

# Civil Society

## SWISS FIRM SHOWS THE WAY IN INDIA

It helps farmers prosper with organic cotton

Plus: Interview with Patrick Hohmann

Page 4

## Ram Gidoomal: Value the immigrant

Page 20

## Rajender Singh on environment policy

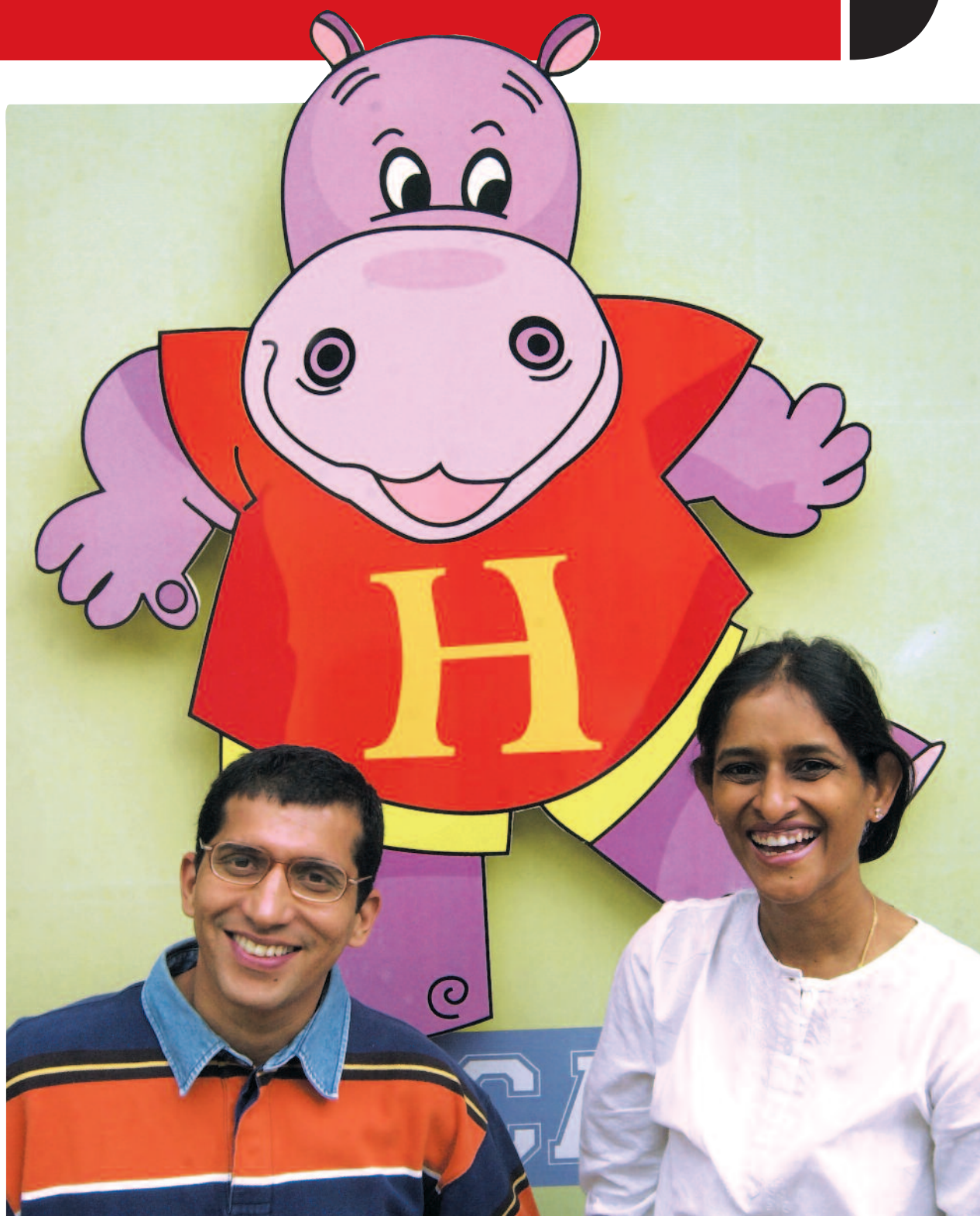
Page 17

## Suman Sahai: Golden Rice just for money

Page 19

## Essay: A Malayali in Moonland

Page 26



# HIPPOCAMPUS

*Umesh Malhotra made his money at Infosys. Now he and wife Vimala help children discover books*



**COVER STORY**



**WELCOME TO HIPPOCAMPUS**

Umesh Malhotra and wife Vimala introduce youngsters to books from across the world at their library in Bangalore. Will this become a reading movement?

**10**

**LEAD gets Jill's grassroots touch** ..... **6**

**Leprosy: ALERT ready for big LEAP** ..... **8**



**Kolkata police find softness pays** ..... **8**

**Jean Dreze talks about employment guarantee** ..... **9**

**Women demand law against verbal abuse** ..... **16**

**Amirul Arham: A gentle lens on harsh reality** ..... **24**



**Arun Maira: A man you can talk to** ..... **25**

**Murli Menon: A Malayali in Moonland** ..... **26**

**Civil Society**

*Indian industry should get off its perch*

We have always been of the view that no real change is possible in India unless industry can be persuaded to address the problems of the country with sincerity. Sadly, most Indian businessmen are accustomed to buying power and influence. There is little evidence that they believe in genuine competition. And they don't seem to be able to bear the thought of being subjected to public scrutiny. In more than a decade of liberalisation no real respect has been shown for the consumer though everybody wants her money. When industry bands together in groupings like CII and FICCI there is an eagerness to offer prescriptions, but unwillingness to broaden and deepen the process of consultation. So, when it comes to dealing with problems as complex as they are in a country like ours there are few genuine beginnings. In the course of our journalistic duties we like to look out for people in the world of business who think differently. We have found a few and written enthusiastically on them in the past 15 months since our magazine has been around. We are ready to add two names to that endangered line-up: Patrick Hohmann and Arun Maira. Both of them feature in this issue.

To meet Patrick, we hared off at short notice to Madhya Pradesh where for more than 10 years he has helped farmers grow organic cotton. He buys the cotton for garments, which he sells in Switzerland under the brand name bioRe. The interesting thing about Patrick is that he is not merely espousing current consumer tastes to make some quick money. His interest in organic cotton is a reflection of the ethical foundations he has tried to give his business. His Indian arm, Maikaal bioRe, is increasingly being owned by the farmers themselves. Patrick does not see his business solely in terms of how much money he makes or loses, but as a chain from the producer to the consumer and back. All the links in that chain need to be healthy and accounted for. Now, ask yourself why, after all the fracas over suicides by cotton farmers across the country, no Indian businessman has tried to put such soul into a business. The answer is simple: Indian businessmen only see their country from the perches they have given themselves.

Arun Maira's message is to get off that perch and look for real solutions. Maira is the chairman of the Boston Consulting Group in India. Recently he was turfed out of the Planning Commission at the behest of the Left. He has spent long years working for the Tatas in senior capacities and has been a successful management consultant in America. Maira calls for an inclusive model of development involving industry, government and local interests. Only this will work. He questions the top-down approach and the celebratory whoops of joy over growth figures. His views are best expressed in his latest book, *The Remaking of India*, and in extracts from a two-hour-long interview we did with him. We consider him a man you can talk to, but more importantly we hope industry is listening to him.

We are also very happy to publish an interview with economist and activist Jean Dreze, who has played an important role in the employment guarantee campaign. We have featured Dreze in our pages several times, but in this interview he explains some of his complex positions a little more and hopefully sets to rest fears regarding the new law, which has been promised by the Manmohan Singh government.

*Umesh Anand*

Printed and published by Umesh Anand on behalf of Rita Anand of A 53D, First Floor, Panchsheel Vihar, Malviya Nagar, New Delhi-17. Printed at Kaizen Offset, 19 DSIDC Scheme 3, Phase-2, Okhla Industrial Area, New Delhi-20.

Write to Civil Society at E-2144 Palam Vihar, Gurgaon, Haryana 122017 Ph: 9811787772, E-mail: civil\_society@rediffmail.com. Editor: Rita Anand

RNI No.: DELENG/03/11607



# St Patrick's organic miracle in

*Swiss firm shows the way with eco-friendly farming and ethical marketing*

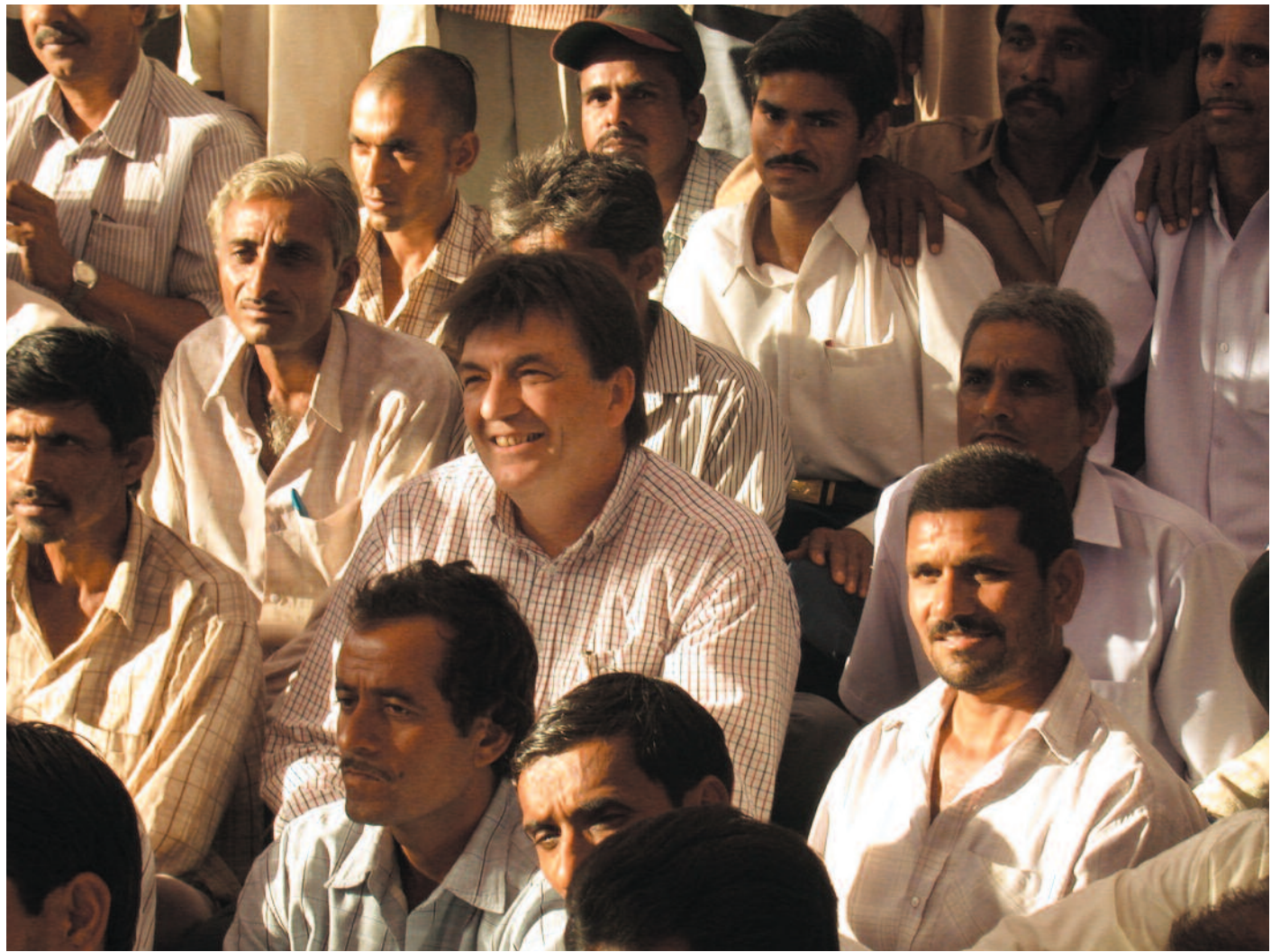
Civil Society News  
New Delhi/Versailles

THREE hours out of the ramshackle city of Indore, deep into the dust bowl of Madhya Pradesh, Swiss businessman Patrick Hohmann is steeped in an effort to get farmers to grow organic cotton. He has been at it for more than a decade — from the time when he decided that going natural wasn't good enough. Sharing with farmers the higher margins that ecologically friendly products command in the developed world was as important as shunning chemicals. Cotton was a clear choice because it is a devil of a crop: it represents two per cent of agricultural production in the world, but consumes 25 per cent of pesticides. It also helps that Hohmann is a textile engineer by training who knows the business of ginning and spinning and building garment brands.

Beginning from the first 150 holdings that Hohmann managed to convert to organic production methods in the nineties, there are now 1500 farmers who grow cotton without chemicals in Madhya Pradesh and a few hundred more in Maharashtra. Hohmann buys cotton from them at a premium, spins it in Kolhapur and manufactures garments in Tirupur in South India and the Balkans. The bioRe brand, owned by Remi AG, finally sells through COOP, the largest retail chain in Switzerland.

To connect farmer with retailer and customer, Hohmann last month brought COOP's president, A Felder, to Madhya Pradesh. COOP has gifted to farmers a \$250,000 centre for training in growing organic cotton. Under Felder, COOP aggressively pursues the marketing of organic products. Garments with the bioRe label are among them. The gift of the training centre is the buyer's way of bonding with the primary producer, sharing profits and building a sustainable business.

It is Hohmann's idea of fair trade. "When people look at the bottom line



JUST ONE OF THEM: Patrick Hohmann of bioRe among farmers in Madhya Pradesh

they want to know whether they have made a profit or a loss. The number becomes all important. A business must certainly make profit. But profit must be judged on the basis of who have been accommodated in that number. For a business to really work everyone has to be fitted in," he says.

Hohmann pays farmers a premium of five, 10 and 15 per cent over the prevailing market price for chemically grown cotton. The slabs represents the three years that it takes to go wholly organic. There is regular checking of crops and global certification.

Now cash crops growing organically alongside cotton will also be marketed because farmers say they are losing out on this score. Organically grown vegetables need a special marketing push because, though healthier, they are invariably smaller and less radiant.

But no one's really complaining. Hohmann has been able to deliver real rewards for organic farming. Farmers have been given shares in Maikaal bioRe, the Indian entity in Hohmann's operations. And a study conducted by a Swiss-Indian team shows that growing organic

cotton is no more expensive than using chemicals. Water consumption and yield are comparable. But the gains from soil preservation and the lack of exposure to chemicals are immense.

At an open house to launch the training centre gifted by COOP, Mangula, a farmer from village Deola in Badwani district, sits quietly in one of the plastic chairs. He owns 100 shares in Maikaal bioRe and says he converted his five acres to organic farming in 1994. "I have no regrets. The yield is better. I don't have to spend on chemicals and my soil is not

## 'It took a lot of strength to do this'

COOP is the biggest retailer in the Swiss market. It has about 2000 shops selling everything from traditional foods to specialised department stores. COOP is a cooperative which means that the consumers are its share holders.

COOP buys garments made from organic cotton produced by bioRe farmers. What makes COOP unique is its fair trade practices: the cooperative believes in promoting eco-friendly products and is ploughing back a part of its profits to producers in developing countries.

COOP is spending nearly Rs 1 crore in setting up an institute to help farmers, agricultural workers and women farmers to learn organic agriculture. A Felder, president of COOP, personally flew down to lay the



foundation stone of the institute. Extracts from an interview:

**Why is COOP interested in this project?**

On the one hand it's a personal issue. We believe very strongly in ecological and social harmony. On the other hand it's also company policy. COOP has been deeply involved in the past ten years in introducing this policy to the Swiss market.

**What is the share of organic garments in the Swiss market? Is it growing and are consumers getting more and more interested?**

It is difficult to tell but for COOP as a company organics are of enormous value. It is widely perceived in the company as something worth doing. In that respect the

impact might be tricky but the impact on the Swiss market is tremendous because it's the biggest retailer promoting this idea.

**In terms of COOP's business how much has its share been growing?**

Organic products have grown more in proportion to traditional products within the last ten years. It was zero ten years ago and now its 1.5 billion Swiss francs annual turnover throughout Europe.

**You were responsible for this change in COOP's policy. Was it very tough?**

A team worked on it. It took a lot of strength to do this. Once the first success story came up it was easier to convince people and then it was...like an avalanche.



# Madhya Pradesh

being destroyed. The use of chemical pesticides and fertilisers is like alcoholism," he says. "First you take a little, then a little more and then yet more. It is destructive. Now many of the farmers in my area want to go organic as well."

