 approved technologies. Out of that, 23 that have been decentralised. These are disseminated through our 23 technology resource centres and through larger experienced NGOs who can help smaller VOs.

Which technologies have been the most successful?

All of them are useful but technologies related to habitat and housing have done exceptionally well, especially construction of low-cost housing using local material. Technologies related to organic farming and livelihoods are being picked up. Another technology, which is doing well, is a rural crematoria designed by one of our partner NGOs. It saves nearly 40% of wood. Our

energy programmes are also succeeding.

Are these successes having any impact?

Surely. I visited Orissa where one of our voluntary organisations is working on sanitation and environment in about five to six districts. They have constructed about 5000 latrines. Diarrhoeal cases have come down by 90%. People spend less on health and poverty has reduced.

Are there any regions in which you would like the voluntary sector to grow?

We are particularly concerned about remote and backward regions of the country. Our focus is on the north-eastern states, Jammu and Kashmir, tribal and backward regions.

How would you rate the performance of the NGO sector?

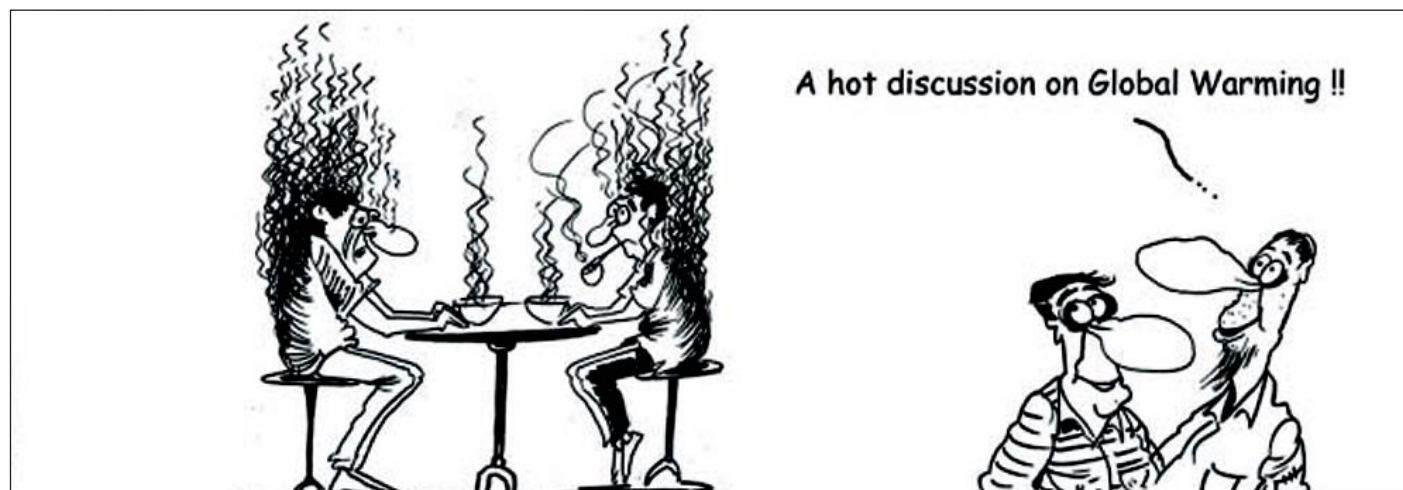
I would say it's a mixed bag. Some have done extremely well and others have not maybe because of lack of interest or their motives were not okay. What worries us is the mushrooming of fake NGOs, the fly by night operators.

So what should be done about it?

We have to be very cautious. We have checks and balances. But there is no foolproof system. Sometimes they do sneak in. We have a system of putting them on a blacklist. Some of them refund our money or they comply with our guidelines. Out of 12,000 NGOs we have dealt with, we do not have more than 400 blacklisted ones.

DEVELOPMENTOON

BY SHARAD



Project Why has some answers

Anuradha Bakshi shows how to make sweepers into teachers

Civil Society News
New Delhi

WHY does the daughter of a diplomat, born in Prague, prefer to work in a Delhi slum? Her office is a tiny room in Giri Nagar bustee. Her list of clients includes dropouts, special children and impoverished nomads. Instead of a car, a ramshackle auto-rickshaw is parked at her gate. To finance her project, she dips into her inheritance. But 52-year-old Anuradha Goburdhun Bakshi is happy with her chosen destiny. "I make sweepers into teachers," she says with pride.

About one and a half years ago Anuradha started Project Why, which today provides 500 children with an education. She began Project Return-Renewable Energy Technologies in Urban Rural Networks-some months ago to inspire slum dwellers to go back to their villages. Under this programme, bio-diesel extracted from karanji seeds is used to run power plants, gensets, make fertiliser and soap. A group of Bihari migrants identified karanji trees in their village and are keen to return and process bio-diesel. In Delhi Anuradha plans to hire rag-pickers to collect seeds and offers them literacy classes.

Anuradha's family are bhoomihars from Barka Koppa in Patna district, Bihar, one of India's poorest states. She identifies lack of electricity as an important reason for the state's poverty. People cannot run gensets to mine groundwater. As a result, small farmers suffer and youngsters end up joining private armies to survive.

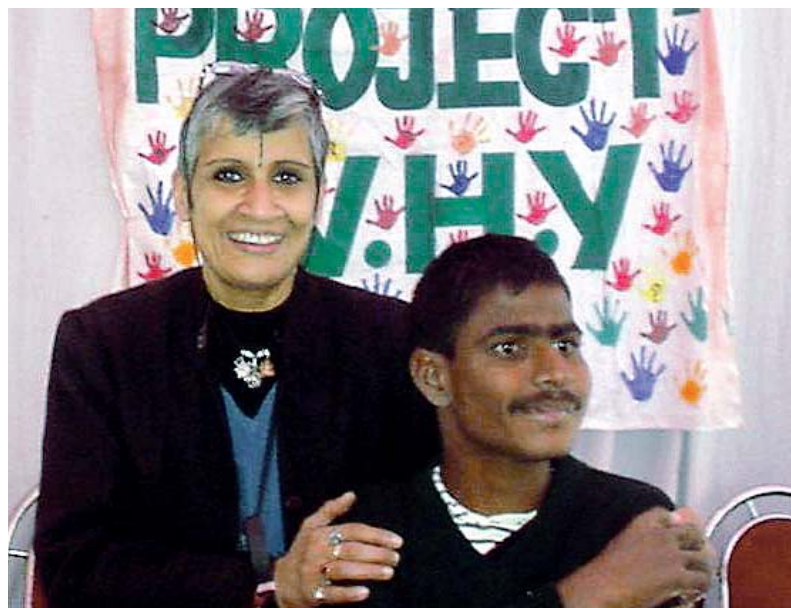
In 1871, Anuradha's great grandfather Goverdhan Singh, indentured labourer no 354495, left for Mauritius on board SS Nimrod. He returned to marry and dig a well for his village. Her grandfather, Gopinath Sinha, was a freedom fighter, in and out of jail. Her mother, Kamala, refused to marry till India gained freedom. In 1947 she was 30 and driving a truck for the Red Cross to ferry supplies for famine victims.

By the time Anuradha was born, the family had prospered. Her father, Sri Ram Goburdhun, a judge, educated at the Inner Temple and the University of Lille, was persuaded by Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, to become an Indian citizen. He became a diplomat and served as an Ambassador.

So Anuradha lived a life of luxury in various capitals. She learnt French before English or Hindi. Life was a lark, with cruises and parties. She qualified for the IAS but opted to become a French translator for Indira Gandhi

and Rajiv Gandhi. Married to an executive, she has two lovely daughters, Parul, a social psychologist and Shamika who works for autistic children.

And then suddenly between 1990 and 1992, her parents passed away. Anuradha was devastated. Her father's last words were: "Don't ever lose faith in India." Her mother explained the ground reality: "When I was the young child of a poor priest, my cousins were wealthy. They would grudgingly give me a sweet but only after pointedly licking it on all sides. Don't ever forget that such pettiness happens all the time in this land.



Anuradha Bakshi with Manu, a special student

They can scar lives."

Anuradha plunged into depression and developed physical symptoms. Her doctor said she had spondylitis and fitted her with a collar. In 1998, Shamika found herself a misfit in Indian schools. Anuradha wondered why. Earlier she had visited her village and was welcomed by her kin. Yet the poverty made her gloomy. Why, she wondered.

She decided to do something. She began a trust in her father's name and began supplying nutritious biscuits to undernourished children. But it gave her little satisfaction. Then in 2001, she met a local healer, a poor Nepalese woman whom she calls Mataji, through an acquaintance, at Giri Nagar. Mataji told her the collar was a decoy. "It leads you away from what you should be doing. Get rid of it and start examining yourself through involved work for the needy."

After nine years Anuradha threw away her collar. Coincidentally, she met Manu a handicapped boy living on

the streets. Children flung stones at him. Neighbours threw food at him. He was abused and neglected. Anuradha rented a hovel. She cared for Manu and showered him with affection. His transformation drew attention. Soon, other parents began bringing their handicapped children to her. A friend bought her a shanty for Rs 70,000 and the Sri Ram Goburdhun Trust had an address.

Anuradha finally found answers. Poor adults lived without hope and their children never overcame poverty. "We don't realise how much a dysfunctional school system contributes to social discord," says Anuradha.

"The formal schools end up convincing children that learning is beyond them. Add to that the abuse, mockery and caning and you have the perfect recipe for future outlaws."

Anuradha began by offering slum children an English-speaking course. She has 35 teachers who are paid salaries between Rs 1500 and Rs 3000 and are from slums. The minimum qualification is Class 8, though many are graduates. "If I can get a girl of Class 9 to teach a child in Class 1, then why not," she reasons. Anuradha's monthly budget of Rs 85,000 is spent on salaries and rent.

The children come after school, depending on their shift. Everyone sits on the floor. Each classroom is divided into small groups, each with a teacher. In this way every child gets special attention. The teachers work through the year, except on Sundays. "We don't have any discipline problem," says one teacher, "the children always attend class, rain or shine."

The pass percentage among Project Why's children is now 98%. Last year, ten children appeared for the CBSE exam and passed with flying colours. There are children and adults with muscular dystrophy, mental retardation, deafness and other disabilities. Muhammad Hussain, once a sweeper, teaches 50 children on six computers.

The Planet Why shop sells T-shirts, jute bags and other eco-friendly crafts made by the children. A dispensary, run by a disabled man who travels nearly 60 kms everyday, provides basic health care. "He has never missed a single day of work," says Anuradha.

The government school has well paid teachers who spend their time knitting sweaters, says Anuradha's executive assistant Rani. Anuradha's prescription is straightforward. "In the RK Puram government school, where children of educated middle-class families enrol, teachers do their job. Here families are poor. We need to make parents put pressure on them."

(Inputs from Good News India)

Herbal markets for the rural poor

Biswajit Padhi
New Delhi

LET us make the markets work for the poor: This was the message Oxfam wanted to send at the international conference on 'Medicinal Herbs and Herbal Products: Livelihood and Trade Options', held at the India Habitat Centre in Delhi. The idea was to create an environment in which primary collectors get their share of profits in five years' time.

This was possible, said Narayanswamy of Indica Research. He revealed that the pharmaceutical industry was pegged at Rs

364 billion and growing at a rate of 12% while the personal care market was estimated at Rs 180 billion and growing also at a rate of 12%.

According to Indica's research, stomach disorders and acidity top the list of health problems at 90 per cent. Cough and cold formulations, are around 80%

of total sales. Diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and skin ailments are also on the rise. Given these findings, potential cultivators should take up plant species that are widely used in such drugs.

Arjun, an international trader from Holland, pointed out that China funds a university in Europe where courses are

run on herbal medicine. A large number of students graduate from here and write prescriptions for Chinese herbal products.

The Indian herbal industry uses around 9,093 plant species for its various formulations, but the trade is centred round 800 species, out of which 650 are plants in the wild, 60 are cultivated and 60-70 imported.

Dr S K Pandey, former director general of forests, said communities could take up the cultivation of medicinal plants in forest areas.

Professor Anil Gupta of the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad,

pointed out that industry does not spend even 1% of their profits on the conservation of plants.

Darshan Shankar, director of the Foundation for the Revitalisation of Local Health Traditions (FRLHT), advocated the need for setting up community owned enterprises to take up medicinal plant cultivation to bring down the collection from the wild to 30 per cent. He wanted financial institutions to help set up more such ventures.

The conference was able to open possibilities, which the poor, if given a level playing field, can use for their development.

Finally, 9 people care in Mumbai

Deepali Gupta
Mumbai

THE stress of urban living has reached new heights in Mumbai as normally cautious commuters ignore their personal safety in the hurry to get home. In the past, train accidents invariably involved youngsters fooling around or trying to copy stuntmen. Today, the largest number of accidents result from hopping across tracks in order to save time.

The number of lives lost keeps mounting and in March alone 143 deaths and 101 injuries were reported. "The dead bodies just lie on the platform. There are times when the bodies are carried away in gunny bags because there are no stretchers. Sometimes the victims cry for help, but nobody comes to their rescue," says Bhavesh Patel, who has launched a helpline called Manavta for commuters in distress.

The Manavta Railway Accident Response Helpline attends to railway accident victims. "When I asked the railway police they said it was the administration's problem. The administration, in turn, put the onus on the railway police," Patel utters glumly. He therefore initiated a proposal to start a 24-hour helpline in collaboration with the railway authorities. With the help of S.P.S Jain, general manager of Central Railways, the project was launched on a trial basis in December 2003. Since then Manavta has saved 40 lives.

In April, Manavta launched a Unix based website. The

idea is to put photographs of victims on the Internet. This way, the family members can identify the person from a remote location. They would only need to go to the police station or hospital after identifying the victim.

The procedure at Manavta is quite simple. Distress phone calls are received at the main office at Dadar central station. A chart on the walls of the office indicates the closest location where help can be sought. The attendants call the nearest station manager and rush to the spot. Manavta has also stationed ambulances near crowded railway platforms, for example in Kurla and Thane.

"Usually, by the time we get there the person has been moved from the accident site, so we just have to ascertain the cause of the accident and arrange for hospitalisation," says Manish Jadav, an attendant with Manavta. Their tie-ups with hospitals help the volunteers to admit the patients quickly.

The next step is to contact the family of the victim. All the information about the person is fed into the central database. The family is asked to identify the injured

person, and that is where Manavta pulls out.

Manavta is run by nine people and spends Rs 49,000 a month. Each volunteer gets a mere Rs. 4500 plus travel and cell phone expenses, but they continue to work unselfishly for the greater good of society. Patel hopes to expand the Manavta team by nine so that volunteers can be stationed at hospitals and preparations can be made even as the patient is on the way. Eventually, the project will cost just under Rs. 1 lakh a month.

The Manavta volunteers feel that the Railway authorities were just waiting for someone to reach out to them and help. "Now, even the railway authorities help us and initiate quick action," says Patel. "They are fencing platforms," he continues, "to prevent people from getting on the railway tracks and once the infrastructure is in place we can hope fewer lives will be lost so unnecessarily."

In the meantime, Mumbai is faced with another serious problem: will the people who pass by the injured and dead bodies without as much as a passing glance, take the trouble to make that phone call?



This picture shook Mumbai recently. It showed an injured commuter lying on a railway platform as people walked by

Courtesy: MID DAY

Child in trouble? Call 1098 in 55 cities



Ehsaan, Shankar and Loy sing for Childline – a helpline for children in distress

Deepali Gupta
Mumbai

ON April 2, Mumbai rocked to the beat of Ehsaan, Shankar and Loy. They were entertaining people to raise money for Childline.

1098 is a toll-free number earmarked as the Childline. Any child in distress – lost, abused, homeless or just hungry – can call this number for help. The call is free from any MTNL line. Concerned citizens too can dial this number if they spot a child in trouble. The call is connected to the closest Childline call centre. In a matter of minutes, a Childline volunteer rushes to where the child is and from there the rescue operation begins.

Childline India Foundation (CIF) began as an experiment seven years ago in Mumbai as a project of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. "When the child's rights are being violated somebody has to come to the child's rescue and link the child to a long term solu-

tion. For that we started Childline," says John Menachery, Deputy Director (presently officiating Executive Director) of the CIF. Its effectiveness in Mumbai propelled Childline to expand nationally. Today, services are available in 55 Indian cities.

