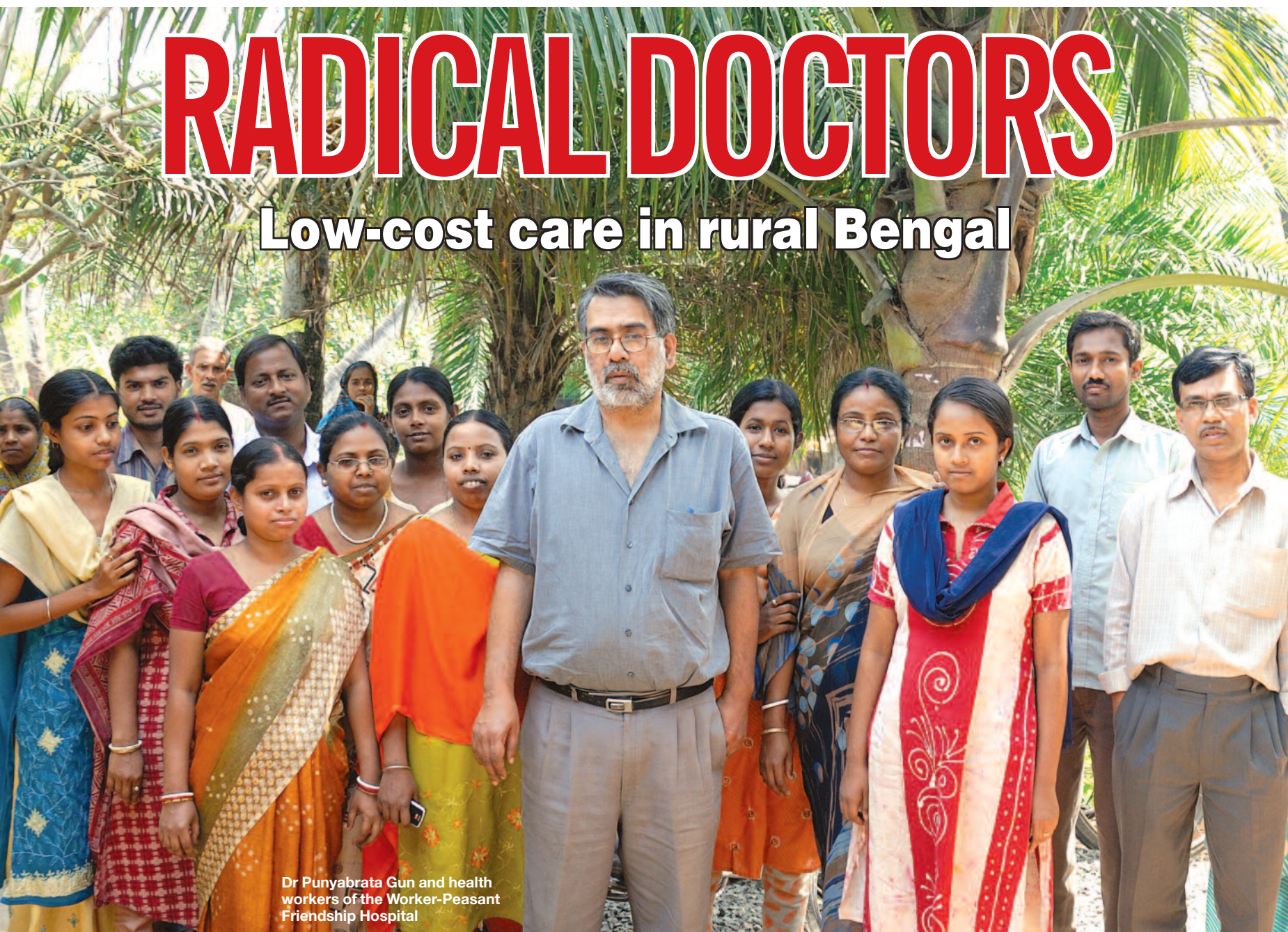


# Civil Society

## RADICAL DOCTORS

Low-cost care in rural Bengal



Dr Punyabrata Gun and health workers of the Worker-Peasant Friendship Hospital



### 'UID IS ABOUT ACCESS WITH MOBILITY'

The number will give people an identity which they can use across the country

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### RURAL HEALTH MISSION REVIEWED

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### SONIA'S NAC 2 IS HERE

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### WHY ABBA BECAME AN ACTIVIST

Pages 31-32

## Not in good health

**R**EVERSING six decades of neglect is not easy, but the state of public health care in India, particularly in the rural areas, should be a reason for all of us to feel embarrassed and concerned. A mid-term review of the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) confirms that not enough is being done. Infrastructure is inadequate, doctors aren't on duty and equipment hasn't been bought. The NRHM is a flagship programme of the Congress government at the Centre. Its implementation depends greatly on the states. But the failure to deliver has implications for everyone. Healthy people are needed to make an economy strong and competitive.

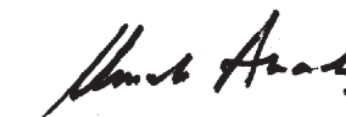
The mid-term appraisal has been conducted by The Earth Institute at Columbia University with Prof Nirupam Bajpai in the lead. We caught up with Prof Bajpai for a rather long breakfast meeting in Mumbai where he talked in some detail about NRHM and Dr Manmohan Singh's keen interest in the programme.

It is not as though there have been no achievements under NRHM. For instance, health workers are in place for a great many villages and that is a really huge step forward. Read our cover story, Reaching Mothers, published in December 2009, to understand the difference these health workers can make. Thanks to them, women are turning up at health centres for deliveries, which means there are expectations which will have to be met sooner or later. NRHM can be credited with having created a demand for institutionalised health care.

There is also more money which has been freed up for rural health care together with the freedom to use it at the local level. Better processes are needed so that doctors feel emboldened to buy what they need, but a beginning has been made. Similarly, the states have begun innovating. There are lessons to be learnt from Rajasthan, Assam and elsewhere. Also, panchayats have got their first taste of being empowered to monitor health care.

There is no doubt that the government needs to spend much more on public health care. How quickly it will do so is the question because time is running out. We also need to ask ourselves whether the investments made in private health care actually serve a national purpose. Or are these private investments creating dissonances that actually erode the foundations of a public health care system. Private hospitals that are coming up are unaccountable and geared to making entrepreneurs and some doctors very rich. They are tuned to stock market valuations. We need to ask ourselves how good this is for us when the deficit in health care is at scary levels.

NRHM can't flourish in isolation. It needs a national framework of priorities. It is important to assess whether public-private partnerships are working to the benefit of everyone. Or whether they should be restructured as part of an inclusive national effort, involving the rural surgeons' movement and the kind of doctors we have featured in our cover story this month.




COVER STORY

### RADICAL DOCTORS

A quiet movement in health care is unfolding in rural West Bengal. The Worker- Peasant Friendship Hospital, for instance, shows how to provide quality low-cost care.

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# Smiles that tell a thousand tales!

In our operations, we are blessed to bond with some very special people. People not daunted by odds, but with the passion and perseverance to overcome them. In doing so, they allow us to work with them to support livelihood generation and environment protection, to create education and health infrastructure.

Above all, they help us fulfill our goal to be a committed corporate citizen. True to the tradition of the Tata Group.

Mr. Sujit Soren of Gopalpur village in East Singhbhum district of Jharkhand. He was the first in the village to adopt water conservation techniques of the Gram Vikas Kendra society of Tata Motors. Today, the village boasts of perennial irrigation for about 100 acres and about 10,000 fruit and timber generating trees.

Mrs. Rohini Bhanudas Wadekar of Pune in Maharashtra. A widow with three children, she was trained to become self-dependent with technical skills by Tata Motors' Grihini Social Welfare Society.



Mr. Jowahar Ram Paswan of Baranimdih Mohalla of Chaibasa district in Jharkhand. Today, he is an employee of Nav Jagrat Manav Samaj. It became possible when the Nav Jagrat Manav Samaj, supported by Tata Motors, intervened to manage his leprosy and found him a job with a permanent income. Today, Mr. Paswan intervenes to bring comfort to others.

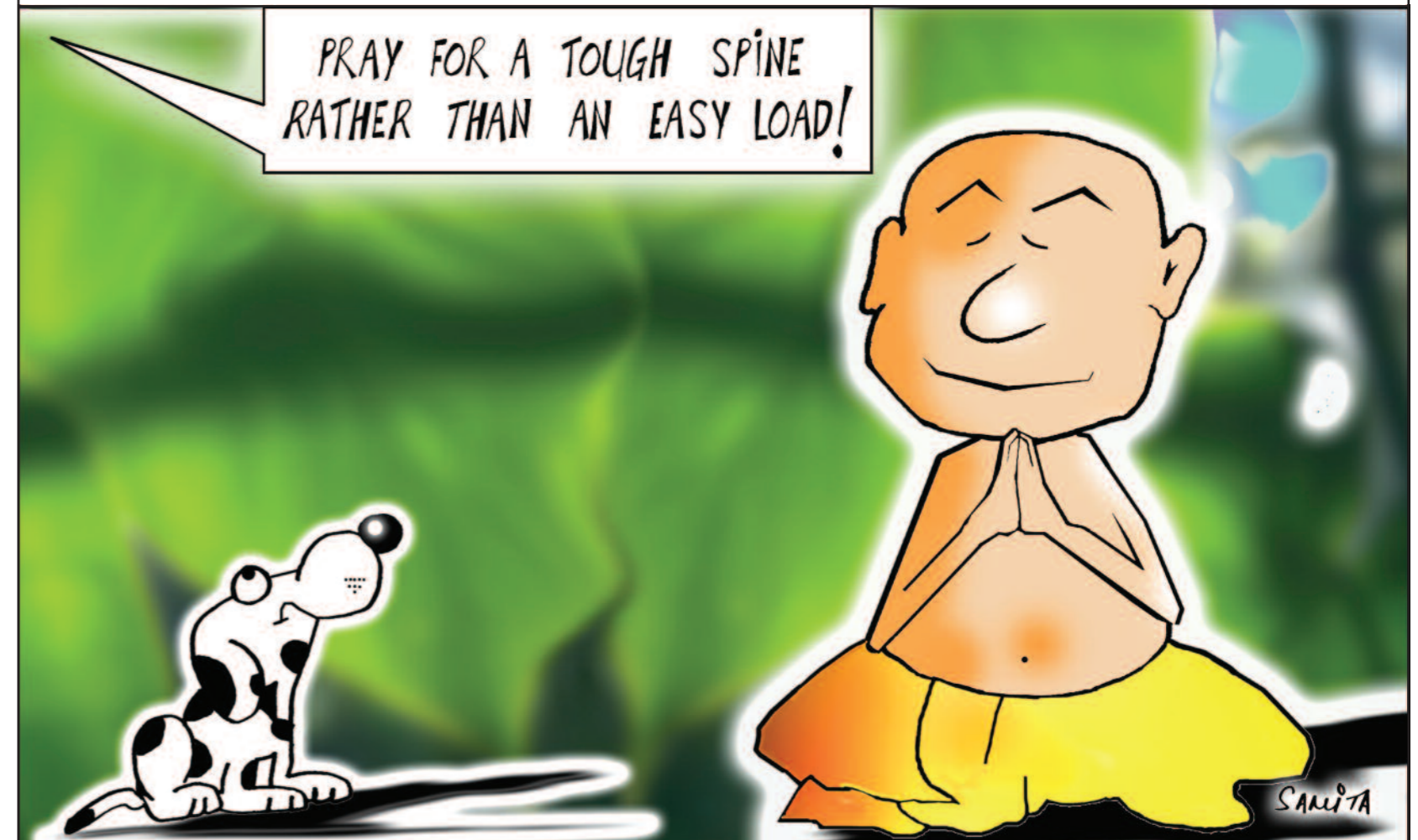
Mr. Man Singh Murmu of Baijnathdih village in East Singhbhum district of Jharkhand. With mostly infertile land holdings, Mr. Murmu and other residents found meeting both ends difficult. Tata Motors helped him lead change by beginning a tree plantation drive. Today, Baijnathdih has a forest of income-generating trees, and a Forest Protection Group to nurture its economic turnaround.

Mr. Vinod Pachpute of Shelu village in Pune district of Maharashtra. A diploma holder in mechanical engineering, he is also a trustee and an alumni of the Bhamchandra High School in the village – the only one in the vicinity covering seven villages. Tata Motors helped set up the school and continues to support it. About 600 students have passed through its portals till date.

Tata Motors' Sustainability Programme. Striving for Sustainable Change.

### IN THE LIGHT

by SAMITA RATHOR



### LETTERS



#### Theatre

I read your cover story, 'South Asia bonds on stage' from cover to cover. I did not know that this festival was happening otherwise I would definitely have loved to see some of the plays. The good thing was that groups from Maldives, Bhutan and Burma were present. We get to see very little of their culture. Everything revolves around Pakistan. India should highlight

other countries in the South Asian region.  
**Asha Bakshi**

All art forms, cinema and theatre included, depict social situations. All great stories too are about society. But though your cover story was interesting you failed to tell readers about how these plays were reflecting the social issues of those countries.  
**Greta Singh**

Your cover story this time was lively and not too heavy. Generally, I read your magazine through the month, one story at a time. But this time the cover story was breezy and an easy read.  
**Shantha**

I went to the South Asia theatre festival and saw some of the plays. Language was an issue. The auditorium I went to needed renovation. The problem is theatre does not attract money as yet. It needs to be marketed much better. Look at the money that is spent on promoting banal mainstream movies. If young slightly known film actors do a bit of theatre, which is more of a challenge, it will attract more money. And improve their skills.  
**Shekhar K Singh**

#### World Bank

Good to know the mighty World Bank will have a right to information policy. A lot of researchers will want to delve into their information records to find out about development projects which caused dislocation and destruction. I hope a few scandals come to light.  
**Arbind**

I want to know if I can access information about a project going on in another country in South Asia from the World Bank. Will there be one right to information website with information available from all countries the World Bank is working in? Will it have archival material posted on it?  
**Lalita Mukherji**

#### Urban power

With respect to V Ravichandar's piece, 'Empower the city' I would like to say no government likes to give power to the grassroots. Whether it is panchayats, or gram sabhas, or corporations or wards, money and power continue to be vested with people at the top. People will have to vote out governments which don't devolve power before any change takes place. Or we have to take to the streets.  
**Suresh Santhanam**

#### Indian cities

It is true our cities are changing very fast. Old and beautiful architecture is being destroyed and replaced by hideous stuff. We seem to have lost all aesthetic sense. Before a project for the people is constructed, its design should be put on display so citizens can vote on it. That, of course, is never done. After all, we may have cheaper and more artistic options which contractors addicted to concrete won't like.  
**Ashok Lal**

#### Soul Value

Thanks Samita for demystifying what the Bhagavad Gita says about achieving peace within. In the old days they had war, in the conventional way. These days every day is a battle. I guess it's important to find a little time for your self to relax and do yoga.  
**Shikha Dwivedi**

You are right about work and play. In childhood we were taught, work while you work, and play while you play.  
**Bharati Asher**

# 'UID is about inclusion'

*The number will give choice, mobility and access*

Civil Society News  
New Delhi

It is 9.30 in the morning and the office of the Unique Identification Authority is alive with activity. There is the buzz of a start up here with Nilekani more in the mode of a CEO than the director of a government agency. The UID project is quietly getting off the ground with pilots in three states. The first numbers will rollout in February 2011.

Nilekani has been busy travelling across the country, talking to chief ministers, being an evangelist for the UID project. The response of chief ministers and various government departments has been positive. Everybody is on board.

The big question is how will an identification number help those who have been left out of the system like the homeless, migrant workers and nomads, living on the margins of society, and how will it seamlessly deliver their entitlements.

The UID project has immense possibilities. It can be used to plug leakages, stem corruption and mainstream the poor. It could radically change the face of rural India. Inclusion will rely on making sure everybody has numbers – a UID number, a phone number and a bank account number. "It's the door that opens other doors," said Nilekani in an interview to *Civil Society*.

## Which states will the UID project begin with?

Its premature to say but as part of this rollout plan I have visited all the states. I have met people in government and most of the chief ministers. There is a lot of enthusiasm. We are signing MoUs with different states. We have signed the first MoU with Madhya Pradesh. We are also doing pilots in three states. The pilots are not actually issuing numbers but testing individual components of enrollment such as how long it takes to capture fingerprints, quality issues, how long it takes to capture the iris, what is the quality of documentation people have, you know, just to debug these issues.

## Where is this happening?

Well, Andhra is one of them. We are actually moving on several fronts so it will be difficult to predict which will be the first states.

## Would your focus be on the poorest districts first?

Absolutely. The purpose of this programme is very clear. It is about inclusion. It is about the fact that there are a few hundred million people in this country who don't have any form of identity, who don't have a birth certificate, who don't have a school certificate, 75 million homeless people... they are the ones who are suffering due to lack of identity because identity is required for everything, to get a BPL card, to get an LPG cylinder, a mobile phone, a bank account. We want to work with



Nandan Nilekani

**'The purpose is very clear. It is about the fact that there are a few hundred million people who don't have any form of identity.'**

NREGA, through the PDS, the pension system for widows, old age, for disability, the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana... so absolutely the idea is to use this to provide inclusive growth or opportunities to people who are not part of any system right now. The focus is to help the underprivileged, the marginalised and those will be the priority for enrollment.