In Mohna district, Poonamchand Champalal shows off his organic field. He has grown cotton on 50 per cent and sorghum, soyabean, wheat and chilli on the rest. The entire produce is organic because it doesn't make sense to use conventional agriculture on the other half. To prevent his neighbour from contaminating his field he's grown sorghum around his patch and kept a narrow space in between as a barrier.

"We don't need to haggle with agents at the *mandi* anymore. Our partnership with bioRe gives us a sense of security. We want them to buy our food crops as well," says Champalal. Farmer Tej Singh has raised cotton on 70 per cent of his 17 acres. He's revived old agricultural traditions of making compost in a *matka* and using cow's urine. He picks up a handful of dark brown soil. "Its finally healthy after years of misuse." His envious neighbour is planning to switch.

At Maikaal bioRe's cotton research project at village Bheelgaon, in Khargone district, a small team of Swiss and Indian researchers first grew organic cotton on their sprawling campus and showed local farmers. They had to begin from scratch because identifying farmers was a problem: land records are completely skewed.

Research done by the team reveals that farmers who opted for organic cultivation are better educated and wealthier than the conventional farmers in the region. Last year they conducted a research project in 75 villages to find out how organic farming was faring. They found that conventional and organic farmers use the same amount of labour but more women worked on organic fields. Organic farmers also used more water—the region adjoins the Narmada—and they tended to make better use of micro-irrigation.

Organic cotton yields were 16 per cent higher. Even wheat, sorghum, pigeon pea, maize and other food crops did better. The only exception was chilli and bioRe scientists are putting their heads together on it. Cotton seeds being sown are the usual hybrid varieties, but environmental scientist Frank Eyhorn says they have been experimenting with traditional drought resistant seeds. *Surbhi*, a local variety, is showing the best results.

The biggest danger to organic cotton is the growing popularity of Bt cotton. Last season nearly 15 per cent of farmers were decertified for planting Bt. Monitoring is strict, says Rajiv Barua, the managing director of Maikaal bioRe, holding up the tainted results of the farmers. Once decertified the farmer cannot join the organic chain again.

Frank says Bt cotton has become a status symbol. But he believes it is a passing fad because the seeds are costlier and more inputs are needed. The farmer invests a lot and stands to lose a great deal if the crop fails. Cultivating organic cotton may just emerge a winner in the race with Bt cotton. For one, production costs are 20 per cent lower for organic

cotton. "There is a sense of well-being and self-esteem among organic farmers," says Frank.

The organic cotton movement has spread to Maharashtra's Dhule region where the state government has been promoting it, said a farmer at the Open House. Farmers from Andhra Pradesh came to take a look last year.

From the farmer the cotton will soon travel to a new ginning mill being set up by Maikaal bioRe. The

BERNE DECLARATION



Farmer Poonamchand Champalal on his field in Madhya Pradesh

machines are already in place. This mill is mechanised. It has been designed as closed system so that cotton does not fly around causing breathing problems for workers. BioRe garments are dyed in non-toxic colours. At the stitching stage work is spread through the year so that garment workers are not exploited.

The institute will teach not only organic farming but how better-off farmers should treat their workers. Agricultural labour will be taught too so that they can get higher wages and become organic field workers. Women farmers will be especially welcome.

It does look like the institute will be mighty busy. Yarn traders are zeroing down on bumpy roads to Khargonde district. Miyazaki Michio from the Nippon Organic Cotton Marketing Association is keen to buy organic cotton for garments made in Japan. He travels all over the world sourcing cotton and it shows on his back. His T-shirt is made of organic cotton from three countries. The green sleeves came from Peru, the beige collar from the US and the rest of the T-shirt from India. Of course, it was made in Japan, he says with a grin.

Another interested party is the South Asian Producers' Association, which works with artisans to increase livelihoods. Basket weavers want to switch to making garments, say representatives Alfred Davis and K Panchaksharam. The association has been exporting traditional toys using vegetable dyes to Australia and the US. They have 25 natural dyes which they want to try out on organic cotton.

## 'Profit has to work backwards'

FRANK EYHORN

*Patrick Hohmann is a truly global citizen. He speaks Arabic, lives in Switzerland and helps marginal farmers in India and Tanzania grow organic cotton. His company Remei AG links producers and consumers through a chain of partners.*

*We travelled with him to an open house with farmers and to lay the foundation stone of an institute for organic agriculture. He was greeted as a hero wherever he went. Farmers turned up with garlands, wives and children in tow.*

*"Globalisation is a wonderful word," Hohmann told Civil Society. "You can take the best produce from anywhere in the world, but you have to give back the best too."*

*"Globalisation is a wonderful word," Hohmann told Civil Society. "You can take the best produce from anywhere in the world, but you have to give back the best too."*

**You have an interesting description of profits and the bottom line.**

A business entity has to make money. But if it's only about making money there will be no space for ethical thinking. Profit has to work backwards. If the balance sheet does not look good we don't think how can we pay less and the others pay more. Instead we think how do we get into a better situation so that we can give the network more. Then profit gets its rightful place on the balance sheet. It becomes a monitoring decision.

**How does the bioRe chain work?**

Our farmers know their cotton eventually goes to COOP through our partners in spinning, dyeing, stitching and designing. We build on information. The farmers get the market price plus the premium. We have special incentives and social projects too. These are non-negotiable. From there to the consumer, negotiations start. The consumer pays a price. We match that, together. Sometimes we have to reduce margins or increase them. Our network is a continuous communication platform.

**How do you monitor quality at so many levels?**

We have operating manuals and the Codex, followed by everyone. We have control systems. The monitoring system is tough. We go forward step by step. We have transparency. Our partners have security. We don't want them to jump from one business relationship to the next. Jumping brings cheap supplies and short-term relations. It is one of the keys to poverty.

**How has the influx of Bt cotton affected your business here?**

We lost about 15 per cent of our farmers to Bt cotton. But this is only because organic agriculture has not been sufficiently promoted. Right now we can manage the bollworm organically. If one really wants to help the farmer, then organic farming is closer to the Indian psyche. Bt cotton is divisive. Marginal farmers don't get included in the product chain. For me organic agriculture is the basis of social harmony. We are giving shares to the farmers in my company Maikaal bioRe so that it becomes theirs.

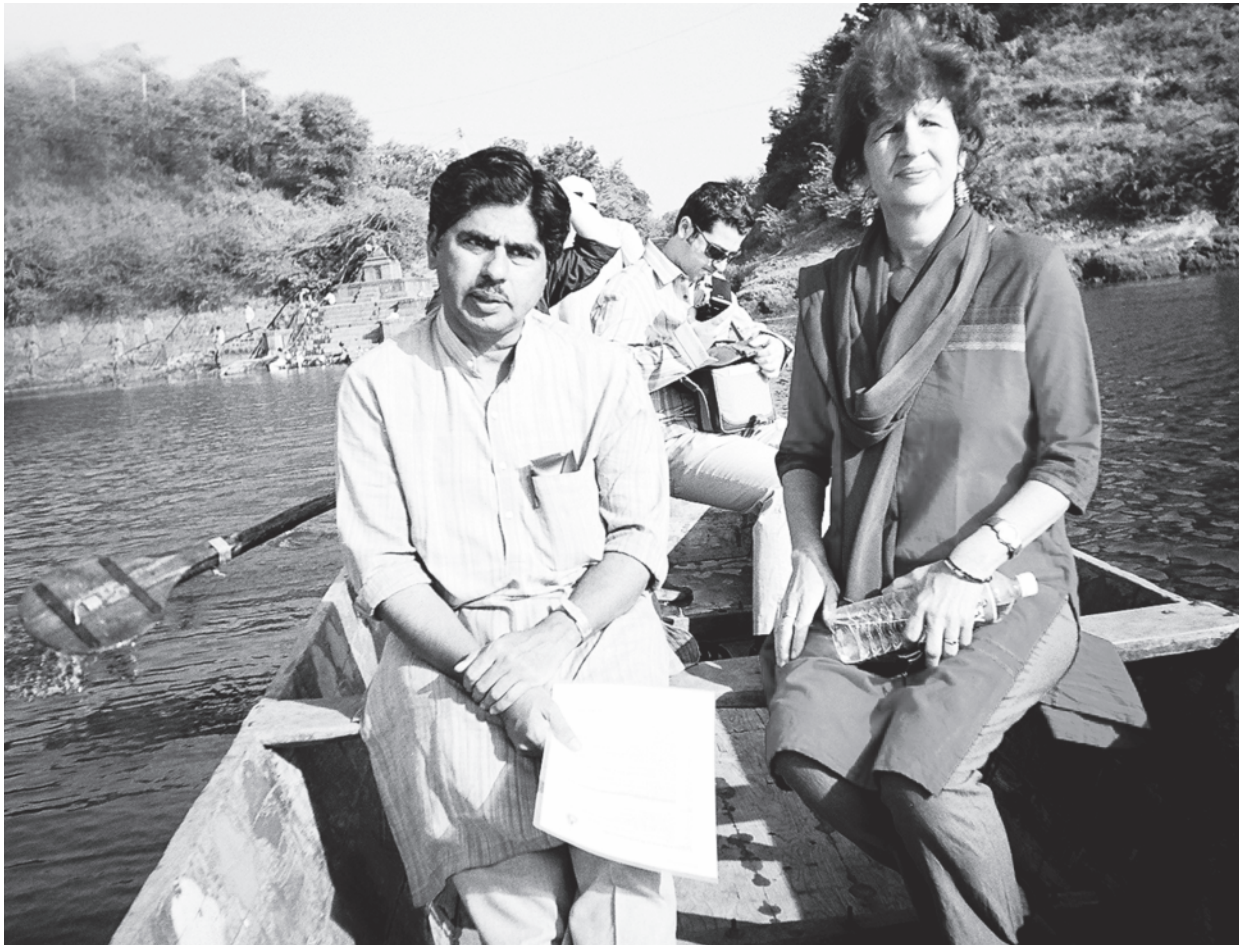
**Tell us about the training institute.**

One of the biggest problems we have is building awareness about organic agriculture. So we are starting this school where farmers can learn organic farming and how they should treat their workers. We are training farm labour to become organic field workers in the hope that they will be able to support farmers better and get the minimum wage. We will have farmers and workers study together to overcome differences. We will include women farmers as well.





# LEAD gets Jill's grassroots touch



On the Narmada: Jill Carr Harris with P V Rajgopal. Jill's involvement with Ekta Parishad in Madhya Pradesh has given her valuable exposure to land rights and other grassroots issues.

## Civil Society News New Delhi

AFTER trudging through miles of dusty rural India fighting for land rights, Jill Carr Harris has been appointed as Lead India's new director. Her predecessor, Mathew Cherian has moved to Helpage. Clad in a bright sari the effervescent Harris has metamorphosed from scruffy activist to methodical lobbyist with a certain ease. "I'm fully programmed," she says reassuringly, "And I come with many agendas."

Harris was born in Canada. She worked for a while with the UN and got disillusioned seeing wasteland develop-

ment go to waste in India. So she packed her bags, moved to South South Solidarity and went to the Philippines to examine land reforms. After that Harris shifted to Bangladesh to work on gender issues. Here she found more money was spent on consultancies than on actual development. Her stay there was predictably short.

But she found her kind of movement when she joined Ekta Parishad's Land First campaign, marching shoulder to shoulder with PV Rajgopal.

That yatra took her into the heart of India, to its nooks and crannies and dark secrets of exploitation. Harris is global. She brings to the table the experiences of the grassroots activist with a global perspective.

## Extracts from an interview :

### What are you planning to do at LEAD?

I'm planning to indigenise this service and make our network more relevant. Earlier many mid-life researchers joined Lead India's programme to get global recognition or garner consultancies. I will encourage younger people from small towns and tehsils to become fellows with us. We need youngsters who are ready to serve. Otherwise we all agree sustainable development is very important and then we continue to live with traffic jams and pollution.

### What exactly are Lead India's many fellows doing?

Lead India has trained 135 fellows and they are like a general body. Some have done great work. One of our fellows, Pushkin who is in Uttaranchal has been arguing that since mountainous regions provide environmental benefits for the plains, they should receive tax benefits. We have others like Pankaj of Kalpavriksh who works on biodiversity. From our end we provide back up to fellows to do good things.

### Tell us about your many agendas.

I've come from the grassroots so my agenda is to bring these issues upfront. I'm keen to include women as leaders in environment management. We are setting up an IT platform to link communities so that they can talk to each other, the neutral space is very important. We want activists and campaigners to research and influence policy, not just staid academic researchers watching from the sidelines.

Lead India wants to bring activists and the corporate sector together. So far battle lines are drawn between the two, the activists complain the corporates are all bad. Sure, corporates had better follow the laws of the land and keep in mind the interests of the people. We are all watching them.

### What exactly do you want to discuss with industry?

We want to discuss many things. Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) for instance. The debate has gotten lost and dialogue is needed. Corporate social responsibility is another area. River-linking is a third serious issue. We are not an activist organisation so we can be backroom boys and talk to those corporates and activists. Lead India is all set up but has no programme. But I'm over programmed.

## Mine workers get a hearing in Delhi

## Civil Society News New Delhi

A thinly attended meeting to chalk out an action plan for workers in hazardous industries was held at the Indian Social Institute in New Delhi on November 10 by People's Rights and Social Science Research Centre (Prasar). Heads turned when Congress politician, Margaret Alva walked in. Activist Medha Patkar came and so did AITUC secretary Amarjeet Kaur. Doctors, activists and lawyers attended too.

Mine workers from Delhi's Lal Kuan mining area recounted their miseries. In 1992, the Supreme Court in the M.C. Mehta vs Union of India case ordered that the mines be closed to protect New Delhi's environment and shifted to Pali in Haryana.

The workers got no compensation and lost their livelihood and health. The mine owners went to Pali where it is business as usual. "Workers get buried under the debris during blasting. No compensation is given unless a noise is made," said Gulab Devi a mine workers.

Unemployed mine workers are suffering from TB and silicosis, an irreversible respiratory ailment caused by breathing high levels of silica dust from the mines. There is no cure. The disease reduces the ability of the lungs to extract oxygen. Chronic silicosis takes 10 years to develop while accelerated silicosis takes five to 10 years. Acute silicosis manifests itself in a few weeks.

"Do you want to do something else?" Alva asked the gaunt mine workers. "If we close all the mines, your problem will not disappear. Small units must find ways to be environment friendly. The labour department should enforce, but it is a corrupt department."

Dr Ashish Mittal said mining and blasting affected not just labour but also managers, electrical staff, foreman, helpers, watchman and even the *munshi*. Extreme heat, cold, humidity coupled with noise and vibrations resulted in poor physical and mental health. Noise led to deafness, vibrations caused heart problems and affected the nervous system. Silica dust resulted in silicosis. Workers died during accidents. They were prone to stress and violence and took alcohol or drugs. There were ergonomic hazards too like backache. Poor

living conditions added to the burden of disease.

Dr Mittal said signboards should be posted prominently at every mining site warning workers of health hazards and informing them of protective measures. Water must be sprinkled to reduce dust. Communication systems should announce timings of blasting. Protective gadgets, a canopy, personal hygiene and air monitoring of SPM were important. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health in the US posts all these on its website.

Trade unionist Amarjeet Kaur said workers did not know that if they died on duty their families were entitled to a compensation of Rs 60,000 from the central government. She said trade unions had their limitations. Workers got sacked at the first hint of union activity and then much energy was spent reinstating them. She suggested workers form associations across sectors of industry and lobby for the unorganised workers social protection bill. Industry could be taxed for the purpose.

Medha Patkar said the movement to improve environment health standards should be led by doctors and the media. Trade unions and activists must work together to make quarries safer.





Jamsetji N. Tata (1839-1904)



J.R.D. Tata (1904-1993)



Naval Tata (1904-1989)

# The Human Face of Industry

The year 2004 is a significant year for the Tata Group as it marks the death centenary of Jamsetji Tata, and the 100th birth anniversaries of J.R.D. Tata and Naval Tata. These are the leaders who left an indelible mark on the Tata Group, on industry and on the country. Much of their enterprise was an expression of self-belief that the country could manufacture steel, generate power and use modern technologies. From building India's first luxury hotel, to pioneering civil aviation, to taking the lead in the development of harmonious industrial relations in the country, the Tata Group has been driven by the vision of its leaders.

This vision also emphasized the importance of returning to society the wealth that was generated. Over the years, the Tata Group has funded and established schools, hospitals, community centres and institutions of higher learning. It has also extended support towards management of natural resources, livelihood and other welfare projects across India.

Built on the cornerstones of integrity and honesty, for over 100 years, Tata stands for trust in any language or dialect spoken in this vast land.