But don't be fooled by the term "its services," because none of them are actually owned by the CIF. "The government and NGOs have already funded institutions to help the children. The services are already in place. Creating a new infrastructure will only make us more expensive," reasons Menachery.

Instead the CIF uses the principle of partnership. NGOs such as YUVA, Prayas, and YMCA collaborate with Childline to provide a host of facilities a child might require. Depending on the specific needs of the child, (s)he will be referred to the NGO best equipped to handle the situation. Even the call centers are setup on NGO premises. However, for facilities that are unavailable the CIF attempts to fill that "gap in service." For instance,

there is only one shelter for mentally challenged children in Mumbai, and it cannot accommodate new inmates. "The eldest child there is 83 years-old," exclaims Menachery. In such a case the child will either be sent to a mental hospital or left on the street. Childline has therefore, proposed a Rs. 1 crore project to develop a shelter for the mentally disabled.

Till date Childline has responded to approximately 3.6 million calls, most of which are for emotional guidance and support, medical help and shelter. On an average, every day Childline receives 67 calls for medical aid and 46 requesting for shelter in Mumbai. In Delhi the average is 11 calls for medical and 87 calls for shelter per day; a response rate that outdoes any other helpline in the world. The success of Childline in India, led Jeroo Billimoria (founder of CIF), to setup Child Helpline International in Amsterdam.

Childline established the "Action Research for Innovative Entrepreneurial Services" (ARIES) wing two years ago to study the data generated from the calls. This department aims at establishing more innovative, practical, universal and permanent services: expansion into the rural areas of India using technologies simpler than the telephone, such as the radio, for example.

Unfortunately, like everything else in India, Childline lacks funds and support. "Ideally we would like to expand into 25 cities per year, but the government only allowed six for the financial year 2003-04," says Menachery. Plus donors do not want to give money to the organization. "Contributors want to see the money in the child's hands, but they are unwilling to sponsor the salary of a person helping the child," Menachery points out the irony.

Still, Childline volunteers are determined to make a difference in all marginalized children's lives, and they deserve support in their endeavour. Welfare of children is a possible solution to a lot of India's problems. And while it may be true that the number of lives the CIF has helped save may be small, compared to the total Indian population, it's a significant beginning. How it ends depends on every one of us.

INDIA OUT THERE

Poverty, school, jobs, health

FOR rural India, 'India Shining' and the 'feel-good' factor are just poll gimmicks. For them, the most crucial issues in the coming elections are eradication of poverty, employment generation and development

This is indicated by a sample survey of villages under 45 gram panchayats spread across Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Chattisgarh and Uttaranchal, carried out by Charkha Development Communication Network, New Delhi, to find out how far the government's social welfare measures have reached targeted beneficiaries.

On the question, which issue should get utmost priority in the coming election, 14 per cent indicated poverty eradication, another 11 per cent were in favour of primary education and 15 per cent felt that employment generation should be a priority.

Regarding the impact of anganwadis on public health, 22 per cent felt that the impact was positive, 49 per cent thought the programme had made no difference, and 24 per cent said they were unable to avail of the facilities offered. On the working of the public distribution system (PDS), 45 per cent of the people contacted felt that PDS shops do not open on time, but the majority-55 per cent-said the shops open regularly.

About availability of basic amenities in villages, the survey revealed that only 45 per cent of them are electrified, while only 15 per cent of the villages surveyed have facilities such as basic telephones. Only 10 per cent of the villages have pukka roads.

Tribals bring stream to life

Ranjan Panda
Jharbada Mundatola

A derelict water-harvesting structure, revived by Munda tribals of Jharbada Mundatola in Sundergarh, Orissa, has resuscitated a five-kilometre stream, which gushes into the Koel river after joining the Ghaghra Nallah. The new stream has recharged wells in neighbouring hamlets and now irrigates tracts of agricultural land as it meanders down hills and slopes.

"We have fought the menace of drought quite successfully," says a proud Sebastian Lomga, the tribal king of the village. The revival of the water-harvesting structure, called a Ghaghra, is a success story, likely to be emulated. The Mundas had been living on a parched settlement for more than thirty years.

Bisra-Jharbada or Mundatola is situated in the Ravan foothills. The village has good forest cover. The village houses 202 Munda tribals. Almost all 46 families are poor and eke out a livelihood from forest produce and agriculture. Their fields have been carved from the slopes of the Ravan Hill. Except for 1950, 1954, 1962 and 1998, the village had never succumbed to drought, though rain was sometimes inadequate. Even during these years, they forest came to their rescue.

"When we were young, the Ghaghra always remained filled to the brim and we used to plunge in from nearby trees," recalls 60-year old Anthony Munda. Nobody remembers the origin of the structure but the name of the village originates from "Jhar" and "Beda", the first means a stream and the second a plateau in the middle of a hill.

History took a different route in the early seventies as the forests started degrading. The Ghaghra, got filled with silt. A small deep structure, it used to get filled with rainwater from the upper reaches of the hill. Once it filled, surplus water would travel down irrigating Mundatola and four other villages.

In 1999, the Mundas participated in

lects Maria Munda. The village women used to walk about 10 km every day to fetch water from Akhayashila, a small spring.

"We wondered where the water could have gone. Earlier, even during years when rain was scarce, the Ghaghra used to hold water. Then we chalked out a revival plan," says Albis Munda, who led the effort.

The people first discussed the plan with local block officials and panchayat leaders. The officials paid a visit and drew up a big expenditure of about Rs 3 lakhs. The amount was never sanctioned. The Mundas decided it was possible to do the job with much less money.

The Ghaghra was revived with just Rs 25,000. Disha arranged the money. The Mundas did all the work. They repaired gullies and built small bunds. They used local material: flat pieces of rock, sand and soil which allowed water to permeate as it went down the hill. The Ghaghra was excavated and the structure sprang to life. Just above the Ghaghra, another small structure was also revived for the cattle.

The entire work was done in April 2000, before the onset of monsoon. Besides holding sufficient water the Ghaghra has revived a stream, recharged wells and improved agriculture.

"There was a time when our men used to migrate in search of jobs to nearby and far off towns," recalls Albis. "Shamefully we have to say that some villagers even resorted to thieving to survive. This was very hard to bear. However, things have changed now and we are starting to forget those old woes. Our village is now in the news and we feel doubly proud."

The officials drew up a big expenditure of about Rs 3 lakhs. The amount was never sanctioned. The Ghaghra was revived with just Rs 25,000. Disha arranged the money. The Mundas did all the work.

a "People's Planning" exercise facilitated by Disha, a voluntary organisation. After pondering why they were so vulnerable to drought, they suddenly recalled the Ghaghra. A plan to revive the structure was made but not implemented. A severe drought followed in 2000. The Ghaghra virtually dried up. It could not even meet the drinking needs of cattle.

"The crops withered, we did not get minimum drinking water. We used to wait for hours at night with small bowls to collect drinking water from the partly dried up open wells" recol-

Milk defeats liquor in Gajipur

Nirmala Putul
Gajipur

G AJIPUR is a small, predominantly Dalit-tribal village in Jharkhand's Dumka district. Poverty reigned supreme, not so long ago, because of scarce agriculture. The village attracted the illegal trade in country liquor. The women had very little money and lots of drunken men to contend with.

Today, milk production has replaced liquor in every household. This metamorphosis did not take place overnight. The Mahila Sabha with the Badlav Foundation had to wage a prolonged struggle.

Social activist Namita Kadaar says that when she visited Gajipur initially the women of the village wouldn't come out of their houses to talk to her. The few times she succeeded in bringing some women together, the men hurled abuse at them, even beat them. But she persisted in her efforts, and gradually, the women responded.

The process culminated in a Mahila Sabha. The women pooled their small savings and gave loans to other women for fertiliser, seeds, medical treatment and marriages. The needy, instead of going to money-lenders, came to the Mahila Sabha. Seeing the benefits the Sabha



Women from the Mahila Sabha earn money selling milk

provided, the men also became more helpful.

The Gajipur Mahila Sabha also found affiliation with a nearby bank. As an acknowledgement of its good work, the Sabha was granted Rs 20,000 in 2001 and Rs 2,08,000 in 2002 under the Golden Jubilee Self Employment Scheme. The women used these funds for meeting local requirements and generating balanced employment in

the village. Bullocks, carts, fertiliser, seeds and pump and sprinkler sets were provided. Artisans relying on their ancestral skills were given aid.

Cows and buffalos were given mainly to households engaged in liquor making with dire warnings that any further participation in the illegal trade would deprive them of their animals and cause them to be expelled from the Mahila Sabha.

Within months, the change was apparent. Fields that had been fallow grew vegetable harvests. Milk from the households was pooled together and sent for sale to a neighbouring town. People began using scientific methods of farming and this increased harvests. Next, the women fought to get their health centre reopened. Some of them trained as midwives. Defunct hand-pumps were repaired with money collected from the village community. Children started being sent to school regularly.

The women also began intervening in government development and welfare programmes. They took an interest in the construction of roads, wells and ponds, and effectively intervened in the Annapurna, Antyodaya, Old Age Pension and Maternity Benefits schemes.

Gajipur has amply proved that women's empowerment is not the monopoly of urban centres.

Kashmiris wait for Uri bus to start

Ishfaq-ul-Hassan
Srinagar

URI is the last bus stop before the Line of Control (LoC) which divides India from Pakistan, begins. People who live here want the Uri-Muzaffarabad bus service resumed so that they can meet relatives and friends on the other side. The Hurriyat and the ruling PDP too agree the road should open and the bus must start.

It seems India and Pakistan can't agree on what documentation the passengers should carry. India prefers passports and visas. Pakistan is suspicious of any piece of paper which will make the LoC look like an international border. So while India and Pakistan played cricket, the people of Uri watched games of another kind.

"I feel very lonely. I want to be with my family living across the Line of Control (LoC), but we cannot go there. It is very traumatic for me," says Khair-ul-Nisa with tears in her eyes.

Nisa's family, is settled in Muzaffarabad. Her husband died in Srinagar last year and she lives alone with her daughter. A teacher, Nisa comes from Jammu. In 1947, most of her maternal family fled to Pakistan. Her mother preferred to settle in Srinagar. In the late 1980s, her brother, Sardar Mohammed Ayub Khan, and sister, Zeenat-ul-Nisa, also migrated to Muzaffarabad.

"There is no communication from our side. We rely on their phone calls and e-mails. My brother-in-law died in Muzaffarabad and we received the news after a long time. We cannot go there because of the restrictions. We are now pinning our hopes on the Uri-Muzaffarabad road reopening. But even

that will work only if the divided families are provided some sort of visa relaxation," she said.

Seventy-four year old Abdul Khaliq Dar of Magarmal Bagh in Srinagar still regrets that he could not attend the funeral of his sister, Aziza Begum, in Karachi. The tough visa rules and cumbersome travel posed a hitch.

These families debate Pakistan's liberal visa policy for Indian cricket fans. "We pray for the friendship of the two countries. More surprising is the liberal grant of visas to cricket fans. We do not object to it, but we have a grudge. We also want to meet our family members living across the LoC," says Mohammed Rafiq Dar, Abdul's son. Rafiq wants similar visa relaxation for divided families on both sides of the LoC

Aziza Begum migrated to Pakistan in 1953 to reunite with her husband, Ghulam Nabi, who had decided to stay on

"We are now pinning our hopes on the Uri-Muzaffarabad road reopening. But even that will work only if the divided families are provided some sort of visa relaxation."

in Karachi in 1947. Nabi had been a lecturer in Kashmir. He later joined the Pakistan Navy and retired as its commander. For 30 years, the two branches of the family had no contact with each other. Ghulam Nabi died in Karachi and the Dar family could not go. In 1998, the Dar family finally got visas to visit Pakistan. "It was a dream come true for both our fami-



wish-to visit his sister's grave and offer fathe (a prayer offered at a grave) before he dies. "My sister, Meharban Bibi, died and no family member could participate in her last rites at Rawalpindi. My cousin brother's son performed her last rites. She did not have any children and we, too, could not go," laments Ahmad.

Ahmad's wife, Nadira, too, has half her family, including her sister, brother and maternal uncles, living in Pakistan since 1947. This Gurdaspur, Punjab, family was divided during the Partition. "My elder sister, Bilquis Khanam, was married in Lahore later. She died 10 years ago and I could not go. Before the militancy, we used to receive letters, but after 1990, we have had no contact," says Nadira.

Ishfaq-ul-Hasan is a fellow with Charkha

Mulayam tag doesn't help this village

K Narayani
Lucknow

SHARDA, the 17-year-old daughter-in-law of Durjan Singh, a ward member of Ghadi Nirbhay village, lost both her infant sons to jaundice soon after they were born. Ghadi Nirbhay is the village that shot to fame when UP chief minister Mulayam Singh Yadav landed there in a chopper two years ago. Yadav has relatives in the village.

During both pregnancies, Sharda never had tetanus shots or iron tablets, most essential in a pregnancy. Sharda says candidly that though no ANM visited her during her pregnancies, even if one had, no one would have allowed her to take any injections.

UTTAR Pradesh (UP) is still to recognise the importance of adequate healthcare for pregnant women. Look at the statistics. With an infant mortality rate (IMR) of 86.7 per 1,000 live births—the highest in the country—UP is far behind the National Health Policy IMR target of less than 60 per 1,000 live births. The national average is 67 per

1,000 births. Lack of medical facilities and sheer lack of awareness seem to be the main problems.

In neighbouring Ramnagar, 19-year-old Kanti is pregnant for the third time. She lost both her earlier children as infants. This time, when Kanti and her husband, 22-year-old Joginder, decided to consult a doctor at the Usayani block primary health centre (PHC), they are told to come on a Saturday when an ANM would be there. When they persisted, the doctor in charge, M L Mishra, advised Joginder to take his wife to the lady doctor in the district hospital or to the Tundla PHC, which covers their village.

Kanti reveals that no ANM has ever visited her house.

An ANM in the area says it is humanly not possible for her to visit every home as she has 10 villages under her. Besides, the women do not agree to take medicine or injections, she says.

ANM Sushila Chauhan of Usayani PHC says, "I sit in my village once a week and whoever wants anything comes to me. They think we have an ulterior motive in offering them pills or injections."



Sharda (left) of Ghadi Nirbhay village

There is a real need for awareness camps in reproductive healthcare in the area. The health camps organised by the government and SIFPSA (State Initiative in Family Planning Services) are full of women brought by ANMs for sterilisation. SIFPSA is a USAID funded reproductive child healthcare programme currently on in UP, but there are hardly any pregnant women in the SIFPSA camps. A district hospital doctor, Anjali Gule, says, "We have to concentrate on sterilisations in the health camps and we cannot be doing other things at the same time."

Randy Kolstad, the SIFPSA official in New Delhi, says the project provides for holistic care of pregnant woman. Tetanus shots and iron tablets are provided and adequate emphasis laid on them. Kolstad dismisses specific instances of denial of prenatal care and says, "In a large state like UP, exceptions could be there. But SIFPSA has been emphasising holistic care of women rather than population control."

The UP government prefers to pass the buck. UP health minister Rajvir Singh says, "What you are talking of happened under another government. Come to our state now and you will see the difference." Singh is unable to explain, however, what steps he has taken to make healthcare accessible to pregnant women.

Stories on pages 8 and 9 sourced from Charkha feature service

The average Indian uses 5 kg of paper in a year. Soon it will be 11 kg. Even as the demand for paper and wood spirals, the government hangs onto forests, shutting out communities and industry alike. Is the rural economy being deprived of a windfall?



THE MISSING WOOD

Umesh Anand
New Delhi

EARLIER this year, representatives of the Indian paper industry trooped into the office of NK Singh, member of the Planning Commission, for a special briefing. They carried with them a gloomy message of mills being forced out of business in the next decade, putting tens of thousands of jobs in jeopardy, unless forest laws are amended to permit captive plantations and make wood available at more competitive prices.

Singh gave them a patient hearing, so did S Narayanan, economic adviser to the Prime Minister, at another presentation. But such is the frenetic paper chase taking place in the Indian economy that the need for change goes far beyond what a government can do in the normal course.

Each year, the demand for paper keeps shooting up. The average Indian consumes

5kg of paper a year. That figure could go up to 11 kg by 2011. Per capita consumption is already 30 kg in China. And Asia as a whole is expected to account for 34% of the world's consumption of paper in the near future.