## Some states already have devices like smart cards. Bihar, for instance. What happens to those when the UID number comes?

Ultimately, its upto states. But I think everybody is realising that once they have a single system of national verification it makes more sense to use that. The advantage of national verification is that it is all online, its all real time, you don't need a card, just a thumb or finger, it has mobility being a national number, so tomorrow if a migrant goes from Bihar to Delhi or Mumbai, he can still use his

number.

The advantages of the UID are becoming more and more apparent to states and over time they will realise that rather than get into creating silos of data you can just use this for authentication.

## How long do you think this process of the UID will take?

It will take many, many years. We are saying in the next five years we will do about 600 million. As we approach the last two or three hundred million, it will become slower.

## How have states reacted?

Positively. The states have multiple benefits from UID, to address leakages in the system. We have all heard these stories about duplicate ration cards, the ghost ration cards. There are states where the number of ration cards exceeds the population. If you want to make that more efficient, then UID is a good part.

Secondly, the UID helps in the verification process. If everybody has a UID the verification costs go down. Thirdly, states can now really become inclusive because with the UIDs, and once we make sure that the poor and underprivileged have UIDs, it will be that much easier for them to come into the system. Today what happens in our system is that we have this Type One and Type Two problem. Type One is there are people in the list of BPL who need not be there, they have money. Type Two is that people who are really poor are not in the BPL category. So we think we can address both

problems. The UID will also help in tax collections. It has multiple benefits for state governments.

We are not getting into the decision of who is BPL. We are giving everybody a number. Certainly it will help in inclusion, those who have no form of identity. Who the people are on the BPL list, whether state governments feel they should be there or not, it is for them to decide. Essentially today BPL becomes the status for deciding entitlements. When we have the UID we can make sure the really poor become part of the system. As to whom we want to exclude, that is a political choice the state exerts. We are not the people to decide that.

## How will you reach the homeless, migrant labour and nomads?

They will get high priority. We will have an outreach programme. For example, if there is an NGO for the homeless, we will work with them. If there is an NGO for the differently abled we will work with them, similarly for urban migrants. That's the whole purpose of the project, to get the marginalised, underprivileged, disenfranchised, into the system.

This is a massive project for which everybody has to contribute. Where the state government's machinery is there, and it is massive, we will use that. Where NGOs can act as outreach partners we will work with them. We'll bring the NGOs and the government together. We have a person in our team whose only job is civil society outreach coordination.

## How will UID help people to get food entitlements from the PDS?

It does not do it by itself. But, for example, in the PDS, if the state government decides that the PDS system will have the UIDs of everybody, that means there will be a family PDS card, say with four family members so with four UID numbers. One, it will eliminate duplicates, secondly it eliminates ghosts and that itself will reduce diversion and misuse.

Once the poor have UIDs it will be easier to give them ration cards so you can be more inclusive. You can do UID authentication at the point of service delivery, at the fair price shop, so you can make sure that only the beneficiary is claiming his entitlement of rice and wheat. And to take that further you can say that allocation to the state will be done on the basis of withdrawals based on UIDs. So if a state says it should get 10 million tonnes of wheat, then we should be able to show that 10 million tonnes of wheat is going to 25 million families of four and here are the UIDs. So this is a demand driven approach.

Right now if the beneficiary is allotted only one fair price shop and if the shop says I don't have stocks, he has to go home. Once you have UID based identification, he can go to any fair price shop. He gets choice. That empowers people.

Now we (at the UID Authority) can't do all this. But we are giving you a handle around which you can build all of this.

## What about NREGA?

Whether states use UIDs for NREGA is their decision. But at base level you can have UID-enabled bank accounts and you can have a chain of business correspondents. So the money can be put

into the worker's bank account and he can go to any business correspondent, authenticate himself (with a finger print reader) and withdraw his money. Money transmission can be made more convenient and only the genuine person can withdraw the money.

These are vertical applications. PDS is one, NREGA is another. So is old age pension. We are going to give the UID which is a horizontal platform for authentication. And we are going to work with the financial sector to give a financial inclusion platform based on UID which allows people to open accounts and send money easily across the country. Once you have these horizontal infrastructure components, then they can bring the vertical applications.

**In the Indira years the slogan was *garibi hatao*. Then it was *roti, kapda makaan*. In the last few years, it was *bijli, sadak, pani*. This is about UID number, mobile number and bank account number... all tools of empowerment.**

## How have banks reacted to this idea?

Very well. We have had meetings with RBI, the ministry of finance... in fact everybody is on board. We are coming out with our UID and microfinance white paper. The banking system will open a chain of business correspondents. Only six per cent of Indian villages have bank branches out of six hundred thousand villages, some thing like 30,000 villages have bank branches. The government has made a commitment that by March 2012, they will have a business correspondent in very village with a population of more than 2000. We have to extend business correspondents to 65,000 villages in the next two years. So we are aligning our UID rollout with the commitment of the Government of India and the budget speech.

## This will bring down transaction costs?

It will lower costs in the system. In the Indira years the slogan was *garibi hatao*. Then it was *roti, kapda makaan*. In the last few years, it was *bijli, sadak, pani*. This is about UID number, mobile number and bank account number. All three are numbers. If we are able to reach a UID number to everyone, if we can give everyone an account and if we are able to give them a mobile phone, then those are all tools of empowerment.

So we are working very closely with the mobile industry. They tell us they are already at 500 million subscribers, or 400 million individuals, since people have multiple cards. They feel they will go up to 800 million subscribers in the next 36 months. I mean that is fantastic news. We will work with them for if every person can be given a UID num-

ber, a bank account and a mobile phone, then they can be part of the system, of society.

In the Janani Suraksha Yojana, for instance, there are 10 million women supposed to be getting this cash transfer. We think by using our approach, you can have an account for them and then it is just a question of remitting the money electronically to their account and sending them an SMS that your money has come.

So all these things will have a huge impact on delivery.

## Will there be any special package for remote areas to ensure they get connectivity and mobile phones?

We are working on it. So is Sam Pitroda on how to make connectivity ubiquitous. Our applications will be online real time. It is a fact that today connectivity is not there everywhere. But we should always design for the future. In the next four or five years we are hoping there will be connectivity everywhere and it need not be a mobile phone. It could also be a landline. Building online systems has huge benefits. They happen in real time so you can't touch the data and so on.

## Would there be linkages with the Bharat Nirman programme?

Absolutely. The way we visualise this is applications like NREGA and PDS will on the cloud. So say in the PDS a beneficiary has an allocation of 35 kilos of rice. He or she will have a food account on the cloud somewhere. The beneficiary goes to a PDS shop and gets 10 kilos say for Rs 30. So now it will be reduced. He or she can go to another shop and pick up the remainder.

## Or collect his food entitlement in the city?

Exactly. Our current systems are location bound. You did not have choice. The reality is people are mobile and they want choice. We are seeing how we can create solutions that give both mobility and choice. There is a paradigm shift in the way we think of public delivery – by putting the recipient at the centre of it and giving choice, mobility and access.

Take remittances. Indians are sending anywhere between 60 to a hundred thousand crores a year domestically from Delhi to Bihar, Mumbai to Chhattisgarh. The flow of migrants creates a corridor between this village and this city. And then they send money home, the remittance economy, 90 per cent of it is through informal channels, not through the banking system, not through the post office system, nothing.

They pay a premium of five to seven per cent which is expensive just to send money. Secondly in the informal channel there is no insurance. So if the guy taking the money to the village gets robbed, that's gone. It's very insecure. All that can be fixed with this.

The way I get my PDS in the village, I can get it in the city. I can operate my account in the village, I can do it in the city. Take old age pension. An elderly lady, her husband dies, she gets Rs 400 a month as widows pension but she gets it in the village where she lives. She goes to live with her son who is 40 km away, she has to come all the way to collect her money. Why?

Our current systems don't recognize this mobility or choice or access.

# Kashmir worries about food crisis



People collect as rations are loaded from a truck for a ration depot of the CAPD

Syed Basharat  
Srinagar

PROTESTS in Kashmir are changing. People are voicing their anger over lack of basic amenities. But these protests are getting drowned in the din of politically motivated demonstrations.

Take the commotion at ration depots of the Consumer Affairs and Public Distribution (CAPD) department. There is a scarcity of rice, sugar, flour and kerosene, all essential commodities. People resent standing in queues and then being turned away.

The grim reality is that Jammu and Kashmir is facing a crisis in food production. According to a survey conducted by the Supreme Court's commissioners, Dr NC Saxena and Harsh Mander, on the 'status of actual implementation of food, social security and livelihood schemes in Kashmir,' the Valley suffers from a 44 per cent deficit in food grain production, 33 per cent in vegetables and 69 per cent in oil seeds, all of which are imported into the state from the rest of India," says the survey's report titled "Hunger in Valley."

Experts here attribute massive conversion of agricultural land into rain-fed horticulture as one of the major reasons for declining food grain production. Prominent economist Prof Nissar Ali says cultivable land has been declining for the last 30 years. "We have been using our cultivable land for roads, hospitals, schools and other infrastructure development," he says. Experts also believe that people find agricultural activity less lucrative and are therefore using agricultural lands for commercial purposes.

Prof Ali, besides teaching at University of

Kashmir, is member of the State Finance Commission. He says: "Jammu and Kashmir needs 21 to 22 lakh tonnes of foodgrain per year. But local production is only 15 lakh tonnes. So we are importing seven to eight lakh tonnes per year against cash payment of Rs 12 to 14 hundred crore rupees from Punjab, Haryana etc. Nearly 87 per cent of land is economically unviable in the state. Viable land is fast declining due to non-cul-

**'Hundreds of truckloads of rations are being clandestinely sold to hoarders by officials of the CAPD,' a reliable official of the CAPD said.**

tivation activity on it. Therefore the net area sown has declined sharply and continuously."

Population has been increasing and food grain has been declining. In 1980-81, the deficit was 23 per cent for a population of 33 lakh. This has increased to a deficit of 42 per cent for a population of 60 lakhs.

The public distribution system (PDS) is riddled with corruption. The survey by the commissioners, which was led by Tanveer Ahmad Dar, a post-graduate in social work, made a series of recommendations to the state government. One of these was on a Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS). "The records in the ration shops

were not maintained properly. There was no public display of all the information related to the PDS in more than 85 per cent of ration shops visited. The entries in the ration cards were not properly maintained and did not match the entries made in the distribution register," reads the report.

This observation is substantiated by many whistle blowers in the CAPD department. They told *Civil Society*, on condition of anonymity, that many store keepers along with top officers in the department are hand in glove with black marketers. "Motivated by skyrocketing prices of food grain in the market, hundreds of truckloads of rations are being clandestinely sold to hoarders by officials of the CAPD," a reliable official of the department said.

Taking rampant corruption in the department into consideration, the commissioners have recommended that the state government create a website and paste all records, documents, monthly progress reports down to each PDS shop online regularly. The state government should also constitute vigilance committees in all villages to monitor the functioning of local ration shops. Details of stocks, allotment orders, list of beneficiaries etc should be made available to this committee. States like Tamil Nadu and Chhattisgarh have already put such transparency measures in place and it should not be difficult for Jammu and Kashmir to do so, say the commissioners.

The CAPD faces constant criticism for its 'inefficient and faulty' mechanism of distribution. Rice, flour, sugar and kerosene are being distributed at subsidized rates. But scarcity of these essential commodities at ration depots of the CAPD is one of the major issues before the government.

The department puts forward its own arguments. "There is a wide gap between demand and supply. We are being provided ration quota as per the census of 2001. But the population has increased considerably. Still we try to see that rations reach the maximum population," says Meharj-u-Din Kenu, director, CAPD, Kashmir. As per the 2001 census, the state needs 13,200 metric tonnes of food grains per month but the present allocation is only 6,3067 metric tones.

The minister responsible for CAPD, Qamar Ali Akhoun, candidly admitted black marketing was taking place. He said the state was devising a comprehensive mechanism to curb the department-market nexus. But how far he will succeed is a million dollar question.

Among mainstream political parties, the state secretary of CPI (M) and MLA, Muhammad Yousuf Tarigami, is the only voice demanding for long a revised comprehensive food policy for the state. Tarigami has even introduced a private members resolution into the ongoing legislative assembly session urging New Delhi to enhance monthly allocation of food grains at prevalent PDS rates.

Continued on next page

# Activists hit out at food law draft

Bharat Dogra  
New Delhi

THE deep disappointment with the government's proposed food security law was very visible at the *dharna* organised by the Right to Food Campaign and Roji Roti Abhiyan at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi. A huge banner proclaimed that what the government was offering was not a food security law but a food insecurity law.



Kavita Srivastava addressing campaigners at Jantar Mantar

Placards by protestors carried slogans and demands for a genuine food rights law.

"The draft national food security (NFS) bill as it exists today is completely unacceptable," said Kavita Srivastava, a member of the steering group of the Right to Food campaign. "This is why activists and people from all over the country are here for a five-day *dharna* from April 15 to 19th."

Kavita also complained that while permission for the *dharna* at Jantar Mantar, Delhi's protest street, had been given earlier, this was later withdrawn. But activists who had already arrived in Delhi decided to go ahead with the *dharna* anyway, braving all odds.

"If we do not get a sympathetic hearing, we'll carry out a nationwide yatra to mobilise public

opinion on this issue and then come back to Delhi in much greater strength," Kavita warned the government.

In an open letter to the Prime Minister written from the venue of *dharna*, the right to food campaigners stated: "We are deeply disappointed with the narrow manner in which the new law is being visualised, where the government seeks to restrict the proposed Act to only providing 25 kgs of food grain to a limited number of Below

poverty line households. This is meaningless in the face of high malnutrition, spiralling prices, drought and deepening hunger. Such a minimalist view is inadequate to address the issue of providing food and nutrition security to the people of this country. Instead, the new law must be seen as an opportunity to not only address the injustice of large-scale hunger and malnutrition in the country, but also to revitalise domestic food production and agriculture. For this, the food security law must deal with at least some of the causes of hunger and provide each and every resident of this country with food entitlements."

grain per household along with other entitlements such as supplementary nutrition for young children, school mid-day meals, old age pensions, maternity benefits and so on. A legislation that reduces these entitlements, where the only aim seems to be curbing subsidies to the poor rather than ensuring basic social services to all cannot be accepted. The scope of this Act must be broadened to ensure that it meets its basic objective: protecting everyone from hunger and malnutrition. Policies must be put in place to also ensure that the invasion of corporate interests in agricultural production and in food and nutrition policy is stopped immediately."

The Right to Food Campaign is not merely critical. It has also made suggestions.

In fact the campaign has carefully listed what ought to be essential components of a comprehensive and satisfactory right to food law. These include:

- An overarching obligation to protect everyone from hunger
- Promotion of sustainable and equitable food production ensuring adequate food availability in all locations at all times
- Protection against forcible diversion of land, water and forests from food production
- Protection of food sovereignty and elimination of entry of corporate interests and private contractors in food production, distribution and governance
- Promotion of decentralized food production, procurement and distribution systems
- Protection of interests of small farmers, especially ensuring that farmers are given remunerative prices for food items
- Family ration cards should be in the name of women
- A universal Public Distribution System (providing at least 14 kgs of grain per adult per month as well as 1.5 kgs of pulses and 800 gms of oil)
- Special food entitlements for destitute households (including an expanded Antyodaya programme)
- Consolidation of all entitlements created by recent Supreme Court orders
- Support for effective breastfeeding (including maternity entitlements and creches)
- Elimination of all social discrimination in food-related matters
- Safeguards against cash transfers replacing food transfers under any nutrition-related scheme.

Continued from previous page

Tarigami criticised the food security bill in its present form. It proposes 25 kg of food grains to BPL and Antodaya card holders instead of the existing 35 kg per family at Rs 3 per kg. The Above Poverty Line (APL) subsidy will be eliminated and the APL category, cancelled. The net result will be withdrawal of Rs 4000 crores of food subsidy whereas the demand is for more food subsidy. Tarigami reiterated his demand that buffer food stocks be purchased and made available to

people especially the rural and urban poor.

An official in the CAPD revealed that there is mutual understanding between top officers in the CAPD and ration shop owners at the bottom on how to make official records look clean while continuing nefarious dealings with wholesalers in the market. The official also disclosed that records submitted by ration shops in posh areas show 100 per cent offtake, while the truth is hardly any affluent household buys food from there.

"The ration depots show 100 per cent sale of ordinary rice in areas where 90 per cent of people consume high quality rice including Basmati. The ration depots located in these areas get their quota as per the population of that area. It is as simple as that. They sell it in the market on mutual interests. One should check how many FIRs have been registered by the police in Kashmir against the seizure of CAPD ration trucks which were being sold to the black marketers," said the official.

# 'Every village we visited had an Asha'

## A mid-term evaluation report assesses the strengths and weaknesses of the National Rural Health Mission



A government-run health centre

Civil Society News  
Mumbai

A huge six-year effort to provide basic public health care services in rural India has run half its course with much remaining to be done, but a few significant successes offer hope for the future.

A mid-term evaluation of the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) shows that there aren't enough doctors for villages and rural medical infrastructure continues to be in bad shape. However, on a more positive note, the programme has succeeded in releasing funds, putting one health worker, the Accredited Social Health Activist (Asha) in place for every 1,000 persons and boosting demand for improved health services. More rural women are going to government hospitals for deliveries.