A Century of Trust





# Kolkata police find softness pays

Rina Mukherji  
Kolkata

THE Kolkata Police are on the threshold of an image makeover. In 1999, they embarked on a community-policing project called Nabodisha, to build bridges with people in one of the most crime infested areas of the city. The bright idea came from ex-Police Commissioner Dinesh Vajpai.

The project started with a monthly health check-up for street children organised together with the Lions' Club and Rotary Club, says Joint Commissioner Banibrata Basu. The Police Commissioner and his top brass then decided to include education services as well. Since the police did not have the expertise, CRY was requested to help.

Implementation was handed over to their partner, Vikramshila, which runs the schools with Woman's Interlink Foundation. Vikramshila set up one school in each of the five zones under the Kolkata Police—namely South, Port, North, Central and East. "The idea was to upscale once we put Nabodisha on a sure footing," says director Shubhra Chatterjee.

But the local policemen were dead against the project. "The constables and OCs at the respective police stations saw it as undermining their authority which had been built on the strength of their *lathis*. Lack of sensitisation made them view the project as nothing more than a fad of the big shots at Lalbazar," says Shubhra.

But once the project began succeeding, the OCs got interested. The biggest constraint was space. In Narkeldanga, classes are held on the pavement. The police tried to make room available. The Lake Police Station, for instance, cleared a garbage dump on PWD land. At Taratala, an adjoining building, used as an out-

post, was repaired and handed over. At Narkeldanga, teaching inside a local club proved irksome because local goons would hassle the teachers. So the policemen gallantly offered space at the police station.

The next problem was getting slum-dwellers and pavement squatters to send their children to those schools. "The attendance is erratic. Sometimes we have 25 children and sometimes 30. There is no fixed number ever. The children have to be dragged here," admits Ratna



Kolkata police admiring children's work

Chakraborty, sub-inspector and Child Welfare Officer at the Bowbazar police station. Indira Dutta Chowdhury, a teacher with Vikramshila, says she's had 'pitched battles' with women to send their girls.

But their persistence has paid off. Anita Rajwar, a 12-year-old dropout studying at the Taratala police station centre, is from the adjoining Calcutta Port Trust (CPT) slum colony. Although bringing her to non-formal school was quite a task, and her attendance was erratic, she is now doing well. Her embroidered table-cloth is intricate,

her interest in studies exemplary and she bagged several prizes in the Nabodisha inter-school sports meet this year. An average of 20 students are packed off to formal school each year.

Although police officers feel the effects of the Nabodisha Project will take a decade to be really felt, they say there is a distinct difference in policing troubled areas.

When the Calcutta Electric Supply Corporation (CESC) clamped down on a slum for tapping electricity lines, Taratala Additional OC Sudhendu Chakraborty was faced with a volatile situation.

His solution is an example of how things are changing. "I advised the residents to opt for permanent connections by forming a cooperative. The illegal tapping stopped and a residents' cooperative came up to maintain order in the slum," he says. The cooperative was named 'Deepshikha'. Illegal tapping of electricity has vanished from the Watgunge area too.

Violent crime has also decreased. Residents are keen to enlist police help. Chanchal Sarkar, Watgunge OC, says when he was posted at Garden Reach, local rickshaw-pullers pre-empted an armed abduction and robbery by informing the police. "The criminals were an armed gang of outsiders. We managed to apprehend them."

The project has its flip side too. Policemen feel their police stations are grossly understaffed. Some people take advantage of better relations expecting the police to let them off for petty offences—something that the police resent.

Free check-ups and medicines were stopped at Bowbazar because medicines were being sold or thrown into drains by pavement-dwellers. "We found that the free food packets were the real draw," says Bowbazar Sergeant Arup Datta.

Charkha Development Communication Network

## Leprosy: ALERT ready for big LEAP

eepali Gupta  
Mumbai

LEPROSY is a completely treatable disease. Yet, the stigma attached to the disease is so intimidating that most victims often go into denial and sometimes do not take treatment until it's too late.

Discernable as insensitive patches on the skin, leprosy is the least contagious of communicable diseases. It takes almost three years for the illness to affect the nervous system, enough to lead to disability. At the initial stages, and even later, the disease can be treated with Multi Drug Treatment (MDT).

This is where organisations such as Association for Leprosy Education, Rehabilitation and Treatment - India (ALERT) come in. Endorsed by celebrities like Sachin Tendulkar and Jackie Shroff, ALERT conducts education campaigns, and check ups among the urban poor of Mumbai. "We target the urban poor for two reasons, first they don't have the resources for treatment, plus the population density in these areas is

high, and thus the chances of the disease spreading is greater," says Veera M Rao, director, Resource Mobilisation, ALERT - India.

India is one of the worst-hit countries. However, over the years the incidence of the disease has been checked. The prevalence rate of leprosy has gone down from 25.9 per 10,000 to 3.2 per 10,000. In fact, the ministry of health is now planning to withdraw the vertical programme that separated leprosy from other diseases and integrate it into general health systems so that the disease can be treated at any hospital or health center.

"That will take a lot of effort and time, because doctors in every hospital and medical students will have to be taught how to treat the disease," says Antony Samy, chief executive. To improve standards in treating leprosy, ALERT has proposed LEAP or Leprosy Elimination Action Program.

The aim of LEAP is to develop

patient oriented, community-based strategies to deal with the disease. ALERT believes that it is important



Veera M Rao and Antony Samy

to set guidelines for doctors and paramedics for the sake of smooth integration. LEAP also aims at developing supportive action, and bringing together groups to mitigate the fear and stigma leprosy evokes.

ALERT held a national seminar

on 11 October. Attended by some of India's leading minds, the seminar addressed issues, experiences and lessons from and for the integration of leprosy in the general health care system.

Leprosy patients, particularly those with affected feet and legs, require special gear to protect the limbs. This gear is expensive, because it can only be hand made. To help the poor ALERT raises funds by conducting concerts. "Jagjit Singh is one of our supporters, and last time he did a concert for us for absolutely no charge," says Rao.

In January ALERT plans to bring Hema Malini and her daughters on stage to raise funds for treatment and care of leprosy patients. They are still waiting for sponsors.

E-mail: alert@bom5.vsnl.net.in  
Phone: 022 24072558



# 'The cost of EGA will be a good investment for the nation'

Civil Society News  
New Delhi

THE Employment Guarantee Act (EGA) is being tabled in Parliament this month and activists are waiting anxiously to see its outcome. The EGA is part of the Congress-led government's Common Minimum Programme (CMP). The National Advisory Council (NAC) chaired by Sonia Gandhi to implement the CMP cleared the draft EGA and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has made favourable comments. Yet campaigners worry whether the EGA will be passed in its present shape. Politicians of all hues are not supportive. State governments say they do not have the money. The big question now is whether politicians and bureaucrats will conspire to kill off the EGA even before it is born.

The EGA promises employment to any adult person who is willing to do casual manual labour on public works at the statutory minimum wage. Its origins can be traced to the drought in Rajasthan in 2001, which led to starvation deaths while the government hoarded surplus food. Eventually, activists of the Akal Sangharsh Samiti got the PUCL's Rajasthan unit to file a PIL in the Supreme Court. Since then the court has passed significant interim orders on the right to food. To implement these, activists started a right to food campaign. They realised employment was the best security against starvation. If every person got work, starvation deaths would not happen. A central draft based on Maharashtra's state-level Employment Guarantee Act was drawn up after intensive discussions.

Right to food campaigners are planning a signature campaign this month on banners, inviting ordinary people to put their stamp of approval. They are clear that the EGA has some "non-negotiables"-universal work guarantee across India, minimum wages, equal pay for women, transparency and decentralised implementation.

Will EGA result in Bharat Shining? Jean Dreze, a key campaigner and a member of the NAC, says in the long term EGA will change equations in rural Indian society for the better, lift people out of poverty and revive democracy at the grassroots. Extracts from an interview:

**The finance ministry isn't enthusiastic about the Employment Guarantee Act (EGA). Why do you think they should implement it?**

The finance ministry's lack of enthusiasm is not a very good indicator of the desirability of an Employment Guarantee Act. India's finance ministry is basically a department of the IMF. Its main concerns are not with people's lives but with things like India's international credit-rating, the health of the stock market, and so on.

The Employment Guarantee Act should be implemented because it is a means of bringing about far-reaching economic, social and political changes in rural India: the elimination of hunger, the reduction of rural-urban migration, the creation of durable social assets, the empowerment of women, the revival of panchayats and so on. Further, the Employment Guarantee Act is a non-negotiable and irreversible commitment of the Common Minimum Programme (CMP).

**The states are in a fiscal mess and raising objections too. How will the EGA benefit them?**

The share of the state governments in the cost of EGA will be very small, if any - say 10 per cent or so at the most. If the total cost is around 1 per cent of GDP, this means that the contribution of state governments will be of the order of 0.1 per cent of GDP. This is not a serious issue in the medium-term, though some transitional financing mechanism may need to be arranged in the short-term. Note also that state governments already contribute a substantial share of the cost of centrally-sponsored employment programmes (for instance, 25 per cent in the case of Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana). These programmes will be merged with the Employment Guarantee Programme after the Act comes into effect. The additional cost of EGA for the state governments is likely

to be low. In fact, this 'cost' will be a good investment, considering the wide-ranging economic and social benefits of an Employment Guarantee Programme.

**You have proposed infrastructure projects, such as road-building to generate employment. How do you expect to compete with private infrastructure companies, which can possibly make roads cheaper because of mechanisation?**

Competition does not enter the picture since the implementation of these projects will not be based on competitive bidding but on participatory planning processes. In any case, the real issue is not private costs but social costs. Mechanisation may lower private costs for the employers, but the social costs of mechanisation are often quite high. In an economy with a huge amount of unused labour, it makes more sense to employ labour-intensive techniques than to spend precious resources on building or importing mechanised equipment.

**How will the EGA benefit women below the poverty line?**

It will benefit them in at least two ways. First, EGA will help to protect them and their families from poverty and hunger. Secondly, EGA is likely to be an important source of empowerment for women. Indeed, experience shows that women often make up a large proportion of labourers employed on public works programmes. Further, there is much evidence that women who have independent income-earning opportunities tend to have more bargaining power in the family and society.

The contribution of EGA to women's empowerment will be significantly enhanced if guaranteed employment is an individual entitlement rather than a household entitlement. One limitation of the draft EGA prepared by the National Advisory Council is that it restricts guaranteed employment to 100 days per household per year. There is a risk that women will often be marginalised in the allocation of work. An individual guarantee, extended to all adults, would be more equitable.

**Environmental programmes for employment have also been mooted. Is the government willing to release degraded land and do you see such a programme becoming self-sustainable?**

If the government is not willing to make degraded land available for this purpose, it will need to be persuaded. It is hard to think of a more useful activity than the

regeneration of the environment using labour that is unemployed. Indeed, in many parts of India there is a natural synergy between the twin objectives of employment creation and environmental protection.

**What are the long-term positives you see as a result of EGA?**

I have already mentioned some of the positive benefits of EGA and most of them extend over the long term. Taking a long view, I think that one can expect further changes of some importance. For instance, an effective Employment Guarantee Act could significantly alter the balance of power in India's rural society. This, in turn, could lead to further changes, such as the revival of democracy. In India as elsewhere, democracy has been derailed by social and economic inequalities. A more equitable social order would make it possible for people to participate in the democratic process, especially at the local level.

**Some say the government is only implementing the EGA because it wants to subvert the land reforms movement.**

The issue is not the government's intentions, whatever they are, but whether we want an Employment Guarantee Act. Anyone who stands in solidarity with the underprivileged is bound to support this demand. Indeed, employment is the overwhelming concern of working people in India today.



Jean Dreze at a right to information meeting

**EGA will enhance women's empowerment if guaranteed employment is an individual entitlement rather than a household entitlement.**





# WELCOME TO HIPPOCAMPUS

*A house full of books from around the world is a rare library and activity centre for children in Bangalore*

**Vidya Viswanathan**  
Bangalore

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

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

Umesh Malhotra and his wife, Vimala, who run Hippocampus, say they love buying books. It took them about seven months to research and order all the books you find here. They went to different publishers in India. They hunted on the Net. They got a list of 10,000 most popular children's books in the US from Ingram and hunted among them



books that would interest Indian children. "We got a list of Newbury medal winners. The Newbury is equal to the Pulitzer in children's publishing. We have books by Sharon Creech, an American author who writes for 12 and 13-year-olds about the turmoil they grow through. We have books for parents on sex education and how to handle children's tantrums," explains Umesh.

But how did the Malhotras build a collection of books from around the world? "When we went to Korea and Japan, we picked up some. We got Korean folktales in English. A friend called from South Africa and asked what we wanted. We told her to pick up the 10 most popular books there. That's how we got Nelson Mandela's favourite stories." Most books in the library have a price tag of US\$18-25 and would be unaffordable even to Bangalore's well-heeled techies.

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

**BRIGHT SPARK:** How did a busy couple in their early 30s start a public library? Umesh Malhotra, an IIT Chennai alumnus, was one of Infosys' first employees and was posted to the US in 1998, where Vimala and he lived with their only son, Tarutru, for a year and a half. They stayed in a 30-year-old Californian town called Foster City. Tarutru started going to a public school that had a small library. According to the Malhotras, Tarutru's life was transformed by the library. He started enjoying himself. He was encouraged by the school system to pick up books himself.

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

In 2001, they set themselves a goal. They would build a role model library - a beautiful, bright place. Not just that, it would also be economically sustainable. In 2002, Umesh quit Bangalore Labs, a start-up he had co-founded, and submitted the building plans. The library became operational in May 2003. Today, he has lost weight, looks 10 years younger than he did a year and half ago, comes to "work" in long shorts that 18-year-olds would find cool, and brings his dog along. Malhotra treats his real estate as an investment and claims that for the amount he has invested in books, he gets more than the regular bank rate of interest. The library has 600 members now. They pay an average of Rs 255 a month. That adds up to Rs1.35 lakh a month.

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

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

"Once you are in this, you meet amazing people. What is happening in society now is very, very interesting," points out Umesh, who says he is enjoying himself thoroughly. He talks of a phone call he received from

**But how did the Malhotras build a collection of books from around the world? "When we went to Korea and Japan, we picked up some. We got Korean folktales in English. A friend called from South Africa and we told her to pick up the 10 most popular books".**





# 'There is a demand for reading in English... terrible sin isn't it?'

*Rohini Nilekani is the chairperson of Akshara Foundation, an organisation involved in primary education. Akshara is part of Pratham's nationwide network involved in education. Rohini is collaborating with Umesh Malhotra on the Reading for Real project and also hatching more ambitious plans. She spoke to Vidya Viswanathan of Civil Society.*

## Why do you feel so strongly about the libraries?

Fifty percent of children in government schools cannot read. We have to tackle this problem on a war-footing. Pratham has come up with a programme called Read India and then there is the Read (City) programme. We have developed an accelerated reading method where we teach children to read in 45 days. We have developed charts with stories. These are laminated and well produced and the child can take it home.

## But you need to keep it going beyond basic reading skills...

Yes we need excited readers. There is a gap here. We need community libraries that are non-existent in India. So we have created a hundred mobile libraries. That is just a fancy word for a woman who keeps 50 books at home and takes them door-to-door to children. Each child pays Rs 5 to become a member and borrow books from her. This is also an income generation programme for these women.

## Why are you collaborating with Hippocampus?

You should see the aspirations of these children. Even those who cannot read are borrowing books. There is also a demand for reading in English - terrible sin isn't it? So we are working with Hippocampus to get them to start reading to learn. They too want to promote reading and we are helping them work within the system and with the system. They are also helping us with getting volunteers for the English programmes. We have a six-month pilot programme in nine schools.

## You want these programmes to be sustainable and also to scale?

Yes. We have trained the HLL Shaktiammas - Hindustan Lever has trained women from self-help groups to sell toiletries - to become mobile librarians. We have 25 of them in Mandya. We make the books available. We want them to sell books and



Rohini Nilekani

teach reading.

But most of the books used in the reading programme are a little childish for these children. They are picture books meant for much smaller children. These children have a lot of life experience...

The fact that all children read is a new concept in our brahminical society. There are not enough books in our languages and cultural context. I hate that word vernacular. We have now started Pratham books in Bangalore. We have already published 50 books.

Children's publishing has been going on in this country for fifty years but the markets could not sustain it. But we have a captive market of 3,50,000 children in the Pratham network across the country. We will have 5000 mobile libraries across the country in an academic year. We will publish high quality books at very low cost.