This could have been a huge opportunity for Indian farmers, forest dwellers and the paper industry. Wood markets, on the whole, could have been stimulated. But instead forest policy has stood still. Sincere efforts by environmentalists to do the right thing by communities resulted in an intervention by the Supreme Court. But the failure to review positions has resulted in a giant mismatch between social concerns and the reality of opportunity and demand.

Industry currently sources its wood from farmers through extension arrangements. Some 40,000 hectares is planted annually. But this is not fast or efficient enough. The shortfall in pulpwood is already five million tonnes a year. In 10 years the shortfall will go up to 20 million tonnes. At that point the country will be forking out \$2.5 billion annually for importing paper.

The paper industry says that apart from being inadequate, the wood it buys from farmers is not of uniform quality. It is also expensive because it has to be shipped to mills from distant places. Indian paper is therefore outpriced at a time when tariff barriers are coming down.

It is a double tragedy that India should be short of wood when of its 76.52 million hectares of designated forests, 28 million hectares are degraded and urgently in need of re-greening. Also, a tree in India grows in just five to six years because of the tropical nutrition that it gets. A tree takes twice that time to come of age in the northern hemisphere.

Forestry could have been an important source of rural employment. Plantations alone could create some 1.1 million jobs. But the prosperity that would be derived from wood-based activity in general would be quite incalculable. There are also the benefits of soil and water conservation that come from improved green cover.

Who is to blame? One view is that a myopic paper industry never prepared itself adequately for future demand and globalisation. The industry is responsible for much senseless deforestation and was happy to buy wood from the government at subsidised rates. It originally killed farm forestry in India by beating down wood prices and made it unrewarding for farmers to grow trees.

Another view is that government exercises far too much control over India's forests with the result that communities, which have historically used forests in a sustainable manner, have been dispossessed and replaced by the forest department. Forests have gone from being a people resource to a government domain and slipped into stagnation instead of dynamic growth.

Add to all this the role of environmentalists whose data and ability to influence ignorant governments are rarely subjected to adequate public scrutiny. Have their concerns been expressed so unrealistically that they have ended up doing more harm than good? This is a question now being asked.

As markets open up under the World Trade Organisation (WTO), Indian mills find themselves hopelessly out priced.

In Indonesia pulpwood is available at \$20 to \$25 a tonne. But in India, wood, of varying quality and sourced often at a distance from mills, comes for between \$40 and \$50 a tonne.

Ever since the Indian government became a signatory to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), forest policy has been directed solely at conservation and not at increasing the productivity of forests.

In India, forests belong to the government and even degraded land, where there are virtually no trees, is kept out of the reach of people. Such land continues to be called forest. There has been some success with joint forest management involving communities, but in the final count afforestation programmes are way behind target.

The paper industry is now telling the government that it wants 1.2 million of the 28 million hectares of degraded forest land to grow a mix of trees suitable for producing high quality paper. These plantations would be in a radius of 200 km of the mills and



'The time has come to re-examine the efficacy of State ownership of forests in really fulfilling social objectives. Forests are required to provide both tangible resources and intangible services to the society. Unfortunately, the nationalised forestry sector has failed to strike a balance between these two objectives.'

falling price of eucalyptus was analysed and industry was accused of suppressing wood prices.

The Saxena report said the paper industry should plant trees on non-forest degraded land. About 20 million hectares of such wasteland existed, said the report, and states were eager to provide leases. Besides, industry should buy wood directly from farmers.

bring down costs drastically.

When the paper industry buys wood through farm forestry arrangements it cannot ensure quality and has to transport it across long distances. Industry says it is willing to invest in farmers living around mills, but not in those who are hundreds of kilometres away. The cost of giving seedlings and other inputs is extremely high. Even if all this were to be done, there is nothing to stop the farmer from selling the trees to someone else.

It is only through plantations that industry can hope to get the quantity and quality of wood that it requires to meet the escalating demand.

"We are not saying transfer the title of the land. We only require use of land for industrial forestry. This should be incorporated into the Forest Conservation Act," says RR Vederah, deputy managing director of BILT, India's biggest paper manufacturer and vice-president of the Indian Paper Manufacturers' Association (IPMA).

If captive plantations were to be granted, some Rs 10,000 crores, which would otherwise go into paying for imports, would get pumped into the economy. The plantations would generate a million jobs in the countryside.

The paper industry says it is ready to face any form of social audit of its plantation activities, but it cannot do without a consistent and reliable supply of wood.

"Plantations will have to have to be kept sustainable because they supply mills which are totally dependent on them," says Raj Chaurasia, head of forestry at BILT Tree Tech and industry's key lobbyist.

Sustainable forestry products, with certification, are essential for being competitive and will fetch more in the international market, insists Chaurasia.

The demand for paper is expanding continuously and so the trees farmers grow under farm forestry programmes near mills and done in tandem with industry will continue to sell. Plantations will merely fill the gap in demand and supply. And even for this to happen will take eight to ten years. It is only then that production from plantation wood will replace imports.

The paper industry's appeal to the Planning Commission is not its first. It went to the commission in 1997 and asked for one million hectares of degraded forest land on lease for captive plantations. The commission set up a committee under NC Saxena, then secretary department for wasteland development. It ruled against plantations on degraded forest land.

The NC Saxena report had argued that 100 million poor people depend on degraded forests for their livelihood and leasing such land to industry would deprive them of an income. Farmers growing trees on non-cultivable tracts would lose a market for their wood. The government's successful Joint Forest Management (JFM) programme would be adversely affected. The

PSU shows the way in Mysore

THE paper industry has chosen a role model and it happens to be a public sector unit (PSU) called the Mysore Paper Mills, located at Bhadravati in Karnataka. Since 1984, the mill has been quietly nurturing a captive plantation on 30,000 hectares of degraded forest land leased to it by the state government of Karnataka.

"The mill is getting wood pulp at Indonesian prices, at \$20 per tonne," says Raj Chaurasia, Head Forestry, BILT Tree Tech.

The plantation produces 130,000 of pulpwood, every year and 15,000 tonnes is paid as lease to the forest department. Villagers get lops tops and barks free, which is also roughly 15,000 tonnes. The plantation provides employment of 570 mandays per hectare for plantation and 240 mandays for harvesting

to local people. About 115 species of birds flutter here as well as 19 species of mammals. The plantation has reduced pressure on a nearby natural forest and improved the water table, according Chaurasia.

In 1980, the Mysore Paper Mills was looking for raw material to produce paper. At first they decided to cultivate bamboo but gave up the idea since the crop flowers every few years. A steady supply was needed. The mill was surrounded by degraded forest land. The forest department planted a few trees here and there, but much more could be done.

The mill decided it would be best if they grew trees for paper on the surrounding forest land. They approached the state government, which was favourably inclined and informed the central government. "It took time for the land to be released,"

recalls R. Narayan Moorthy, secretary general, IPMA.

It was decided the afforestation would be done in consultation with the Oxford University's forestry department. The funding came from the Commonwealth. A group of officers from the forest department were specially chosen.

The plantation was divided into two: the dry zone and the wet zone depending on rainfall. Initially, various families of eucalyptus and tropical pine were imported. "Tropical pine has taken root there and indicates a favourable climate," says Chaurasia. Eucalyptus, acacia, casuarinas are also grown. The breakthrough they have made is in a hybrid acacia.

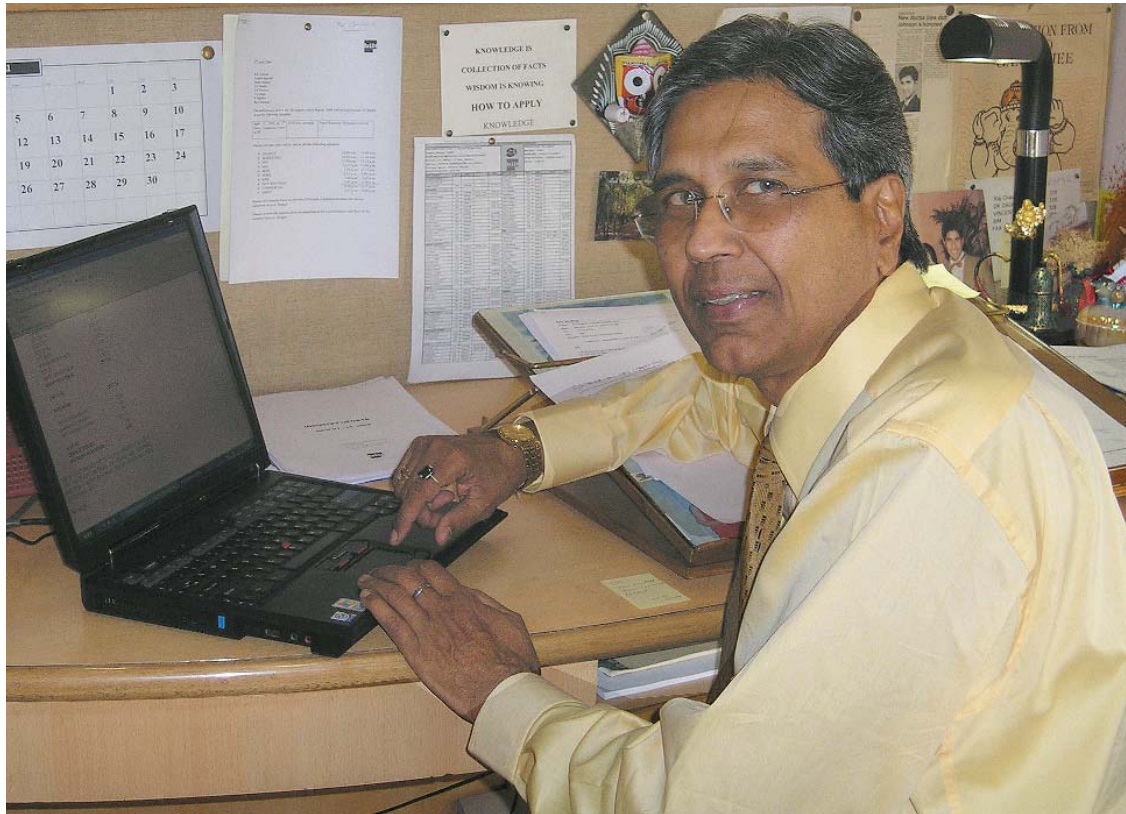
The mill also has a farm forestry project for surrounding villages. It now plans to cultivate a bamboo plantation.

It recommended the paper industry bring pulp-making units closer to the farmers.

But in February 2003, the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) published a study titled "Public Private Partnership of Degraded Revenue, Private, Forest Lands-A Cost Benefit Analysis." Based on scientific surveys, the study's findings completely contradict the views of the NC Saxena report.

Industry studies are normally so biased that they instantly invite scepticism. But in this case, the lineup included Professor Samar Dutta, Chairman CMA, Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, Dr Milindo Chakrabarti, Director CREATE, Darjeeling and Dr AK Bhattacharya, Indian Institute of Forest Management Bhopal.

The CII study found that the quantum of wasteland in India is not known. There was confusion about the meaning of degraded land. The Saxena report had not examined the ownership status of these lands or their exact level of degradation. The experts found that in areas they surveyed, only 8.5% of degraded non-forest land



Raj Chaurasia, head of forestry at Tree Tech

'Plantations will have to have to be kept sustainable because they supply mills which are totally dependent on them,' says Raj Chaurasia, who has been lobbying for forest land for the industry.

belonged to the state.

The CII study team surveyed villages in Orissa and Andhra Pradesh. According to its findings, on an average, only 2.48% of people's incomes depended on tangible benefits from degraded forests. Even among the landless, just 4.31% were highly dependent. They had to enter well-stocked forests for their needs.

JFM worked in some areas, but employment was shrinking, the government was giving less money and benefits were not being shared justly by forest department officials with the people. The falling price of eucalyptus was analysed. Between the farmer and the mill there are several intermediaries. Each makes some money by selling the farmer's wood and could be a reason for "market failure."

The study found that converting degraded forest land into plantations of pulpwood would definitely reduce biodiversity, but would increase biomass. Plantations had a much larger capacity to trap carbon to the ground as compared to natural and older forests. As a signatory to the Kyoto Protocol, India could earn credits from trading in emissions, in future.

The CII report said use of degraded forest land by industry would increase afforestation, provide jobs at the grassroots and catapult the Indian paper industry into global markets.

"We feel that the time has come to re-examine the efficacy of State ownership of forests in really fulfilling social objectives," said Samar Datta and Milindo Chakrabarti in an interview to Civil Society.

"We must remember that forests are required to provide both tangible resources and intangible services to the society," they added. "Unfortunately, the nationalised forestry sector has failed to strike a balance between these two objectives in a meaningful manner."

Datta and Chakrabarti believe that a steady decline in productivity is accentuating the supply-demand mismatch in tangible products and leading to further degradation of forest resources. They see the need for a re-examination of the Forest Conservation Act (FCA) to provide a "sense of balance across these twin objectives of production and protection."

Chakrabarti says whoever undertakes the job of developing forestry to provide services and resources to society in a balanced manner should be involved in its management.

Ironically a public sector company, the Mysore Paper Mills at Bhadravati, is being seen as a role model by the paper industry. Since 1980, the company has been quietly growing five species of trees on 30,000 hectares of degraded forest land leased to it by the state of Karnataka. It is supplying pulpwood and firewood. Local villagers are being employed. Flora and fauna have increased.

Some soul searching took place within the industry after the government spurned their request for degraded forest land to grow trees. Till then the big Indian paper manufacturers were divided into rival camps: the Indian Paper Mills' Association and the Indian Paper Makers' Association. They fought with each other and nobody took them seriously. A Joint Plant Committee existed only on paper. All these formations were based in Kolkata.

In 1999, R. Narayan Moorthy, secretary-general of the Indian Paper Manufacturers' Association (IPMA) took over charge of the unified and now stable association. About 19 major paper manufacturers are now its members.

"In the emerging era of global competition it is only the large integrated paper mills who can compete internationally. They can produce volume, quality, compete overseas or ensure that the influx of imports does not ruin their domestic market," says Moorthy.

The Indian paper industry is a Rs 14,000 crore industry and contributes Rs 2,500 crores to the exchequer every year. But compared to global giants it is small and terribly expensive. Faced with a famine of trees, the industry can't cut costs and upscale.

"Manufacturers will not be able to meet the domestic demand," says Vederah. "Our existing facilities will become uncompetitive. You can say grow this industry on imported pulp. There is no value addition on imported pulp."

Mills cannot upscale their operations. "If we want to increase our Kamlapuram mill into 600 tonnes from 265 tonnes per day, our raw material unit will throw up its hands. I don't have any wood," says Vederah.

Bamboo, wood, bagasse and waste-paper feed the mills. Very often, all are churned together. "This is a peculiar situation, which no other country except China has faced and things are changing there too. It is a survival strategy," says Moorthy. "We have no choice."

Paper of international quality comes from trees. "In all our research it has been proven that the best sheet of paper can only be produced by uniform quality of pulpable wood," says Moorthy.

The industry's raw material requirements include use of bamboo as part of a mix. But the problem with bamboo is that it is not freely available since it comes from forests which are increasingly reserved as sanctuaries.

The paper industry is not asking for degraded forest land on lease anymore. They want user rights to grow trees on degraded forest land with a crown density of less than 10%, within 200 km around their mills.

"Allow me 50% of my future wood requirement from high-yielding captive plantations and the rest will continue to be bought from farm forestry," says Vederah. "We are not saying transfer the title of the land. We only require use of land for industrial plantations. This should be incorporated into the FCA."

Industry wants to plant eucalyptus, casuarinas along the coast, acacia and subabul. "In this way we will get away from mono-cultivation and the criticism that birds won't chirp on our trees," says Vederah.

Reforestation would cost Rs 45,000 per hectare. This works out to Rs 450 crores for 100,000 hectares. It would take about five to seven years before industry can hope to reap a harvest. Since industry is investing this money, they would like the government to give them the freedom to manage their plantations. There is talk of joint ventures with Forest Development Corporations. Industry would like a 51% stake.

"The government can put whatever regulatory mechanism it wants. The large companies are all listed companies. Any kind of flare up on this issue will get their stocks tumbling down," says Vederah.

Farm forestry would continue since 1.2 million hectares would be shared by 19 big mills. "We will not be able to transfer completely to a plantation system. We have drawn a model for 30,000 hectares from where we can get 200 tonnes of pulp per day. We would need two such plots. But there are about 19 guys looking for 30,000 hectares," assures Vederah.

There are jobs available in planting, watch and ward, maintenance and harvesting. Besides manual labour involves a large number of women.