The NRHM is a flagship programme of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government led by the Congress. It is easily the world's largest health-care initiative. A board of international experts provide their inputs for the programme on a regular basis.

The mid-term evaluation was led by Professor Nirupam Bajpai of The Earth Institute at Columbia University, which will now have a South Asia centre based in Mumbai. Jeffery Sachs and Ravindra Dholakia are co-authors of the review.

Professor Bajpai is an accomplished economist who has taught at Harvard. His involvement with India cuts across party lines. He has been advisor to



Professor Nirupam Bajpai (centre) and Jeffrey Sachs (left)

Atal Bihari Vajpayee and now Dr Manmohan Singh. *Civil Society* caught up with Professor Bajpai in Mumbai for an extended interview over breakfast. Edited extracts of the interview:

### How did this report come about?

This report was essentially requested by the former Union Minister for Health, Dr Anbumani Ramadoss, in July 2008. The idea of putting together a panel of experts to advise the ministry of health on best practices relevant to India was broadly an idea suggested by the Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh. The panel meets every six months with the Union health minister.

### What is the big picture of the NRHM? What is the takeaway?

NRHM is the world's biggest public health programme. I am so happy we have it in place. It was needed. India has not invested in public health. Much more needs to be done but a beginning has been made.

As for the takeaway, the NRHM proposed to have a community health worker, the Asha, for every 1,000 population which is really in place. This is something one sees not just in terms of data but from all the fieldwork we did. We did not come across any village which did not have a community health worker. This is supposed to be a woman who is a graduate and lives in the village and actually connects health facilities and beneficiaries. So that I think is the single most crucial achievement of the mission in the last four years.

I am told there are now 700,000 Ashas in villages trying to create awareness of ante-natal care, institutional deliveries, post-natal care, immunisation and nutrition. I think they are doing a brilliant job in terms of creating awareness and bringing women to clinics. It's another matter what happens subsequently, what the clinics are able to do.

This is a huge achievement of the mission. Also, more funds, untied funds are available from the government if health centres want to buy equipment. Money is available at every level, the sub-centre, the primary health centre etc.

### You are saying the Asha is effective?

She is. That is my personal experience – and of the members of my team – of seeing Ashas in the field. We travelled

to so many states. We saw that these women are in place, that they are trained to a certain extent. They are acting as agents of change in creating awareness and bringing expectant mothers to clinics instead of delivering at home. That certainly is happening and it's an achievement.

### The increase in the number of institutional deliveries means the Janani Suraksha Yojana is working. But the rural health infrastructure is not in place. Can you explain why?

Institutional deliveries are certainly surging. Making sure the clinics are geared for safe childbirth is where the challenge is. The clinics need much more support in terms of space. Sometimes you find women actually lying on the floor because there are just two beds and four women who need attention.

There is need for human resources. You need more nurses. You need better lab facilities. Then, once a mother has delivered, because of sheer shortage of space, they don't allow her to stay in the clinic for too long. So sometimes soon after delivery in less than 24 hours she is asked to leave. And that just defeats the purpose of institutional delivery. You have to be in the clinic, in a safe environment, for at least 24 to 36 hours before you can go home if everything is alright. So the next focus of the NRHM has to be on the infrastructure side, on the human resources side and on creating conditions for safe childbirth.

### Given the time-frame of the programme – you are halfway through – why has money not been spent on health infrastructure?

I think money has gone into infrastructure. What they have not done is to create additional space. One reason is that they did not expect that institutional deliveries would start surging so soon and so fast. That has become a reality. The picture is not wholly rosy here. There are some issues about financing and how money is spent. One thing we found is that untied money is not getting spent, especially at PHCs. Doctors worry about spending on equipment because they fear that the choice they make may later be questioned by their superiors.

The idea of untied money is that you have the freedom. But here you don't want that freedom. We brought this issue to the attention of the government. We said so clearly in the report. It doesn't take much to figure that one out. For every health facility you can have a chart which says here are the mandatory requirements for every centre. For instance, a sub-centre should have one to 15 items and if you don't have those you are free to buy them. Similarly, for a community health centre or for a PHC you have a mandatory list which says you can buy all these equipments.

But apart from that I think there is a general problem with public financing. We have been saying in our meetings, and we have said this in the report, that India spends just a little over one per cent on its national health. This is just not enough. You

can't run a public health system with this sort of investment for a billion people especially when you are talking about seven hundred million or so in the rural areas.

You have to substantially increase what you spend on public health. We hope in the coming years the increase will be much more sizable than it is right now. That will allow you to spend more on infrastructure and pay the Ashas regular salaries. Whether it is Rs 1,000 or Rs 1,500 we have to pay them a certain amount for sure every month and top it up with incentives. Merely paying incentives I don't think is good enough because the amounts are too small. It also takes months for the money to be paid and so on.

The other significant part is on the health management side. You need, at the village and district levels, proper health management structures. The doctor really should not be managing the clinics. He should be doing what he is trained for.

'India spends just one per cent... You can't run a public health system for a billion people with this sort of investment.'

### So you need another tier of management for health facilities which are coming up.

Yes. I think the mission is trying to do that. It is recruiting a large number of graduates and then training them for managing these village level and district level facilities. It will take the burden off the doctors and paramedics who can then do their own job.

### What is the solution to the huge shortage of doctors, nurses, paramedics?

It goes back to the point I made earlier that you have to pay them properly. The community health workers are not being paid, certainly not something that is sustainable. If you want to create a system that will serve the people for the next 30 or 40 years, then you have to create a foundation for it that will work and so you have to pay them.

Secondly, the problem with doctors is that they don't show up. The reason is that there is nowhere for the family to live. Where are the schools? What do you do in the evenings? A doctor posted in a remote area has to run two establishments. The family has to live in the town or state capital. So, you have to pay them a substantially higher amount than what you pay them now. You have to be realistic about it because we can't create the right infrastructure in the next five years. Meanwhile the health facilities and health delivery systems have to function. Paying doctors more means spending more on public health.

### Should the dai or midwife be incorporated in the NRHM?

I would think so certainly because in some states like in Rajasthan the dai plays a significant role. She

is an intermediary between the Asha and the ANM (auxiliary nurse midwife), since the Asha is not trained to conduct deliveries and the *dais* typically are. In Rajasthan for instance I think they should be integrated into the system. They can be upgraded and if you have a work force available might as well use it. I think this should be left to the states.

### Are the panchayats getting involved in the NRHM?

This is one of the key problem areas. The mission itself says that the idea is that the Panchayati Raj Institutions or PRIs should own, manage and control the health facilities which I think is a great idea especially for a country of India's size. This simply cannot be managed by bureaucrats sitting in state capitals. They are not geared to controlling oversights in health facilities.

But, I am afraid all through our field visits, we have not seen the involvement of PRIs in any state except in a couple of districts in Assam. This is a huge area of neglect in some sense. Enough attention is not being paid because the panchayats have to be trained. The members of the panchayats certainly don't know what is expected of them, they don't know what authority they have, they don't know what control and oversight really means. The problem is that the panchayats are not statutory bodies. After a few years you have elections and a new set of people come in.

So you have to have ongoing training programmes for panchayat members so that within six months from the day they are elected they know at least on the NRHM front what is expected of them what they are supposed to do and how can they contribute. Unless that is done I don't see how panchayats are going to get involved.

### Would you say PRI involvement across the board is not there?

I would say it is more or less not there at this stage at least from our experiences.

### Are states innovating?

Oh certainly they are! I think every state has something or the other to offer. Assam is doing great in a number of areas primarily because it has a very dynamic health minister who has really taken on NRHM and is using it to the state's advantage. A lot depends on leadership. Similarly in Rajasthan's Dungarpur district, the district collector was doing great things. UP as well. There were areas where you could see the leadership looking at how best to integrate health with nutrition. They have the freedom and they have the money for the first time to do this so if they want to there is tremendous scope.

### Is it fair to say NRHM has managed to create a demand for health services?

It is true that for the first time there is demand from the ground up. There are queues outside PHCs, which is for the most part a good sight to watch. PHCs used to be locked and were in such bad shape that if you were to get in you might get sick. I think what the mission has done is provided more resources, more flexibility, more freedom to the states. If the people start demanding these services, that is where change comes.

The mid-term evaluation of the NRHM has been published by Sage. Titled 'Improving Access and Efficiency in Public Health Services' it is available for Rs 695

# In heart of Delhi, a poor mother left to die

## Historic judgement orders maternal audit



Shanti Devi's son with her premature baby girl

Kavita Charanji  
New Delhi

ON 20 January, Shanti Devi, 35, a Scheduled Caste woman, died minutes after giving birth to a premature baby girl. She had not eaten for three days prior to her delivery.

Shanti Devi had delivered her baby at home, helped by a neighbour. She left behind two sons, aged six and eight and the baby girl.

About a year and a half earlier, Shanti Devi, pregnant for the third time, had been denied emergency obstetric medical care though she was carrying a dead foetus in her womb due to a miscarriage.

Four different hospitals turned her away then because she could not pay the fees. The privately run Saroj Hospital in Rohini, North Delhi, asked her husband, Kishan Mandal, a daily wage labourer, to pay an exorbitant sum of Rs 2.5 lakhs.

This was in clear violation of the Delhi Government's directives which state that hospitals awarded land at concessional rates have to reserve 10 per cent of their beds for people below the poverty line (BPL).

Shanti finally got medical attention at Sanjay Gandhi Hospital. The case may never have come to light had it not been for a report in *The Hindustan Times* (25 November 2008).

Early this year, Fatima, 24, a destitute and ill-

erate Muslim woman, was forced to give birth to a baby girl under a tree in full public view in the crowded Nizamuddin locality right opposite the Commonwealth Games car park. Abandoned by two husbands, she went into labour in a dangerously critical condition compounded by serious epileptic fits. Fatima's mother, Jaitun, approached a maternity home run by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) in Jangpura. But she was turned away.

Shanti Devi and Fatima might have become just two more statistics in a country with an appalling record of maternal deaths and maternal morbidity if it wasn't for two crusading lawyers from the Human Rights Law Network (HRLN), a collective of lawyers and social activists.

Senior advocate Colin Gonsalves, founder-director of HRLN, and advocate Divya Jyoti Jaipuria filed writ petitions on behalf of Shanti and Fatima in the Delhi High Court.

In an historic judgement delivered on 8 March, Justice S Muralidhar of the Delhi High Court sought accountability for India's high rates of maternal death and maternal morbidity. He said: "The broad issues in these petitions are concerned with the reproductive rights of health as well as the rights of the newly born, free treatment and care in government facilities essentially on the grounds that they are persons below the poverty line."

Justice Muralidhar also directed Dr M Prakasamma, executive director of the Academy of Nursing Studies and Women's Empowerment Research Studies, Hyderabad, to carry out a maternal death audit in Shanti Devi's case. The audit has resulted in an in-depth investigation of the causes and circumstances under which Shanti Devi was found to be carrying a dead foetus when she was admitted to Sanjay Gandhi Hospital on 19 November, 2008 and the subsequent events.



Fatima with her son

**'For the first time in legal history, there is a clear mention of reproductive rights and violations in both cases, particularly that of Shanti Devi who has lost her life.'**

Jameen Kaur, programme manager, HRLN, sees the judgement as having a "far reaching impact both nationally and internationally."

"The two cases are likely to be cited in other judgements relating to reproductive health," she says. "Though maternal audits have been carried out successfully in Tamil Nadu, which has one of the lowest maternal mortality ratios in the country, this is the first time that a court has ordered such an audit. We will also get an opportunity to legally redress the causes and remove them."

"For the time in legal history, there is a clear mention of reproductive rights and violations in both cases, particularly that of Shanti Devi who has lost her life," said Jameen Kaur.

Both Shanti Devi and Fatima faced enormous bureaucratic hurdles in proving their BPL status to get government benefits. Fatima was denied her entitlement under the benefits of the National Maternity Benefit Scheme, under which she was supposed to get Rs 500, eight to 12 weeks prior to delivery. She had also been denied an Antyodaya Anna Yojana card (AAY).

Her mother, Jaitun, had to face a huge amount of harassment and humiliation before she got her entitlements. The Maternity Home, MCD, Jangpura, falsely recorded that Fatima had delivered her baby girl at their institution.

The two cases call into question the ambitious National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) under which the government has introduced incentives for institutional deliveries under the Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY) specifically targeted at ensuring the reproductive health of women who are BPL.

Thanks to the HRLN petitions and the Delhi High Court's intervention, there has been some element of redressal for Shanti Devi and Fatima.

After her miscarriage in the previous pregnancy, Shanti Devi was collected by an ambulance, taken to hospital and treated free of cost. Directions were passed that she was a certified person living below the poverty line and must be medically treated free of cost in all future incidents. After she tragically lost her life in the next pregnancy, the court ruled that her newborn be treated free at a Delhi hospital.

The epileptic Fatima is now provided free medical treatment and is assessed every 15 days. She has been given an AAY card which entitles her to concessionary food rations. Fatima has also received Rs 500 under the National Maternity Benefit Scheme from the National Corporation Territory. Her infant, Alisha, has been provided with infant tetanus shots and routine immunisation.



College students pledged to promote maternal and infant health

## Youth promote safe motherhood

Shreyasi Singh  
New Delhi

ON 11 April, National Safe Motherhood Day, over 500 students, teachers and volunteers formed a human chain in New Delhi to highlight the cause of safe motherhood.

The event was organised by the White Ribbon Alliance, a global network committed to saving mothers and babies and Jamia Hamdard, a well-known educational institute.

Rock bands, Half Step Down and Aleph, played for participants, dedicating their music to safe motherhood. The two band leaders promised to make this a "great event for everyone to wake up and listen." "India contributes to a quarter of the global maternal death toll," says Dr Aparajita Gogoi, National Coordinator, White Ribbon Alliance. "More than 78,000 women die every year. Sadly, most women are in the prime of their lives. If they had access to basic medical care, knowledge of nutrition, 70 per cent of these deaths would be prevented."

In Orissa and Rajasthan, the alliance has been running a 'Know Your Entitlement' programme for over two years. Women are informed that they can avail of free ante natal care and be paid Rs 1400 if they come to a government hospital for delivery under the National Rural Health Mission's Janani Suraksha Yojana.

Dr Gogoi says it's mindsets that are tougher to change. To accelerate awareness, the alliance's current theme 'Play Your Part' seeks wider involvement. "We all need to pledge to play our part to stop these deaths. Our messages are specific for each segment. If you are a panchayati raj member, you can monitor and track the delivery of services. If you are a social activist, a journalist, mention it in various forums. Each person

needs to contribute," she says.

"Women are like the core of an onion. You need to peel so many layers of tradition, preconceived notions, family filters to talk to them, draw them into a conversation," said Gogoi.

The alliance says targeted communication can yield results. In Orissa, where the alliance has organised several public hearings, they found that women would be hesitant to speak in the beginning because they felt nobody really cared for their health. But, slowly, they start to talk when they found that the environment was a safe one to speak in.

In a small pre and post test research the alliance conducted on a group of 200 women in Rajasthan, they found awareness levels on maternal health, maternal entitlements and accessibility to maternal health services went up for each participant after a three month awareness campaign by SUMA, Surakshit Matritva Gathbandha and the White Ribbon Alliance in Rajasthan.

The alliance also took 'Play Your Part' to its other member states. In Orissa, human chains were formed in 30 district headquarters to educate people on safe motherhood, birth preparedness and complications readiness.

A month-long advocacy campaign was initiated for frontline health workers in Uttar Pradesh to create awareness in villages. Discussions and meetings also took place in Delhi and Kolkata all through April.

Since its inception in 1999, The White Ribbon Alliance in India has been working to prevent maternal deaths and promoting safe motherhood by handing out life-saving messages to women, counselling them to understand how they can delay their first child, space their children or delay marriage to ensure lives are not lost in childbirth.

# Dark truths of India's mining children

Civil Society News  
New Delhi

NEARLY seven per cent of India's children work in mines for a pittance, their faces smudged, their childhood gone. In Rajasthan alone around 375,000 children slave in mines and quarries.

In Karnataka, estimates suggest that at least a few hundred thousand children are working in mining. India's mining children are leading horrendous lives: malnourished, denied education and employed in dangerous conditions.

Findings from a report on the impact of mining on children in India titled, 'India's Childhood in the Pits,' underline the complete violation of child rights by mining companies and the indifference of the state.

The report has been published by HAQ, Samata, Dhaatri Resource Centre for Women and Children, Mines, Minerals and People and supported by Terre des Hommes, Germany.

Earlier the groups involved had undertaken a fact-finding mission in the iron ore mines of Bellary district, Karnataka. This is the first study on children in mines. The objective is to mobilise and lobby for the rights of these hapless children. "Research on mining and children has tended

to focus solely on the aspect of child labour," the report states. "The multitude of ways in which children are impacted by mining have been completely neglected. Neither the groups and campaigns that focus on mining issues, nor those working with children, have paid attention to this issue."

The report says although almost half of India's districts are subjected to mining, the mining industry is not legally responsible for ensuring the rights and development needs of children.

Increased morbidity and illness, greater mal-

nourishment than in non-mining areas, an increase in child labour, and further marginalisation of adivasi and dalit children due to employment in large mining areas are some direct and indirect impacts of mining.