# 'Reading English is a critical life skill'

*Twenty-five-year-old Vishal Talreja gave up his job to start a non-profit called Dream A Dream. He raises funds innovatively and has 300 volunteers. The idea is to network and get underprivileged children integrated into mainstream society. Vishal is one of Hippocampus' supporters. He spoke to Vidya Viswanathan of Civil Society.*

## How was Dream A Dream started?

It started in Mumbai in November 1999 with twelve of us. Brinda Jacob, the dancer, was instrumental. Each one of us wants to give back to society. We just don't know how. We started working with HIV kids. They normally come from low-income families and are isolated. But they are normal children. They laugh, cry and play pranks. So we used to go play with them and hug them.

Children are already an empowered lot. They influence decisions in families. Use that as a tool. They are going to be decision makers of tomorrow so help integrate them into the mainstream.

## In Bangalore you work with a network of shelters for street children...

We work with six shelters. These shelters provide food, clothing and education. But they also get them dependent on shelter homes. How do we get children to become responsible citizens? By expanding their world, letting them explore the outdoors, arts and crafts and nature. Ninety percent of these children do not study beyond Class 10. They need vocational training but the child has to decide. They also lack self-confidence. Theatre, sports and public speaking can change that. Their aggression can

be channelised into sports.

So we have a hockey programme with the Ashish Ballal Academy. Shanmugam, who played in the Indian team, teaches 35 children at the Bangalore hockey stadium. We have a programme with the Vasana Bharadwaj table tennis academy. We choose inexpensive sports. We took some children on a forest trek. The idea is to help them get leadership skills and team attitude.

Our children met Dhanraj Pillai. Three of our children participate in table tennis tournaments. Three girls have got admission into fine arts. They have amazing endurance. They can play hockey for 4 to 5 hours. Nike has given us an offer to start basketball.



## You also work with Hippocampus...

Every day we find a new vehicle. Reading English is a critical life skill. We use their facilities on Tuesdays. Our volunteers help the children with reading, movies and computers. In addition, we can also help them implement their Reading for Real programme. We have 250 volunteers. Bangalore has a huge population of working professionals from other cities. They go to a pub and get drunk or watch movies. College students too want to get involved in unconventional things. We train these volunteers through an induction programme on holding workshops, handling peer pressure, crushes on volunteers and so on.

As a result they will start appreciating their maidservants and the dhobi. We also get them to tell the children, "if you want to be household help that is fine, but then be the best".

## How do you make sure that the volunteers are regular for each reading session? It is Saturday afternoon after all...

We have trained eight volunteers for each centre instead of the required two. We tell them volunteer at your own time and convenience. But they get hooked if you match their interests carefully and if they see results.

## How do you raise money? Are you making enough money?

Well we have grown from 15 children to 300. My salary has increased from Rs 3000 to Rs 8000 now. I have a deal where I'm going to get a portion of the proceeds from a Colonial Cousins concert and so have to rope in people to sell tickets. Umesh, the dude, will help me sell... Life goes on...



Mrs Padmanabhan, a 75-year-old lady who lives in an old age home in Koramangala. She wanted to do something with Hippocampus for Dassera. The previous Dassera, Hippocampus had organised 'Golu', a dolls exhibition, and she had heard of that.

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

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

But even this was not enough. Umesh had something more ambitious on his mind. He



## The Malhotras intend to make Hippocampus pay for the activities of the Reading Foundation. They kicked it off with a fund-raising screening of Shrek II.

wanted to set up a string of libraries across Bangalore for underserved children and get them excited about reading. He knew he could not go it alone, so he approached Rohini Nilekani, who is the chairperson of Akshara Foundation, a partner of Pratham's nationwide network, which is involved in children's education.

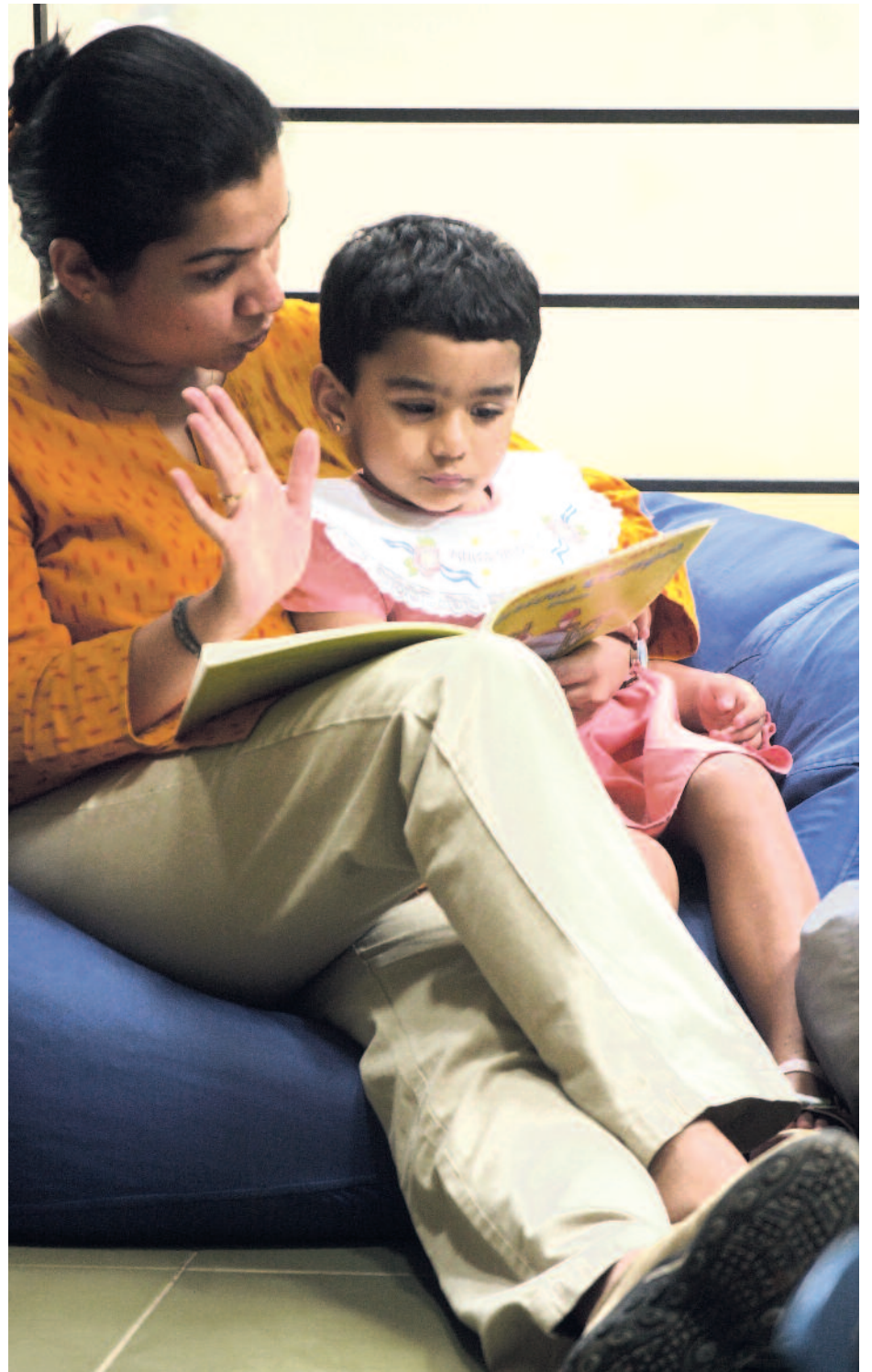
Rohini realised that although children in government schools were promoted from one class to the next, they could barely read. So, Umesh and Rohini networked 10 stakeholders and got Rajeev Narang who works in a Bangalore based innovation consulting firm, to facilitate a discussion and come up with a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

The Malhotras intend to make Hippocampus pay for the activities of the Reading Foundation. They kicked it off with a fund-raising screening of Shrek II. In May 2004, they held a carnival for children. "Now six months later, CRY has come to us to help them raise funds. So, we will become event managers for them and ask for part of the income to go to the Reading Foundation. For that, we have to constantly think of positioning Hippocampus as a premium brand," says Malhotra, who is brimming with ideas.

**READING FOR REAL:** One of his ideas is to set up libraries in government schools and have reading related activities there on weekends. What is amazing are the number of organisations working together to make this happen. The Akshara Foundation, which interacts with the Karnataka government, has 600 volunteers who can speak Kannada; the foundation also organises the infrastructure. Teacher Foundation, a Bangalore based education consulting firm, has come up with a manual on what kind of books should be read in each session, what will be done before reading a book, and the fun, but learning, activities to which the children can be introduced after the book reading session.

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





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

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

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

The English session at the Government Urdu School in Jagjivanram Nagar starts at 4.30 pm. Malathi Nayak, a third-year law student, K P Pavan, a chartered accountant who has just joined Intel, and Sunil Kennar, a Dream A Dream employee, go there every Saturday. "I heard about Dream A Dream when a trustee of the organisation came on Radio City, so I enrolled as a volunteer," says Malathi, an attractive young girl in faded jeans. The trio

**Come Saturday and there are reading sessions in nine libraries across Bangalore. The session at Yarub Nagar starts at 3 pm. This has children from classes five, six and seven. The sessions here are in Kannada.**

are adept at thinking up word games and getting the children to play. Before a reading session, they make large cutouts of all the big words in a book and 15 sets of each cutout. After Malathi finished reading the book aloud, each group of four children had to search for words in the book and pick the cutout of that word and paste it on a poster.

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

**SCALE THE MODEL:** Being able to cross-fund from Hippocampus to the Reading Foundation has tickled Umesh's imagination. He has now come up with yet another audacious plan. Why can't other NGOs use the same sustainable economic model? "The Children's Lovecastle

Foundation, for example, had been funded by Intel to create a technology clubhouse for underserved children for two years. But now they are struggling to raise fresh funds. They have the infrastructure and could easily build a Hippocampus library for children who can afford to pay and use the surplus to run the clubhouse. In fact, several NGOs working with children who have campuses could do that," says Malhotra, who has worked his numbers well.

If there are many Hippocampuses in one city, they could share books. In fact, Malhotra is open to the idea of working with partners across the country to set up similar libraries. "It could even be someone who wants to run it as a business. Including infrastructure, it would take an investment of Rs 30-35 lakh and that would pay back in two years," he explains. Any takers?



# Empower your future with Green Power

## AD Hydro Power Limited (Joint Venture of LNJ Bhilwara Group & Statkraft Norfund Power Invest AS, Norway)

LNJ Bhilwara Group is a well-diversified Rs. 1800 Crore business conglomerate with interests in Textile, Graphite Electrodes, Sponge Iron, IT Enabled Services, Hydropower Generation and Consultancy Services. AD Hydro Power Limited, a Joint Venture of LNJ Bhilwara & Statkraft Norfund Power Invest AS of Norway, is now implementing the 192 MW Allain Duhangan Hydroelectric Project in Village Prini, District Kullu, Himachal Pradesh. The Project will be developed in accordance with Internationally acceptable Environmental and Social standards.

To strengthen the Environment and Social Cell, the following categories of professionals are required for appointment at the Project Site:

S.No.	Positions	Responsibilities	Qualifications	Experience
1.	<b>Dy. General Manager, (Social &amp; Environment)</b>	Will lead the Environment & Social cell at project site. Responsible for coordination and implementation of : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rehabilitation Action Plan</li> <li>• Community Development Plan</li> <li>• Environment Management Plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ph.D. Environmental Sciences/ Social Sciences</li> <li>• B.E. Environmental Engineering/ Social Sciences</li> <li>• M.Sc. Environmental Sciences/ Similar degrees in related subject</li> </ul>	Minimum 15/18/20 years experience in implementing environmental & social action plans for power/infrastructure projects. Candidates who have worked on projects compliant with World Bank/ IFC environmental and social standards will be preferred.
2.	<b>Environment Engineer</b>	Will be responsible for implementation of the Environmental Action Plan	B.E./B.Tech. in Environment Engineering or Civil Engineering with specialization in Environment	Minimum 3 years experience in dealing with environmental aspects of power/ infrastructure projects.
3.	<b>Safety Officer</b>	Responsible for safety management and occupational health during all phases of the project	B.E./B.Tech. or B.Sc./M.Sc. with sound knowledge of Environmental, Health & Safety Audits	Minimum 3 years experience in conducting environmental, health, safety audits and generation of bankable audit reports.
4.	<b>Community Liaison Officer</b>	Responsible for land acquisition Rehabilitation and Community development, Grievance Redressal and Liaisoning with local community to implement the various project schemes and Rehabilitation Action Plan.	Post graduate in Social Sciences, knowledge of land acquisition procedures	Minimum 5 years experience of working on rehabilitation issues, community consultations, social development, rural livelihoods.

Successful candidates can look forward to a rewarding career. All positions carry the best remuneration package in the industry. Applications, duly superscribing on the envelope the position applied for, may be sent within 10 days to AGM (P&A):



PROUD TO BE INDIAN  
PRIVILEGED TO BE GLOB-

### AD HYDRO POWER LIMITED

Bhilwara Towers, A-12, Sector-1 Noida 201 301 (U.P.)  
E-mail: shivkumar@lnjbhilwara.com





# Women demand law against verbal abuse

**Usha Chaudhury**  
Jaipur

THE first national meet of single women was held in Jaipur by Ekal Nari Sangathan, a forum of activists working for the empowerment of single women in 25 districts of Rajasthan. Nearly 1600 single women marched through the streets of the city chanting songs and slogans. The rally stopped at the State Assembly. The women submitted a memorandum of their demands to the government.

The memorandum asked the state government to include all poor single women in the below poverty line (BPL) category and simplify disbursement of pension. The pension amount given should be increased from a lowly amount of Rs 200 to Rs 1000. The women said priority must be given to single homeless women in the Indira Awas Yojana. The memorandum asked for government jobs, loans for income generation and concessions in bus and rail fares to encourage single women to travel.

Among the list of political demands, single women asked for reservation of seats in the panchayats and compulsory discussion of issues affecting single women during panchayat meetings. Single women are stigmatised as being inauspicious and denounced as witches. The

Ekal Nari Sangathan has asked for a special law against verbal abuse heaped on single women and demanded they be given more respect. They said laws against dowry and physical abuse should be strictly implemented and single women's property rights ensured.

At the conference, single women decided to take part aggressively in the next panchayat elections. They

and get employment. Ekal Nari encourages single women to defy social mores and wear red with pride. Its membership has expanded to over 16,000 women nationally.

At the meeting Krishna Devi, a single woman from Taleda village in Kota district, related how she got back her land. After her husband died three years ago an encroacher occupied her land and threw her out along with her children. A woman in her village told her about Ekal Nari Sangathan and Krishna Devi sought the forum's help.

The Sangathan's activists informed the Collector who was sympathetic and told the tehsildar to transfer the land back to Krishna Devi. But the encroacher refused to budge. Ekal Nari Sangathan took the case to a lawyer who advised Krishna Devi to forcibly plough the land. Ekal Nari Sangathan got 40 women together. Three women got on to a tractor and the rest stood near the boundaries of the land.

The encroacher arrived with some goons and started to obstruct ploughing. The women confronted them. One phoned the local police station. A policeman arrived shortly and the women completed ploughing in his presence. They also sowed seeds 20 days later. The encroacher gave up. Krishna Devi profusely thanked activists from Ekal Nari Sangathan and said she got justice because the activists risked their lives for her.

Charkha Development Communication Network



Rally by Ekal Nari Sangathan in Jaipur

**Single women asked for reservation of seats in the panchayats and compulsory discussion of issues affecting single women during panchayat meetings.**

declared that they were not "single" but part of an organisation. Their campaign would change patriarchal mindsets, eradicate gender discrimination and outdated social mores.

Members of Ekal Nari Shakti Sangathan firmly believe that single women seek dignity and a life free of violence, atrocities and discrimination. Since 1999, the forum has helped women gain property rights, fight social injustice

## SHGs snub bank, fight liquor

**Biswajeet Padhi**  
Khariar

AHALYA Patel, a rustic tribal woman in her mid-forties, has become a celebrity in Khariar district, Orissa. After uniting disparate self-help groups (SHGs) she is now leading a vigorous campaign against liquor. Ahalya is the president of the Narishakti Mahasangha, a federation of self-help groups (SHGs) in Khariar and Nuapada blocks. Recently the Pragati Youth Club of Duajhar invited her to speak on women's empowerment and prohibition.

Four years ago, the Kalahandi Aanchalika Gramya, the local rural bank, snubbed her federation. Now the bank ardently woos them. Business for the women has picked up. Most cultivate vegetables on their small farms and trade them in Bhawnipatna, the district headquarters of Kalahandi.

When the SHG started, the concept of saving money was strange to the women of Ahalya's block. A local NGO called Srusti explained the benefits of pooling resources. So the women began saving every month to meet emergency needs since getting a loan from the Kalahandi Aanchalika Gramya Bank meant running back and forth several times.