"Forest dwellers and the people from the village would be preferably utilised for these jobs. About 80% of nursery work is done by women. Men are employed for heavier manual labour. Removing weeds, tending to saplings is all women's work," says Chaurasia.

"Cement and steel have become globally competitive on the strength of their backward linkages to raw material such as iron ore and limestone. The paper industry needs similar backward linkages. Once we have that, we can contribute to greening and increase the forest cover. We will be creating nearly 1.1 million jobs, helping education and providing other services," explains Vederah.

'Wastelands are not for industry'

Amrita Patel presides over the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) and has a formidable reputation for holding her own. She is also chairman of the Society for the Promotion of Wasteland Development (SPWD), an NGO whose agenda is perhaps more impressive than its achievements. Ms Patel, it is hoped, will bring new energy and pragmatism to this organisation. **Civil Society** emailed her some questions on the use of wastelands, in particular for industry. Here are her answers:

How many hectares of wasteland exist in India?

The estimates of the extent of wastelands carried out by various agencies vary from 38.40 million ha to 187 million ha. In 1984, SPWD estimated the wastelands outside forest areas to be around 129.58 million ha. The National Wasteland Development Board estimated them to be around 123 million ha in 1985. In 1995, the National Remote Sensing Agency (NRSA) estimated the country's wastelands to be around 75.50 million ha.

According to the latest survey (2000) by Department of Land Resources carried out by NRSA through a district-wise mapping of wastelands on a 1:50,000 scale using satellite data, the total wastelands are estimated to be 63.85 m. ha.

There are wastelands which are untreatable and not used such as wastelands under snow, sand-inland and coastal areas, etc which according to an estimate are around 18.82 million ha but the rest of wastelands are treatable, which can be brought back to desirable productive level through appropriate measures.

What is SPWD's experience in regreening wastelands?

Areas are being treated for regreening under a number of programmes. These are the Department of Agriculture and Cooperation, the Department of Land Resources and the Ministry of Environment and Forests. Up to the 9th Plan the area is around 27.5 million ha. Apart from this there are a numbers of NGOs working on wastelands with funds other than those available under the government programmes, for which aggregate figures are not available.

At the same time the area reported as treated up to the 9th Plan does not mean that all interventions were successful in regreening the area. There is a possibility of overlap and duplication. When programmes such as the Integrated Watershed Development Programme and the Drought Prone Area Programme are taken up they do not strictly adhere to the definition of wastelands and may treat tracts of degraded areas which are not wastelands as defined by the Ministry of Rural Development.

Has SPWD undertaken surveys to examine the ownership status of these lands, their exact level of degradation, agro climatic zones, suitability for any particular use?

All available estimates classify wastelands according to the nature of problem and land use and none of them pertains to property rights. However, state-wise comparative statistics on common property lands and wastelands of 16 states show that only four states --- Gujarat, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir have wastelands significantly more than common lands.

Although no ownership-wise estimates are available, most wastelands under saline and waterlogged lands appear to be under private ownership. The under-utilised degraded notified forest land which accounts for 14 million ha of the forest wastelands are owned by the state.

A detailed survey of the ownership status of wastelands is desirable as the ownership has a relationship to the cause of degradation and is important for



deciding a strategy for afforestation and regreening.

Are there any wastelands in India which could be given to the paper industry?

The possibility of making wastelands available to the paper industry is rather low. As per the NRSA assessment sizeable portion of wasteland fall under uplands scrub jungles and underutilised or degraded forest land. Land available under the classification uplands scrub jungles plays a critical ecological role besides contributing to the local economy.

The lands available under the classification of under utilised or degraded forest lands attract the Forest Conservation Act and it is difficult and undesirable to change its landuse and ownership. Most of the wastelands are under some prevailing landuse practice and are in many cases the only lands and economic opportunity available for the dependent population, whatever be their status of degradation.

The NC Saxena report suggests people don't depend on wastelands for their livelihood. Is this true? Has SPWD been able to differentiate between "degraded but heavily used land" and "land which is no longer used"?

While we are unaware of NC Saxena's report that you are referring to, his other writings suggest a strong dependence of the local population on natural resources such as forests, grass lands, etc. It is also unlikely that the industry would be interested in acquiring wastelands that are low in productivity.

What do you think should be done with wastelands?

SPWD is of the view that the development of wastelands should strengthen and

Rich forests, richer people

THE CII report, "Public Private Partnership of Degraded Revenue, Private, Forest Lands- A Cost Benefit Analysis," recommends modifications in the Forest Conservation Act (FCA) of 1980 to strike a balance between conservation and production and meet the needs of industry. The changes include community participation in forest management and rights for forest dwellers.

The report says that degraded forest land can be given on lease to the Indian paper industry to make it more competitive and allow it to capture a larger share of global business. But the report also goes on to say that the Indian paper industry has to evolve from sheer opportunism that it has shown in the past to being a creative player, using resources in a dynamic public-private partnership.

The report points out that government control of forests has not helped productivity. It has excluded communities from forests and even made them poorer. It calls for a balance between conservation and productivity.

Although the FCA does not define forests, the definition of forest has been extended to include all areas recorded as forests under the guidelines of Act. The report recommends that forest-land be defined as land which has been notified as reserve forests and protected forests under Indian Forest Act of 1927.

A major reason why villages located near dense forests are underdeveloped is because building infrastructure such as schools, roads, tanks, electrification, attract provisions of the FCA.

The report recommends that the FCA should permit community development works such as Nistar tanks, check dams, school buildings, primary health centres, approach roads, electric lines. For such works, the state government should be permitted to sanction land between two hectares and five hectares in linear strips.

Forest villages were established before 1980 by states to help forestry activity. These have not been permitted to become revenue villages under the FCA, leaving them underdeveloped. Likewise encroachment on forest land prior to 1980 should not require clearance under FCA because denotification of these did not take place prior to 1980.

The report states that the FCA should not apply to forest villages and encroachments prior to the enactment of the Act. Due to lack of money, vast tracts of degraded forests are not being reforested. Tribal communities should take part in forest management. But under the FCA only government agencies can be involved in forest management and no lease can be granted to any private individual, organisation or agency. The CII report recommends that "community management of forests on an identified piece of forest land, as per sanctioned micro plans and assignment of usufruct rights on forest produce to its forest dwelling members by the community will not be considered as lease."

If people use boulders, sand, murrum, soil from forests for domestic reason, they attract penalty under the FCA. The report recommends that as long as such use does not result in trees being felled and is done through a prescribed procedure, use of non-forest produce should be allowed.

'Lease forests to communities also'

Samar K Datta, professor at IIM Ahmedabad, and **Milindo Chakrabarti**, Director of Create, were important members of the study team which wrote the CII report. "Public Private Partnership in Re-greening Degraded Revenue, Private, Forest Lands-Cost benefit Analysis." The report is in favour of leasing degraded forest land to industry for captive plantations. In an interview to **Civil Society**, Chakrabarti and Datta points out that state ownership of forest has not produced results and its time to rethink forest policy.

What sort of mechanism would you suggest to ensure industry follows a code of conduct in managing degraded forest land as plantations?

Forests involve the interests of multiple stakeholders, ranging from local communities to the global population. Very often the interests are conflicting. Yet, the mechanism that may help effective participation of all these stakeholders in a meaningful way has been eluding the people of the country.

However, it is also not prudent to "nationalise" forestry resources, even though we are often tempted to go for such an easy way out, and subsequently mess up the situation further. Even though in an ideal democracy the State is expected to take care of the interests of all citizens, the Indian State is yet to show itself capable of shouldering such responsibility.

A State property need not necessarily become a 'social' property, unless proper institutional mechanisms for conflict resolution are carefully crafted to operationalise the congruence between the two. Unfortunately, our craving for nationalisation of resources emanate from a belief that such institutions are already in existence or our unwillingness to spare time, energy and resources to design such mechanisms through dialogue.

The necessary mechanisms are not readily available. One has to sit down with the relevant stakeholders and design it. One possible mechanism, subject to threadbare debate involving all concerned, may be Joint Forest Management (JFM) involving the State, industry and the communities.

Are you suggesting changes in the FCA which would legalise people's rights to access forests for usufruct purposes?

We feel that the time has come to re-examine the efficacy of "State" ownership of forests

in really fulfilling "social" objectives. We must remember that forests are required to provide both tangible resources and intangible services to society. Unfortunately, the nationalised forestry sector has failed to strike a balance between these two objectives in a meaningful manner.

While the earlier policy regime was heavily loaded in favour of production of tangible resources with little concern shown towards the production of intangible services, the present regime appears to have turned the emphasis upside down.

The steady decline of productivity of Indian forests is an indicator of such shift in balance and has resulted in accentuating the supply-demand mismatch in tangible products and leading to further degradation of our forest resources.

Under such circumstances, a thorough re-examination of the FCA is urgently necessary to inculcate a sense of balance across these twin objectives of production and protection. Whoever simultaneously undertakes the jobs of developing forestry to provide the services and resources to the society in a balanced manner should be involved in its management. We must reiterate that the "State" so far has failed miserably in doing the necessary balancing act.

Adivasis claim historic rights on forests and this issue is becoming political in nature. How can these aspirations be addressed?

We believe that the Adivasis traditionally undertook sustainable management practices to ensure the balance. Hence they are the rightful claimants to such rights. However, under the changed global economic scenario they may have to forge win-win alliances with other stakeholders who may help enhance their capacity and capability to manage the forests. A tri-polar JFM involving communities, private sector and the state may be a possible answer. It should be noted that we have never argued in favour of leasing out the entire stock of degraded forest-land to the paper industry. A large chunk of forests may even be leased out to local communities on appropriate terms and conditions.

There are other industries dependent on forest produce. Should they also be given degraded forest land?

Yes, of course, provided they are capable of and willing to perform the balancing act.

How Chaitan Padhi earned Rs 94,350

It is a slow process. If one farmer does well, others follow



Chaitan Padhi on his land

FOR tribal farmers in Koraput, one of India's poorest districts, money is finally growing on trees. A programme to plant on small farms, taken up by BILT Tree Tech, 200 km around its Sewa paper mill in Jeypore, is helping tribals, classified as below the poverty line, to earn a decent income.

On February 24, tribal farmer Chaitan Padhi, received an award for planting the most trees on a one-hectare plot. In six years Padhi's harvest of eucalyptus earned him Rs 94,350 from the Sewa paper mill.

Yet in 1994, tribals were indifferent to Sewa's overtures. They had land lying fallow for ten or fifteen years. But they said it was a waste of time to grow anything. Soil was degraded and there was no water, anyway.

To enthruse them, Sewa decided to set up a rain-fed demonstration plantation, under a share-cropping scheme. Farmers were paid Rs 1,250 per hectare for giving their

uncultivated land to BILT for the demonstration plantation. Since the cost of land was Rs 5000 per hectare, tribals got interested. About 580 hectares were planted. The 316 farmers who gave their land were employed on the demonstration plantation and received wages and free firewood.

The trees grew with just a few showers of rain. Tribals were now keen to plant. Today 18 million seedlings have been planted on 4,700 hectares in a radius of 150 to 200 km around the Sewa plant. "The process of change is slow," says Raj Chaurasia, Head-Forestry, Bilt Tree Tech. "If one farmer does well, then others follow. Not all are as forward thinking as Padhi."

A root trainer nursery provides seedlings at subsidised costs. Technical help is free. Clonal plants which grow fast are also being provided. Farmers can choose from eucalyptus, subabul, acacia and casuarinas. Most opt for eucalyptus since it grows quickly. Cultivation of trees brings much more money to farmers than collection of tendu, medicinal plants, fuelwood or cashew cultivation.

Since farm forestry has a gestation period loans are arranged from banks. BILT provides a support price and assures purchase. Cultivation activities and maintenance are worked out for each year. The company's forest organisation certifies these activities have been carried out and the bank pays the money to the farmer as loan. When the trees are ready the company buys them and deposits the sale value in the farmer's bank account. The bank adjusts its interest and pays the balance. The farmer joins the scheme by pledging his land to the bank as collateral.

Similar farm forestry and agro forestry schemes are being carried out by BILT in Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Chattisgarh and Tamil Nadu. Three nurseries and 40 decentralised nurseries are supplying root trainers and clonal plants to about 9000 farmers. Rich farmers are also getting interested. BILT sources nearly 85% of its fibrous raw material from farmers, sometimes at a distance of 900 kms from mills, at huge costs.

'Degraded forests are India's biggest non-productive assets'

As deputy managing director of Ballarpur Industries Limited, India's biggest paper manufacturer, **RR Vederah**, has his hands full, keeping track of mills, raw material supplies and paper. Vederah is also vice-president of Indian Paper Manufacturers' Association. It is in this capacity that he spoke to **Civil Society** from his office overlooking the burgeoning city of Gurgaon.

What is the paper industry's position on forest policy?

We were exporting timber to Indonesia some 30 years ago. Today, Indonesia is a dominant global player purely because their government allowed plantations on certain portions of forested land. Let's look at paper as a commodity like steel and cement. We have enough limestone in the country so you can build an industry that is the second largest in the world in capacity.

Paper is in the same bracket. But we have not been able to develop this industry or invest in the right technology because we have no backward linkages.

Is industry realising the need to be competitive and organised?

It's not just that. Globalisation has brought changes. Previously the customer had no choice. In 1981, when I joined Ballarpur, we had 86% tariffs. Today we are down to 20%.

The mindset has changed. The government has realised that imports or talking to the private sector are not such bad things and that disinvestment is the right way. The government should be building infrastructure and governing.

We are a Rs 14,000 crore industry. We contribute Rs 2,500 crores to the exchequer every year. Today demand and supply are evenly balanced but soon demand will outstrip supply. Manufacturers will not be able to meet the domestic demand. Our existing facilities will become uncompetitive. We have told the government there is no harm, no evil, in letting the private sector get into captive plantations. We have also said since we have to invest a lot of money, we should have the right to manage plantations the way we want to.

Has the industry decided where it wants land?

There are about 30 million hectares of degraded forest land where the crown cover density may be as low as 10%. I'm not saying the government should give us 1.2 million hectares of contiguous area, but each mill has a catchment area. Today I am accepting wood for my mill, located in Andhra Pradesh, from Karnataka. We burn money carrying it. The cost is completely out of step with what it should be globally. Within 200 km --- we are going right up to 800 kms-we should identify degraded forest lands which are of low crown density and be allowed to grow a variety of trees and get over monoculture.

We are not saying transfer the title of the land. We only require use of land for industrial purposes. This should be incorporated into the Forest Conservation Act. The government can put whatever regulatory mechanism it wants.

We are also giving the government an assurance that our existing work with farmers would continue. Five million hectares is not going to meet the needs of the paper industry.

We have invested in 45,000 hectares of marginal farmland annually. We are subsidising plant stock but that is not enough. The effort required in passing on essential services and training is huge. We cannot introduce better technology into small two or three acre plots. On contiguous plots we could use techniques to make cultivation cost effective.

We did a techno-economic study that identified that the so-called dependence on forests by people is only 25%. They have to migrate to urban areas for work. We are asking what is the long-term plan of the government to green India and improve the living conditions of landless people.

Allow us 1.2 million hectares. We can then compete in an environment where duties are even 5%. A mill in China makes 1000 tonnes of paper per day. We cannot make even 100 tonnes. Our raw material costs are twice more than plantation wood.

How much will 1.2 million hectares give you?

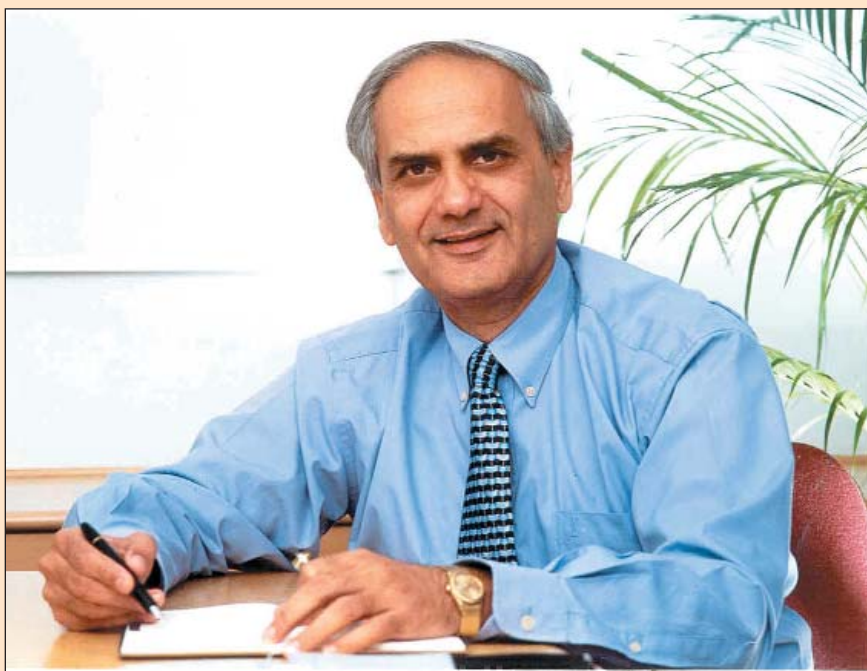
Say by 2010, we need about 10 million tonnes of paper to meet domestic demand and for exports. The organised sector manufactures 50%. If we get 1.2 million hectares which will be planted at the rate of 200,000 hectares per year for six years.