The report conducted field research in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Orissa, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand. It stresses an urgent comprehensive assessment of the status of children in mining areas. Strengthening protection mechanisms for children and campaigns against child labour in these regions must be a foremost concern. Concern for children must find reflection in all laws and policies on mining like the National Mineral Policy 2008, the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) and Mines (Amendment) Act, 1983. Currently, the problem is that very few laws provide any protection or relief to mining children since the principal job of the Ministry of Mines is to mine.

The Ministry of Mines must evolve regional plans with appropriate local governance institutions at the district and block level to give children affected by mines a basic quality of life. The report suggests that resources for these be drawn from the public exchequer which could be recovered from the promoters of mining projects.

Although almost half of India's districts are subjected to mining, the mining industry is not legally responsible for ensuring the rights and development needs of children.

# People's tribunal for peace, development

Amit Sengupta  
New Delhi

JUSTICE PB Sawant's remark reflected the angst of speakers at the three-day Independent People's Tribunal held in Delhi in early April on 'Land acquisition, resource grab and Operation Green Hunt.'

"This is not a brief for Maoists. This is a brief for the oppressed people of India, especially the tribals who are being crushed in their own homeland," he said.

Apart from civil liberties activists, tribals from Dantewada in Chhattisgarh, Lalgarh in West Bengal, various districts of Jharkhand, and the land struggle zones of Orissa participated.

The tribunal reflected a range of pluralist opinion reflecting the deep crisis Indian democracy is facing. While former Union law minister Shanti Bhushan sharply condemned the Maoists as well as the mining mafia and the Indian State for destroying "the law of the land", author Arundhati Roy took a polarising view: "The Maoists want to overthrow the

State. But I would say that the State has already been overthrown – by the corporates and mining mafia."

She saluted the valiant non-violent struggles in several parts of India against land acquisition and SEZs, and declared it as a victory of the people, "although, look at how the government and the judiciary betrayed the two decade plus Narmada Bachao Andolan, which was non-violent and Gandhian".

So what is the message? That if you resort to satyagraha, peaceful protests, petitions and appeals, even for many years, they will not listen to you. But if you pick up a gun, they immediately sit up.

Speaker after speaker said it is the poorest, the tribals, the forest dwellers and the farmers, who are pitched against powerful corporates who call the shots in the political establishment, so much so, even district collectors and the police follow their diktat. "I was picked up and branded as Maoist, when I merely said that we will not give our land or forests to the companies," said Radhakrishna from Ranchi in Jharkhand.

Tribal women from Dantewada narrated ghastly stories of police and Salwa Judum atrocities, gang rapes, murders, burning of houses, disappearances. They said almost 100 people have been killed in the last one year but there is total silence on these atrocities. "Those who want to construct and protect, they are arrested," said Himanshu Kumar from Dantewada.

Dr Binayak Sen narrated the survey done by him and other doctors on 10,000 poor people in Bilaspur district: the majority were so terribly malnourished that it has become a striking epidemic of 'Nutritionally Acquired Immune Deficiency'. "You measure the graph between epidemics like malaria and tuberculosis during the four months when there is acute scarcity of rice – and you will see that this malnourishment is so rampant that people just can't resist any disease," said Dr Sen. "So what about this organised structural violence in an area where there are no Maoists?" he asked.

The tribunal's jury included Justice Hosbet Suresh, former NCW chairperson Mohini Giri, former DGP Subramaniam and scientist PM Bhargava.

The jury unanimously asked for an immediate end to violence from all sides, withdrawal of Operation Green Hunt, end to all mining activities and mass displacement of tribals, protection of natural resources, ecology, livelihood and land of people, and dialogue with all the groups, including those who are leading peaceful struggles.

PIX BY LAKSHMAN ANAND



Children painted their vision of a city



Girls hold up their works of art

# Claiming cities for everyone

Shreyasi Singh  
New Delhi

ALL over India, cities are launching plans to beautify themselves. But their beautiful plans don't include the urban poor who provide low-cost, efficient services. Slums are being mowed down, humble jobs taken away. But people are resisting.

Every year the Hazards Centre in New Delhi organises a cultural festival to bring such issues to light. This year, its two-day festival, *Humse Bhi Hain Shehar*, saw participation from groups in other cities.

"This is the first year we invited groups in cities where we have been working because there are similar trends everywhere, the stories of oppression and suppression are the same," said Dunu Roy, Director, Hazards Centre. "Through this festival, we hope to focus on the key issues collated from similar experiences across the country."

Set up in 1997, Hazards Centre works for the urban poor, providing them consultancy services on threats to housing, dangers at work, lack of basic amenities, inadequate information, harassment, insecurity and exploitation.

Mataji, popularly known as Shanta Toofani, inaugurated the festival. Mataji is an illustrious activist well known for her wit and wisdom among slum dwellers.

There were performances by Budhan Theatre, Ahmedabad, Beghar Mazdoor Sangharsh Samiti, Delhi, Mobile Creches, Delhi, and Breakthrough in Lucknow amongst others. Every performance was followed by a 10 minute discussion. Also, there were music performances and exhibitions. Altogether 25 community groups from 12 cities took part.

With a special focus on how our so-called 'world class' cities are developing, the festival highlighted patterns of resistance and protests against the attack on shelter and livelihoods. Each cultural form was used to throw light on how disadvantaged communities look at the city, and the role they play in making it.

The cultural shows depicted demolition drives,

'relocation' of the urban poor, effect on the environment, construction workers, cleanliness of slum areas etc. During the discussions and performances, it became evident that slum dwellers, hawkers, vendors, homeless, daily wagers, construction labour, domestic workers, rickshaw pullers and rag pickers, were being thrown to the wolves by city governments.

Communities are questioning the strange priorities and policies of governments. "Urban poor groups are beginning to participate much more actively," noted Roy. "In some cases, they are able to counter what civic agencies are doing. The debate over negotiations led to a definite degree of assertion. We want to embolden their response, and begin the process of people linking up with each other – enabling them to understand how alliances are made."

There was also a photo exhibition on the wastages and misplaced policies adopted by the Delhi government while preparing for the

Commonwealth Games. There were pictures of rampant environmental damage. At a painting workshop children were encouraged to paint their images of the city. Many made banners demanding equal rights to the city.

"Why are there so many cars on the road? Why do we have to be pushed into crowded buses when so many people travel in big cars alone? Our roads should be for everyone," said Raju, a young slum dweller who says ever since new flyovers were built, he finds it more difficult to cross the road safely.

"There is a lot of strife, simmering discontent in our cities, especially in Delhi over the Commonwealth Games. But, there is no mechanism or structure through which this discontent can be articulated. We have a new campaign coming up called 'Everybody should play'. The Commonwealth Games is a scam and our tentative estimates say over Rs 35,000 crore is going to be spent," says Roy.





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# Sonia's NAC 2 is here and activists have hope

Civil Society News  
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THE second National Advisory Council (NAC) headed by Sonia Gandhi is all set to be installed with expectations rising about the influence it will have over the policies of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government.

Critics accuse the NAC of being a behind-the-scenes arbiter. But social sector leaders and grassroots activists look forward to the NAC resuming its former activist role.

The first NAC was known for landmark legislation: it pushed through the right to information law and rural employment guarantee in the face of stiff opposition from within the government. The forest rights act was similarly shaped with NAC support.

In the last Lok Sabha elections these were the measures that helped the UPA come back to power and offset the negative impact of special economic zones and land acquisition for industry. So, while the BJP lost power over India shining, the UPA succeeded in introducing reforms but coming back with greater success thanks to the NAC.

The situation is different this time, say activist groups. The Left and the Common Minimum Programme are not there and the Congress has a majority. "It looks like a Congress think tank," says Kavita Srivastava, right to food activist and secretary of the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCIL). "But if it can act as a pressure group, it will be effective."

The revival of the NAC is also being welcomed because it comes at a time when people's groups are deeply worried about the government's response to the Maoist insurgency in tribal regions. Alongside, there are growing reports of hunger and malnutrition in under developed regions of the country. It is hoped that NAC will take up these issues. Sonia Gandhi is seen as a person who is 'sensitive to these concerns.'

"The NAC was responsible for steering most important legislations," says Harsh Mander, one of the commissioners appointed by the Supreme Court on the right to food. "Such laws have deepened democracy by enabling people to hold the government accountable. The employment guarantee law is the most important law after land reforms, enabling people to survive with dignity. The synergy between the Manmohan Singh government and NAC resulted in high levels of growth and at the same time an acknowledgement that people were being left behind, that India had high levels of hunger and malnutrition which needed to be addressed."

Ashok Khosla of Development Alternatives says governments must be confronted with issues. Khosla set up the first environment department when it was a small and lean entity that functioned out of the Prime Minister's Office in the eighties.



Sonia Gandhi with a portrait presented to her by Bhimrao Ambedkar's followers on his birth anniversary

"The idea is that governments should be forced to look at issues. A mechanism that asks inconvenient questions is needed. It is necessary to promote a think-tank culture in the country," he says.

"Whether you have coalitions or not there is a need for a multi-sector dialogue. This is what has been sought to have been achieved since the Earth Summit in Rio. In the US and the Philippines a parallel mechanism exists at the

People's groups are worried about the government's response to the Maoist insurgency.

highest levels."

Khosla points out that Indian governments have traditionally been suspicious of civil society. But if there is one country which has grown because of civil society it is India.

"If people feel the NAC is an extra constitutional authority, then bring it into the system," says Khosla. "There is a need

for the NAC kind of mechanism that seeks feedback and works as a conscience all the way down to the zilla parishad level."

Vendors of India (NASVI). "Somehow, it has been our experience that it is very difficult to push through a pro-poor agenda from within the government. That becomes easier with something like the NAC. For example, urban reform is very difficult to get done with the urban development ministry. We try and work with the government on these areas but it has been tough to get things implemented. With the NAC things do move faster."

**FOCUS AREAS:** The list of expectations from the NAC is understandably long. But it is the condition of tribals and Dalits living in forested areas which occupy centre-stage. The Home Ministry's Operation Green Hunt is being roundly condemned as 'genocidal'.

Grassroots activists feel the Maoist insurgency could be stopped in its tracks with implementation of laws like the Forest Rights Act, the Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas Act (PESA) and by development schemes.

"Instead all governments see tribal issues only in terms of the Maoist agenda, as a law and order problem," alleges Ashok Chaudhury of National Forum for Forest People and Forest Workers (NFFPFW).

"Adivasis need special protection, not armed conflict," says Madhu Sarin, a long-time activist for forest rights. "The government must follow the Constitution, implement PESA and the Forest Rights Act. The tribal ministry must be strengthened and take responsibility for implementing the forest rights law and strengthening schemes for tribal development."

Closely related to the issue of under development in tribal regions, is the problem of displacement, land acquisition and resettlement. Peoples' movements are unhappy over the rehabilitation and resettlement policy drafted by the government and want the NAC to review it. The National Alliance for People's Movement (NAPM) had drawn up such a policy after consultations and given it to NAC years ago and they would like their draft to be considered.

The third looming crisis which is worrying groups is food security and nutrition. The right to food movement has made considerable headway with the expansion of midday meals and a renewed focus on the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS). The movement has been agitating in Delhi for an expansion of entitlements under a proposed food law.

"The nature of legislation which the government is proposing for food security is very minimalist. They are reducing the entire question of food security to giving 25 kg of grain to the poor but it goes beyond that," says Mander. "No man, woman or child should sleep malnourished and hungry."

"We also want an expansion of education and health services and social security for workers,"

says Srivastava. Quality schools and building infrastructure for the National Rural Health Mission are part of demands.

The growing numbers of the urban poor call for attention. Nearly one-third of the poor are slated to be living in cities. Cities don't want them around. Pushed to the margins with no provision for housing or basic services, the urban poor suffer from hunger, deprivation.

"As our cities change rapidly, this group is the most adversely impacted," says Arbind Singh. "Not only are they at the receiving end, they are also left out of our planning horizon. Some concrete and solid reforms which gives them teeth and includes their concerns in policy must be done on priority."

"We need to look at the rights of the homeless, the migrants and street children," says Mander. "There is no programme for the education and care of street children."

Mander would also like the NAC to review the Communal Violence Bill. In its current avatar it proposes expanding the powers of the police. But, he points out police and governments already have enough powers. What is needed is to make them accountable. "If there is loss of life due to communal violence, the government has to act," he says.

The law has to make the government accountable for failing to act.

NAC is also being asked to play a monitoring role. Both laws and government schemes need to be implemented better.

"The most important thing in this country is not that we need new laws, programmes and policies, but what is happening to the old ones," says Rajesh Tandon, who heads PRIA. "We have more laws than perhaps any other country, but we have the least delivery. I would like the NAC to seriously raise questions about how existing commitments, policies, schemes, public investments are being delivered. When we have an education cess, why is it not reaching tribal children? Our most serious problem is non-delivery and lack of accountability."

"Since NAC will also be an advisory body, it must have a monitoring committee," says Gita Gairola, state coordinator, State Mahila Samakhya, Uttarakhand. "Unless it monitors, it cannot advise. Many laws passed by the last government, like NREGA and the Domestic Violence Act, are not being implemented in their true spirit."

How much the NAC manages to get involved with remains to be seen. But of this there is little doubt that it is being constituted to promote inclusion and influence policy at the national level. Many of the issues being raised by activists require systemic changes in agriculture, regional imbalances, urban planning and governance. The NAC by working with the government at the highest and headed by Sonia Gandhi is well positioned to make a serious difference.

'We need to look at the rights of the homeless, migrants and street children. There is no programme for the education and care of street children,' says Harsh Mander.

# Veena S makes history

Tanushree Gangopadhyay  
Bangalore

VEENA S feels victorious after she was defeated in the recent Bruhat Bangalore Mahanagara Palike polls. "It has opened doors for me," she says with satisfaction. "I can now do political work in Okalipuram ward where I was born and lived for years." Losing the polls has revved up her spirits. After all, she has created history by being the first transsexual in the four southern states to stand for civic elections.

"I got 671 votes after canvassing for only three days," she says. "Standing as a first time Independent candidate is no mean feat." Congress candidate Queen Elizabeth, wife of the former Councillor, won from this reserved ward (Women - SC) trouncing her BJP rival by 6,888 votes after polling 9963 votes.

Veena's campaign of 'Re 1 for one vote' created a stir in this ward inhabited mainly by poor Dalits and OBCs. Several people actually chipped in. "I am asking you not to sell your vote to those who are trying to buy you with money and liquor," said Veena, a Dalit, explaining that candidates take back thrice as much as they invest during the polls.

Praja Rajakiya Vedike (PRV), a political platform of dedicated social activists working for people's movements in Karnataka, felt that real change is possible through people's political power. So they fielded two candidates, Veena from Okalipuram and Derick Anil from Hebbal.

Veena, 33, is vice-president of the Karnataka Sex Workers Union and on the boards of several Dalit and sexual minority organizations. She has



Veena on the campaign trail

struggled for their rights.

Yet her candidature was volatile from the day she filed her nomination papers on 15 March. The concerned officer delayed accepting her change of name and medical certificate for trivial reasons till late evening even though it was issued two years ago. Her nomination papers were finalised only after the media intervened. "I ended up paying a bribe of Rs 500 for my caste certificate. My nomination was accepted only at 7:30 pm."

"We were on tenterhooks," said Pushpa Achanta, an activist with PRV.

Veena is very grateful to the media for having stood by her.

"My supporters who came from 14 districts of the state faced the wrath of the local goons. After I complained I was given police protection much against my wishes."

Breaking into the Congress bastion and reaching

out to all 38,000 voters was not on Veena's agenda. She and her supporters campaigned door to door visiting nearly 10,000 houses and addressing street corner meetings in Tamil, Kannada and Hindi condemning corruption, goonda raj and discussing lack of civic amenities like water, power, schools, hospital, anganwadi, housing, livelihoods, ration cards.

"Financial conditions for sexual minorities in my ward is abominable," says the anguished Veena. "Voters opposed the Congress MLA's quest for building apartments on the EWS plots."

Uplifting the hijra community along with other sexual minorities and Dalits is of utmost importance to her. "They face a lot of violence from goons and the police. If they

get employment, ration cards, Voter ID cards, housing facilities, they will stop sex work and begging. Some of us who are with Sangama, an organisation working with sexual minorities, have stopped doing sex work," said Veena.

Veena was born Vittal in a very poor Dalit family with four siblings. Her mother had moved to her natal home in Okalipuram due to her father's harassment. Vittal passed school doing odd jobs from the age of 12, starting with salary of Rs 75. "I realised that I was actually a girl. With the help of hijras in my neighbourhood I ran away from home at 20 and changed my sex. My mother cried but accepted me. Soon I started doing sex work and earned a lot of money and got my sisters married. I also adopted a boy when he was just three days old from the hospital and I named him Vijay. He is studying in Class 5. My mother looks after him. I heard about Sangama in 2000 and joined them in 2005.



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by SAMITA RATHOR



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# RADICAL DOCTORS

## Low-cost care in rural Bengal

Amit Sengupta  
Chengail (West Bengal)

A quiet movement in health care has been unfolding in the rural interiors of West Bengal, improving the lives of thousands of people in villages where no doctor has ever been before. It is an effort defined by vision and commitment and is far removed from the CPI(M)-led Left Front, which has spent 30 years in power in the state.

The epicentre of this endeavour is the Shramik Krishak Maitri Swastha Kendra (Worker-Peasant Friendship Hospital) in Chengail in Howrah district, about 25 km from Kolkata. It is a simple two-storied building enveloped by huge trees in a quiet bylane. Outside the hospital there is a bench made from bricks, a small tea shop and a pond.