The group, called the Tulsawadi SHG, grew and grew. They got a loan of Rs 2.2 lakh under the government's Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY), a programme aimed at self-employment for the rural poor. The women then realised that savings can make families richer. They designed strategies to increase their income and limit wasteful expenditure.

Some 13 months ago, the Tulsawadi SHG invited 20 other SHGs to a meeting at Khasbahal village and they formed a federation of SHGs called the Narishakti Mahasangha. Ahalya was chosen as president. In 2003,

OXFAM, an international donor agency, added to their corpus with Rs. 1.2 lakh and topped it with Rs 1 lakh this year. The Mahasangha now has 37 SHGs as members, covering around 400 families in three panchayat blocks.

The Mahasangha lends money to member SHGs at an interest rate of 15%. The SHG lends to individuals at interest rates ranging from 24% to 36%. The rates may seem high but the local moneylender demands 120% and expects security. He takes gold, utensils, bicycles or land till the entire loan amount is paid. The Mahasangha plans to reduce interest rates once they start lending more money.

This leaves the Kalahandi Aanchalika Gramya Bank out in the cold. Although the bank charges only 11%, it has few takers and Nabard is breathing down its neck to meet a target. So officials are running door-to-door offering loans to the women. When they refuse officials offer to sanction 50% of the loan as subsidy under the Swarn Jayanti Swarozgar Yojana (SJSY). But the women find it more convenient to borrow from the Mahasangha's friendly office bearers who are just round the corner.

Once the SHG federation expanded, members began to think. "We realised we should not only do financial transactions but also work for the benefit of the community," said Ahalya. "We clean the village roads and drains. We have taken up corruption in the public distribution system. But that is not the end of it."

The biggest problem the women faced were drunk husbands waiting at home to pounce on their money. "The men would squander our loans when we returned from the Mahasangha office," said Jira Patel. "We were trying to better our lot but the men were not understanding the point," said Janak Sabar. They organised a rally to inform the village about their intention to close all liquor vends or "kothis".

But the *kothis* blithely ignored them and continued

with business as usual. So the women entered the shops and broke the bottles. Some men fled to the jungle and started brewing liquor there. The women chased them and got them to stop. As a result Khasbahal has become liquor free. "We didn't even allow liquor on the day following Nuakhai, the biggest agricultural festival in western Orissa when traditionally we tribals celebrate by eating mutton and drinking," added



Ahalya Patel (second from left) president, Narishakti Mahasangha

Manjuri Sabar, proudly.

The news spread like wildfire and Ahalya was repeatedly requested to address rallies by women. She spoke to the SHGs in Upparpita, Bargaon, Tukla and Duajhar villages. The Narishakti Mahasangha has now declared war on liquor. *Kothi* owners are on the run. At this rate Nuapada and Khariar blocks will become liquor free, thanks to the SHGs.



# Civil Society

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

## PERSPECTIVES

# Pollution is a crime, is a crime, is...

RAJENDER SINGH



**Paani**

**T**HE draft 'New Environmental Policy 2004' is not a policy document intended for India. This is evident from the fact that its formulation did not include any public debate on the subject, and that it does not incorporate real societal aspirations. It is a document whose genesis can be traced to the ministry of finance, but which hides behind the cloak of phrases like 'environmental conservation' and 'restoring natural balance'.

It enables private investors to have a greater stake in our environment. It suggests that pollution can be paid for and that one can virtually buy oneself a right to pollute. It makes an insidious attempt to shift environmental offences from the present category of criminal offences to the milder, ineffectual category of civil offences. It makes a commitment towards

granting permits and clearances to industries desiring to operate on forest land and other protected areas. In one fell blow it does away with the requirement for public hearings prior to starting large-scale development projects. Most phrases and concerns articulated in the draft policy bear no relation to our culture, our lifestyles and our unique occupational structure. It emphasises on issues that are of no immediate concern to India such as ozone depletion and global warming. These issues are decidedly not of India's making and are not a direct result of Indian lifestyles and land-use. These problems are the consequence of policies pursued by America and Europe over the last few centuries and it follows that the responsibility for remedying these must also fall on their shoulders.

The draft policy enumerates a host of measures that it believes are necessary to curb the current rate of environmental degradation, yet all these are clearly measures that are designed to mitigate the damage of purely western habits. Instead of condemning western consumer goods for increasing the burden on the natural environment, this draft policy almost seems to encourage the use of appliances like air-conditioners. What else can one make of the benign attitude adopted towards such destructive consumer goods and the pro-industry stance that is apparent through the length and breadth of the policy? While conventional wisdom says that industrial growth and environmental conservation are mutually exclusive, this policy goes to the other extreme and welcomes all possible industrial proliferation and investment. It virtually lays out a red carpet for foreign multinationals to invest in India, and ensures that all obstacles in their path such as environmental and forest clearances disappear.

The New Environment Policy (Draft for Discussion and Comments) creates a great deal of confusion and generates many misconceptions in the reader's mind. While the draft is ostensibly an attempt to highlight progressive practices and policies to be adopted towards conservation and to showcase well-established principles of environmental protection, the provisions enshrined belie a completely different story. The draft veils its true intentions cleverly by mouthing a few reassuring lines. For instance, it speaks of giving legal rights to forest-dwelling tribes to continue living in the forest and also of awarding them conservation rights that would entitle them to plant new trees and become extensively involved in all future conservation efforts in their region. In addition, it expresses a commitment to increase our forest cover from the current 23 per cent of total land area to the critical, globally approved 33 per cent land area by the year 2012. But before one starts giving the drafters credit for their noble vision, it is pertinent to point out that this target of 33 per

cent forest cover was first set in 1972, when our forest cover was still 30 per cent. Since then, despite successive governments pledging to raise new plantations, the overall area under forest cover has fallen sharply. Thus, merely saying that this is one of the draft policy's aims is never going to be enough. Most significantly, the lack of real commitment to increasing forest cover is apparent from other provisions of the policy that speak of establishing industries on existing forest land. Therefore, the provisions of the draft policy itself are self-contradictory.

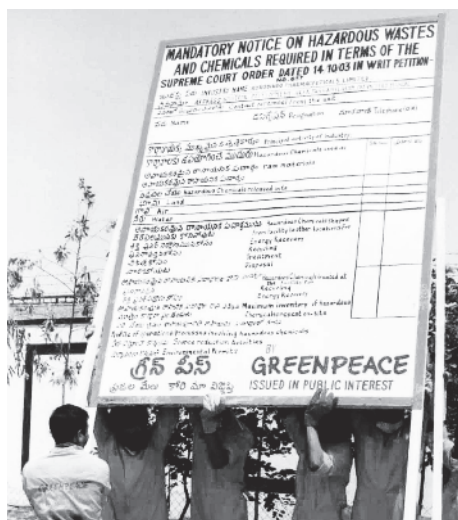
The procedural reforms suggested by the draft policy are all directed towards simplifying the process of setting up large-scale projects and industries. It actually makes recommendations that the concerned officials hasten the entire process and conduct environmental impact assessments only in the initial stages of any project, regardless of consequences that get known later. Of course, all this is made to sound appropriate by stating obvious truths alongside, such as there must be decentralisation of environmental authorities, that all bodies in this field should operate with due foresight and that there must be more accountability.

The draft policy recommends that all existing environmental laws and policies be reviewed, perhaps in an attempt to ensure that they also metamorphose into equally pro-investor, pro-consultancy instruments after the necessary amendments. The draft policy suggests that forests, presently a central subject, should be made a state subject. Who knows which chief minister dances to the tune of which large industrial group or MNC? After all, every state government comes to power with the promise of promoting industry and investment. This is dangerous, as there will be no uniformity in future conservation efforts. It also raises the fear that forest conservation will become hostage to the whims and fancies of various chief ministers and their subordinates at state level. In the current scenario at least the Centre can monitor or regulate conservation projects and is an equal partner in most initiatives. But if the proposed changes take effect then every inch of the earth will be an open playground for industries, mines and quarries.

The draft policy reflects no concern whatsoever for protecting our immense biodiversity and the 8.4 million species of animals and birds that India is home to. It implies that all these belong to man and he can do as he pleases with all other living beings in his domain. The basic premise of this document is that modern man is the owner of all things in his natural environment and that he must safeguard his proprietary interests by denying the rights of others who are dependent on the forest for survival, including animals and even forest-dwelling tribes. The policy makes no mention of wildlife sanctuaries, national parks, or even previous conservation campaigns like Project Tiger.

We are an inherently nature-loving society. In trying to imitate the lifestyle and behaviour of western countries like the United States, however, we have hurt the fragile natural balance that existed in our country for millennia. Countries like the USA have destroyed all their natural richness in pursuit of 'development' to such an extent that there is no clean, unpolluted water available there anymore. Even the bottled water sold in the markets contains pollutants like industrial effluents and chemical contaminants. Studies have often shown the presence of contaminants in bottled water in the USA and this has been the subject of many campaigns by vociferous environmental groups. Tragically, we now seem to have followed their path and face similar problems at home. Today, ironically, the USA is preaching sermons on environment protection to a nation where the inhabitants

(Continued on page 18)





(Continued from page 17)

traditionally recite prayers to seek permission from Mother Earth even before they lay one single step on her soil.

One of the most clearly articulated objectives of the draft policy is the polluter pays principle. This provides for a scenario where industries, investors and developers can probably even pay up lumpsum in advance and purchase indemnity for all the pollution and resource destruction that they will set out to do. Decriminalising the offence of pollution and making it a civil offence further encourages pollution. One could be forgiven for believing that the goal of this policy is to create conditions where the common man, the labourer, the menial worker and other 'insignificant' inhabitants of this country succumb to pollution-related diseases and perish, while the rich industrialists thrive.

Financial principles dominate the draft NEP 2004. For example, it suggests that in order to stem the rapid loss or extinction of species, natural resources must not be made available free of cost and that there be a price paid for their utilisation. In effect, the draft aims to convert our environment into a marketplace and price these resources out of the reach of the common man who has long been dependent on such resources for his subsistence. This exemplifies the dichotomy that runs through the entire text of the document, while the provisions appear well meaning, they are actually motivated by mala fide — an intention to promote commercial interests over environmental interests.

India is one of the very few nations where the Constitution itself mentions the need for environmental protection and has provisions to promote conservation. India also has a surfeit of environmental legislation and policies, with more than two hundred such laws, regulations, notifications and orders at the Central and State levels. This begs the question why the government felt a new policy was needed.

Back in 1962, an expert committee constituted by the ministry of health recommended that laws be enacted to curb water pollution at the Centre and in all the States. Drafts of the proposed Bill were sent to State governments in 1963, and by 1969 the Bill was introduced in the Rajya Sabha. Finally passed in 1972, this Act was later complemented by the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972 and the Environment Protection Act of 1986. In 1972, the 42nd Amendment to the Constitution inserted Article 48A into the Directive Principles of State Policy, and brought environmental protection into the national consciousness. In 1980 we had the Forest Conservation Act, and in 1981 the Air Pollution Control Act.

In the year 1981 the ministry of environment and forests began issuing an 'Ecomark' on those products whose manufacture had no adverse effect on the environment. The passage of all these Acts heralded a new era in environmental protection in India, but sadly these laws remained in the statute books and have not had any effect at ground level. It must be asked why are all these laws not effective? And what can this toothless policy do that these laws and regulations have been unable to?

It is interesting to note that it was the cabinet Economic Reforms Committee, and not the MoEF which initiated the preparation of this draft. Even our future pollution abatement or monitoring technology will have to be purchased in foreign markets, if this policy comes into force. Everything that the world market wants from India has been carefully provided for by this draft. It will enable globalisation of our industrial sector at a never before rate and also increase the fiscal power at the Centre. Small-scale and cottage industries that are far more environment-friendly will be wiped out.

This has a clear precedent in the way our water policy drastically altered the nature of our domestic water market and turned water into a commodity. The so called 'international standards' that have been set for all drinks and beverages are deliberately so stringent that only big players like Coke and Pepsi will be able to satisfy them, and the smaller players will be forced out of the market. Another example of how our market-oriented policies have hurt domestic industries is the manner in which local mustard oil traders failed to compete with the labelling and packaging requirements imposed on them.

*Rajender Singh is chairperson of Rashtriya Jal Biradari, India's largest network of water activists.*

# Palliative care when there is nothing else

HARMALA GUPTA



## Know Your NGO

**D**AME Cicely Saunders is widely acknowledged as the founder of the modern day hospice/palliative care movement. In 1967 she set up St. Christopher's Hospice in South London with the aim of relieving the pain and suffering of people with terminal cancer. As a former nurse, who later became a doctor, she was aware of the far from satisfactory care that people with end stage disease received in London's hospitals. Her inspiration was one of her patients, a Polish gentleman by the name of David Tasma, who had shared his vision of a place that would offer "total care" to the person dying with cancer to her. The World Health Organisation (WHO) was to later take up this definition of palliative care which it described as, "the active total care of patients whose disease is not responsive to curative treatment. Control of pain, of other symptoms, and of psychological, social and spiritual problems is paramount. The goal of palliative care is the achievement of the best possible quality of life for patients and their families."

The hospice movement has now developed in every continent of the world with over 7,000 hospice and palliative care initiatives adapted to suit local needs and culture in about 100 countries. In much of the developing world, where need is often the greatest, there are usually great barriers to implementing a hospice service: lack of pain relieving drugs such as morphine and the problems of legislation enabling their use; lack of professional and public education and lack of finance for research and development.

CanSupport has faced all these barriers in varying degrees.

CanSupport, a registered not-for-profit society, started a home-based palliative care service for people with advanced cancer in Delhi in 1996. This initiative, the first of its kind in North India, was spearheaded by Harmala Gupta, a cancer survivor, and by Ruth Wooldridge (a nurse from the UK). At present, CanSupport's home care teams, comprising doctors, nurses and counsellors trained in palliative care, have up to 90 patients under their care at any given time. Patients with incurable cancers are referred to the home care programme by cancer hospitals, specialists and concerned persons. From the very beginning there has been a special tie up with the pain and palliative clinic at the Institute Rotary Cancer Hospital (IRCH) at AIIMS. While previously, patients were required to live within a 25 km radius from AIIMS, since September 2004, CanSupport's home care teams have started operating from bases located in different parts of the city and so this is no longer a requirement. We feel that this is the most rational and cost-effective way of covering the NCR of Delhi.

CanSupport also runs a day care programme at its center where patients may drop in for information, emotional support, good food, rest and relaxation. On Mondays, children under treatment for cancer at IRCH visit with their parents. On Fridays, a few home care patients are brought in for a couple of hours. They are looked after by volunteers who offer them their company, delicious home-cooked food and a hand and foot massage. On the first Wednesday of the month we have a "drop-in" meeting for all those at various stages of the cancer journey. It is a time to seek support and share experiences.

Since 18 October, CanSupport has started a joint psycho-social cum information programme for people with cancer and their care givers with the Rockland Hospital. It is held once a week over six weeks and besides offering information about cancer, its treatment and side effects, there are presentations on the emotional side of cancer, including the benefits of self-healing. This is a programme that will be offered on a recurring basis.

Another first is the CanSupport cancer telephone help line service (Phone: 26711212) which started functioning from August this year. It aims at providing timely and useful information as well as emotional support to people with cancer and their care-givers to help them better manage and face the trauma of a cancer diagnosis. Volunteers have received extensive training in listening skills and also have a resource directory that they can refer to.

When one considers that almost 80% of patients with cancer in India (i.e. at present almost 16,00,000 out of 20,00,000) will need palliative care at some time or the other the paucity of such services is apparent. In a bid to meet this challenge CanSupport together with its collaborating partner IRCH has been holding a foundation course in palliative care for medical professionals every year since 2002 to train them so that they may start palliative care services where ever they are based. We think that the home care service model is the most appropriate for Indian conditions as usually there is a family member willing to look after the sick loved one, while ideally home is where most patients would like to be. It is also more cost effective. Presently, it costs CanSupport approximately Rs.4000/- per patient per month to run its home care service which is a fraction of the cost involved in keeping patients in a hospice or a hospital ward.

At CanSupport we are proud of the fact that with the backing of doctors at the pain and palliative care clinic at IRCH and our dedicated home care teams we have so far been able to provide meaningful support and high quality care to almost one thousand patients and four times that number of family members. This has included medical and nursing care to relieve the pain and distressing symptoms that can accompany cancer and an opportunity for the patient and the family to talk over issues that may be troubling them with experienced and caring professionals. Medicines, medical equipment, nutritional supplements and occasionally food rations are also given to those who need them. The emphasis of the service is to provide comfort and care that extends to all aspects of the individuals well being. After the death of the patient, bereavement counselling is also offered to grieving relatives.