This should give us 15 to 16 million tonnes of wood on a sustainable basis. This will give additional capacity of 4.5 million tonnes per year of paper.

You need to raise money to grow trees. It will cost us Rs 45,000 per hectare over a five or six year period so if I am going to grow 100,000 hectares the cost will be Rs 450 crores.

A key concern is that land is being handed over to the corporate sector across the board?

You have to lay down some criteria. Today anybody can put up a paper mill. We are a polluting country and a corrupt country. Who are the people dependent on these trees? It is only the organised sector. The others are one-tenth our size and completely fragmented. The large companies are all listed companies. Any kind of flare up on this issue will get their stocks tumbling down.



Once you get forest land for plantations won't it create dissonance in wood markets for farmers?

Say Ballarpur requires 1.2 million tonnes of wood and 200,000 tonnes of bamboo. Today, we are meeting this demand almost entirely through the farm forestry programme. It is most uneconomical. We are going to Karnataka, to Kerala to meet our wood requirements.

This 1.2 million tonnes of wood cannot be entirely supported by our seedlings programme. Obviously, sometimes, we are usurping somebody else's trees. Market forces are work. Freight is a deterrent. The farmer closer to the mill gets a better price.

So the model is if today Ballarpur is supplying 40 million seedlings per year, we will continue to do so and take it to 60,000 seedlings. But we need to put a

ceiling on the cost of our wood. Indonesia is getting wood at \$ 20 to \$25 per tonne, mill delivered. My cost can spiral from \$40 to \$ 60. I am not globally competitive but I have to compete in the same market.

Allow me 50% of my future wood requirement from high-yielding captive plantations and the rest will continue to be bought from farm forestry. To reduce my costs from \$50 to \$30 I need to access raw material from 200 km around the mill. As for extension farming, I have no control over it. I have to convince farmers to see that the trees grow.

Do you see extension farming dwindling?

It cannot. We will not be able to transfer completely to a plantation system. We have drawn a model for 30,000 hectares from where we can get 200 tonnes of pulp per day. We would need two such plots. But there are about 20 guys looking for 30,000 hectares.

Unless the government does this, we will continue to hunt for wood and import pulp. If we want to increase the Kamlapuram mill into 600 tonnes from 265 tonnes per day, our raw material unit will throw up its hands. I don't have any wood. So the plan in Ballarpur is to import some pulp, mix it with what is available and slowly grow the pulp capacity.

Lets understand the dynamics of imported pulp. There is a Rs 10,000 difference per tonne which is the profit those guys are retaining because of the investment they have made.

If demand keeps growing and you do not get access to raw material what will it mean to the country, in terms of growth?

If demand grows to 8 million tonnes of paper, then you would need to import. If you import 3 million tonnes of paper then that's \$2 billion. This environment would kill off the domestic paper industry. So you would have to import 5 million tonnes of paper, which is around \$3.5 billion.

This, in a country with a huge land mass where people are waiting to get employment.

There are jobs available in planting, watch and ward, harvesting, lops and tops. We can provide free firewood for the community and reduce dependence on well-stocked forests. We can contribute to greening and increase the forest cover. We will be creating nearly 1.1 million jobs, helping education and providing other services. Here is an industry which wants backward linkages. India's degraded forests are probably its biggest non-productive assets.

African shrub helps in HIV

A perennial shrub called *Sutherlandia Frutescens* (subspecies *Microphylla*) is becoming popular in Africa to treat the symptoms of HIV/AIDS. *Sutherlandia* grows wild in the arid regions of Botswana, Namibia, Zululand, Western and Eastern Cape regions of Africa. It has been traditionally used by tribes as an energy booster and a remedy for cancer.

Three out of four AIDS patients in Africa rely on traditional medicine (TM) to treat symptoms of HIV/AIDS. Only an estimated 1% can afford conventional treatment.

A network of TM healers, botanists, doctors and scientists have formed the PhytoNova group, to prescribe and record the medicinal benefits of *Sutherlandia*. Dr Nigel Gericke, a GP and a botanist and his colleague Credo Mutwa, an 82-year-old traditional healer lead PhytoNova's clinical practice and laboratory in Cape Town, South Africa.

Gericke describes weight gain in full-blown AIDS patients as *Sutherlandia*'s most valuable medicinal property.

"We have seen several examples of bed-ridden patients able to get up after a month's treatment and even return to subsistence farming," says Gericke. He has contracted local farmers to grow acres of *Sutherlandia* shrubs. This precautionary approach has created local employment and maintained the "not at risk" status of *Sutherlandia* as a medicinal plant.

PhytoNova is convinced that progression to AIDS from HIV can be delayed once the patient has agreed to receive the appropriate treatment and doses of *Sutherlandia*, which are taken on an ongoing basis, in addition to careful attention to diet. It is recommended that alcohol, recreational drugs and other drugs that damage the immune system should be avoided.

The medical records of a patient who had ceased taking conventional anti-retrovirals to combat symptoms of HIV/AIDS for two years before turning to PhytoNova for treatment using *Sutherlandia* pills were documented. These show a marked decrease in the patient's viral load and a significant increase of his CD4 lymphocyte cell count over a six-week period.

To date, no severe adverse reactions to *Sutherlandia* in any form has been reported. An independent safety study conducted by South Africa's Medical Research Council (MRC) tested the effect of *Sutherlandia* on sixteen vervet monkeys in four groups including one control. The monkeys were fed with dried *Sutherlandia* leaf powder for three months and exhibited no single indication of toxicity. This is the first South African medicinal plant to be evaluated for toxicity using primates in a controlled study.

Stuart Thomson, director of Gaia Research has however, attacked the plant, the MRC trials and PhytoNova. He says *Sutherlandia* is a "poison panacea" and PhytoNova is unlawfully distributing a substance, which he believes is potentially toxic as well as using people as human guinea pigs. Thomson considers the MRC study to be invalid because the monkeys were not infected with HIV/AIDS and were studied for less than six months.

Gericke defends *Sutherlandia*. He says the plant can dramatically improve the quality of life of many AIDS patients. "We are certainly not making the absurd claim that *Sutherlandia* is a cure-all or a cure for AIDS."

The German sex tourist

CHILD prostitution is not uncommon in many parts of the world. But for some strange, statistically inexplicable reason, their clientele are predominantly German men.

They are, mostly, part of organised sex tours. Coming from one of the richest European nations, the Germans offer a lucrative deal to the 'providers' in relatively poor countries. Of late, these 'sex tourists' are turning to a market next door - the Czech Republic.

Last year a United Nations-sponsored report by the German humanitarian group Karo, accused the Czech government of ignoring child prostitution on its border, which is frequented by German sex tourists. The two governments tried to downplay the issue with the German Minister of Justice Brigitte Zypries stating that "three years ago we felt this problem was far more serious."

This spring the much awaited trial of Marc Dutroux, a convicted child rapist at the centre of a national paedophilia scandal in the 1990s charged with the raping and killing four teenage girls, took place. Two of his victims, 12-year-old Sabine Dardenne and 14-year-old Laetitia Delhez, were found alive. The really bizarre part was the repeated negligence of the Belgian Justice system. It took them almost eight years to bring this lifelong criminal to trial. They even released him in 1992, after three years, for 'good behaviour' when he was serving a 13 year sentence for kidnapping and raping five underage girls in 1989. Many critics in Europe believe the reason was that a large network of very influential people including judges, senior politicians, lawyers, police officers and a former European Commissioner were part of Dutroux's clients.

In the excitement of September 9/11, the world overlooked a book, published the following week in Belgium and later in France, despite a warning from the Belgian ambassador threatening legal action against one of France's leading publishers, Flammarion. The book linked King Albert II to a paedophilia scandal. It was written by a Luxembourg based investigative journalist, Jean Nicolas. He said he made no accusations against King Albert, but merely published legal

documents written by a Belgian judge.

It has now been shown that José Maria Aznar's Popular party, in Spain, which the majority backed as likely winners before the Madrid bombings, attempted to turn the wave of emotion which followed to its advantage by manipulating information, concealing evidence suggesting that Islamists were to blame and insisting on blaming its preferred enemy, the Basque organisation ETA.

European participation in the illegal war in Iraq seems to be slowly coming to light for what it really was - illegal. Daniel Ellsberg's letter in the Guardian on Jan 27, challenged all men of integrity and conviction in the British and US governments who knew the real truth to say what they knew and save their countries from further ignominy. People like Richard Clarke (White House counter-terrorism coordinator,

who served under four presidents), Katharine Gun (a translator in the security services of the British Defence Ministry), Sir Christopher Meyer (ex-British Ambassador to Washington), former British International Development Secretary, Clare Short and others did come out.

Despite the usual bickering the EU did not need much goading to being the process of appointing an anti-terrorism

Czar (note the American nomenclature) within a week of the Madrid bombings. The process will differ somewhat due to the nature of the Union, but with Blair and Berlusconi as Bush's henchmen one can only assume there is pressure to adopt American hardline tactics.

British Home Secretary David Blunkett, is trying under various guises to usher in anti-terror measures in accordance with the ones in the USA. This is mainly being done under 'national public emergency' which allows 'wartime laws,' that include indefinite detention without due process and evidence obtained under torture, albeit in other countries. France too has instituted similar changes under 'Vigipirate'. In Germany new supervisory powers embodied in new laws that were initially passed in 2002, give virtually unlimited access to the intelligence services and national law enforcement agencies to data from telephones, e-mails and bank accounts, as well as travel details.

LETTER FROM EUROPE



Riaz Quadir in Versailles

EU tries to hide its Roma

Valeriu Nicolae
Brussels

TWO months ago, British tabloids ran a huge campaign on the motive of EU enlargement. Their reporters returned from Slovakia, with heart-rending stories about desperate Roma allegedly planning to move to Great Britain after May 1. "Britain, here we are!" was one of the headlines of a cover story in The Daily Express. A picture of an unshaven young man with a broken tooth and a child on his back, obviously just on his way to Great Britain, was displayed.

Among the countries, joining the EU on May 1, Slovakia has the second largest Roma population after Hungary. The economic situation in Slovakia is particularly bleak.

Roma continue to face widespread discrimination and exclusion here. This makes Slovakia a good case to demonstrate that thousands of east European Roma will invade Great Britain, where they would live at the expense of the British taxpayer.

The campaign was started by *The Economist*. On January 15, the magazine ran an article on the likely impact of an alleged mass immigration of citizens from the new member states following Enlargement.

The *Economist* wrote: "the bigger worry for the rich-country governments concerns are migrants in search for state benefits. Central Europe's Roma minorities ... are a particular case for concern."

But Britain was not the only country, fearing an invasion of Roma from east Europe. Asylum applications of Roma who

attempted to escape rampant violence and discrimination in their home countries were systematically turned down in most EU member states. Many west European countries are relieved that east European Roma will not be able to lodge asylum applications following the entry of their countries into the EU.

The European Union has always told candidate countries of Central and Eastern Europe that they would need to improve the situation of their ethnic minorities, especially Roma, as a prerequisite for their entry. Today, when the accession of these countries is becoming a reality, the EU15 does not feel comfortable including some 1.5 million Roma.

There is the silence of defeat. Since early days, when the former Socialist countries started negotiations with the EU, surveys have piled up documenting widespread discrimination and marginalisation of Roma in all the CEE countries.

Last year, the UNDP stated that Central and East European Roma lived in conditions akin to sub-Saharan Africa and that one out of six faced starvation. Recently, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance issued two country reports on Slovakia and Bulgaria. Both are a shameful account of lack of real progress and the absence of political will in the two countries to improve the situation of their Roma minority.

Slovakia has just experienced its worst social crisis ever: The Slovak government turned its troops against its own civilian population, mainly Roma, after they recklessly cut social welfare, a clear statement that they will not compromise with Roma. The EU has remained silent.

Off city streets and into a happy home

Rathi A Menon
Chandigarh

THE children of Bal Sadan look like any other kids their age, healthy and well fed. They are proud of their neat rooms, where each one's talent is on display—paintings on the walls, dolls, soft toys.

One of them, Jyoti, is a dancer. She performed at Bal Sadan's recent annual function attended by the governor of Punjab, who is also the administrator of Chandigarh. "We need volunteers who can train these children in classical art forms. There is immense talent in them," says Kalpana Ghai, the Sadan's main resource person.

Then there are Poonam and Anu, toppers in their respective classes. "Poonam is from Arunachal Pradesh and Anu from Jharkhand, both are victims of abject poverty," says Kalpana. There is no trace of a tortured past on their confident faces.

Raman says he's going to be a doctor. His friends tease him like typical teenagers. "He has already started treating us here, but we are still alive." This sally is greeted with a sudden burst of laughter from the boys and giggles from the girls.

However, Raman's youthful ambition is not a flippant thought. Dr Devinder Kumar, the US-returned doctor who has put in his own money to strengthen Bal Sadan, reveals, "Raman's father threw acid on his mother. We brought him here because his father is in jail and his mother cannot look after him. Her entire face has been burned. When he arrived, he was mentally devastated and all he would say was 'I want to kill my father'. But now he is one of the brightest students in his class."

Bal Sadan is a home for orphans and destitute children, which was set up by a young man called Satish Almadi. He was a heart patient and knew he was going to die, but he wanted to do something for the children he had



John from Italy with Bal Sadan's children

picked up. "He set this up in his small dwelling with just six children and meagre finances in 1991," says Kalpana. But Almadi's efforts soon got noticed and more people joined him till, finally, they moved into a house.

After Almadi's death, Bal Sadan and its children fell on bad times. In 1997, Kalpana, Dr Kumar, K N Gulati, its

RESCUE POINT

current patron and H K Khosla, its chief advisor, came together to lend a helping hand. The Sadan began to prosper again. Kalpana roped in a number of donors.

When they finally got a plot to construct their own building in 1998, each room was added with the money doled out by benefactors. And a plaque on every room's door records the name of these friends.

Kalpana talks of one of them, a lady called Danielle. "She came here as part of the International Women's Group and spent a day with the children. She took our pamphlet and displayed it at her shop there along with a

donation box. People contributed. It was about Rs 52,000. So, we could add one more room for the girls." Then there's Mohammed Kassim and his wife, Meenaz, from Canada. They not only contribute (the recreation room and library are thanks to them), but also visit the children whenever they're in India.

The picture was not so rosy some years ago. "Each one of us had to put in our own money and we are all volunteers here, but today, with help flowing, we have a computer centre and soon there will be a tailoring centre, too," says Dr Kumar.

The flow of help began with a charity concert organised by the Chandigarh centre of the Alliance Francaise. Then the State Bank of India provided them with a Tempo Traveler. "That has really eased our troubles. Now the children have their own transport to go to school." The

children are all studying in good schools in Panchkula.

There are 25 children at the Sadan now, including six boys. "We don't want to overcrowd our house, though there is demand. We want to add all the facilities before bringing in more children. But we won't deny those in dire need." Children like Kajal, daughter of a newspaper employee, who is a drug addict, and a domestic helper. "But we have got a sponsor for her now as she has been an excellent student throughout," Kalpana's face glows when she talks of her children.

Dr Kumar plays friendly confidant to the children. Bal Sadan also has house-mothers and a matron, Rita. It is with shock that you learn that Rita is herself a victim of domestic violence.

"We have some wonderful sponsors now. Some are ready to sponsor the child's entire education and some are willing to come and spend a year here, doing voluntary work," Kalpana says.

Contact Bal Sadan at (0172) 258 1195, 274 7497 or at I-9, Sector 12-A, Panchkula.