The Worker-Peasant Friendship Hospital is clean and basic. Its doctors and health workers provide high quality health care without any fuss and bother. Patients turn up assured of attention. Initially, the hospital was meant only for the poorest of the poor. Now, however, all are welcome.

**HEALING HANDS:** It's about 6.30 in the morning as we wait for Dr Punyabrata Gun. There is something languid and unhurried about the wait. No one is jostling and jumping queues as might be the case in most hospitals run by the government. You won't find patients lying around in extreme distress either. Systems are in place and working.

Dr Gun is a general physician in his fifties whose experience and commitment show in his manner. He wears rubber slippers and is bearded. As is evident from the patients waiting to see him, his day always begins early. We are told it invariably ends late because he does not turn anyone away. It could be evening or even night by the time he has examined 100 or 150 patients. It is then that he heads back to his home in Kolkata.

This morning he is a bit behind schedule because he was on a train all night from Pakur and Gumani in Jharkhand, locations which are on the border with Bengal. He attended medical camps there for people afflicted with Kala Azar, tuberculosis and silicosis. Camps of the kind Dr Gun has attended are reaching out to extremely poor people who have received no attention from the government health system.

As he arrives at the Worker-Peasant Friendship Hospital, Dr Gun first heads for a quick bath. His trained health workers, most of them women from families of unemployed jute workers, are already on the job. They are recording case histories, providing physiotherapy, conducting ECGs and organising the dispensary. Lunch is being prepared in the canteen: a basic meal of rice, *dal* and *aloo bhaja*. Sometimes eggs are cooked.

These women are the backbone of the hospital. They care for it because they have known Dr Gun from the time he set up his first camp at the Kanoria Jute Mills when it went defunct and the workers were in dire straits. The women have their own stories to tell of a trade union movement that failed. One of them joined Dr Gun when her husband committed suicide. She is transparent: "He was in the forefront of the struggle. Suddenly he lost his mind." Her daughter is now a member of the kitchen team and has her hands full trying to meet the demands of the youngsters: give us some more curry, *bhaja*, how can we eat such dry food?

Every patient knows the doctor. More importantly, the doctor knows every

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Dr Punyabrata Gun in his chamber



Case histories being recorded by health workers

## Gumani's barefoot doctors

Amit Sengupta  
Gumani (Jharkhand)

TOUCHING the border of Birbhum in West Bengal, in this abjectly poor district of Sahebgunj in Jharkhand the story of despair is stark. In the black stone mines of Pakur and beyond, run the dark narratives of Kala Azar, silicosis, malaria, tuberculosis and rampant malnourishment. Poverty stares brazenly but there is not even the shadow of a government or relief for the people.

At Gumani (Sreekund) the local MLA has a sprawling mansion, shockingly huge. He is building another massive building with "Saudi Arabian money", locals say. Across Pakur and Gumani, people have nothing – poor homes, thatched huts, most of them in the BPL category, undernourished, without schools, without doctors and hospitals, jobless, hopeless. Little girls make *bidis*, afflicted with TB. Miners are severely malnourished. Even the Jamaat-e-Islami with its formidable network, has just a one-room dilapidated 'office' with a blanket on the ground in a broken down building. Everyone speaks Bengali, but there are no red flags here, not even a CPI(M) office.



Dr Gun training paramedics in Gumani, Jharkhand

However, a ray of hope has arrived. In jam-packed medical camps, the young and old are sharing their angst, digging for change. "Let's start with health first," says Imtiaz, a science graduate, jobless. Agrees Mohsin and Ibrahim, and others, including girls: let's begin with primary health care, and push this awareness into social transformation. That is how the Gram Swasthya Sewa Sansthan has found its contours of hope.

That is why Dr Punyabrata Gun from the Shramik Krishak Maitri Swastha

Kendra of Chengail has arrived. He teaches the 100 odd 'quacks' and paramedics the nuances of medical philosophy, the importance of case histories and socio-economic backdrop of patients, how to define basic healthcare, how to avoid the 'culture of indiscriminate drugs, including antibiotics'.

"Was the fever intense when it started, did it increase, what were the earlier ailments? Did the patient have diabetes, blood pressure or any other history, what are the ailments which can be cured by medicines and not surgery," Dr Gun speaks softly, but they are listening in apt attention, taking notes.

Dr Swapan Jana, the life-force behind the Rural Medical Practitioner's Association of West Bengal is the catalyst behind this movement of thousands of rural doctors in Bengal. He has charged up the meeting, cajoling every 'student', including an old man who has been 'practising' medicine for four decades.

"How do you look at patients in pain when you are the only 'doctors' for miles together? Are they not your friends and community members, are they not close to your hearts? Don't you give them what they need most in a crisis, the healing touch, relief from suffering?" says Dr Jana. "You are already illegal by law. So what is the worry? If healing pain is illegal, so be it. That is why, organise, upgrade your skills, change the world."

Everyone agrees. They have come from long distances to create a collective. They know their villages, their people. Most common ailments they can cure, and they follow the medical rules: complicated or specialised treatment only at the district hospital – which is in shambles anyway, while there is no official primary health care around.

"Hence, the need to train rural doctors. In the absence of government machinery and complete breakdown of the public health system, rural doctors are the lifeline of immediate hope. So they have to be professionally upgraded, trained, equipped with technical and research knowledge systems. They have to be provided higher medical support systems. They have to be legalised since health is a fundamental right," says Dr Jana.

One of the first batches of young people at Chengail are from Gumani – training to be paramedics. Others have followed from Madhepura in Bihar, the Kosi flood-hit area, Jadugoda and Sahebgunj. The new batch has 10 girls, Muslims, Hindus, tribals.

Says Sharmistha, a tribal girl. "I want to become a health worker and help children and women. They have no one to even ask for basic health care." Agree Raina Khatun, Anjali Devi, Zenaab – shy but stoic and determined. Those who have kids, their husbands and fathers cajole them to go. "Don't worry, Dr Gun's hospital is the best. And we will take care of the children."

In this poor and conservative domain, all these girls just out of school, mark an optimistic rupture with the past. Women here are often left to their repetitive fate, there is lack of education, they have no right to their bodies or sexuality. Young girls are forced to become mothers. In this domain, a new empowerment is blooming, the 'girl paramedic' becoming a catalyst and role model of change, along with the boys.



Kakuli Bhuiya at the registration counter

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patient. Some of the bonds are old and even personal. For instance, there is the ageing school master who seems to be losing his memory and hangs out at the hospital as though it were his second home.

But key to the doctor-patient relationship is the system of records. Medical histories are meticulously preserved on computers and when that is not possible, in handwritten files. "Case histories are crucial," says Dr Gun. "How can you treat a patient without knowing the complete biographical details of their ailments, their social and economic condition, the mental backdrop, earlier treatments, nourishment levels, family conditions, if he or she can buy a certain medicine or afford a hospital bed?"

Registering at the hospital costs just Rs 5. The registration fee was Rs 1 in 1994 and rose to Rs 2 in 1996 and Rs 4 in 1999. It was raised to Rs 5 in 2002. There are those who cannot even pay this small amount and they are allowed to register free. No one is turned away.

"It's not that we are only giving dignity to every poor patient. We are also creating a new discourse of alternative and mainstream allopathic medicine and professional health care," says Dr Gun. "This knowledge is their political right."

Part of providing access is to make tests available cheaply. An ECG for Rs 50, an ultrasound for Rs 150 or an X-ray for Rs 65 are very reasonable for those who can pay. And those who can't, use the hospital's diagnostic facilities anyway.

Says Dr Pradeep Saha, radiologist, "The hospitals and clinics in Kolkata charge Rs 20 for what can be done for Rs 1. Okay, we don't have the best equipment, but our results are on the dot. In India we just don't have a policy of national health care, everyone is fleecing the patient."

**QUALITY CARE:** Doctors easily rally around Dr Gun and his mission. They are drawn to his idealism as well as the practical efficiencies that he has inculcated. Both are needed for building a health care system that is inclusive in spirit and yet representative of the best professional standards.

Dr Gun is, of course, the mainstay, the one man who does it all day after day, from administration to basic health care to arranging for super specialty treatment. The best of doctors from Kolkata and elsewhere, including veterans from medical colleges, visit Worker-Peasant Friendship Hospital to provide free treatment and consultation to poor patients, who would otherwise be ruined trying to get private care in the clinics of Kolkata.

The hospital attracts specialists in various disciplines: ENT, skin, reproductive health, dentistry, eye care, physiotherapy. There is a need for psychologists as well because of the trauma that jobless workers and their families experience. High levels of distress lead to psychological problems.

When surgeries need to be performed, a network of doctors in Kolkata helps out. They arrange for beds and operations at subsidised rates. Or they succeed in getting the surgery done free in Kolkata Medical College and other such institutions.

Dr Chanchala Samajar, a gynaecologist five years senior to Dr Gun,

PICTURES BY PRASANTA BISWAS



Board of Shramik Krishak Maitri Swastha Kendra

explains: "It's a drop in the ocean, but we still try to give our best." Her husband, Dr Ashok Kundu, who is a general practitioner and runs a private clinic, is equally committed.

For these doctors providing equal access to health care is necessary for the transformation of society. It is part of the larger politics of workers and peasants asking for their rights.

Says young Kakoli Bhuiya in a cotton saree with a big bindi and a generous

smile, "I have been cured by Dr Gun many times. Now I have brought my mother. Where else can you get such extraordinary treatment, tests, cheap medicine? For my baby too, I came here. Dr Gun arranged everything in a hospital for us. We had no trouble. He is like god to us, but he is also like a friend. And he knows us, like he knows everybody, their entire life, like family."

It has taken just about one hour for Kakoli to get her mother a good session with the doctor. So off she goes to her village half-an-hour away, riding her cycle, her mother perched at the back, on a familiar journey of hope.

**LEGENDARY HEROES:** On the walls of this Worker-Peasant Friendship Hospital are black and white pictures of the heroes who inspire the kind of work done here. There is the Canadian physician and medical innovator Dr Henry Norman Bethune, born 3 March, 1890, who painstakingly built up medical units during the Spanish Civil War. He developed the first mobile blood-transfusion service in Spain in 1936. Later, he worked with the People's Liberation Army of China during the Second World War, and sacrificed his entire life in support of the politics of radical struggles for a just society.

Then there is Dr Dwarkanath Kotnis, made famous in India by V Shantaram's *Dr Amar Kotnis ki Amar Kahani* penned by Leftist writer Khwaja Ahmed Abbas, who lived and died during the Chinese epidemic in the Second World War, married a Chinese girl, and finally, succumbed to plague himself. There is also a picture of Dhiranjan Sen, Calcutta Medical College student, shot during a protest on 'Vietnam Day' in 1984, in Calcutta.

Among other legends on the hospital's walls is the trade union and mass leader Shankar Guha Niyogi, who was murdered on 21 September, 1991, by contract killers because he was seen as a threat to industries in Bhillai.

Niyogi's vision is what the hospital has been built on. Niyogi entered Madhya Pradesh's rural and industrial areas and created a completely new,

non-violent discourse among mine and textile workers, peasants and adivasis. His message and influence spread like wildfire in Dalli Rajhara, Durg, Rajnandgaon, Bhillai and Raipur.

His original vision broke through conventional trade unionism and conformist communist politics and created strong, often highly paid mine workers' unions, schools, cooperatives, peasant networks, anti-prohibition campaigns, women's empowerment struggles and a political language rarely seen in the annals of Indian grassroots politics. One of the great experiments was called the 'Shaheed Hospital' at Dalli Rajhara, dedicated to the fallen comrades of the movement.

Dr Gun, as Dr Kundu, Dr Binayak Sen and others, worked for years in this alternative model of revolutionary health care, where the health of the workers and peasants and poor and locals became a political challenge of total transformation through militant, creative and non-violent mass struggles for an alternative people's movement and a new society.

Dr Gun and other doctors have tried to show that the Shaheed Hospital model can work without external

funds and dubious donations. "If health care can't radically change the world, then what is the use of being a doctor?" says a stoic Dr Gun. "And if we can't change the world, what's the point in talking about it?" Dr Gun and Dr Swarup Jana, who teaches pharmacology at the Calcutta Medical College, have set up a formidable network of thousands of non-professional doctors in the hinterland who gave life when there was no medical system or doctor at hand (see box) and all of them set up medical camps staking their lives against the CPI(M) goons at Nandigram and Singur, also at Sunderbans when the typhoon struck.

In village after village they are working, sleepless, with no basic equipment. Even now the Chengail chapter is entering Bauria and Bagnan in Howrah, Beliapore in Bankura, Kumar Nati, Barasat, Sarberia in North 24 Paraganas, Jamespur in South Paraganas, Babdowan in Purulia and areas in West Midnapore.

**Dr Gun and other doctors have tried to show that the Shaheed Hospital model can work without external funds and dubious donations.**

## Friendly, floral hospital

Satya Sivaraman  
Fulberia (West Bengal)

**T**HE first thing that greets the eye at Amader Haspatal, a rural hospital in a remote part of West Bengal's tribal dominated Bankura district, is the sheer burst of colour all around.

"If I had my way I would plant flowers in every hospital around the country today," says Dr PK Sarkar, the moving force behind this low-cost healthcare initiative. "People should come to hospitals," he explains, "and feel nice about it."

Growing flowers is only one way in which Amader Haspatal's tries to be as patient-friendly as possible. Apart from charging dirt-cheap prices (Rs 5 to 10 per consultation) for its services what really makes it unique compared to any other health facility, is the top quality medical attention its patients get from Dr Sarkar and his wife, who is a senior nursing professional.

Located at Fulberia, around 270 kms from Calcutta, the hospital is still under construction and receives a steady stream of out-patients, who come from far away places because of the professional reputation of the Sarkars.

"This is one of the few hospitals I have been to where the doctor gives me enough time to describe my problems and then consults me on various aspects before prescribing a medicine," says Manik Chakrabarty, who has come all the way from neighbouring Purulia district for medical treatment.

In the coming year or so the hospital, run by a trust called Foundation for Health Action, plans to have around 100 beds for admitting patients



Amader Haspatal at Fulberia, Bankura

apart from a hostel for at least 20 health worker trainees at a time. Money for setting up the hospital has been raised from the savings of Dr Sarkar, his wife and a few other colleagues together with contributions from well-wishers.

One of the unique features of Amader Haspatal, is that the local panchayat, where it is located, has full say in the policies and administration of the hospital. This ensures strong support and involvement in solving local health problems many of which are related to poor nutrition, lack of clean drinking water and proper sanitation facilities.

The core philosophy of Amader Haspatal, as Dr Sarkar explains, is not to let any patient, however poor or sick, feel humiliated in any way. One of the main reasons why many poor people shun public health facilities – if they exist at all in their areas – is the harshness and indifference with which they are treated by hospital staff.

Paying attention to details like this is typical of Dr Sarkar, a former direc-

PICTURES BY SATYA SAGAR



Dr PK Sarkar

tor of the prestigious Calcutta-based School of Tropical Medicine and also the former Drug Controller of West Bengal, who has spent his entire illustrious career worrying about putting the concept of 'care' back into healthcare.

Back in the early eighties Dr Sarkar, while teaching at the Calcutta Medical College, took up the cause of the rational use of medicine, advocating use of generic medicines instead of branded ones. While there are only around 200 medicines that are considered essential by the WHO, the same drugs are sold under different names and irrational combinations adding up to more than 70,000 formulations in the Indian market. This not only increases the cost of medicine to patients in a poor developing country but also results in their inappropriate use often with health threatening consequences. Dr Sarkar along with other colleagues have built the entire rational drug movement in India and inspired an entire generation of their students to practice it's principles in their work till today.

Another cause very close to Dr Sarkar's heart is the training of health workers from rural areas so that they can go back home and start addressing primary healthcare problems there. One of the specific objectives of Amader Haspatal he says is, for example, to train quacks, who work in villages, so that their quality of treatment can improve and they can serve rural populations better.

"There is no way, in a large country like India, we can wait till we have qualified doctors everywhere. We need to engage positively with existing rural doctors and not make them outlaws," says Dr Sarkar. As of now one of the problems the hospital faces is lack of doctors to come and provide services, largely due to its location, around 270 kilometers from Calcutta. However, for Dr Sarkar and his wife, Haspatal's remoteness is not as much an obstacle as the very reason to be here where no other medical professional dares to go.

# Business

- Enterprise
- Inclusion
- CSR
- ICT
- Go Green

## The alternate distributor *IPDA puts mission into the book trade*

Civil Society News  
New Delhi

GETTING a book out is tough, but reaching it to readers is even tougher. The small publisher faces many hurdles. Retailers insist on dealing with established distributors who in turn are reluctant to look beyond known publishers

and titles they are sure will sell.

The books business in India will only go in for what it thinks is certain to work. Anything out of the ordinary is suspect and not welcome. There is little interest in innovation and no understanding of how diversity strengthens publishing and enriches society.

So, what should you do if you are a first-time

publisher with just one title to your name? Or if you have crossed that stage but are still trying to define your space and need a distributor who is willing to listen and try something fresh?