Finally our aim is to ensure that for each patient under our care there is a family better equipped to deal with their grief and to go forward in life. This is preventive healthcare at its very best - another benefit of good palliative care.

It may be noted that all CanSupport services are free of cost. Those who wish to use the daycare and home care services or attend the monthly 'drop in' meeting may contact our office by calling: 26102851, 26102869. The telephone help line service is manned on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. The number is: 26711212.

CanSupport is a registered not-for-profit society. Donations are tax exempt under section 80G of the Income Tax Act. It is also registered under the Foreign Contributions Regulation Act (FCRA). Cheques may be made to CanSupport and mailed to our centre at: Kanak Durga Basti Vikas Kendra, Sector 12 R.K. Puram, New Delhi-110022.

Email: cansup\_india@hotmail.com; Website: www.cansupport.org



# Golden rice is just a money-spinner

SUMAN SAHAI



## From The Fields

**G**OLDEN Rice is a genetically modified (GM) rice supposed to contain sufficient Pro Vitamin A to prevent night blindness caused by Vitamin A deficiency. Its developers said it was being created to help the undernourished in the developing world. However as soon as it was announced, the news came that Golden Rice may never get a chance to reach the poor. It was found to be shackled in so many patents (over 70, big and small) that if all the licence fees had to be paid, the rice would price itself out of any market that the poor could access. Further developments in Golden Rice were watched closely. It became a test case to see how far the Life Science corporations would go to defend their patents and block research aimed at helping the poor.

The agbiotechnology industry realised it had a public relations crisis that a food allegedly developed to address the food and nutritional needs of the poor may never reach them if some solution was not found for the myriad patents holding Golden Rice back. GM baiters set up a chorus of 'I told you

so', that the life science industry never intended to solve food and nutrition problems, that the corporations owned everything through their patents and money making was their primary, if not only goal. The 70 patents on Golden Rice proved that point. The GM industry, reeling under bad press and consumer rejection, had to do some quick thinking not to look like the avaricious exploiters they were accused of being.

This product was after all their magnificent Trojan horse, to breach the wall of resistance against GM foods. Here was a product developed for the express goal of helping the poor and underprivileged and saving children from blindness. This product could not possibly be allowed to look bad. So the company, Astra Zeneca, stepped in and made arrangements that Golden Rice could be developed further. Donations of "free licences for humanitarian use" for many of the 70 patents were negotiated. Astra Zeneca was subsequently subsumed under Syngenta so the Syngenta company now controlled access to Golden Rice. To keep public criticism at bay, Syngenta set up a Humanitarian Board to negotiate access for developing countries. Terms and conditions were worked out for public research institutions in developing countries to use the patented Golden Rice to develop locally adapted vitamin A rich rice varieties. These varieties could be cultivated by small farmers with incomes below a certain level, without paying royalty. Bigger farmers, on the other hand, would be allowed to cultivate Golden Rice only after paying a licence fee.

Then Syngenta suddenly changed its position. The company appears to have decided that since the furore over the 70 patents has died down and the public opprobrium over the

industry control over Golden Rice seems to have receded into the background, they could establish their claim over the product again. In the meantime research on Golden Rice has advanced and it is acquiring more the shape of a lucrative, money-spinning product than the laboratory exercise it was a few years ago.

To reestablish its claim on Golden Rice, Syngenta has quietly started a process by which it has acquired complete control over the way in which the genetic material of Golden Rice can be used by researchers, ignoring the earlier conditions set by the Humanitarian Board. Syngenta can now allow or deny access to researchers at will. Rather than the open research agreements that had been agreed upon earlier with the South, the Humanitarian Board has laid down stringent new conditions under which Golden Rice will be available for breeding work to researchers in developing countries. The old contracts between the Board and the researchers have been revoked and new ones put in place. All users, including the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in the Philippines, and all research partners in India have had to sign the new contract and agree to abide by the new conditions.

Under the new contract, researchers have lost "the freedom to operate" that was part of the earlier terms of access. They now cannot do their research using their own methods. The new contract demands that only those Golden Rice lines that have been developed by Syngenta can be used by developing country breeders. These new developments are designed to establish Syngenta's absolute ownership of Golden Rice and are a precursor to patent claims in all countries developing Golden Rice.

The final element of corporate control over Golden Rice comes in the person of Gerard Barry who has been appointed by Syngenta as the Golden Rice Coordinator at IRRI. Mr Barry's major responsibility at IRRI is to work with intellectual property rights specialists, and biosafety and regulatory agencies in Asian countries 'to facilitate the development and deployment' of the genetically engineered Golden Rice. Prior to moving to IRRI, Barry was at Monsanto, so we now have a former Monsanto executive who has administrative control of the inter-governmental Golden Rice research project!

Mr Barry's new assignment to manage Intellectual Property Rights on Golden Rice would appear to have set the clock back to where it was when the charade over the Humanitarian Board and the pro-poor goal of Golden Rice was played out. Mr. Barry's charge it would appear, is to promote the adoption of patented Golden Rice for those in developing countries who can afford it. The poor blind children that were held up as the reason why Golden Rice was being developed do not seem to be part of the discourse anymore. Gone, apparently are the pious intentions of delivering this rice to the world's poor. It looks like there is a high-end nutraceutical in the making instead, a golden health food for those who can afford these things, out of the reach of the impoverished children who it was supposed to benefit.

*Suman Sahai is director of Gene Campaign*



**Syngenta has quietly started a process by which it has acquired complete control over the way in which the genetic material of Golden Rice can be used by researchers, ignoring the earlier conditions set by the Humanitarian Board.**

“Just received the May issue of Civil Society. It is excellent as have been the three previous issues. The series on poll reforms is illuminating. Please keep it up!”

—S. Mundayoor, *Herbs for Better Health, Dibang Valley, Arunachal Pradesh*

**Civil Society**

FOR PEOPLE WHO CARE

THE MAGAZINE EVERYONE LIKES TO READ



# Value the creative immigrant

RAM GIDOOMAL



## Through NR Eyes

**P**OLITICAL commentators in the UK were caught by surprise at rumours that the General Election could be held as early as February next year. May 2005 was widely mooted as the most likely date, but whenever it is held, one thing is certain – immigration, always in the background in the UK, will be a key election issue.

While the Labour Party had other things to worry about at its annual conference, the Conservative Party leader, Michael Howard, called for stricter controls on immigration. "At a time when Britain faces an unprecedented terrorist threat, we appear to have little idea of who's coming into or leaving our country." He proposed an Australian type points system for immigrants, an annual cap on the numbers and far tougher controls on asylum seekers, including withdrawal from the Geneva Agreement on refugees and asylum seekers.

The irony is that while the Conservative Party was calling for immigration to be halted 'before it is too late'; they found

themselves expressing their thanks, post-conference, to hotel staff comprised of 34 nationalities! Immigrants that they wanted to attach quotas to, prepared their dinner, made up their beds and cleaned their rooms. It is estimated that licensed workers are contributing £ 4 million a week to the British economy. Without them many businesses would grind to a halt. Yet, according to many opinion polls, immigration continues to be one area of greatest concern to undecided voters in the UK.

A very different perspective emerged at the British Council's 12th annual Pontignano Conference on "The Age of Europe".

Europe faces a major demographic challenge as its population ages. Italy's population, for example, will actually shrink from 55 to 45 million by 2050. Two major results are the enormous need of personal care for elderly people and the problem of paying for pensions. Is immigration the answer? Can Europe import younger, more fertile people from countries which still have a wide base to their population 'pyramid'? This is certainly an option, according to Adair Turner, former head of the Confederation of British Industry, who has just released a major report on Britain's 'pensions crisis' for the government. But it could never be the whole answer because of the vast numbers that would need to be 'imported'. And what about the social consequences? We come back to the political compulsions.

One thing is certain: a combination of factors means that the flow of peoples in our world will continue and increase for the foreseeable future:

- on-going economic inequalities
- the quest for education and economic opportunity
- escape from political and social oppression
- demand for skilled workers
- ageing populations in the developed world
- environmental pressures: the UN estimates 150 million people will be forced to move because of environmental degradation by 2040

What is needed is a willingness to look differently – and creatively – at this issue. At a conference on immigration in Amsterdam in 2003, a Dutch official highlighted the fact that: "By 2030 over half the population of Amsterdam would be non-Dutch..."

I suggested to the official that there could be another way of looking at it: "Would it not be possible to foresee that by 2030 a 100 per cent of the population of Amsterdam would be Dutch – except that the definition of 'Dutch' will have changed?"

One of the Pontignano Conference workshops looked at creativity. There is no doubt that immigrants are often associated with creativity. They have to be in order to survive! My family came to Britain as refugees from East Africa. We were twice migrants, having first fled from Hyderabad Sindh in Pakistan following the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947. On arrival in London in 1966, we bought a 'corner' shop – a shop selling confectionery, cigarettes and newspapers. It provided a roof over our heads with 15 of us sharing four bedrooms above the shop.

But in business terms we identified niche markets – such as the needs of other migrant communities like the Irish who represented a significant percentage of the local population in Shepherd's Bush in West London. They worked mainly in the construction industry and had relatively high levels of disposable income. Having identified the specific needs of this migrant community, we proceeded to source their needs from Ireland and found ourselves increasing our profit margins and sales volumes. This resulted in increased cash flow that enabled us to buy several more shops within the space of

**The irony is that while the Conservative Party was calling for immigration to be halted 'before it is too late' they found themselves expressing their thanks, post-conference, to hotel staff comprised of 34 nationalities! Immigrants who prepared their dinner, made up their beds and cleaned their rooms.**



months! The same data set seen through different eyes resulted in a creative response that added value to the local economy.

While writing this column, I couldn't help but be amused by the headlines in the UK media about one immigrant of Indian origin in the UK who had just awarded himself a dividend of one billion pounds! "Mittal now owns biggest steel company in the world," "He tops Chelsea boss as richest man in Britain," "Billionaire earns an incredible £35 a second – but he still loves *aloo gobi!*"

"A creative society is one where immigration is an opportunity, not a problem to solve" (Pontignano).

Immigrants came to Britain – and still come – for a whole range of reasons, often beyond their control. What opportunities does their coming create? Some, like Lakshmi Mittal, have been amazingly successful. Others are struggling. It seems to me important for all to consider what contribution they can make, both to their host country and their country of origin. Those who have done this have also reached out and built relationships of friendship and trust. Of course this applies even more to the host community. Some here have realised the added value that diversity brings. Others still remain to be convinced. A note of caution from Pontignano: "While minorities tend to value diversity originating from migration, it is very difficult to persuade majorities about it."

### Postscript

Another headline: 'Ferreiras likely to be dropped from Eastenders'

They are the Asian family in the BBC's popular soap. But their departure is not a sign of racism – rather the reverse. Asians have been complaining that the Ferreris are a totally un-Asian creation. Their name suggests they are Goan, but their behaviour doesn't fit any known Asian profile. A Goanese commented: "They should be shown as real Goans, enjoying life!" By contrast, the Ferreris are boring.

Their departure is not a case for the Commission for Racial Equality to investigate – nobody will miss them.

**I suggested to the official that there could be another way of looking at it: "Would it not be possible to foresee that by 2030 a 100% of the population of Amsterdam would be Dutch - except that the definition of 'Dutch' will have changed?"**



## Polar bears walk on very thin ice

THE Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (ACIA), produced by more than 250 scientists for arctic governments, provides incontrovertible proof that climate change is happening in the Arctic and that it will worsen quickly unless emissions of carbon dioxide are cut. A warmer Arctic will impact the world, contributing to global warming and sea level rise.

The eight arctic countries emit more than 30 per cent of global carbon dioxide emissions.

WWF welcomed the report but also highlighted the hypocrisy of arctic governments which sponsored it because they have failed to cut emissions of carbon dioxide.

### Key findings in the report are:

- Warming in the Arctic will be around two or three times greater than the rest of the world.
- Polar bears could become extinct by the end of this century.
- Sea levels could rise by nearly one meter. A warmer Arctic will contribute up to 15% of this rise. Kolkata, Dhaka and Manila are some of the cities at risk from sea level rise.
- The area of the Greenland Ice Sheet that experiences some melting has increased by about 16% from 1979 to 2002. The area of melting in 2002 broke all previous records.
- A melting Arctic will also accelerate the rate of global climate change. As arctic snow and ice melt, the ability of the Arctic to reflect heat back to space is reduced, accelerating the overall rate of global warming.
- A warmer Arctic could possibly halt the Gulf Stream, which brings warmer water and weather to north-western Europe.

## Blair gambles on vice

If one has taken an "Eight days 10 Cities" tour of the USA that covers Atlantic City in the East and Las Vegas in the West one can understand the true meaning of kitsch. For many, simply visiting the US of A is sufficient. Now imagine having Las Vegas in your own backyard in the UK, say, in Brighton or Wembley or Birmingham. No, it's not a newly imported Halloween trick or treat. It could very well happen in the near future if Tony Blair and his culture minister, Tessa Jowell, are given half a chance.

Ms. Jowell has presented Parliament with the Gambling Bill, which is provoking some serious debate in the UK. Once again, it seems the same forces are at battle: corporate profiteers versus the hoi polloi. Unfortunately, the government of the people, led by the Labour Party, or at least its head honcho, seem to be backing big business. Or is it that Tony Blair has promised the American people more than just Iraq? Perhaps he is honour bound to Caesar's Entertainment Inc. and MGM Mirage who are sitting like vultures on a cliff top in the Nevada desert ready to swoop down on a new Las Vegas.

While the people debate the evils of smoking, drinking and gambling and how far these should be regulated by government one must pause and ask the larger question: should morality be relegated to make way for fiscal priority? If we cannot answer that how can we make decisions on such questions? It has become fashionable for modern organisations to have a mission statement. A noble idea. What exactly is the mission statement of modern government? Why is it that the feelings of the majority seldom filter to the top of the decision-making hierarchy once they have grabbed the mandate ever so many years? We live in an age when polling gives us the pulse of a nation almost in real time. Yet, time and again 'democratic' governments ignore and subvert the wishes of their constituents.

An ICM survey shows that 34% of the population support the new bill and 53% are opposed to it. 93% believe that there are enough gambling opportunities in the UK. So what exactly is the Bill proposing? It wants to remove the current barriers to casinos (accessible to club members only) and make it open to all adults. It proposes unlimited jackpots. It wants the limitation on restricted location to be lifted.

On the surface it sounds, well, democratic. If we were talking about healthcare, housing or education it would indeed be laudable. But we are talking about gambling-- a proverbial vice, breaker of families and lives.... Examine who the winners will be: the gaming industry with ever increasing profits and the government through its taxes on these profits. Using these for public goods is the sop the government is offering as justification for the Bill. It is as moral as the college co-eds in America doing lap dance in 'Gentlemen's Clubs' to pay for their courses. Doesn't everyone know that casinos have what is called unequal betting where the gambler bets against the 'bank' or the 'house' that can never lose? To add insult to injury it is rumoured that ministers have secretly agreed to lower taxes to between 15 to 20% to woo new investors and prevent the old ones from leaving for greener pastures.

There are already about 120 casinos in the UK. So why woo more global investors?

Economics, competition, new jobs... always the same arguments. On the positive side: one will be making shorter trips from continental Europe to experience kitsch.



### Global giants play monopoly

I disliked playing monopoly as a young boy but now looking at global giants that buy and sell companies across the world at will, I can understand better the sinister ramifications of that childhood game. It is so hard to know who owns what any more. If you are in the market for a luxury car and are attracted by the traditional panache of a British thoroughbred, the Jaguar, you will be disappointed to learn that the American Ford owns it. Of course, when making such takeover deals, rich startups always forswear tampering with the elements that created the original. We all know traditions cannot be bought. Belgian Godiva chocolates never tasted the same after I found out that Campbell Soup now owns the brand. Wiser Americans have stopped buying castles in Europe and shipping them back to the USA. They now maintain them in Europe, except for Bill Gates who has been buying the 'digital rights' to a lot of the European artwork for years.

## LETTER FROM EUROPE



Riaz Quadir in Versailles

## Afghan minister heaps scorn on NGOs

Abdul Baseer Saeed  
Kabul

ACCORDING to Dr Ramazan Bashar Dost, the controversial planning minister in President Hamid Karzai's current government, thousands of international and local NGOs operating in Afghanistan have largely failed to deliver effective assistance to the Afghan people.

Ever since he was appointed planning minister in March, Bashar Dost has sought to reduce the number of NGOs operating in the country. He has complained publicly that they are ineffective and waste money that should be spent on the Afghan people.

He has spearheaded a draft law that would regulate their operations. Bashar Dost said that if the new cabinet approves his draft law, all domestic and foreign NGOs would have two months to re-register under new rules, or suspend operations.