PEACEWORKS

Snapshot of borders

Civil Society News
Kolkata

THE Seagull Arts and Media Resource Centre, Calcutta is playing host to an international photo exhibition "Borders and Beyond" in collaboration with Pro Helvetia, Arts Council of Switzerland. The exhibition showcases photo-essays by ten well-known photographers from across the world, and concentrates on frontiers: natural, social, and political.

The photographs depict dire frontier situations in areas of conflict, violence and poverty. Along with the photographs are maps, statistics of migration, and x-ray photographs of refugees and stowaways attempting to cross borders to escape human oppression. Recognising a common theme, the Seagull Foundation included pictures from PeaceWorks team's trip to Pakistan. Pictures of the Wagah border, taken by Sharmistha Sarker, coordinator, PeaceWorks, have been included by Pro Helvetia as part of the official exhibition.

Mahabaleshwar on the map

Deepali Gupta
Mahabaleshwar

MAHABALESHWAR'S first functional Automatic Teller Machine (ATM) was inaugurated on March 22. It was a State Bank of India (SBI) ATM, and senior officials from Mumbai traveled all the way for the occasion. However, the big shots from the big city were not the only crowning jewel of the function. To celebrate about 20 children from Giristhan Prayshala, Marathi (Primary) School II, performed a percussionist act, on what would seem an unlikely stage.

"Normally we only put up this performance for the Republic Day celebrations, but SBI has motivated our children by distributing prizes on Children's Day, so this is our way of saying thank you," says Santosh Shinde, accompanying faculty member. Behind that gratitude lies a painful truth: most of these children can't even afford a pair of shoes, leave alone books and

stationery, and they get very little attention. The school's only aim is to get students to qualify for a Maharashtra Secondary School scholarship, and on an average they are able to get one girl and one boy to study further every year.

Although Mahabaleshwar has the status of an urban centre, there is very little infrastructure to deal with its bad weather and rains. "The rains normally waste about six months for our

children every year," grimaces Shinde. "and the children compete with better-equipped children from Pune and neighbouring cities." The fact remains that there is a vast difference in the level of development.

There is still hope and it reflects in the bright eyes of the Giristhan children. As a reward for their performance, SBI decided to donate a computer to the school.



Children of Giristhan Prayshala at the function

Civil Society

PERSPECTIVES

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

Put votes back into those rolls

ARVIND KEJRIWAL

THE past few years have seen an increased participation of civil society in the electoral process. The role of money and muscle power in elections was well known for long and the average citizen has felt helpless. But in recent times, a pro-active Election Commission and some judgments from the Supreme Court have galvanised a number of concerned individuals and civil society groups into action.

Fidelity of electoral rolls is the starting point to ensure fair elections. Various surveys conducted by a number of groups in different parts of the country have revealed the extent of deficiencies in electoral rolls. About 20% of the people in the rolls are bogus entities (or do not live anymore at the addresses declared or have died). Almost an equal percentage of people, who are genuine voters, do not find their names in the voters' lists. It is these names of non-existent people on the lists, which provide easy opportunities for bogus voting. When elections are won on very slender margins in a number of constituencies, such large-scale deficiencies in electoral rolls make a total mockery of the whole electoral process.

The Election Commission issued an order in August 2003 that the electoral rolls would be read out in ward sabhas in rural areas and in similar citizens' gatherings in urban areas. The rolls would be corrected on the basis of feedback received from the people at such meetings. In Rajasthan, about 700,000 names were added or deleted as a result of this exercise before the last assembly elections. However, there were allegations in Rajasthan that the names of supporters of a particular political party were deleted on a large scale in this exercise.

Whereas the existence on the rolls, of the names of people who have moved out of the constituency or the names of the people who are dead is understandable, the existence of a large number of bogus names on electoral rolls is serious and indicates collusion between the officials and the political parties. Recently, a number of cases have been reported from several states like Andhra Pradesh, UP, Delhi etc where several hundred bogus voters were registered from the same address. Responsibility needs to be fixed on the officials who did the survey. The names have clearly been added on extraneous considerations. The Election Commission needs to lay down strict penalties, which should be imposed on the guilty officials in a time bound manner, if such bogus names were found in the electoral rolls prepared by them.

How do we minimise the role of money and muscle power during elections? The institution of Election Observers (EOs) can play a useful role. EOs are senior civil servants deputed by the Chief Election Commission, as its agents, to ensure free and fair elections. They have the powers to investigate any complaints received by them and

report back to the Commission. However, the Commission and its Observers do not have adequate powers to take steps and to punish the guilty in any way. For instance, if it comes to light and is proved that a particular candidate has spent more than the legally prescribed limit, there is little that the Commission can do. Only an election petition in a court of law, after the elections, is the solution. But election petitions are hardly a deterrent because they are tough to file. This issue needs to be addressed.

However, the EOs can stop counting of votes if there are instances of rigging or booth capturing. The institution of EOs is not known to too many people. It needs to be widely publicised so that people can report cases of malpractices. EOs should also be duty bound to investigate and report on every complaint received. The process of investigation and the report of an EO should be available to the public.

LAKSHMAN



Samajwadi Party candidate, Narayan Singh questioned by voters in Seemapuri in East Delhi during the 2003 Assembly elections at a public hearing organised by Parivartan

Declaration of antecedents by the candidates has had some impact. Before the last assembly elections, the parties themselves, before giving tickets, scrutinised the criminal antecedents of the aspirants. This did have some impact on choice of candidates. However, such disclosures had absolutely no impact on voting patterns. The quality of disclosures was also quite poor. A number of candidates declared zero wealth including zero cash in hand, which is prima facie a false declaration. However, the Election Commission has no powers to take any penal action in such cases. It is being strongly felt that soon this exercise may be reduced to a mere formality with candidates not disclosing anything.

Recently, the Chief Election Commissioner unsuccessfully attempted to introduce a column "None of the Above" at the bottom of the ballot paper. This would give a chance to the voters to express their rejection of all the candidates. There have been demands that if this column bags majority in any constituency, there should be a re-election in that constituency. In the re-election the rejected candidates should not be allowed to stand. This would force the parties to put up good candidates. It would also provide an opportunity to good people to enter the fray in re-elections. However, this would require legal changes. Such a system already exists in the State of Nevada in the US, where, however, there is no provision for re-elections.

The demand for cleansing of elections is growing. The heartening aspect is that it is not happening as a result of executive orders by a benevolent government. The changes are taking place as a result of active civil society participation. This gives hope that despite the slow progress change will finally come and be sustainable.

(Arvind Kejriwal is the founder of Parivartan, a respected Delhi-based group of young people seeking the right to information for citizens and electoral reforms.)

DP Yadav and other hot potatoes

MAJA DARUWALA AND ADITI DATTA

SO D. P. Yadav was in but now is out. For the rejoicing public, who must wonder how the likes of Jaitleys and Shouries and Suresh Prabhus can bear to think of sitting on the same benches as Mr Yadav's kind of politician, his ouster is a small victory for public opinion.

Mr Yadav, a history sheeter from 1979, has been mired in controversy from the time he joined politics as a legislator in Uttar Pradesh. His son is himself presently under indictment for murder. Mr Yadav has usually had an easy passage from party to party and though he may not get a ticket this time he is confident that he will remain in politics.

With the 14th Lok Sabha elections looming, there will be close to 5,000 hopefuls be in the fray and 543 winners will rule India for five years. Parties are busy with their calculations, inducting likely relatives, building cynical coalitions and plain horse-trading. As always, results will depend a great deal on those old equations of caste and class, muscle and money power. Whatever parties may promise about clean politics they continue to give tickets to the worst sorts be it Prabhunath Singh of the Samata Party or Shahabuddin of the RJD, or Ramji Lal Suman of the Samajwadi Party. But this time, especially after the high-visibility rejection of Mr Yadav, they may pause because there is a small new facet, which may change outcomes significantly.

Electioneering this time seeks to be different because of the Supreme Court's 2003 decision that candidates contesting have to reveal on affidavit their criminal past if any. A criminal record may not disqualify candidates from running for election, but it can cause embarrassment and may even cost parties a seat or two. The decision to drop Mr Yadav like a potato came after the top BJP leadership feared losing middle class votes.

Sadly statistics of the recent state assembly elections held in Delhi, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan reveal 15-30% of the successful candidates have criminal cases pending against them. The Association of Democratic Reforms, which monitored the 2002 elections in Gujarat, found that one in every six candidates fielded by the major political parties had a criminal past.

It is true that their own local compulsions and Hobson's choice often leaves voters with little option but to elect tainted candidates. Perhaps this old calculation of 'winnability' at all costs is what prompted Mr Promod Mahajan and Mr Venkaiah Naidu to induct the unlovely Mr D.P. Yadav into the party with a difference. All this says something for the growing power of public opinion. It displaced Mr Yadav but may not yet be strong enough to displace every rogue in politics.

But for once parties who fear little else are sensing they cannot for long continue to scorn the intelligence of those who vote them in. In state after state, civil society groups such as the Association for Democratic Reform in Gujarat, Loksatta in Andhra Pradesh, Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan in Rajasthan, the Chattisgarh and the Delhi Election Watch, have taken to monitoring. They have written to parties seeking assurances that candidates nominated for seats will be clean of corruption and crime. They have worked hard with state and central election commissions to remove bogus voters and register excluded ones and have wrested affidavits from reluctant grass-roots bureaucrats, who would not part with them without a fight. They have collated statistics and shared them with the media and shown up individual and party hypocrisy. More than all this they have catalysed ordinary people into realising that it is their fundamental right to know who they are voting for. Though this may not yet upset the old equations at least now the citizen has the opportunity to know more about his candidate than just his name, face, caste or party affiliation. Knowing how educated, wealthy or clean he is will help the voter make choices on grounds other than sectarian loyalties and fear of reprisal.

In the best of democracies, politicians, bureaucrats, the judiciary and any one who holds public office seeks to keep excellent reputations because they fear public wrath at bad behaviour. Whatever the real truth, at least the fig leaf of honesty and good reputation is maintained. Where it is not, there is a price to pay. No minister with a sullied reputation can hope to seek re-election. But in our own democracy politicians still believe they need barely heed public opinion. Through scams galore from Bofors, Fodder, Coffin, Telgi, to such national stigmas as the Delhi riots, Ayodhya, and Gujarat, politicians have been confident that they can brazen out bold faced lies and bad reputations in front of a largely rural, poor and illiterate population. Till now there has been little to challenge this belief and criminalisation of politics has been the norm rather than an exception. The disclosure provisions highlighted in the glare of elections will now keep shining before the public those uncomfortable truths that, till date, have been so easy to push into the dark.

We like to bill ourselves as the world's largest democracy. But to become the world's greatest requires that voters not only have periodic moments to vote in this or that new government but have the possibility of making informed and judicious choices about the kind of persons who should govern them. Mr Yadav's ouster provides that possibility.

(Maja Daruwala and Aditi Datta work for the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, New Delhi)



10th National Media Fellowships Programme, 2004-2005

"Giving Voice to the Unheard"

For Print and Photo Journalists

The National Foundation for India has a programme for young (upto 40 years), mid-career (5-7 years experience) and sensitive journalists, to research and publish articles / photo essays on issues of importance to ordinary Indians, their battle for a better life and to cover diverse aspects of development work viz., the working conditions of people, environment related matters and other social concerns.

The foundation offers eight fellowships of Rs. 1,00,000/- each. Women journalists from small newspapers with demonstrated capacity to publish well-researched articles/photo essays are encouraged to apply. One of the fellowships will be awarded to a photojournalist.

The last date for receipt of application is August 12, 2004.

For more information contact:

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NATIONAL CONVENTION ON THE RIGHT TO FOOD AND WORK

A national convention on the right to food and work will be held on 11-13 June 2004, tentatively in Bhopal. Organisations committed to the right to food and work are expected to join from all over the country. The main purpose of this convention is to share experiences of grassroots action for the right to food/work, and to plan future activities. This is also an opportunity to address the organisational issues that arise in building coordinated action for the right to food and work.

This will be an action-oriented event, with plenty of discussion groups, training workshops, cultural activities, and more. Potential issues for discussion include guaranteed employment, the public distribution system, mid-day meals, land rights, and judicial action for the right to food and work, among others.

This convention is a follow-up of earlier discussions held at the World Social Forum in Mumbai (January 2004). It is facilitated by the support group of the "right to food campaign", in collaboration with several country-wide networks such as the National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM), Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samiti (BGVS), Jan Swasthya Abhiyan (JSA), All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA), National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW), Human Rights Law Network (HRLN), National Conference of Dalit Organisations (NACDOR), National Campaign Committee for Rural Workers (NCCRW) and People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL).

The convention is being organised on a shoestring budget. All participants are expected to bear their own travel costs, and may be asked to contribute to subsistence costs, if necessary. Other costs will be met through voluntary donations with no strings attached.

If you are keen to participate, please send a line to right2food@yahoo.co.in or get in touch with any member of the "coordination team". Contact details for the coordination team, and the confirmed venue of the convention, will be circulated soon and also posted on the website of the right to food campaign (www.righttofood.com)

How does negative voting help?

SANJAY KAUL

THE recent proposal by the EC that voters be given the facility and the right to reject all candidates has stirred up a controversy about the very idea of elections – and rightly so as has been argued, for what else is an election all about except rejection to the exclusion of one. This new idea to take the process to yet another level of pan-rejection is fundamentally flawed and almost naïve in essence.

What is the idea in the first place – where did this concept emerge? Ostensibly from the need to cleanse politics; from the big bus ride of electoral reforms that is becoming quite the rage around town. But if that is the idea, how does this solve the problem – how does asking people to reject all candidates allow better candidates to come in! On the contrary, as we have time and again argued, this only strengthens the stereotypical image of the politician and ends up scaring away the middle classes from engaging with politics or the political process, as a whole.

Imagine the length that we are prepared to go in reverie, so to say, to expect that all the very people who just don't go out to vote will now queue up on a hot summer afternoon and wait patiently for their turn, only to say they don't want to vote. Someone's got it all wrong here. Then there's the rest of the scenario – that a majority of the voters having rejected all candidates will actually force a re-election. Great. So who will stand this time for election. Bright knights in shining armour? Well, why didn't they do so in the first instance and solve the problem! (The other caveat – that those who are voted out in such a contest not be allowed to contest a second time is so preposterous in its naivete, that we will let it pass) Clearly, it just doesn't work like this.

In an earlier debate with the Legal Counsel to the EC, we had argued that instead of indulging in such complicated and unsustainable concepts, there is much that the EC can do that is within its powers and needs no reference to the Government or the Courts to remedy the situation. We said let all aspirants be declared through a public notice 45 days in advance of Nomination – this will cure the problem of crony politics in ticket distribution. We said let the withdrawal option be withdrawn – this will cleanse the process of non-serious and profiteering candidacy. We said increase the time between nomination and polls to 45 days – so that civil society can involve itself in the process and debate and discussions can take place in right earnest before constituents make up their mind.

To each of these the Hon'ble Legal Counsel found obstructions, mostly from the very players we wished to restrict. In the case of allowing more time between nomination and polls, the Counsel said that it had been reduced from 30 days to the present 13 days only because of pressure from the people in parliament – well, are we surprised? When we said the withdrawal option only leads to bargaining and non-serious candidature, the counsel inverted the argument and said that is why we have the withdrawal option. When we said aspirants must make their intentions public vide a notice to the EC, the Counsel said parties don't adhere to such strictures. But Sir,.....!

All the three proposals, in some measure can be implemented immediately, but we find the EC more amenable to incredulous proposals such as the power to reject all candidates which by any estimation needs all party approvals, governmental ascent and perhaps almost certain litigation. This is apart from the fact that it does not guarantee any improvement in the situation, and in fact acts quite the contrary, as we have argued, in reiterating negativist political stereotypes and scaring away the middle classes from any real engagement with the political process.



How does asking people to reject all candidates allow better candidates to come in! This only strengthens the stereotypical image of the politician and ends up scaring away the middle classes from engaging with politics or the political process, as a whole.

In a recent television debate on NDTV on the same issue, all panellists were unequivocal in their view that this was a misguided step and perhaps a result of overzealousness on the part of the EC without thinking it through. It is worth mentioning that sometimes this is due to the abnormal influence of overzealous reformers, who lose focus in what they set out to achieve and end up pushing the EC for reforming the reforms. Electoral reforms is only the means to an end and not an end in itself. Its objective is political reform. Every move whether by the EC or other active reformers must be weighed against this objective and not anything else.