It would be a good idea to journey to a couple of cramped rooms in the warren-like Shahpur Jat area of South Delhi. Here a team of eight people led by Amrita Akhil has been trying since 2005 to

LAKSHMAN ANAND



Amrita Akhil with members of the IPDA team

redefine how books can be moved to make the business more meaningful.

The Independent Publishers' Distribution Alternatives or IPDA does a whole lot of things differently to make its point. It is a lean energetic outfit which is strong in spirit and low on costs. There is no fuss and bother because everyone is hands-on. IPDA's way of engaging is to be business-like but not corporate, casual but not without focus.

The absence of formality should not be mistaken for the lack of professionalism. IPDA has a good sense of what moves. It balances its idealism with the ability to drive hard bargains with retail chains and important single stores.

"I won't supply books unless I have an order," says Amrita. "I tell retailers to take only what they can sell. I don't want books to lie around and then come back as unsold."

Amrita travels for half the year, meeting retailers and working with merchandising teams on what can sell. She also likes to influence displays so that the books she distributes are positioned on shelves where they are most likely to be picked up.

"There is nothing worse than sending books to a retailer and then finding after months that they have been lying around in cartons unopened," explains Amrita.

The truth is that the books business is steeped in ignorance. Distributors and retailers aren't the reading types. Over time they learn to take certain kinds of calls. But they just don't know how to map contemporary concerns and recognise emerging trends.

This is where IPDA has defined a role for itself by being vigorously professional, clued into the market and yet willing to look beyond the conventional for business opportunities.

Amrita says she insists on standards. "We have gone with publishers who have just one book. But on the other hand there are a lot of people who come to us whose books we don't take because I can't put them in the market. Content and quality matter," she says.

A recent success has been *Amrita Sher-Gil: A Self-Portrait in Letters and Writings* published by Tulika Books and priced at Rs 5,750. Around 1,500 copies of the two-volume book have already been sold.

So, IPDA likes to believe that it has range. It can do children's books, the academic stuff and also the high-end variety like the Sher-Gil book. "We

know which stores sell and how much," says Amrita. IPDA now has some 380 accounts.

But it is from its point of origin that IPDA draws its strength. If it has succeeded in making a difference it is because it still holds on to its core values. So, it matters that IPDA distributed 500 copies of *On Cultural Front*, a single title from an unknown publisher in Kolkata. Similarly 250 copies were sold of *On Community and Culture* from a publisher in Karnataka.

IPDA has a good sense of what moves. It balances its idealism with the ability to drive hard bargains with retail chains and important single stores.

The challenge is in sticking to its mission while looking for commercial viability. It is necessary to be practical. When people ask Amrita why she lays so much emphasis on chains instead of standalone stores she says it is because it is to the chains that people go when they want to buy a book. So, while it is good to strengthen single stores, it is also important to be part of the action in the trade.

IPDA was set up in 2005 by eight independent publishers to serve as a response to the domination of multinational corporate publishing houses. A handful of conglomerates had wiped out small and medium publishers robbing the books business of its diversity. With globalization, the Indian market faced the same danger and therefore IPDA was born.

IPDA would promote independent publishers by using both mainstream networks and alternative channels. It would be in the market to enrich it and make it more socially relevant.

IPDA is a partnership. Its founders are Leftword Books, Navayana Publishing, Samskriti, Stree Samya, Three Essays Collective, Tulika Books, Tulika Publishers and Women Unlimited.

IPDA's initial infrastructure came from Tulika. The phones, the tiny office space and so on were

made available on credit. In the initial years, everyone was crammed into a single room. Now there are a couple of rooms and Amrita has a small one to herself.

Amrita, who is a qualified chartered accountant, came from Katha, where she worked in marketing and fund-raising.

Even after five years, IPDA has all the atmosphere of a combative new business living from day to day in the face of challenges. But it is also a fact that it has discovered its own viability. With a turnover of Rs 1 crore and a reputation for quality it has found its own viability.

As a business, it can make ends meet, invest in travel and pay its rent and other bills and disburse modest salaries. All of this is important because to compete with big distributors it won't do to depend on charity.

To have a market presence, one has to command respect. It is important to be wide awake. Idealism will attract attention, but making a difference requires much more than being noticed.

IPDA pulls off a difficult act rather well. It raises the bar for distributors and publishers, but doesn't talk down to the trade. It is out there with everyone else, pushing its titles, fighting for shelf space and making the connections that help a business grow.

"I have high regard for IPDA," says Krishna Kumar Nair, GM Merchandising for Odyssey, a chain with outstandingly well laid out stores, particularly noticeable at airports. "The people at IPDA know what they are selling and that is a refreshing change from a lot of other distributors," he says.

Nair says he listens seriously to Amrita's advice about the books she puts out. A final call may depend on many factors and Odyssey's own sense, but her input is never ignored. Nair believes that IPDA succeeds in widening the choice that is available to readers.

A quick look at IPDA's list reveals a large number of serious titles on politics and development. There is fiction, but no pulp. Children's books abound and they are the ones that bring in the money.

All in all, IPDA seems to have succeeded in structuring a business in the alternative space. By getting its mix right, it has managed to give a lease of life to authors and titles that might not have otherwise made it to stores. It doesn't matter if they don't sell very much. It is enough that they survive.

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# 'Talented go to caring companies'

*Time to overhaul management education*

**M**UCH before it became a trend, Dr Harivansh Chaturvedi began trying to make management studies more sensitive to issues of poverty and inclusion. He could see that India needed a new breed of managers who could take companies beyond profit and make them socially relevant. Standalone courses in ethics and corporate social responsibility did not satisfy him. He wanted to integrate values and developmental concerns with the teaching of marketing, finance and human resource development.

Dr Chaturvedi put some of his ideas into practice at the Birla Institute of Management Technology better known as BIMTECH. He built links with social sector organizations, invited activists to speak to his students and encouraged internships with NGOs. His search for freshness took him to industry leaders like Arun Maira (formerly chairman BCG and now in the Planning Commission) who also believed in the need for capitalism to reinvent itself – particularly in an emerging economy.

These efforts gave BIMTECH a distinct identity, elevating it from being just one of the many institutes teaching management across the country. Recently, it hosted an international conference on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in the hope of institutionalizing some of the learning within companies and linking them to campuses.

Extracts from an interview Dr Chaturvedi gave to *Civil Society* at his office in Greater Noida.

## What is the learning from your recent conference on CSR practices?

We have designed this conference to find out how CSR can be linked to inclusive development. The country is striving for inclusive development. The whole debate on economic growth is centred on how the benefits of growth can be distributed among common people. We have been concerned about the stark poverty and deprivation in many parts of the country and the problems that result – such as the growing Maoist problem. We want to understand how CSR can be rooted in Indian social realities and go beyond mere philanthropy.

I think many Indian companies are in tune with global thinking that CSR has to go beyond charity. Now there is growing realisation that CSR has to be in the DNA of business decision-making. It is our learning that CSR in India is taking root. There is significant interest at the board level. Top management is recognising the importance of CSR because many big companies in India are facing adverse situations. Being an academic institution we want to develop ourselves in teaching CSR and being consultants.

## There must have been companies that stood out at your conference.

Mahindra and Mahindra left a strong impression. They have taken a board decision that one per cent of their profits after tax will be used for CSR. They



Dr Harivansh Chaturvedi

have also encouraged employees to spend their time on social activities. So, they are not merely spending money. The experience of the company is that employee involvement in CSR improves motivation levels and makes for a greater sense of job satisfaction.

Several companies, among them many in the IT sector, rely on CSR and their image as caring companies to improve the quality of their recruitments.

Young people between 18 and 30 feel strongly about social commitments and uplift of the poor. They want to work for society and if companies provide them with that opportunity then they are interested in working for those companies.

## So a company which is known to be socially conscious attracts better talent.

It is a better employee retention strategy. The other is that it is a better corporate reputation management strategy. If you are perceived as being a good corporate citizen, socially responsible and considerate towards people then in moments of crisis they will not disbelieve you. People will give you an opportunity to explain your position. They won't distrust you outright. There are examples such as the Tatas and Birlas which are groups that built their reputations over decades. They benefit from the perception that people have of them.

## You see a trend of better people going to socially conscious companies.

Yes. What is happening here is in keeping with global trends. In 2007 a survey was conducted among the students passing out of the top business schools in the world. The majority wanted to work in a company which was socially conscious and ethical in its conduct. Similarly in our country, younger

people – though they may want to earn well and have a good profile – increasingly show a preference for companies that work for society.

## How is this influencing management education?

I was at a conclave of academicians from leading Indian business schools convened in Goa recently by the Aspen Institute where the theme was the response of management education to the global downturn and the socio-economic conditions prevailing in the country. It was an informal group but everyone agreed to work for promoting CSR in management education.

I suggested to the group that to promote CSR as an important element in management education we should talk to the regulator and the Union Human Resources Development Ministry. Only the regulator can influence thousands of business schools. The other requirement is that companies show a preference for making recruitments from business schools which give CSR importance.

So, what I suggested was that we have a roundtable of the schools, the regulators and companies to decide on how CSR can be built into management education.

I think the global awakening about CSR is about teaching CSR as a part of the core subjects. We have to propose to the regulator that future managers should be taught that their business decisions should be based on ethical business conduct and social responsibility.

We hope to have this roundtable this year when management education completes 100 years.

This is also the centenary of the great management thinker Peter Drucker who said in his later years that the great learning in management will come from non-profits.

LAKSHMAN ANAND

# Insights

- Opinion
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## More clout for Western Ghats

KANCHI KOHLI



**T**HE Western Ghats are undoubtedly one of the world's most critical biodiversity areas. Stretching 6000 km through six states in India, this complex ecosystem forms the catchment area for a network of river systems that drain almost 40 per cent of the country.

But in an era where everything is being built over or dug up, this ecologically fragile region, closely linked with people's livelihoods, is not being spared either. Forests in the Western Ghats house 5000 species of flowering plants, 139 mammal species, 508 bird species and 179 amphibian species which are under severe stress. A large network of dams and power plants has been proposed or are poised to be granted clearances. Vast areas are being sought for industries, while huge tracts are already being mined for ore. Illegal and legalised tree felling, poaching and several other threats are being stepped up. The biodiverse habitats and species along with the livelihood and cultures of

local communities face irreparable damage.

People have been responding. Over the years several research studies have not just highlighted the importance of the Western Ghats but the threats it faces. Movements around specific projects detrimental to the area have been in existence for decades. It would not be fair to name one over the other, as each movement has been fought with fervour, passion and determination. From *dharnas* and foot marches to court cases and petitions, the Western Ghats has seen it all. The battle, ironically, continues.

## NEED FOR AN AUTHORITY

Over the years, NGOs, local movements and researchers have proposed several strategies to counter the massive destruction of the Western Ghats eco-region. One of these has been the demand for a Western Ghats Environment Protection Authority (WGPEA). The broad logic

has been that the Western Ghats need to be recognised and conserved as an ecosystem that cuts across all state boundaries. The present conservation measures have only ensured (if at all) protection of pockets of the Ghats leaving out contiguous stretches. Moreover, there needs to be an independent regulatory and monitoring authority for the entire Western Ghats. Thereby, no new intervention in the Ghats will be done without the approval of this authority.

What is important to note is that since the last few years several proposals for a regulatory body have been considered either by the government or civil society groups. Previous suggestions include one in the Western Ghats Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan which proposes the setting up of a Western Ghats Conservation, Planning and Development Board. The BSAP (Biodiversity Strategic Action Plan) details these suggestions, and states that such a Board "should be vested with the authority to examine and approve/modify/reject any proposal or activity including 'Impact Assessments', undertaken by any sector viz. private, governmental or others, which has a bearing on biodiversity conservation, planning and development in the Western Ghats." This Plan was prepared and published as part of the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) process.

The Final Technical Report of the NBSAP submitted to the MoEF had endorsed this suggestion. In fact almost all eco-regional plans under the planning process had suggested an eco-regional authority. Section 7.0 on Overall Governance and Planning of the Final Technical Report mentions the Western Ghats Conservation, Planning and Development Board.

At another level, the network of organisations which had lobbied for a Sahyadri Ecologically Sensitive Areas (SESA) included, in their draft notification of SESA, the provision of a "Protection cum Monitoring Authority" to be constituted for the purpose of implementation of the provisions of this Notification. So in their mind the SESA and a WGPEA were linked. Efforts to declare a SESA across a significant portion of the Western Ghats of Goa, Karnataka and Maharashtra have been on since 1998.

Since 2009, attempts have been made to enervate this thought, along with revival of the Save the Western Ghats movement of the 1980s. The Save the Western Ghats movement involved over 20 local and regional people's movements who got together to march across the length of the sector between November 1987 and February 1988, in an awareness-building protest against the construction of dams and power stations that destroy one of the world's richest habitats.

Finally, on 18th February 2010, a formal announcement has been made. The Union Environment Minister, Jairam Ramesh, publically made a commitment for a special authority for protection of the Western Ghats eco-region. He was at the second meeting of the Save the Western Ghats movement being held at Kotagiri, Tamil Nadu. In the press release issued by the minister's office, such a body is referred to as the Sahyadri Ecological Authority. It will bear the responsibility for demarcation of areas within the Western Ghats which need to be notified as ecologically sensitive; and also make recommendations for the conservation and protection of the Western Ghats. This is only after an elaborate and comprehensive consultation process involving all the six concerned states takes place.

**QUESTIONS FOR AN AUTHORITY**

At this critical juncture, where a proposal for setting up of a full fledged authority for an ecological region is about to be realised, some core questions emerge. Foremost is the need to understand whether we are trying to find an administrative solution to a political problem? This is primarily because the stress and degradation in the Western Ghats is as much a socio-political issue as it is environmental. Therefore, a lot depends on where we locate the reasons that subsume the problems of environment degradation and livelihood impacts prevalent within the region.

We might feel that while such a regulatory and administrative response does not even begin to address the political conundrum it does provide a mechanism whereby we bring in an element of increased and tedious scrutiny of all that is proposed in the Western Ghats region. This is with the objective of achieving protection or short term

conservation of ecological spaces (both cultivated and wild biodiversity based) and people's biodiversity based livelihoods, lifestyles and cultures.

To initiate a process of engaging with this concept, I seek to raise some basic questions:

- Will bringing on board a new Environment Protection Authority be able to counter the 'efficient' environmental clearance of development and industrial projects which is the trend today? Or will it be another body where this pattern will be institutionalised? The National Environment

**There needs to be clarity on the larger role of a WGEPA. At present the suggestion does not include planning or policy functions.**

Protection Authority (NEPA), proposed by the MoEF, has been envisioned as a scientific, professional and autonomous body. However, if the NEPA continues to implement within the limitations of existing environmental laws, will the fate of ecosystems and dependant livelihoods be any different than what it is today? Will WGEPA also follow such a model?

- There needs to be clarity on what would be the larger role of a WGEPA. At present the suggestion does not include planning or policy functions. The Western Ghats BSAP had specifically included those aspects since planning for the area precedes any kind of 'development' agenda. Are the campaign groups or MoEF looking at broadening the role of such an authority to determine planning for the Western Ghats? This is critical to discuss as it will largely determine the other components of mandate, composition and powers that are proposed to be vested within such an authority.
- Can the Sahyadri authority be truly independent? If MoEF constitutes this authority, it is likely that its funding will be linked to the MoEF. The

existing Dahanu Taluka EPA (DTEPA) is an important model to consider. It was constituted under Section 3.3 of the Environment Protection Act, 1986. So far it has ensured the most effective implementation of an Ecologically Sensitive Area (ESA) notification. However the DTEPA continues to be dependant on the MoEF for basic funds.

- How will the WGEPA interface with existing national/regional authorities set up under Environment and Biodiversity Laws? Do we want the WGEPA to be a second level of 'specialised' clearances? Or are we looking only at environment and forest clearance mechanisms?
- Would the WGEPA also have judicial and monitoring roles? Further, is there a threat that the WGEPA will become another body in which huge amounts of decision making powers are vested? It will then operate with the intentions, priorities and biases of the people who hold those positions, none of whom can be entirely objective.
- Are we looking for one overarching and apex institution WGEPA? Or is the mandate of the WGEPA to have a bottom up process at village, district, state and then eco-region level? This necessitates a tedious process and brings along with it the political debate of centralised versus decentralised governance; or a combination of both. Does SWG or MoEF seek to delve into this arena?

**EXPERT STEPS**

The MoEF has set up a 14-member expert panel chaired by Dr Madhav Gadgil. After six months this group will send in its report. What is interesting is that this group will not be looking at the declaration of the entire Western Ghats as an ecologically sensitive areas, but only smaller areas. In early 2000 when a proposal to declare the SESA was sent to the MoEF for consideration, it had adopted a more holistic approach. With its limitations, the concept of SESA was primarily looking at the declaration of a large contiguous forest stretch with diverse land use and levels of protection as ecologically sensitive. The SESA proposal had taken on this massive challenge of inter sectoral integration which the MoEF committee could not take forward.

*The author is a member of Kalpvriksh Environmental Action Group and is based in Delhi.*

# Agenda for Bangalore

V RAVICHANDAR

**B**ANGALORE just completed its much delayed city corporation election. The IPL century bug bit the BJP too with happy consequences for the party in Bengaluru winning over 110 seats in a 198 city council. It is a no brainer that with the same party at the State and the City government we have a match that should be more hassle-free than the Sania-Shoaib one was.