Bashar Dost highlighted Article 3 of the proposed statute, which would prohibit NGOs from profiting from the funds they receive for reconstruction work. Provisions

in the draft law, he said, would prevent NGOs from spending excessive amounts of money on themselves.

"They can use a car costing \$12,000 instead of using a \$40,000 car," he said. There is a certain amount of resentment in Afghanistan directed toward the "white Land Cruiser crowd", as NGO workers are sometimes known.

Bashar Dost said out of \$4.5 billion pledged to Afghanistan by international donors at the Tokyo conference last year, about a third has been allocated to international NGOs. "I have yet to see an NGO that has spent 80% of its money for the benefit of the Afghans and 20% for their own benefit."

"International NGOs get big amounts of money from their own nations just by showing them sensitive pictures and videos of Afghan people, and there are even some individuals who give all their salaries to NGOs to spend it on charity here, but the NGOs spend all the money on themselves and we are unable to find out how much money they originally received in charitable funds," he added.

Bashar Dost also criticised NGOs - which are tax exempt - for getting privileged access to government contracts that tax-paying commercial companies should have won. He believes they have inside access to contracts because of their close relationships with government officials, including ministers, some of who were formerly their employees. At the same time, he said, many qualified government employees have gone to work for NGOs where the salaries are higher.

"We want the reconstruction carried out economically and to be handled by private companies which are under the control and supervision of the government," said Bashar Dost. "Donors should contract directly with the companies - this is the rule all over the world."

He believes there are too many NGOs in the country. In fact there's a moratorium on registering NGOs until the new law is approved. There are 2,355 NGOs registered in Afghanistan, of which 333 are international, he said.

"We don't have NGOs in Afghanistan, but we have NGO-ism, and we want to get rid

of the NGO-ism, not the NGOs," he said. He complained that there are some so-called NGOs that operate for profit like private companies.

Under the new Karzai administration, the planning ministry will no longer handle NGO registration, the task going instead to the ministry of labour and social affairs. The planning ministry itself will disappear, merged with the ministry of reconstruction to create an economics ministry.

While these changes may come as a relief for many aid workers who have said privately that Bashar Dost has done nothing to help their organisations - and that his comments could compromise the security of their operations - NGOs are still analysing what his law could mean for them.

Mohammad Hashim Mayar, a programme coordinator for ACBAR, an umbrella organisation, said that NGOs are reviewing the law. "There are some confusing parts in this law and after the NGOs finish their review they will propose a response to the ministry of planning."

(Institute for War and Peace Reporting)



# Hello to Myself and to

**Shailey Hingorani and Tonusree Basu**  
New Delhi

**B**USES thundered down Bhagwan Das Road as Delhi plunged into its customary evening chaos. But barely 200 metres away, through the nondescript gates of the National School of Drama (NSD), a small ball of innocent creativity was coming to life. Children from 12 states were feverishly getting ready for *Jashn-e-Bachpan*, a festival of plays. A larger-than-life puppet with a giant white face and flowing red robes greeted visitors. Posters, flowers, balloons, colour bursts, fairy lights, live bands and soirees set the mood for nine days of insouciance from October 29 to November 9.

Attired in tribal gear, a band of boys played a rhythmic beat on drums while an appreciative audience clapped. The chorus sung by enthusiastic little girls and boys on the steps of Abhimanch transported you to a world beyond stars... *Sitaron se Aage*.

Organised by *Sanskaar Rang Toli* (or the Theatre-in-Education Company), one of NSD's primary wings, this festival promoted children's theatre as a tool of education and entertainment. The festival showcased 12 plays from all over the country, including Bengal, Manipur, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.

The *Sanskaar Rang Toli* was established way back in 1989 and is an important educational resource centre. The first *Jashn-e-Bachpan* took place in November 1998 and has become an annual feature since.

The *Toli* consists of actor-teachers working with and performing for children. The *Toli* enacts plays relating to the topics, interests, psychology and language of children of specific ages. The plays are often related to school syllabi and are written, adapted, translated or even improvised. TIE works with various groups to help create space for theatre in curricula and extra-curricular activities for children.

Theatre-in-Education Company (TIE) had started *Bal Sangam* in year 2000. It was a cultural showcase of sorts where artistes from all regions of the country were invited to display their performing, visual or creative arts. Special stages and stalls were constructed for each folk group. Sadly, for want of funds, the *Bal Sangam* will now be held every other year.

"The plays, performed by adults and children, are chosen for the festival by a panel of experts on the basis of their appeal to children. Most of the plays staged are fun but have an underlying message for children," said N.K. Pant, coordinator, TIE.

NSD recognises the importance of theatre in developing a child's personality and skills.

"Theatre is therapy. It helps an individual to get in touch with his or her inner self. It accelerates the process of self-realisation. In the case of children, theatre plays an even

**Language wasn't a handicap. Plays in regional languages performed to packed houses. Theatre is all about movements, emotions, music, expressions and tone of voice. Language just makes the message more evident.**

greater role. It helps them create a world for themselves. They learn how to express their emotions and deal with them simultaneously," said Biswajit Biswas, one of the few adults in the *Santipur Rangapeeth* troupe from West Bengal.

Kuldeep Singh, a member of TIE and part of the cast of *Hello to Myself* believes that not just acting but any association with theatre—stage management, lighting, prop design—creates a great deal of confidence and creative stimulation for the individual.

Language wasn't a handicap. Plays in regional languages performed to packed houses. *Houdong Lamboida Amasung Pebet* in Manipuri, *Aakash Kachakachi* in Bengali, *Rama Ravanara Yudha* in Kannada, *Nilakootan* in Tamil attracted a well-heeled audience. "Theatre is all about movements, emotions, music, expressions and tone of voice. Language just makes the message more evident and easily conveyable, but theatre is more about the subtle nuances of acting rather than the spoken word," said one of the cast members of the Bengali play.

The first play of the festival 'Hello to Myself,' as in fact all the plays, did not have a fixed script. It evolved subtly, sequence by sequence. The play takes a humorous look at insecurities that grip today's youth. Suraj is a thirteen-year-old boy, who grapples with the fact that he isn't good looking, tall or strong, though he has other brilliant qualities. His younger sister Saloni is always upset about her dark complexion and thinks she would have been loved more had she been fairer.

The play examines their obsessive desires and how they break free. They finally say 'hello to myself.' "We are constantly trying to measure up to others, judge ourselves by standards that other people set. The play encourages youth to explore themselves," says Tripurari Sharma, director. 'Hello to Myself' is an interactive play where the audience joins in and helps the play move forward. Badrul Islam and

## Learning beyond the arc lights

**Shahana Chatterjee**  
Kolkata

**L**ET'S take a moment to play a word-association game. I give you a word and you have to respond with another inspired by it. There is only ground rule—be spontaneous. The word is 'theatre'.

Chances are that many of you will come up with 'stage', 'acting' or 'emotions'. There may even be some originals bending sharply off the beaten track. It is less likely, however (if not completely doubtful) that you might propose 'development', 'empowerment' or simpler still, 'change'. This is, by no means, an indictment of anyone's imagination but rather a reflection of dominant reality. Yet, theatre as a medium of social intervention, conscientisation and conflict resolution is no new phenomenon in India. Perhaps, the problem lies in the lack of a cohesive discipline encompassing the work of many, many groups and individuals who are using theatre as a vehicle to spread messages of social, educational, environmental or communal significance.

The Vidya project began with British funding in Ahmedabad in January 2001. Through an intensive process of research, recruitment and training, 16 slum dwellers from the city were formed into a theatre group. Their aim was to initiate dialogue and stimulate action for improving the status of girl children in urban slums. Through community, street and Forum (a radical interactive genre developed by celebrated Brazilian director, writer and theorist, Augusto Boal) theatre, Vidya actor-

activists have been investigating potential means of changing gender-biased acts and attitudes, as well as leading workshops with students and community groups.

Motivated by the immensely successful results of the project (despite enforced interruptions due to major disruptions in Gujarat), a series of workshops are being facilitated in India by Prof. Ralph Yarrow from the Drama Division of the University of East Anglia, UK along with John Martin, Artistic Director, Pan Centre for Intercultural Arts, UK.

With financial support from the UK Arts and Humanities Research Board, these workshops in Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Trivandrum and Trichur are seeking to bring together, on a common platform, teams and individuals doing similar work in various contexts.

**16 slum dwellers from Ahmedabad were formed into a theatre group. Their aim was to initiate dialogue and stimulate action for improving the status of girl children in urban slums.**

Recognising the need to unravel the somewhat enigmatic 'theatre for development' package, these workshops are encouraging practitioners to show and share their methodologies, report on current and proposed projects, and discuss key issues like funding and the potential for future collaborations in the area of training and exchange.

"The objective is to create a network of development theatre workers and provide them with an opportunity to interact with others who are also using drama as a communication tool," says Prof. Yarrow. Participants will be able to showcase their work through print and audio-visual documentations besides live demonstrations.

The Vidya group piloted by Project Leader Manisha Mehta are travelling to the workshop venues with presentations and performances. They are sharing their experiences, tribulations, achievements and future strategies. The intention is to create a congenial forum for contrasting, comparing and analysing the styles and parameters of various models of development theatre and their application in different regional and socio-economic milieus.

Theatre is an important, effective and vibrant device for social mobilisation. As an entertainment medium, boasting of a rich and varied popular culture in our country, theatre has the power to reach out to people both at an emotional as well as rational level.

It also has the flexibility to address and reflect specific and immediate realities unlike the centralised structures of most technological media and 'mainstream' development approaches. Beyond the arc lights, this 'alternative' show must go on.



# you and you and you!



Medha and Zoombish



Dablu Raja

Vibha Chibber played the lead roles.

The second day of *Jashn-e-Bachpan* opened to a Hindi play *Jaadu ka Suit*, performed by *Sampreshna Natya Manch*, a group from Katni, Madhya Pradesh. Performed with children, this play was about corruption and greed in the bureaucracy. It talks about people's preoccupation with "imported" goods, used here as a euphemism for a western culture and how a child makes them conscious about flaws in the system. Alakhnandan wrote the script.

The first language play of the festival was *Houdong Lamboida Amasung Pebet*, performed by the Manipuri Ensemble from Imphal. The story is about a wild cat that constantly disturbs the life of a little bird named Pebet, who lives with her chicks in the bush peacefully and happily. The cat chases the chicks hoping to devour them, but the wise mother soon teaches them tricks to escape the cat. In the end, the cat hounds one of the weak chicks. How Pebet helps the chick escape forms the climax of the play.

The *Sri Ramanand Saraswati Pustakalaya* group from Azamgarh, Uttar Pradesh, performed a Hindi play entitled *Saryu ki Dhar*. The thought provoking play talks about the ironies of war and how each battle, irrespective of who wins, leaves behind a trail of human tragedy and defeat.

*Aakash Kachakachi* performed by Santipur Rangpeeth is about a group of children who wait anxiously the whole day for the evening so that they can play on the terrace. Nobody knows the address of this terrace but it is their whole world, where they are free from scolding and beatings, where they can be on their own and truly touch the sky. The play evolves through interactions among the young performers till finally a convincing script emerges.

Prithvi Theatre staged *Medha and Zoombish*. This play takes the audience through the adventures of Medha alias Maddy the Baddy. She is visiting her grandfather in Vada Kanjeet where she meets an Adivasi boy, *Zoombish* and from there begins a whirlwind adventure.

*Rama Ravanara Yudha*, a play in Kannada, was full of action packed scenes. The children took an established script, the Ramayana, and turned it around. In their version, it is Ravana who wins. The play used a unique folk form



Houdong Lamboida Amasung Pebet, performed by Manipuri Ensemble, Imphal



Hello to Myself

**Prithvi Theatre staged Medha and Zoombish. This story is about the adventures of Medha alias Maddy the Baddy. She is visiting her grandfather in Vada Kanjeet where she meets an adivasi boy, Zoombish, and from there begins a whirlwind adventure.**

called *Bayalata*, which effectively lent itself to the simplicity and flow of children's language.

*Dabloo Raja*, a Hindi play staged by the *Yayavar Rangmandal* group from Lucknow was a play in a play. The story was about a boy who is rejected from a theatre workshop for not being talented enough and how he finally creates and directs a play of his own. The message is to have faith in oneself and the importance of teamwork.

Have you ever wanted to play with the moon? The princess in *Nilaakootam* definitely wanted to. So the king was told of his daughter's desire. He turned for help to the mathematician, museum keeper, and other sundry people in vain. In the end an imaginative court jester comes to his rescue. The play is based on James Durber's short story, "Many Moon".

*Kala Darpan* from New Delhi performed *Neeli Chhatri*, an adaptation of "The Blue Umbrella," a short story by Ruskin Bond. This play revolved around possessing a blue umbrella and the emotions and relationships of the possessor. The play message was about the importance of sharing, of being selfless and sensitive.

'Commerce in Theatre' covered topics from each subject of the commerce stream in Classes Eleven and Twelve. It showed how students find their subjects very boring. But one day they are taught through theatre. After that learning becomes fun. This play showed that mundane subjects like history, geography and commerce come alive through theatre.

Students from the Trimurti group in Jaipur enacted this play. The group consists of Class Eleven students from the commerce section of St Anselm's School, Jaipur. They attended theatre workshops and worked on social themes. These students rehearsed the play since March, along with their studies.

The theatre festival closed with *Hamari Kahani* performed by children from Literacy India, an NGO working for underprivileged children in Gurgaon. The story was an adaptation of a classical Sanskrit play, *Bhagwad Ajjukkam*. The play was performed for the first time in Rashtrapati Bhawan and is about a guru and shishya and the changes that a beautiful lady called *Vasant-Sena* brings into their lives.

*Jashn-e-Bachpan* was truly a celebration of childhood. The twist in the tale is that it was a huge classroom where everybody learnt something yet nobody thought they had been taught.



# A gentle lens on harsh reality

*Amirul Arham's documentaries get an international audience*

AS you enter this little apartment in Nosié, a suburb of Paris, you are surrounded by all things Bengali—a Tagore hymn plays softly on the stereo while a beautiful portrait of the poet in his flowing white beard hangs next to one of Bengal's greatest living poets, Shamsur Rahman. Shelves lined with works of writers across the Bengali divide, fill the room. The kitchen door opens and the aroma of Khitchri and Chingri saag wafts in, accompanied by the owner.

The image of Amirul Arham one carries even after a cursory meeting is of his infectious, open-mouthed laugh with which he peppers his conversation. It also betrays the bon vivant that lurks beneath this concerned humanitarian who has chosen documentary film-making as his medium or "language of work." He could have very well opted for poetry or theatre to awaken and enlighten his audience.

His journey of 48 years has taken him from Kolkata to Paris via Dhaka. Like so many enlightened young men in the early 70s, Arham expressed himself through the Naxalite movement. Before he could settle down to his biology courses at Presidency College he was black-listed by the police and his family thought it safer to ship him to Bangladesh where he continued his studies at Dhaka University—this time wooed into the world of Bengali literature.

His boundless enthusiasm and energy found guidance under great teachers that included Abdullah Abu Sayeed (winner of The 2004 Ramon Magsaysay Award for Journalism, Literature, and Creative Communication Arts) and professor Ahmed Sharif. He became a founder member of Bisho Shahitto Kendro or the World Literature Society that has done so much to enlighten Bengal's populace.

Once he decided on filmmaking, Paris was a short step away. He studied under the famous French filmmaker Jean Rouch, considered the father of cinema vérité, in the mid-eighties. For his Masters' thesis in socio-linguistics at the Sorbonne University he chose "The forgetting of the mother-tongue." That is probably why he makes sure that Bengali is not forgotten in his household, or by his two French-born sons.

Author of a sizable body of work, it was "A Banker for the Poor" based on the life and work of Dr. Mohammad Yunus, the founder of Grameen Bank that pushed him to prominence in 2000. Ironically this film won the first

prize in the International Environment Film festival in Niamey, Nigeria in September 2004 just four months after Jean Rouch died in the same city in a car crash. Then came "Lost Souls of Bangladesh" about over 250,000 abandoned Bihari refugees in Dhaka living for 30 years in a camp, forgotten by their motherland, Pakistan and by the world at large. This touching film was received with such



Amirul Arham with Ustad Sayeeduddin Dagar, whose music will be included in "Arsenic—Devil's Water".

**Amirul's film *Arsenic - Devil's Water* focuses on the worst epidemic ever to face the rural population of Bengal, Bihar and Nepal.**

critical acclaim that even before completing his current project "Arsenic—Devil's Water," focusing on the worst epidemic ever to face the rural population of Bengal, Bihar and Nepal. Arham has all the European televisions from TV5 and France 3 to RVU (The Netherlands), RAI 3 (Italy) to RTBF (Belgium) flocking to pre-purchase the film. Quite an honour for the rebel who in his youth had to escape across the Bengal border to save his life.