In the same debate, Mr. Dwivedi of the Congress, while rightly castigating the move, suggested intra-party democracy as the answer to better candidacy. Acutely conscious perhaps of the fact that he represented a party not often a flattering example of the same, he expounded on the steps taken within his party to address the issue. Dr. M.S Gill, erstwhile CEC surprised me a bit when he analysed Mr. Dwivedi's solution as probably the best bet. There was not much time to ask if that was indeed the solution, why we were still discussing the issue as a problem!

If the idea is to presume that parties can fix the problem, the other problem is of independents who having created their fiefdoms on a career of high crime find enough takers in coalition politics to run riot with their candidacy. Who fixes that? What intra party democracy fixes that? If the idea is to see reforms emanating only from the underbelly of current electoral practices without seeking any other alternative, one can hardly quarrel with the EC, Mr. Dwivedi or Dr. Gill. But if we set out to reform politics, well, it's not going to happen this-a-ways. That's for sure.

All through this campaign, we find the resistance to let the constituents (read civil society) into the political process breathtakingly visible. Nobody can argue that the best solution to something like this is exposing the political process to civil society and letting the dynamics of democracy take over. But there is such a control-mania both among the Reformers, as well as perhaps the EC, that they aren't able to visualise the automaticity of just such a process. It is time that we understand that we don't need guardians of democracy – the people are smart enough to fix that problem – we just need good referees that create a level playing field and let the people do their thing.

(Sanjay Kaul is President, People's Action)

Imagine people power, no parties

K.K. SOMANI

THE efforts of Loksatta's Jayaprakash Narayan to clean the corrupt political system is a welcome step. Unfortunately the steps he has suggested would worsen the system rather than improve it. This is because he suffers from the same complex under which the constitution makers of the country suffered. Ashish Nandy has written somewhere that "Colonisation occurs when minds are colonised. In India, though formal colonisation ended in 1947, minds are yet to be decolonised."

We are unwilling to look into our own traditions and rich experiences as a democratic society from times immemorial, since we are educated by Macaulay that democracy was only started from U.K. and that republican system started with French revolution. We forget that even in the Ramayan a sort of democracy was practiced when Dashrath asked all the noblemen whether they agreed to accept Ram as the heir apparent.

First coming to the reasons why Narayan's suggestions are not suitable for Indian conditions. The change he proposes is due to the inherent corrupt system of present politics. Fighting for elections means crores of rupees have to be spent. When a politician spends he has to recoup these expenses somewhere. This applies not only at individual levels but even to run and maintain political parties, large funds are required which are gathered by various means.

His suggestions for direct election of the head of government would only accentuate this corruption as in the American system. It is no secret that huge sums are spent on getting elected in America and funders extract a price for their support.

His second suggestion is to regulate political parties by law with free secret ballot for elections of candidates and leadership and so on. Nobody in the world can ensure this. As soon as the party candidate knows the system, he creates bogus members by thousands by paying nominal fees on their behalf and pocketing the voting power.

Even private societies and trusts are unable to counter these tactics.

The third suggestion is to have a mixture of direct and proportional representation as a copy of the German system. Yet since this is also based on corrupt party system this is bound to fail as explained below.

The party system is required in the present political system for the following reasons:

- 1) To form a ministry based on certain principles or manifesto.
- 2) To remain in opposition and criticise all Government actions and thereby stop authoritarianism.

That the party system has failed completely, especially in Indian condition is evident from the fact that politicians change sides with the sole intention of capturing positions of power and making money.

Also the opposition system is itself a ridiculous system where the entire energy of the non-governing party is set on criticising, opposing and de-establishing the governing party irrespective of its results on the Nation's health and prosperity. The time of really capable and brilliant people is wasted when they are in opposition. Also many eminent persons who are apolitical are debarred to actively participate in governance of the country due to this system.

The Indian Alternative

Mahatma Gandhi's approach was Swadeshi — not parochial but universal. There was little to inspire him in the British tradition. In 1909 in Swaraj he writes: "The condition of England at present is pitiable. I pray to God that India may never be in that plight. What you consider as Mother of Parliaments is like a sterile woman and a prostitute. Both these are harsh terms, but exactly fit the case."

Mahatma Gandhi was working on an alternative system and had written about this just a day before he was killed. He had proposed disbanding of Congress party to make it non-political or social party. He also suggested that the political system should be based on Panchayats. Each village should select a group of five persons in the Panchayat and subsequent higher chambers at State and Central levels should be formed from these Panchayats or by election by these representative.

However, since he has just started this work he did not clarify how these five members in each village have to be selected. State and Central Legislature would be formed

with every fifty Panchayat members selecting a second grade leader and so on. The author makes his own clarification for both the political system as well as the administration as both are interlinked.

Representation

The basic panchayats should be formed by one representative of every 100 families (i.e. 500 population). These representatives would form the basic electorate for higher administration.

The electorate is assumed to be above 25 years of age (after achieving atleast some maturity). Such population may be about 75 crores in the overall population of 100 crores. On the basis of one representative per 100 families (500 persons), there would be overall 15,00,000 representatives of the population. If there are about 30 States, each State would then have average 50,000 such representatives. If each State Legislature consists of about

200 persons then each would represent about 250 electors. It should be possible for any group of 250 electors (having common interest or vocation) to form a group and nominate their representative to the State Legislature. These representatives at Panchayat and above levels would be freely recallable or replaceable by their electorate. Conditions can also be applied that the representative should not have any criminal record and should have a minimum standard of education, etc.

In case of Parliament a representative can be selected by either a grouping of about 2000 members of Panchayat of the State or alternatively by secret ballot by majority from the 50,000 electors. Perhaps each district having about 2000 electors can elect its representative by secret ballot.

In the old age, the tradition was to select the Panchayat representative by consensus form

amongst the elders of the society. But it is possible that in present age unanimity may not be possible either for Panchayat or for State Legislature. Hence if any group is not able to nominate a unanimous choice, a secret ballot under an independent agency can be held to elect a representative.

Ministership

The authority of Minister should be curtailed and he should be allowed to form only rules instead of seeing the files and clearing individual cases. Instead of approving opening of a secondary school in a particular village, he should only form a rule that all villages with the population exceeding say 5,000 should have secondary schools. If even this is not practicable economically, more condition can be imposed that residents must bear initial cost of construction of building and so on. Thus by removing the discretionary power of minister the craze for Ministership will vanish.

Since there are no political parties, ministership should be given to those who get maximum votes in legislature. For this voting should take place after each election. Also each minister should be required to win a vote of confidence every year from entire legislature.

Administration

Panchayats: There is need of complete decentralisation which can be achieved by reviving the age old panchayat system. On the lines of municipalities of larger towns, panchayats must also be authorised to collect taxes as land revenue (5- 16% of produce) and property tax (½ - 1% property value) and similar other taxes on consumption, etc. They should then be self-sufficient in all their local needs of water supply, drainage, education, medical aid, environment control, town planning, public institutions, roads and so on. Decentralisation though will not completely eliminate corruption, but drastically reduce it as sums involved are too small and under the direct gaze of villagers.

Bureaucracy: The work of all govt. servants should be under continuous supervision by atleast one representative of the Lok Pal per 100 govt. servants. He should continuously check the files of all the main officers by random sampling or check files against specific complaints about delay and procrastination by public and straight away start prosecution.

(K.K. Somani is a public spirited businessman. He can be contacted at contactus@soma.co.in)



Why Gene Campaign popped the PIL

SUMAN SAHAI

THE Supreme Court has issued a notice to the Government of India - Ministries of Environment and Forests, Science and Technology and Agriculture - on a public interest litigation filed by Gene Campaign, challenging the validity of the rules for genetically modified organisms, seeking a moratorium on the commercial release of GM crops until an 'effective' oversight mechanism is in place.

Sanjay Parikh, advocate, argued that biotechnology is being promoted in India in the absence of a national policy, without national consensus, and implemented in an ad hoc manner, without adequate precautions or appropriate regulations prescribed by international practice and convention. There is no clear-cut direction, oversight mechanism or provision for 'Prior Informed Consent', to prevent introduction of genetically modified organisms that could have a devastating effect on our biodiversity, especially since major crop plants originate here.

Going to court

Gene Campaign has long voiced concerns over the arbitrariness in the application of biotechnology in food and agriculture. Existing regulatory mechanisms are inadequate to control potential environmental and health hazards of genetically modified organisms (GMOs). There has been a total lack of attention to socio-economic and ethical aspects of GM technology in food and agriculture, and a lack of transparency and public participation in decision-making process.

Unfortunately, the government chooses to promote this technology without responding to public concerns. Several letters were written to relevant agencies, including the Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (the key regulating body) and the Department of Biotechnology (the key body promoting biotechnology), suggesting ways to improve existing GM regulations and seeking field-trial data on Bt cotton (India's first and so far only approved GM crop) and GM mustard. No letters or phone calls were acknowledged --- clearly infringing the people's right to know and participate in a matter with grave implications for them.

At a multi-stakeholder consultation organised by Gene Campaign in New Delhi in November 2003, 20 recommendations were formulated, stating that India needed a distinct National Biotechnology Policy. When sent to the DBT and other departments, every recommendation was rebutted. They felt there was no need for a separate Biotechnology Policy and the existing regulatory regime met bio-safety requirements.

Faced with continued stonewalling from the government, Gene Campaign filed a PIL in the Supreme Court in January 2004, challenging the constitutionality of the Rules for the Manufacture, Use, Import, Export and Storage of Hazardous Micro-organisms, Genetically Engineered Organisms or Cells, 1989, framed under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.

The PIL alleges the Rules a) are not in consonance with the principles evolved under Article 21 (Right to Life) of the Constitution. Various judgments by the Supreme Court have not only kept environment and human health a part of Article 21, they have also made essential principles like precautionary principle, sustainable development, polluter pays principle, etc., a part of Articles 14 (Right to Equality) and 21, and held that 'the Right to Information and Community Participation necessary for the Protection of Environment and Human Health is an inalienable part of Article 21 ...';

b) have not been brought in line with International Conventions like the Bio-safety Protocol of the Convention on Biological Diversity, to which the Indian Government is bound - being a signatory - and which has come into effect from September 2003.



Biotechnology is being promoted in India in the absence of a national policy, without national consensus, and implemented in an ad hoc manner, without adequate precautions or appropriate regulations.

Holes in regulation

Alarming, there is no provision for qualifications / expertise required by members of the various agencies, who at present lack the technical competence and skills pertaining to bio-safety assessment. Most members of the regulatory agencies, being civil servants in their ex officio capacity, also lack the necessary experience. No provisions exist to evaluate the socio-economic impact of GM crops and products derived from GM technology. Field agencies (State Biotechnology Coordination Committees and District Level Committees), with crucial supervisory and monitoring responsibilities, have either not been set up or are dysfunctional. The lack of transparency in the GM regulatory regime means there is no provision for public participation in the decision-making process and no requirement to

make information available to the public. There is no accountability or liability on the part of the regulatory agencies and/or the occupiers, and no effective penal provisions for cases of violation of the Rules.

The Rules of 1989 are arbitrary and unconstitutional, violating the Fundamental Rights of the people granted under Articles 14, 19 and 21. Various environmental principles held to be part of Article 21 by the Supreme Court have not been incorporated. The regulatory agencies set up under the Rules lack technical competence, transparency, and public participation and are not competent to deal with potential environmental, health and socio-economic risks posed by GMOs in India. The Rules do not incorporate the principles and provisions given under various international instruments, e.g., Bio-safety Protocol, Convention on Biological Diversity, which India has signed/ratified. Many countries, including developing countries, are setting up new regimes or revising existing ones, in light of new scientific evidence and latest international developments. India must do the same.

Remedies sought

The Rules must be brought in consonance with various provisions of the Constitution, especially Article 21. If respondents (Union of India) fail to do so, then the Rules must be declared unconstitutional. A High Powered Committee to formulate a National Policy on GMOs through a multi-stakeholder consultation process must be set up. Finally, a moratorium must be observed on various permissions / approvals / trials concerning GMOs, especially those commercial in nature (particularly for crops where India is a Centre of Origin / Diversity) till the Rules are amended and a sound Regulatory and Monitoring System is put in place.

RESOURCES

Helping Delhi breathe

Leena Taneja Rao
New Delhi

THE appropriately green and open to the elements amphitheatre at the India Habitat Centre, New Delhi, was the setting for a unique film and the release of Youthreach's second issue of Help Delhi Breathe (WHEN WAS THIS??). Founded in 1997, with just three members, Youthreach now has a staff of 14, and it partners many other NGOs.

Youthreach's mission is to create projects and interactions to help young people to contribute their time, energy and skills to benefit the community at large - in other words, to promote voluntarism. Its primary focus is on children, women and the environment.

The organisation was created based on the belief that people already cared and wanted to do something, and Youthreach could facilitate this by putting skilled professionals in touch with NGOs. Remarkably, over the last seven years, hundreds of volunteers have contributed their time and effort to working with slum and street children, victims of blindness and AIDS, and in the fight to keep Delhi clean and preserve its green spaces. Youthreach members believe that "individual and collective voluntary participation affects social change".

The evening commenced with an introduction by founder member and executive director Nanni Singh and readings to show the interconnectedness of nature, the built environment and the self. Ravi Agarwal of Srishti and Toxics Link spoke on ecology and how imperative it is for our very survival and well-being; Bharat Kapur of First City magazine read an eloquent piece called 'City', primarily about the city of Delhi in all its manifestations; and Rukmini Shekhar of Viveka Foundation spoke on 'Self', the link between inner and outer spaces.

Help Delhi Breathe is a slim guide-a user's manual-on what you can do to save Delhi's environment. It is divided into three main sections: water, earth, air, which cover everything from rainwater harvesting, vermicomposting and organic farming to indoor and outdoor pollution, plastics and other toxics. It contains many nuggets of information and practical tips. A list of partner organisations working for the environment in Delhi is included. It is affordably priced at Rs 50, and can be obtained from Youthreach, 11 Community Centre, Ground Floor, Saket, New Delhi 110 017.

Though the evening's events were geared to launch the book, the piece de resistance was the Ron Fricke film, Baraka.

Can't bind sage of Salahpur

Kaly Bose

NESTLED in the south-west corner of Delhi, in the neighbourhood of Rajokri, Samalkha, Kapashera and Brijwasan, lies Salahpur, a nondescript agricultural village. The village, bordering prosperous neighbourhoods in Gurgaon, lies in close proximity to Rajasthan. The culture of Salahpur, is therefore similar to Delhi, Haryana and Rajasthan, since most of its people come from these three areas. The region is fertile and life is easy. Ground water is available. Agrarian wealth is abundant.

Located in the belt of a booming economy and on the periphery of Delhi and Gurgaon, which is the big town bordering Salahpur, the area sees local wealth and money from a transient population. It never had a Cantonment, but a Sadar Bazar, since the Commissioner, the head Jailer and the Police Commissioner had always, prior to Independence, been British. This helped large trading to grow here, bringing further wealth. Ruins of old havelis, boundary walls, abandoned graves, - there does not seem to be any formalized cemetery, other than the churchyard- and watch towers dot the area, giving an idea of obvious wealth that must have come to this area over the years.

When wealth comes in big doses, people tend to offer patronage. Fortunately many times, patronage has no frontiers of caste, creed, community or colour. The legend of the sage of Salahpur is probably the tale of one such expression of patronage. In a predominantly Hindu dominated population, this sage, a Sufi saint know for his godliness and wisdom, found patronage among the people of Salahpur. They lovingly called him their peer baba.

The sage of Salahpur was a wise and religious man. He was a Sufi, who lived and died well over a century and half ago. His remains lie buried in the fields of Salahpur. Over the years, the ownership of the land changed hands and was acquired by a city dweller, who was a breeder of racehorses. The fields on which the sage is buried were for reasons of security, enclosed with high stone walls when the city dweller set up the stud farm. The mazaar of the sage of Salahpur, fell within the boundary walls of the farm and became inaccessible to people. The locals who for decades had paid obeisance to their baba, could no longer do so. The spirit of the peer baba was disturbed.

Despite the stud farm's best efforts, somehow results just fell short. There were invariably some hurdles that cropped up and prevented success. The horses would jump high fences and then bolt. Rounding them from far off places became a nightmare for the owner. The livestock would get injured jumping the fences and gates. High walls were unable to keep them enclosed. Nothing that the owner or his retainers did could contain the animals in the enclosures. No form of fortification helped.