With great power comes great responsibility and citizens' expectations in any city post such a result would be sky high. The papers report that the first act for most Corporators was to pray at their favourite temple with Tirupati topping the charts. They could do with divine intervention if they are to even remotely deliver on citizen expectations. For once the City Hall starts to function it is normally a matter of time before citizens' hopes are dashed and the city is witness to scams, unruly sessions and more. Why do we have a sense of déjà vu about having seen this before and what needs to happen differently?

The starting point of our collective woes is election financing even at the municipal level. Rumour has it that serious candidates spent between Rs 50 lakhs to

over a crore for the Corporation elections. And many of them win after years in the wilderness after having spent and lost in previous elections. As a result we have a serious return on investment issue that winning candidates are faced with. Barring a lucky few from the winning party that become major Standing Committee members, most have to 'manage' from the discretionary piecemeal ward works that they control. These are typically road asphaltting, some drain cleaning, pothole filling, footpaths, garbage bins, et all and are often less than Rs 1 crore per ward per year. So little wonder that engineering specifications in our cities are often halved in execution! A way out is to increase the monthly salaries of the Corporators and ring-fence them from inter-fencing in the tendering and execution process.

When the Corporators get down to the serious business of governance, they will discover that they have no effective powers. It lies with the State. So whether it is enabling legislation for charging additional fees or money grants, the State calls the shots. The Mayor they will elect is a titular one and barring some additional projects in their own wards most citizens will be blissfully

unaware about their first citizen. We all need to push across the country for greater powers for the city.

In Bangalore a Regional Governance bill is under consideration and it has elements worth adopting elsewhere. If implemented it confers the following key benefits – a metropolitan planning council that integrates the actions of the various government agencies, elected ward committees that can work with the ward Corporator on citizen centric projects, a directly elected Mayor that would serve as a future accountability meas-

platform.

This writer was a member of the erstwhile Bangalore Agenda Task Force (BATF). One of the truly innovative efforts was a half yearly accountability platform with the Chief Minister in attendance with citizen participation and extensive media coverage. The head of the city government agency (corporation, water supply, police, public transport, etc.) set out their tangible goals for the next half year. Six months later they (or their successor) came on the same platform to report on achievements and set out the next half year targets.

This ensured continuity of initiatives and acted as a powerful mechanism on agency performance. Similarly the City Corporation departments (engineering, health care, education, etc.) can also set out half yearly project targets and report on their execution in comparison with targets in town hall meetings with citizens.

The holy grail of civil society groups is citizens' participation. Janaagraha, an NGO in Bangalore, has been advocating solutions at a ward level that address both the voter list accuracy and popular public opinion, post elections. The heart of the idea consists of having mini ward units around the city elec-



toral booths. The entry and exit of residents into the ward is maintained at the mini ward level akin to the way a housing apartment society keeps track of the occupants and the owners. This ensures currency of the voters list with likelihood of better voter turnouts come election time. And inhabitants of the mini ward elect citizen representatives with the ward Corporator at the head of the local ward committees.

The voter turnout at 44 per cent, a figure that is disputed by civil society groups involved in getting out the vote, is low. There is a dire need to instill public trust in local government which can result in better voter turnouts and property tax compliance going forward. This can be achieved through a transparent governance mechanism in the City Corporation. The State is a signatory to the JNNURM reforms, though most of it is back ended for the seventh year. It could expedite reform items, related-citizen participation and disclosure law to help build citizen trust. This requires enabling legislation to be passed by the State Government. Years ago, the city had a PROOF mechanism to disclose the quarterly receipts and expenditure of the City Corporation to citizens. This practice must be followed across our cities if citizens are to gain confidence in the City Corporation and engage with the governance

What are the chances of our cities adopting some of the above as part of their long term agenda? Skeptics would claim it is very unlikely given the track record since 1947. But there are signs that State leaders are realising the need for newer ways to ensure re-election the next time around. And delivering on the promise and citizens' aspirations could well be the new mantra. This will require an outcome based administration with a focus on the urban poor that goes beyond generalities and announcements of crores of rupees spending planned. Execution is critical if the advantage gained in any election is not frittered away.

*V Ravichandar, Chairman, Feedback Consulting believes in chipping away at improving the system.*

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# Disha's vision for tribals

BHARAT DOGRA

ALTHOUGH India's Constitution is remarkably sensitive to the special needs of tribal communities, and several laws have been enacted for protecting their rights, the reality is that tribal communities continue to face many sided injustices.

Tribals have lost their land on a large scale. Their forest-based livelihoods have dwindled. They have frequently been deprived of a fair wage in forestry, farming and government works. All this has led to deep discontent among tribals. It is now widely accepted that one of the most important challenges before India's democracy is to take timely corrective action so that the livelihoods and resource base of tribals are protected and they have a sense of justice and well being.

One voluntary organisation whose work with tribal and vulnerable communities has been attracting a lot of attention recently is Disha. It has been working consistently since the last 25 years and has notched some remarkable achievements.

- Even before the enactment of the Forest Rights Act, Disha's mass mobilisation of peasants had resulted in land rights for nearly 32,000 tribal and other forest dweller households.
- Subsequent to the enactment of the recent law, the work for getting land rights for nearly 200,000 families in Gujarat has received strong support from Disha.
- Disha is credited with the formation of the first union of NREGA workers in India, and this in turn has helped to check large scale irregularities in the implementation of the rural employment guarantee scheme in Gujarat.
- Unions of forest produce gatherers and forest workers, construction workers, agricultural workers etc. with a large representation of tribals helped to improve the wages and overall conditions of these workers.

In addition, Disha and its sister organisations brought relief and hope to the victims of communal violence in many villages of Gujarat and their research activities proved successful in helping vulnerable communities.

Disha's main strength has been in creating, facilitating, nourishing and supporting a network of organisations which work for tribals, forest dwellers and similar communities who may not be classified as scheduled tribes in the strictly legal sense of the term. Several of these organisations are trade unions. In fact, a remarkable contribution of Disha to the voluntary sector is to pioneer a path of justice for weaker sections which to a significant extent is based on unions which reach out to the unorganised sections of society.

The person who deserves the most credit for implementing this approach in Disha is its founder, Madhusudan Mistry. Even before he started Disha, he had rich experience in both the

voluntary sector and trade unions. Although he has twice been elected as a Congress Member of Parliament (MP), he is better known as an activist than a politician because of his years of dedicated work in the tribal belt of Gujarat.

Disha has become almost an umbrella organisation for several organisations which have taken forward the struggles of tribal communities.

My memories of the early days of Disha, founded in 1985, is of Madhusudan Mistry covering long distances on his motorcycle to visit remote villages from his base in Ahmedabad. One incident I particularly remember is when some officials stopped his motorcycle and tried to attack him. Mistry was not afraid to antagonise powerful persons. Apart



from Disha's main work, he was more than willing to take up additional challenges.

In the course of his travels to remote villages, he noticed how villagers were not being properly compensated for loss of their land for gas pipelines. He took up the cause of the affected farmers. He also took me to several villages on his motorcycle so that I could report on the plight of affected farmers. My reports were published, the matter went to court, and the farmers got better compensation.

The journey of Mistry and Disha contains several such success stories where mobilisation of people, legal advice and advocacy brought quick benefits to vulnerable people. But what is even more praiseworthy is Disha's ability to continue struggles for a long time with patience and determination. These qualities have been particularly evident in the course of land struggles. Disha and its sister organisation, Eklavya Sangathan, knew that they were in for the long haul and accordingly they prepared for a prolonged struggle that would continue and is continuing for several years. Ultimately their patience and determination brought hope to thousands of families.

Disha provides a good example of an organisation using all democratic methods (mass mobilisations, campaigns and contact programmes including cycle yatras, dharmas and rallies, advocacy at

political party level, government and media, court battles etc.) in a sustained way for nearly 25 years to achieve significant benefits for vulnerable and weaker sections. Disha worked in a hostile environment in which for the most part the government was not very hospitable to the aspirations of forest-land cultivators, forest produce gatherers, farm and construction workers. Under the circumstances, the entire land distribution, wage rise and other benefits may not have been to the extent that Disha desired, but some significant gains were made and Disha as well as its sister organisation deserve a lot of credit for this.

Disha also took up budget analysis work which made it clear how pressing needs of vulnerable communities like tribals were not getting justice. As this understanding grew, pressure increased on the government to allocate adequate funds for the weaker sections.

While the main focus of Disha's work has been the tribal community or others facing similar land and livelihood issues, Disha also came forward to help other vulnerable sections when special circumstances demanded. When Gujarat became highly communalised in recent years and there were extremely cruel attacks on the Muslim minority community, Disha responded by taking up relief and rehabilitation work in several villages. The present director of Disha, Paulomee Mistry, was deeply involved in this work from the outset.

Disha worked in 44 villages of Sabarkantha district to build new homes and repair damaged ones, provide relief kits to about 4000 families, education support to about 2000 children and support for various livelihood activities. Disha worked in some other districts, not only to provide relief and rehabilitation, but also to try to bridge the communal divide, set up unity (ekta) committees and encourage youth groups to combine various activities with efforts for social harmony.

Formation and encouragement of youth groups called Tarvariya Tarun Sugathan has been an important part of Disha's work. In these groups vocational training and cultural activities are combined to channelise the energy of youth into bridging the caste and communal divide so that constructive activities can start with the support of the village community with special emphasis on helping the poor.

Although youth have been involved in Disha's activities and of its sister organisations, a special programme was welcome as the emergence of youth leadership will help to give new energy to initiatives for vulnerable sections and rural communities. As Disha lays emphasis on water-conservation, afforestation, and other issues of environmental concern, it sees the involvement of youth as critical.

# Living

- Books
- Eco-tourism
- Film
- Theatre
- Ayurveda

## Why Abba became an activist

Saibal Chatterjee  
New Delhi

AT an age when most successful professionals deservedly sit back to enjoy the fruits of a lifetime of labour, Shyam Benegal is still capable of springing surprises. By adding a new dimension – the power of humour – to his formidable oeuvre, the 75-year-old director has made a remarkable transition from being a critically acclaimed niche filmmaker to a compelling social chronicler capable of reaching out to a much wider swath of movie goers.

His new film, *Well Done Abba*, a trenchant political satire that blends a delightfully droll tenor with acerbic wit, builds on the breakthrough that *Welcome to Sajjanpur*, released in 2008, represented. The latter was a commercial success because it entertained even as it provoked the audience with its multi-layered comic take on the ways of the north Indian hinterland.

*Well Done Abba*, which blends ideas from three written sources – Jeelani Bano's *Narsaiya Ki Bawdi*, Sanjeev's *Phulwa Ka Pul* and *Still Waters*, a screenplay treatment by Jayant Kripalani – may seem to lack the infectiously breezy quality of *Welcome to Sajjanpur* but this sparkling gem of a film is no less engaging. It finds the doyen of Mumbai's parallel cinema in total control of his creative and storytelling faculties.

Indeed, *Well Done Abba* bears the stamp of a true master of the medium, a man who has nothing left to prove to the world and who, therefore, can afford to let the theme of the film do all the talking for him. So consummate is the skill on show here that the director's hand is barely visible. As lead actress Minnisha Lamba says, "He shot some of the scenes without me realising that they were shot, which is what the hallmark of a great director is."

While Benegal describes the film as "a happy comedy with a touching story", *Well Done Abba* has a marked undertone of anger. But the director's annoyance at the state of affairs in much of rural India is cloaked in genteel humanism. "You need



integrity to run good government schemes or else they run the risk of turning into scams," he says.

Benegal insists that his approach as a director hasn't necessarily changed and the comic approach in his last two films were dictated by the themes. "The content dictates the form," he says. "Some subjects demand a comic treatment, while others call for a serious approach."

Since his epochal feature film debut, *Ankur*, in 1974, Benegal has been at the forefront of a stream of movie making that has all but disappeared in Mumbai. The kind of cinema that dominates the Indian scene today is high on gloss, but rather low on substance. *Well Done Abba*, shorn of any veneer of affectation, is the exact opposite. It is as much for the lay movie audience as for the cognoscenti. Benegal strikes the difficult balance without letting the effort show.

"Ways to connect with your audience have changed over the years," says Benegal. "Today's younger movie goers are exposed to a variety of modes of entertainment and they are more willing than ever before to accept films that aren't conventional." He points to the way in which

*Welcome to Sajjanpur* had found takers across the urban-rural divide.

Much the same could be said of his new film. Aided by an outstanding performance by the chameleon-like Boman Irani and a vibrant screenplay that is full of intelligence and empathy, *Well Done Abba* is an effective expose on how administrative corruption and bureaucratic sloth tend to bring well-meaning government schemes for the poor to naught. It isn't an arm-chair filmmaker's take on the Indian rural reality. Benegal, as erudite a man as any in the business of entertainment, knows exactly what he is talking about – his understanding of the milieu adds depth to the depiction.

*Well Done Abba* differs in a significant way from Benegal's early masterpieces like *Ankur*, *Nishant*, *Bhumika* and *Manthan*: it makes concessions to certain conventions of the popular Hindi film in

order to make it commercially viable. In fact, it is also a marked departure from his previous film, *Welcome to Sajjanpur*, which was a racy rustic satire that addressed a range of relevant social issues through the story of an aspiring novelist who by virtue of being the only educated person in his village becomes letter-writer to the populace.

*Well Done Abba* has a simple, single-track storyline and benefits immensely from the simplicity with which its core concern is articulated. Produced by Reliance Big Pictures, *Well Done Abba*, which has had a nationwide release, serves the important purpose of filling a big vacuum that exists at the heart of the Mumbai movie industry. The film deals with a section of the Indian population that is consistently ignored in mainstream Hindi cinema.

*Well Done Abba* does not narrate a grand tale

Continued on page 32



Shyam Benegal



# Learning to be a solar chef

Civil Society News  
Gurgaon

WHEN the temperature rises, it's time to bake in the sun. On a warm Saturday morning the Advit Foundation offered a solar cooking session for three hours. Cooking enthusiasts arrived to watch as solar chefs rustled up a variety of dishes made with natural heat.



Sudha Nautiyal

The venue was the Rajiv Gandhi Park for Renewable Energy in Gurgaon which is being managed by the Advit Foundation, a non-profit devoted to environment conservation and livelihood skills.

Tables and benches were laid out under shady trees. Four types of solar cookers were on display. The first was SK-14, a round cooker which looked like a dish antenna. The second had a longish box with two mirrors and four wheels. It was invented by an architect, Suresh Vaidyarajan, who turned up to demonstrate its effectiveness. The third was a regular solar box cooker with mirrors but with more space. The last one, invented by Navdanya, was a twisted affair made of cardboard and foil and cost just Rs 100. "I use it when I go

trekking," said Kishen from Navdanya.

Remember for solar cooking there are a couple of implements you need to keep handy. A pair of gloves is essential, so you don't burn your hands. You can't use any old vessel to cook in either, since the sun might sizzle its bottom. Vessels of the Futura brand are recommended. Most importantly, please wear sunglasses while cooking. All those glinting mirrors and dollops of bright sun-

shine are not a sight for sore eyes.

Solar chef of SK-14, Sudha Nautiyal, rigged up the dish antennae and twisted a knob on it several times. "This is to ensure that the sun's rays fall directly on the cooker," she explained to mystified greenhorns. A pressure cooker was balanced in the middle. Oil, followed by onions and spices were thrown in. Rice, vegetables and water followed and voila in around 30 minutes, vegetable pulao was ready.

Nautiyal also demonstrated how *kheer* can be made in the solar box cooker. She assisted the architect in making bread in his long box cooker. That took the most time, but then bread-making is a protracted affair.

village is facing a severe water crisis. So he decides to take a government loan to dig a well outside his house. But his plans go awry as officials in charge of the scheme gang up to deprive Armaan Ali of his dues. With his back to the wall, he decides to turn the tables on the wrongdoers by accusing them of 'stealing' his well, which only exists on paper. Using the Right to Information (RTI) law, he finds out how many other villagers have vanishing wells. All hell breaks loose.

It isn't what you might describe as a laugh riot, but the film is laced with a strong dose of humour that often borders on the sardonic. Benegal's

The deputy commissioner of Gurgaon, Rajendra Kataria, and his wife, Kalpana, came to take a look and encourage participants. Nautiyal showed them how popcorn can be made in SK-14.

Lunch finally consisted of vegetable *pulao*, *kheer*, popcorn and freshly baked bread, sampled by everybody. "Does it taste of the sun?" inquired Charu Jain, director of Advit, solicitously.

A much more elaborate menu can be rustled up, said Nautiyal. You can make idlis, dhokla, chicken curry, rajma, she said. But rotis can't be made. Two *dhabas* on the national highway have bought SK-14, said Nautiyal, a solar entrepreneur. Her company, Safe Environmental Energy Devices and Systems (SEEDS), manufactures and sells SK-14. Nautiyal has sold most of her devices in rural areas. "The families are bigger and there is more space. The women suffer health problems because of wood stoves."

Solar cookers have not caught on in urban areas though. "When I give demonstrations in cities, I find people are very interested. But that doesn't translate into sales. People have nuclear families and not enough space," explained Nautiyal. The definitive solar oven for the urban housewife has not yet been invented.

But clunky solar cookers have enormous uses. Charu Jain said Advit Foundation was exploring the idea of getting women in Haryana to bake breads, biscuits, rusks and other foods for the Gurgaon market using solar cookers. No electricity would be needed and a single solar cooker can bake quite a lot. SK-14 warms up to 10 litres of water and is useful for small industries engaged in making candles, tie and dye, jam-making, sauces and so on. It costs around Rs 6,500.