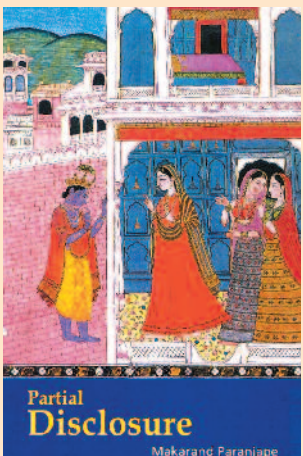
His choice of subjects and his style of working are different from most. His profound empathy for the down-trodden and the wretched goes back to his Naxalite days. Only now, his medium has changed. He spends years researching and 'marinating' a subject before beginning the filming process. In a world of easy compromise he does not yield a millimetre where his work is concerned—

a fact, which hasn't made it easy for him to work as a foreigner in France, nor in Bangladesh. His first feature film "Eviction" was stopped halfway in 1997 when Bangladeshi big-wigs realised that it did not show them in a positive light, even though it was being co-produced by the French government, German television WDR, Italian TV and Bangladesh. That was a major disappointment - specially when he couldn't find a single person of influence to help his cause - but not enough to deter this indefatigable man who is now preparing his second feature film venture "Prattabartan" - The Return, to be shot in France and Bangladesh. Arham always writes his own scripts.

Most of Arham's friends are so familiar with the big delicious Bengali lunches he dishes out for dozens of guests several times a month and his ubiquitous presence at every social and cultural event, that they cannot believe his professional output can be so wide. Far from being a gentleman of leisure, Arham shares time as a full time father and husband, a poet, a writer, a social activist and a cultural advisor to the Mayor of his township. A good Samaritan, his is the number to remember should you ever need help in Paris. Countless Bengalis and other humans have found help as have the characters in his films. Najma and Asma, victims of arsenic poisoning whom we see in his documentary along with nine others are now in hospital in Dhaka thanks to Arham. He is linked with several organizations that regularly channel medicine and other aid from France to Bangladesh.

All this, of course, in between working on his primary passion, making films. He is a regular invitee at the Cannes Film Festival and often on the Jury these days. His works-in-progress include life sketches of the poet Shamsur Rahman and the renowned Paris-based painter, Shahabuddin. Also on the anvil are, 'What is Democracy' and 'Tobacco in the Third World'. Arham has a lot to say and the world will be compelled to hear and see, wherever he points his lens.

## Finding love in Karol Bagh



Partial Disclosure  
Makarand Paranjape  
Mantra Books; Rs 150

**Manisha Sobhrajani**  
New Delhi

*You were the stingiest girlfriend I had.  
Whenever we went out, you said,  
Almost as if you were doing me a favour,  
"Next time, it's my treat."  
Needless to say, the next time never came.*  
"Jewel Box"

**P**ARTIAL Disclosure is a collection of love poems by Makarand Paranjape. This is his fourth book of poetry but it's the very first book a new publishing imprint called Mantra is bringing out.

The book was released by UR Anantha Murthy, fellow, Sahitya Akademi and winner of the Jnanpith Award, at the launch event organised by Mantra and the Poetry Society

of India. The release was followed by a panel discussion chaired by Ashis Nandy.

The book is divided into three sections. Love is the subject, whether as passion or piety. Makarand's poems remind us that amour is primarily a sadhana, a discipline. While spirituality and sexuality are closely related, the key question here is: how to turn the one into the other?

Commenting on Makarand's work, professor Malashri Lal said, "There is a certain play with the language. In his poems, urban sophistication merges with the cityscape and one finds love in Karol Bagh! The poems speak to the human geography of the times before e-mails and metro rails."

It is interesting to note that some poems in Partial Disclosure are thematically paired.

If there is "The Awaited Letter" there is also "The Reply". "What She Taught Him" has a corresponding "What He Learned from Her." While some of the poems from the collection have appeared in poetry journals before, there is one that was written instantly in response to a challenge. It is called "Flying".

Paranjape has authored three collections of poetry previously—The Serene Flame, Playing the Dark God and Used Book. The poet is currently teaches English at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. He has also published a collection of short stories—This Time I Promise It'll Be Different, and a novel—The Narrator. He is also the founding editor of an international journal called Evam: Forum on Indian Representations.

Summing up the evening, Ashis Nandy said we were living in a time when only English can carry the load of our imagination.



# Arun Maira: A man you can talk to

UMESH ANAND

LIKE those ever-optimistic scientists in search of friendly extraterrestrial intelligence, we at *Civil Society* keep a special antenna up for receiving voices from amidst Indian business and industry. In recent months we found a certain Arun Maira coming through loud and clear on several occasions. Incredibly, planet Maira used a language very similar to ours. It wasn't the customary babble from the competing solar systems of CII and FICCI. Initial evidence seemed to suggest that Maira was a CII star, but location apart there were no real similarities. Our signals drew an immediate and extremely warm response. Maira wanted to establish contact. Further investigations on our part revealed a self-contained individual, by looser definition a planet, with highly mobile and exploratory behaviour. Maira's mission, we learnt, was to establish inter-galactic harmony.

Our offering to Maira was the back issues of *Civil Society*. His to us was his new book: *The Remaking of India*. We suggest you read it. It comes from the publishing house Sage and is priced at Rs 295.

In times marked by mistrust and antagonisms, *The Remaking of India* talks of the need for dialogue and understanding. It calls for inclusive development so that all levels of the economy are heard and catered to. Growth as defined by GDP figures alone may be no growth at all because grassroots realities get glossed over by economists sitting in cities.

For prosperity to be meaningful it has to be bottom-up. So it is important for government and industry to be willing to connect with people's movements and gauge local problems and aspirations. It is essential to find local solutions.

Maira heads the Boston Consulting Group in India. He makes a living out of advising companies on how to reinvent themselves and do business better. He clearly believes that industry has a role to play way beyond the limited objective of making profits.

The record of Indian industry is of course quite the opposite. Available evidence suggests that Indian industry is happy with a captive media and some politicians in the bag so as to shape policy to its advantage. Maira believes change can come. What are needed are WMDs: weapons of mass dialogue to bring governments, social activists and industry together.

## Why do you want to remake India?

The title is the publisher's choice. We have to rethink the approach we are taking to bring about the India we want, the outcomes we desire. So that is the perspective of the book. It is necessary to rethink because the approach we have used so far has not produced sufficient benefits to the masses. The last elections woke us up. There was recognition among certain quarters of India's progress, but the shine was just a gloss, not a light from within. There were two Indias all along. I was in the US when the election results were announced. Nobody expected the outcome. People like us are just not connected with the country at all. Industry leaders were dismayed, there was talk about privatisation being stopped about the PSU disinvestments...but what we really have is a problem of PLU (People Like Us).

## So there is a secession of the elite?

Yes. One part of the country has gotten isolated from the other. And it's also associated with an economic model built over time: a top-down, trickle-down model, which says that investment is what's required to produce development. I believe development is more for people. We need more democracy, better communication between the elite and poor about disparities.

We need to develop a new model that is not top down, though that has some desirable elements, but only in a certain context, which does not exist today. We can



Arun Maira at the launch of his book *The Remaking of India* at the Habitat Centre

include socialist elements, the communists ...

## You speak of an inclusive model of development. What is the process?

A dialogue process with societal learning. Dialogue can create change through the rapid evolution of ideas. Development has to include many more voices for practical reasons and for value. Every person has the right to be heard. By listening to people who don't think like you—they have a right to their point of view—learning becomes a tool of dialogue.

From a practical angle, to understand a complex system, you need to see it from many angles—from the economic, social and political perspectives of different people all woven together. Many more people must be involved for an accurate model. Politicians keep getting elected but the economy doesn't necessarily work.

It's not speaking as much as listening which is important, especially listening to people who don't think like you, who have a different ideology. That's where dialogue begins.

## Where does this process begin? The country is run by politicians and businessmen who control the levers of power. CII and FICCI rarely go beyond espousing the short-term gains of industry. Politicians look at their own short-term needs. The only glimmer of hope seems to be Sonia Gandhi and the NAC.

I came back to this country in 2000. I found you had to be with the fashion otherwise you weren't invited into the discussions. And the fashion here was to talk about shareholder value, how your stock prices were going, the clothes you were wearing...these weren't the fashions when I left.

But by outright confrontation I think NGOs are making a mistake. In the last three years I have heard Aruna Roy, Vandana Shiva and I can feel their frustration when they are not heard. You are then compelled to be strident and then begin to appear narrow and unreasonable. People on the moderate side classify you and don't hear you. We need to improve in the way we listen and talk to each other and work together.

I did feel in my interactions business people were more polite at listening to social activists. The social activists were not polite at all. There is a tendency to

demonise, to stereotype the other.

## How do you plan to move forward?

There is hope. I have spent more time with the establishment. All of us are trapped by the current structures. Industry has to respond to pressures... It is up to us in business to invite others to criticise us and for us to suggest what the pressures on us are and build a model, take initiatives. We want to be judged by larger society.

## By building trust?

By opening ourselves to accountability.

## You want a dialogue with civil society organisations.

### What are the key areas you will look at?

The first would be the role of industry, government and civil society — what each should be accountable for, measured by. The second is education, to prepare people to find themselves and earn incomes. The third area is water, including privatisation.

## There are issues on which NGOs have strong views. Like river linking and pollution.

But don't brand industry as one voice. You will find many people with very different views among themselves either because the nature of their business is different or they are just different people. I don't want to brand people. We have to listen to people as they are in themselves.

For the first round of dialogue we want to have people who are willing to open up but who, back in their community, will be listened to.

## What is your starting point?

There are already tiny seeds. I call this the fireflies aspect. Enable change leaders or pilots to get noticed so that others can learn from them. Propagate their ideas and build a movement. Prevent them from being blasted away and help them become confident. People should feel they are capable of making change in the world around them.

For both value and practical reasons fireflies are capable of creating change around them. There are many models of development done by diverse people who can alter their own areas.

LAKSHMAN ANAND



# A Malayali in Moonland

MURLI MENON

THE name, Moonland tourist bungalow, my home at Leh for three weeks, summed up the landscape — large tracts of barren land, craggy rocks and mountains. A chilly morning greeted me. Endless cups of warm black tea, prepared by Mohammed Rasool, the caretaker of the JKTDC tourist bungalow, was the nectar I needed during my stay in Ladakh.

I kept insisting I was a vegetarian and did not consume milk or milk products. The Ladakhi's immediate question was, "Are you an Aryan?" When I replied I was from Kerala, Rasool told me that on the border between Leh and Kargil, there were a handful of villages where Aryans called the Brok-Pa lived. They did not rear cows or hens or consume milk. Neither did they eat eggs, fish or meat. As these villages were surrounded by barren hills and at heights of over 15,000 feet, very few outsiders visited the Brok-Pa.

I decided to spend a week studying the secret lives of the Aryans. My destinations were the villages of Dah and Beema in Leh district and Garkun and Darchik in Kargil district.

We started our jeep safari at 7:00 am. The 130 km seven-hour drive over rugged terrain took us through the villages of Khalatse, Dumkhar, Skurbuchan, Achinathang and Hanuthang. We crossed several high peaks before reaching Beema, located at 14,350 feet.

The first glimpse of the Indus resembled a speck of light blue amid sand dunes, rocks and stone. The ice cold bath in the turbulent waters of this river calmed my body, mind and soul. The tranquillity experienced while meditating on a bed of round pebbles near the banks of the Indus cannot be described in words.

A group of women checked my bags as I got down from my vehicle. There is a self-imposed prohibition in these villages. The sarpanch had authorised the women to ensure no alcohol was brought from Leh by locals, tourists or outsiders. After frisking my bag thoroughly the three women, resembling Greek Goddesses, let me enter the PWD guest-house. Here I met my first Aryan, Sonam Thondup the *chowkidar*. He knew a smattering of Hindi. Through sign language, body language, eye movements and facial expressions, I tried to create rapport with this hostile Aryan, who told me, in no uncertain terms, that my visit to Dah was not welcome. I was the only occupant of the PWD guest-house. I handed over my inner line permit and letter from the collector Satish Nehru, to Thondup. He reluctantly gave me the keys. The PWD guest-house at Beema is located on the banks of the Indus. The gurgling sound of the river was soothing music to my ears.

The next morning, I was summoned to the sarpanch's house for a purification ritual. I had to trek 10 km over mountain streams, rocks and stones to reach his house. Thondup sent two tough looking escorts. It took us almost two hours to reach Laisthiang — the sarpanch's village. Walnut and apricot trees stretched across the horizon and the fields were full of grain. I later found out that the staple food of the Aryans was barley, grown on terraced fields and irrigated by mountain streams. The ascent was steep and the altitude nearly 17,000 feet. I kept drinking lots of natural mineral water from the countless streams that criss-crossed our way.

We reached the hut of the sarpanch atop a hill. Women peeled apricots in his garden. Some of them were breaking apricot seeds to remove almonds. Hundreds of fresh walnuts lay on the floor. I resisted the impulse to pick up some.

Two old women came out of the hut with burning roots of an unidentified tree in their hands (I later learnt it was a juniper tree). I chanted the gayatri mantra silently. I was about to experience the cleansing ritual of the Aryans. This was mandatory for all outsiders who entered their village. The old women, started chanting in unison and the eldest one

brought the juniper smoke close to my face and symbolically waved it across my body.

Later I met the sarpanch, Angmo. His wife poured me a cup of black tea, which I relished. Angmo put some barley flour in my tea. I told them about my being a strict vegetarian and that I wanted to know more about their food habits, music, dance and culture. The NLP had begun to work. The sarpanch issued instructions to my escort to take me to all the neighbouring villages and introduce me to the orthodox Aryans.

About 1000 descendants of these Aryans, whose history can be traced back 5000 years, still live around Gilgit, Hunza, Kargil and Leh. They are nature worshippers and celebrate the Bononah or Nature Festival. They worship the juniper tree (*Cilgi Deuha*). Two 500-year-old Juniper trees crown the village of Dah, which is the venue of the Bononah festival, held on a full moon night in October once every three years. The Aryans draw energy from these ancient Juniper trees by hugging them after a ceremonial dance.

This minuscule community bars marriage to non-Aryans to maintain their racial purity. Polygamy and polyandry is common. Couples who do not conceive are free to choose other partners. About 80% of Aryans marry within their villages while 20% choose a mate from neighbouring villages.



**About 1000 descendants of these Aryans, whose history can be traced back 5000 years, still live around Gilgit, Hunza, Kargil and Leh. They are nature worshippers and celebrate the Bononah or Nature Festival. They worship the juniper tree (*Cilgi Deuha*). Two 500-year-old Juniper trees crown the village of Dah.**

In the wee hours of the morning I trekked three hours to Dah to visit the sacred juniper groves. My escort was Tsewang Nurbu. It was a dangerous trek. We crossed craggy peaks, hanging on to tiny crevices for support. We could hear sounds of gunfire across the Indo-POK border. I chanted continuously throughout this hair-raising experience.

We reached the ancient juniper trees by noon. I hugged the trees to soak in their energy.

The energy aura of these trees was phenomenal. The Brok-Pa worship trees and observe a strict taboo against tree felling. I then visited a few elderly Aryans. I shared a meal with these humble villagers. It consisted of jo (barley) rotis baked in an earthen oven, lettuce leaves, roasted potatoes, spring onions, boiled cauliflower and wild mint. Women cooked in an open hearth, burning fallen twigs, collected from the trees in their courtyard. The simple meal was fresh and tasty. We serve a similar raw diet at our ZeNLP based corporate stress management workshops.

There is an unusually large number of Brok-Pa above the age of 70. Many elderly Aryans are active even at the age of 90. The most striking feature of these people is their looks. Their blue eyes, aristocratic noses, round eyes, fair complexion and flawless skin make them ethnically distinct from Ladakhis or Kashmiris. The Brok-Pa have

restricted their contact with the outside world and are happy with their isolated existence. Married women braid their hair, which makes them look Greek.

One of the most fascinating aspects of the Brok-Pa is a belief in prophecies and recording of dreams. Most elderly members meet in the morning at the juniper grove and discuss their dreams as if nature was communicating to them.

In ZeNLP terms, the Brok-Pa programme their body through exercise, mind through music and soul through prayer. Their way of life is in harmony with nature and could explain the survival of this minuscule community, living in a Himalayan Shangri-La practising their ancient religion over centuries of isolation.

Murli Menon, is a stress management consultant based at Ahmedabad.

E-mail: zenlp@rediffmail.com

Footnote: NLP: Neuro linguistic programming. ZeNLP: Zen neuro linguistic programming.