The owner consulted several animal specialists. Nothing changed. The village elders, who heard the stories, proffered their advice. The sage of Salahpur was a free man. He had loved his people and his people had loved him. They continued to do so even after his death. Every Thursday, many paid obeisance at his grave. Since the owner had enclosed the grave, free access was being denied. The sage was indeed very unhappy and lonely. He loved his people and wanted them close to him. Any such denial was very painful to him. The elders advised the owner to free the spirit once again. 'You cannot cage in our peer and deny people access to him. You must free the boundary that holds back the mazaar'.

Fortunately, wise counsel prevailed and the owner of the stud farm re-demarcated his boundary walls. The mazaar was once again in the open. His spirit was free and no boundaries kept his followers out. Peace reigned.

The devotees could visit his grave, once again, every Thursday. Every day, some one would leave offerings. Somebody would sweep the place clean. Somebody has fenced the place to keep away cattle. Somebody has tiled it attractively. Lots of shady trees have been planted. The mazaar once again has become a living area.

Every Thursday, devotees visit the mazaar. They ask for a specific boon or a wish to be granted. Many come back weeks on end. Many have no wishes to be granted, but come to pay respect to a wise and just man. They bring offerings of gur and batashas and leave it on the grave. The peer is like a patron saint, who guards the area with his wisdom and godliness. To him, all who come are the same. All he asks is for one to have no rancour, but love and forgiveness in their hearts. He helps them, like he would help anyone. To him there are no Hindus, or Moslems or Christians. They are all children of God.

Even today, the grave at Salahpur, which has a new tombstone, of white and green porcelain tiles is kept spotlessly clean. A 94-year old Hindu, sweeps and cleans it. He has done it for many years. A young village girl sweeps the outside and swabs the place, once in awhile. I have seen another youngster, washing the place with buckets of water. Some people have planted a few trees around. A neem tree provides shade, flowering bougainvilleas add colour. The place is serene and quiet. An electric light glows in the evening, though some devotees light an occasional oil lamp. A steel railing guards the grave from the ravages of animals. But it is the sage of Salahpur who from the solitude of his grave stands sentinel to his people. He is the patron saint, taking care of his people.

{There are mazaars of two more peer babas revered by the local populace in close proximity. One is at the runway of the Palam Airport. The other is near the Government General Hospital near Brijwasan. We shall talk about them some other day.}

URBAN HISTORY

A fort's marvellous tank

Rathi A Menon
Jaipur

TRY a water detour. Take a drive to Jaipur and its Jaigarh Fort. There you can find a living example of a practical and viable water harvesting method which dates back to the 16th century, but works even today.

The Jaigarh Fort was used as a military stronghold of the then Jaipur dynasty of Jai Singh and hence housed the army mainly. Since it is perched on a hilltop, without any water resources within, they devised a three-tier water harvesting system. A set of pucca canals on the terrace collected rainwater and through mesh-covered traps brought it down. Dirty water would be diverted into the moats that surrounded the fort.

The second step in purification took place in the first main tank where all the

RUCKSACK

Since the Jaigarh Fort is atop a hill without any water within, a three-tier water harvesting structure was devised

sediments would settle down. This tank is almost 52 feet deep and the water in this tank was used for washing and bathing. Huge pulleys still stand testimony to its frequent use earlier.

A filter in the wall carried the water from here into a small tank, where the third level of purification took place. This tank is 40 feet deep and from here the water flows into the main reservoir. This largest tank,

which still stores water, is 158 feet long, 138 feet wide and 40 feet deep. It is covered and the roof rests on arches. There are 81 pillars inside to support its roof.

This tank can contain 6,000,000 gallons of water. Situated in the front courtyard of the fort, this tank was the mainstay of the residents during the time of siege and war. The guides at the handicraft centre within the fort include 'the experience of drinking the tank water' in their list of items to lure visitors. But it was a saddening sight to see Fruity tetra-packs, plastic wrappers and empty bottles floating in the large open tank and through the door of the underground reservoir one could see hose pipes lying there and strewn 'gutka' covers. All that Indians are capable of now! If only we were to follow the ancient wisdom of our ancestors in using the nature's bounty rather than exploiting it!

THEATRE

Hamari Kahani

MANISHA SOBHRAJANI

CHILDREN entertain you with such simplicity and charm that one is left wondering at the innocence of childhood. And its even better when the entertainment is related to a cause.

On April 18, some of Literacy India's talented children staged a play called "Hamari Kahani", a colourful, musical and hilarious comedy adapted from a classic Sanskrit tale "Bhagwad Ajjukkam", at the Sri Ram Centre. The play was directed by Shrivardhan Trivedi and the music was composed by Bonnie Chakraborty and Oikyotaan.

The story is about a guru and his disciple. While the duo are meditating, the presence of a beautiful



damsel who is waiting for her beloved distracts the disciple.

She is bitten by a snake and dies. The guru demonstrates his power by giving his soul to the damsel, who in turn begins to behave like the guru. Yamdoot, the God of Death realizes that it was not time for the damsel to die. He had killed the wrong person. Hence, he gives back life to the damsel but her soul enters the body of the guru. Towards the end, the confusion is cleared but after evoking much confusion and humour.

Said Capt. Indraani Singh, director of Literacy India, "For these children, the best reward is that you are all here to witness them perform." Among those gathered to watch the play was singer Shibani Kashyap who is also the Goodwill Ambassador of Literacy India. She said, "Working with these children is a unique experience and I would like to be associated with them for as long as possible."

Rickshaw ride, pollution fight

NIVEDITA PANWAR

CITIES have scant respect for two legs or two wheels. If you walk or cycle, buses, cars and trucks will knock you out, for sure. The rickety rickshaw fares even worse. Rickshaw-pullers have policemen on their back and fines on their heads. These forms of transport are eco-friendly and inexpensive. Yet when flyovers and roads are built, city governments edge them out.

A movement for equal road rights is gathering momentum round the world. In Delhi Lokayan organised an exhibition called 'The Pedestrian, the Cycle and the Cycle-Rickshaw across Space and Time' at the Gandhi Peace Foundation, with a



workshop on 'Sustainable Urban Transport for the Future: A Vision for the Non-Motorised'. A book called Ricksha: Ek Mahagatha, was released by former prime minister V P Singh.

The history and relevance of pedestrians, bicycles and cycle-rickshaws in India and around the world was related through pictures, posters, sketches and models. Pictures of Mahatma Gandhi, who walked for freedom, made onlookers pause to think.

"A detailed study of the presence and marginalisation of the cycle-rickshaw and the plight of the rickshaw puller was carried out over two years in the 24 cities of Delhi's national capital region. Later, we went back to those cities with our findings and got a tremendous response from the local population as they realised the importance of non-motorised transport," explains Rajendra Ravi, convener, Lokayan.

"There's a pro-auto atmosphere created by the media as well as the government through its policies. This approach leads to misuse of our natural resources. It all culminates in furthering air, soil, water and noise pollution, global warming, depletion of natural resources as well as foreign exchange reserves," emphasises Ravi.

The exhibition aimed at harmonising the coexistence of motorised and non-motorised transport. In western countries, people have demanded that entry of vehicles be stopped. But for the sake of their economies and their industries, the leaders of these very countries market and advertise flyovers and means of urban motorised transport in developing countries like ours, points out Ravi.



More bad news from paradise

TROUBLED ISLANDS

Writings on the indigenous peoples and environment of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands

Pankaj Sekhsaria

Kalpavriksh and LEAD-India

Contributory amount: Rs. 100, US \$ 10

Leena Taneja Rao

PANKAJ Sekhsaria, aptly describes the Andaman and Nicobar Islands as being "on the fringes of Indian national consciousness." The islands are just too far away and too small for anyone to really care. In fact, they are closer to Myanmar in the north and Sumatra in the south than to mainland India.

This slim volume is a compilation of articles written by the author from 1998 to 2003. A member of the environment action group, Kalpavriksh, and a fellow of LEAD (international network of 1200 professionals), Pankaj is a freelance writer and photographer involved for almost a decade with issues concerning the islands. He is also a signatory on behalf of Kalpavriksh in a petition in the Calcutta High Court and the Supreme Court of India regarding the destruction of forests in the islands. The articles are the result of a six-month investigative project, in which he studied some of the key environmental issues in the islands, such as the timber industry, the situation of the indigenous people and the impact of sand mining on the coastal systems.

His main focus is to change the blinkered view of the government and the enlighten the mainland citizen who is unaware of the islands. Pankaj wants to highlight how 'what happens elsewhere, or what decisions are taken in the national capital, constantly determine the present and the future of the people and the environment of this

unique chain of islands'. In this endeavour, he has largely succeeded. The situation in A & N and the plight of the ancient negrito tribal communities living here for at least 20,000 years have now begun to jog the consciences of more and more people, and force a reluctant and recalcitrant administration to account for its actions.

Troubled Islands is a chronicle of the shocking history of the archipelago - from the destructive policies of the British to the equally destructive policies of the government of India. From being a colony, India itself began to 'colonize'. The tropical forests with their rich biodiversity were 'wastelands' to be exploited for timber, settlements and development. No one thought about asking the Onge, the Andamanese or the Jarawas, who had lived here for centuries, what they wanted. From an estimated population of 5,000 just 150 years ago, these ancient tribes put together now number a mere 500 - this in spite of the total population having risen to about four lakhs. The Great Andamanese have been wiped out as a viable community, their numbers down from 3,000 to 30. The hostility and the voluntary isolation of the Jarawas had ensured the survival of their community, culture and forest, till the construction of the Andaman Trunk Road. The road not only cuts right through the heart of their forests but has also brought along all the attendant ills of 'civilization': disease, alcohol, alien food, poaching, encroachment and exploitation.

The author has meticulously detailed and documented the price of ill-conceived and insensitive 'development' policies - whether the incentives to the logging industry and thousands of settlers from the mainland, or the deliberate or inadvertent introduction of exotics, leading to the extinction of rare endemic species.

Written in a clear, sincere style and stunningly illustrated with the author's own photographs, this eminently readable book can be recommended to readers who would like to learn more about the islands.

The magic and madness of Delhi

NANNI SINGH

I have often wondered how cities came into existence. What was the motivation for people of open lands, who lived with the wilderness and nature cycles to think of the reality of 'urban space' and experience. The City evolved as a habitat we could be safer in, to allow ourselves to explore and express our culture and creativity. To live in the many dimensions of thousands of people, safe from sandstorms and avalanches and snakebite - the wilder bastions of seamless nature and her overwhelming powers. The creation of the City was about the expression of choice, to contain ourselves in an environment in which we could grow and evolve in a particular way. Humans existed before that for roughly two and a half million years as hunter-gatherers, a phase that ended before the climax of the last Ice Age. The first city walls were erected no more than ten thousand years ago, and here we are today, sitting in the lap of one of the greatest cities of all time - a city that began as the famous Indraprastha of the Mahabharata, archeologically dated at 3rd BC to 5th AD, and is today New Delhi.

Delhi has known herself in many guises, in much glory and bloodshed. She has been Lal Kot or Mehrauli in the 9th century, Qutub -shahar in the 12th century, Siri in the 13th century, Tughlakabad in the 14th, Jahanpanah which brought together three existing cities, Firozabad in the late 14th, Shahjahanabad in 1632, and since then, Delhi and New Delhi. The word 'Delhi' comes from the Turkish 'Dilli', which means loose sand, on which one can't peg a tent. The reference is to the 'reti' on the banks of the Yamuna and has strangely been a prophetic name; it also means 'threshold', a place of transience and passage. The word is sometimes interpreted as 'of the heart'.

Dilli has been mother and magician, child and teacher, lover and beloved - to poets and kings, writers and sufis, musicians and craft-makers, glorious trees and spell binding streets, temples and mosques, gurudwaras and churches. To birds and butterflies, fruit and flowers.

She has been the deep womb of fire, of battle and conflict, deceit and rioting. She is the great mystery, cloaked in different ages, languages, peoples, cultures, thinkers, mavericks, religions, artists and mystics, ashrams and dargahs and of various traditions: the literature and poetry of Nizammudin and Amir Khusaru. Hazrat inayat khan, Ghalib, Mir: the architecture of the indo-turkish period, the persian, the havelis, baolis, forts, mosques, Lutyens and Baker. She has been and is the heart of the nation's political power.

She is the celebration of festivities of spirit and seasons: Id and Holi, fasting, fireworks and candle-light. She is the keeper of time - her seasons console, exhilarate, infuriate and inspire...she is the heart of every molten summer. She is the passionate thunderstorm and rain shower of the monsoon. She is autumn, she is the icy chill of winter. She is the howling wind, the mud, the dust that settles on the bones of our beings. She is the magic of a slowly unfolding spring, a flowering of her true nature....

She is the great river Yamuna that begins its journey from a faraway place and carries treasures through her. She is the great Ridge forest that creates her life-breath. She is the beauty of the peacock, parrot and sunbird; the song of the koel, bulbul and mayna, the power of vulture and eagle; she is duck, sparrow and pigeon. She is flamingo.

She is a healer and giver of shade. She is the glorious gulmohar tree, the seductive summer jasmine; she is the aam and amaltas, the Arjuna and Ashoka; she is the bargat and champa. The sour imli and keekar; she is the Maulshree and neem; the peepul and shahtoot; she is the sheesham, the sehmal...she is the great banyan.

She is of which fruit and flower is born - she is the hollyhock and chrysanthmum, the poppy and viola; the amaranthus, sweet pea; watermelon, mango and jamun. She is the Djinn that weaves the boundless bougainvillea and harshingaar....

She is nurturer of people, of our infants and children, of our young people and aging parents. She is the sustenance of our friends and lovers, strangers we pass on the street, the multitudes who have no homes.

She is the medium through which we may discover and experience ourselves; aiding both our highest potential and our most deadening destruction. She is witness of our ruthlessness - she watches as the river turns to sewer; as the Delhi ridge forest loses its breath; as trees choke to death by roadsides; as the air that carried her fragrance and life turns sulphurous and poisonous. She listens as we complain and criticise. We ourselves have brought her to this state. She receives as we brutalise her most precious resources.

She may be silent but she knows.

She is the keeper of our souls.

What in the city nourishes the spirit? What in the spirit nourishes the city? I have wondered about these connections being two-way. I have questioned the source of our city slowly crumbling under the compulsions of mounting traffic, dying trees, a lifeless, ignored river, a dying forest. Could this be an entirely external phenomenon or is it somehow connected with the state of our inner ecology - our inner relationship with ourselves and our essential elements. Could the state of the outer visible world be an extension of the invisible inner?

Is there a deep-seated discontent that is the premise of our essential relationship with the elements of our outer world and relationships with other humans?

The city and indeed nature are both powerful channels through which we may know ourselves and express who we are. They both enable us to grow and evolve or become dysfunctional, violent and regressive. While Nature provides the perfect source of beauty, harmony, power and wonder, the city is the source of community, culture, livelihood and creativity.

Or are they?

I would like to suggest that they are all these things but that the only way for us to derive growth and experience is through an intense engagement with both. Both are fertile ground for us to express ourselves as either sensitive participants or as people who have little to contribute.

The level of our relationship with our environment, our city is the reflection of our expression of ourselves, of who we are.

As the world around us is a mirror to the magical diversity of life, so is our choice to be. In the context of our city we make choices every moment; We could stop to help a pedestrian cross the street, we could help start a community campaign on safe public transport, we could take a stand for people whose homes are brutally demolished, we could add our voices to others who are struggling for survival, we could help our river live again, we could lead simpler lives, we could consume less, we could be kind to an injured stray dog, we could write and paint and make music and sculpture and drama and photo and mural and song about something that inspires us or is a concern.

We could help create perspective, we could help break myths; we could ask more questions. We could enquire more incisively into the heart of things passed down to us. We could generate peace. We could celebrate the magic and madness of life. We could pour ourselves into new friendships. We could unearth and reconnect with our history. We could create a deeper listening to others; a deeper seeing. We could bring to all our choices a quality of reverence; an

awareness of the impact that we as individuals have on our fellow beings and nature - both if we choose to be self-expressed or silent; creative or disengaged.

We could choose this way or that - and in all these choices will lie the experience and creation of our 'self' - and who we are being. Within the expression of my choices and pursuits is the creation and power of my life.

That is my experience of being alive.

That is the journey of my self.



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