Advit Foundation is also planning a natural restaurant called The Roots on its campus. And yes, they would use a solar cooker, said Iona Sinha, who will be managing the restaurant.

"The idea is to reduce the carbon footprint," said Samit Jain, director of Advit Foundation. "We will buy local organic foods."

Meanwhile, visit the Rajiv Gandhi Renewable Energy Park. It combines education with fun. You can watch a green film. Children get to learn about renewable energy and enjoy a ride on solar powered cars. The government of Haryana 'outsourced' the park to Advit and it's the only one which is functioning really well.

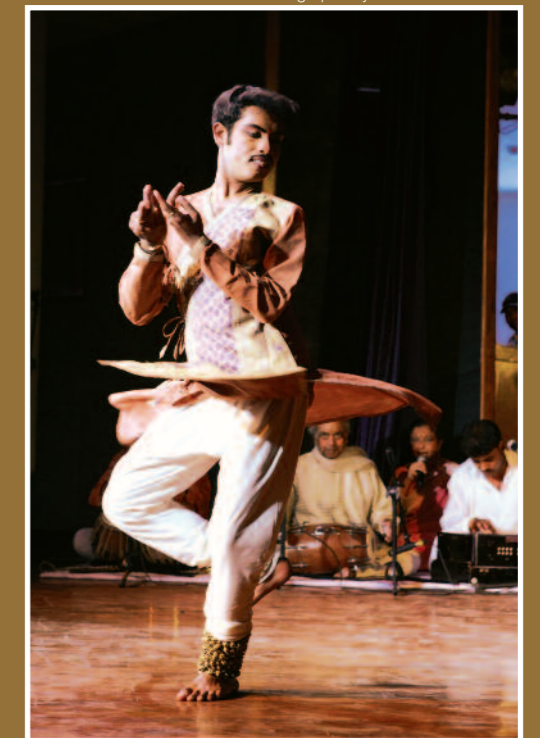
grasp on the material is unwavering: at no point does he get ahead of the plot with unnecessary technical and visual flourishes.

The story unfolds at a languid pace as the director peels layer after layer off the reality as it exists in Indian villages. Narrative simplicity is difficult to achieve, but not for Benegal, who allows his characters to evolve in a smooth, tangible arc. Especially impressive is the gallery of oddballs – an engineer, a police officer, a block development officer and a public works contractor, among others, who represent the immutable face of the bureaucracy.

*Well Done Abba* may not have rewritten the



Indian Ocean



Kathak dancer

## India's culture trail

Civil Society News  
New Delhi

THE ICCR is has taken several initiatives this year. The Festivals of India, popular some decades ago, are being ambitiously expanded. Two festivals are currently on in China and France. Namaste France, unveiled in Paris, will be on for 14 months. And in China the Festival of India, inaugurated in the historic Forbidden City, will carry on till October.

The ICCR invited the media to a preview of what was on offer. There was Indian Ocean's earthy music, a kathak performance by Birju Maharaj's troupe and an amazing Kerala martial arts demo.

There is curiosity about India, fuelled by economic growth and the rise of Bollywood.

The aim of the festivals is to highlight India's performing arts, history, cuisine, films, fashion, commercial and technical capabilities.

"The undertaking of festivals abroad by ICCR is not new," said Virender Gupta, director, ICCR. "But of late the scale and frequency had declined. We aim to accelerate that. Last year we had the India-Russia festival. This year we have China and France."

India, he said, wanted to project contemporary art forms – its fusion of cultures and Bollywood.

The Namaste France festival has performances by Mallika Sarabhai's troupe, Birju Maharaj, Meeta Pandit and Mashkur Ali, (Hindustani vocal) and many more. For the first time there will be an exhibition of Rabindranath Tagore's paintings. The French ambassador, Jerome Bonnafont, said his country would be sponsoring visitors from France to India.

In China, the festival of India will be moving through 30 or more cities, said Xie Fei, China's counselor. This will enable people to get first hand exposure to India's art and culture especially contemporary developments, he said. China too begins its festival in Delhi's Purana Qila, with Harmony of the Divine Land, a symphonic work of Chinese Buddhist music. India and China are linked by Buddhism. Music, dance, an exhibition of China's archaeology, porcelain, are also on the anvil.

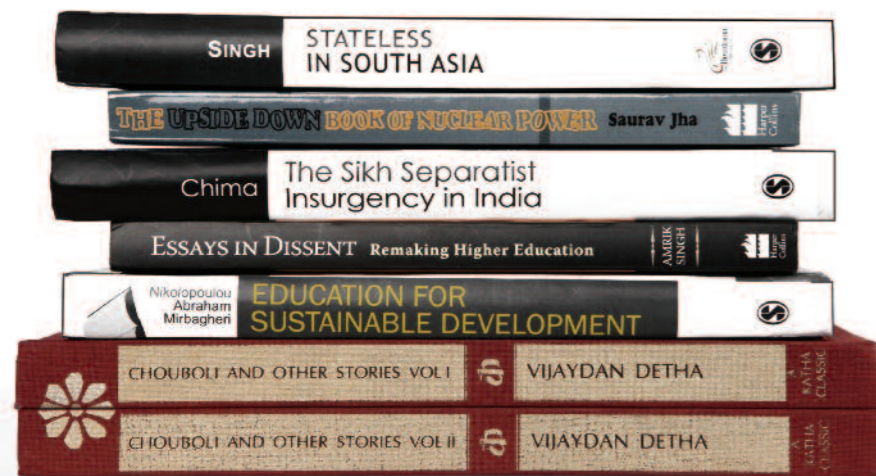
India begins its China cultural sojourn with a play on the life of Emperor Ashoka, music by Indian Ocean and performances by Leela Samson (dance), Hari Prasad Chaurasi (flute), Sohaila Kapoor (theatre) etc.



Kerala martial arts

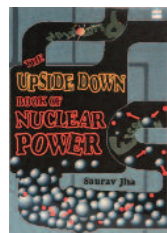


Dancer from Birju Maharaj's troupe



A QUICK SELECTION FROM THE MANY BOOKS THAT TURN UP FOR REVIEW

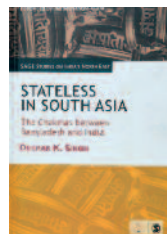
## Random shelf help



**THE UPSIDE DOWN BOOK OF NUCLEAR POWER**  
Saurav Jha  
Rs 250  
Harper Collins

Now that the Indo-US nuclear deal has reached fruition the logical corollary would be the setting up of nuclear plants. India has little choice but to opt for nuclear and non conventional energy since we are not blessed with oil. There will be a spurt in protests as land is acquired for such projects. Nobody wants a nuclear plant as a neighbour.

But misgivings about nuclear energy abound and you can see this among protestors and the media. Jha's book, engagingly written, demystifies this subject, of great public concern, to readers. He begins with a brief history of India's quest for nuclear energy, choice of nuclear energy and its economics. An advocate of nuclear energy, he does not shy away from addressing contentious issues like safety and waste management. There are chapters on the entire gamut of nuclear energy. For those planning protests and press releases, this is a good book to buy so that no goof ups are made.

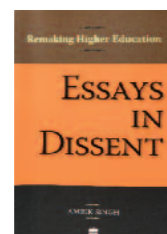


**STATELESS IN SOUTH ASIA THE CHAKMAS BETWEEN BANGLADESH AND INDIA**  
Deepak K Singh  
Rs 695  
Sage

This is an absorbing study of the dilemma faced by the Chakmas who were settled by the Indian government in Arunachal Pradesh, then called the North Eastern Frontier Agency (NEFA) after they were forced to flee their homeland in the Chittagong Hill Tracts in East Pakistan due to religious persecution. The Chakmas wanted to be part of India but were dumped into East Pakistan in 1947 when the sub-continent was partitioned by the British.

Things did not change when Bangladesh was formed. Persecution of the Chakmas continued. Not only were the Chakmas victims of the biggest dam displacement in South Asia, they faced unending political and religious discrimination.

But after the state of Arunachal Pradesh was formed, local Arunachalis do not want the Chakmas to get Indian citizenship rights with the status of scheduled tribe for this would give them access to land, resources and jobs. The ethnic people of Arunachal are themselves marginalized and naturally fear losing what they have. Therefore, a movement against the settlement of the Chakmas in Arunachal is ongoing. The Chakmas see themselves as Indians and have little interest in returning to the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The book is a remarkable study for it dispassionately examines the views of the Chakmas, the Arunachalis and the conundrum the Indian state faces in trying to accommodate all aspirations.



**ESSAYS IN DISSSENT REMAKING HIGHER EDUCATION**  
Amrik Singh  
Rs 275  
Sage

Amrik Singh devoted his life to the cause of education, writing extensively and lobbying for reform. This book, which is part memoir and part analyses, is a critique of the state of higher education in India. The book covers key aspects of India's educational structure – teacher performance, evaluation, funding, distance education, medical education, leadership and so on. Most of all Singh addresses the book to his fellow teachers. The status of teachers, the lack of leadership displayed, their disinterest in policy issues deeply concerned him. Vice chancellors of universities are not dynamic. He feels that if the system of education changes, the outlook of teachers will change too. Teachers need higher status. Students could demand better

performance. The book emphasizes teacher training and rethinking of the transfer system.

The lack of regulation is a constant problem the book comes back to. State governments are disinterested in reform, often flouting even weak directives by the Centre. Students end up with poor skills, as a result. Regulation not affiliation is the answer, he says. The book also covers distance education, the fastest growing sector in India which attracts the most students. IGNOU is the leader with a student enrollment of half a million. There is an analysis of medical education.



**THE SIKH SEPARATIST INSURGENCY IN INDIA**  
Jugdep S Chima  
Rs 750  
Sage

The book is an authoritative political history of the Sikh separatist insurgency in Punjab which focusses on its patterns of political leadership. This perspective has been previously unexplored. The book describes in detail the trends which led to the emergence of the Punjab crisis. Authored by Jugdep S Chima who is the Associate Editor for South Asia at the University of California, Berkeley, the book examines the various dynamics through which the movement sustained itself and the changing nature of its "patterns of political leadership" which eventually resulted in the decline of the insurgency in the mid 1990s.

Chima stresses the need to understand the movement in the perspective of ethnic nationalism wherein the "nation" is defined in terms of ethnicity. By examining the insurgencies in Chechnya, Northern Ireland, Kashmir and Assam, Chima has tried to build wider applicability of the theories formulated.



**EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**  
Edited: Anastasia Nikolopoulou, Taisha Abraham, Farid Mirbagheri  
Rs 795  
Sage

The book, a collection of essays, says education of environment, health, security, democracy, gender and human rights, are necessary for the holistic development of the body and the mind. The book's editors, Cyprus-based academics Anastasia Nikolopoulou and Farid Mirbagheri, and Delhi University professor Taisha Abraham, say this is an idea central to the Gandhian tradition of life knowledge and "Nai Talim" (New Education). This collection of 13 essays is divided into four parts - Globalization and the Politics of Exclusion, From Rio to Indigenous Cultural Resources: Education for Sustainable Development, Empowering the Human Capital: Challenges and Strategies in India, and Ethical Paths to Global Citizenship. The main focus is on the creation of sustainable education practices that are integrated into and relevant to the needs and practices of the larger world.

## Detha's mesmeric stories



**CHOUBOLI AND OTHER STORIES VOLUME I & II**  
Vijaydan Detha  
Rs 1500 for both volumes  
Katha & Fordhan University Press

**Shreyasi Singh**  
New Delhi

WRITTEN by Vijaydan Detha, *Chouboli and Other Stories*, is a book you'd like to introduce others to. The stories are imbued with the feel of the desert. Essentially folktales of Rajasthan, the stories will surprise you with their wry wit, lyrical beauty and relatable wisdom.

Detha, an iconoclast storyteller, infuses his orature with Rajasthan's rich storytelling traditions. He has a gift for picking the most provocative and compelling stories from the landscape of Rajasthan and recreating them in a literary form as engaging and daring as his oral sources.

Using the voices of wise shepherds, foolish kings, crafty ghosts, clever princesses, honest thieves, talking necklaces, and amorous snakes, Detha manages to make their words come vibrantly alive. His stories grapple with contemporary concerns and age-old dilemmas and blur the lines between rural and urban, ancient and contemporary, to pose situations that find echoes across languages, cultures and ages.

In the title story, *Chouboli*, for example, a young woman cross dressed as a man sets off to win the hand of a haughty princess sworn to life-long silence and maidenhood, in order to rescue her own husband from the royal dungeons. In another story, *Dohri Zindagi*, two girls, joined wrongly in marriage as man and wife to preserve a father's false pride, decide to stay married to each other, but as two women.

He also mixes irreverence for oppressive systems with a heartfelt compassion for the oppressed. All along though, he never gets preachy and moralistic.

Translated into English from Rajasthani, the

book retains the colourful and compelling style of the author's narrative. "I have been very satisfied with the translation. Even my friends who have read it say nobody else could have done this," says Detha, crediting his translators Kailash Kabir and Christi A Merrill, an Assistant Professor of South Asian Literature and Postcolonial Theory, University of Michigan, with doing a fantastic job. "I feel the same way I do when I read the Rajasthani version. The emotions, underplay, context have all been beautifully captured. I have been very happy with the appreciation I have got," he adds.

Kabir has, in fact, translated much of Vijaydan Detha's works into Hindi, and also published his own collection of Hindi poems titled *Tumhare Aane Par*. He is the recipient of the Sahitya Akademi National Award for Translation, as well as the Rajasthan Sahitya Akademi Award for Poetry. Merrill translates postcolonial writing from Hindi, Rajasthani and French, and writes on the practice and politics of translation. Her recently published work, *Riddles of Belonging*:



Vijaydan Detha



*India in Translation and Other Tales of Possession* extensively refers to Detha's works, among other Indian writers.

Detha is also thrilled that translations ensure his stories get a wider audience, and awareness that the book is a translation from the Rajasthani language. "It is unfortunate that our political leaders don't have the will to do anything about our language. They use it to get votes, speak it in when they visit their constituencies, but don't want to promote its traditions," he explains.

"Rajasthani has its own beauty. Our deserts, our air, the flora and the fauna are all a part of this language," adds Detha, whose story *Duvidha* was used by director Amol Palekar for his 2005 Shah

Rukh Khan-Rani Mukherjee film, *Paheli*. *Duvidha* was first recreated on film by Mani Kaul in 1973, and is the story of a bride who must choose between a ghost who falls in love with her and assumes her husband's form, and the man who marries her and leaves her to do business in far off lands.

His stories have been used by the film industry earlier as well. *Phitrati Chor*, was adapted by Shyam Benegal for a 1975 children's movie, *Charandas Chor* in which a common thief ends up being more honest than so-called custodians of morality. Benegal had adapted the movie from the famous play by Habib Tanvir, who had first adapted it from Detha's folktales.

Detha confesses he had hoped more filmmakers would come forward to adapt his stories into movies, especially after *Paheli* but says he understands the way the industry works, and there is little place for good adaptations of literary classics. "Look at what Sanjay Leela Bhansali did to Sarat Chandra's *Devdas*. It is difficult to trust them with your work," exclaims Detha, who is not able to write after a bad fall took him ill in 2007.

Apart from writing, Detha, who lives in Borunda village near Jodhpur, has been working tirelessly for the Rupayan Sansthan, an institute he established in 1960 with the late Komal Kothari. The Sansthan does archival and research work on various Indian folk art forms, folk music, folk ballads, folk epics, folk gods and goddesses, food, nomads and pastoral ways of life, ethno-geography.

Detha's contribution to literature has been recognised with many awards. In 2005 he was given the Katha Chudamani: A Lifetime Achievement Award. The award is a fitting tribute as

Detha is one of the most prolific writers of Indian literature today. His folk-based tales have been widely read since the 1970s, and he has more than 800 short stories to his credit which have been translated into Hindi, English and other languages. This is the first two-volume anthology of Detha's work in English. Katha says its Chudamani award is rooted in the belief that true art not only speaks of life but is also the source of the living truth.

Detha is also the recipient of the Sahitya Akademi Award for Rajasthani, the Bharatiya Bhasha Parishad Award, the Sahitya Chudamani, and the Padma Shri. Katha says Detha's work resonates with empathy for every living being.

# Light on clear vision

Dr G G GANGADHARAN

## GREEN CURES



**A**LWAYS make efforts to protect your eyes throughout your lifetime. Without sight, day and night are the same. Money is meaningless if you cannot enjoy the gift of sight.

You can protect and maintain the health of your eyes with the following methods:

- Cleanse your eyes by using Triphala, a combination of three drugs – Haritaki (*Terminalia chebula*), Vibhitaki (*Terminalia bellerica*) and Amalaki (*Emblica officinalis*).
- Keep your mind relaxed.
- Use anjana or application of collyrium.
- Do nasya or nasal instillations.
- Take shaku nashana or intake of bird's meat.

- Do pada abhyanga or foot massage.
- Also udvartana or dry/powder massage.
- Prakshalana or sprinkling of oil/kashaya.
- Padaraksha or wearing footwear.
- Gritha sevana or regular intake of ghee.

Avoid straining the eyes by taking improper food or looking at bright, moving or minute objects. This is recommended by Acharya Nimi to protect your eyes.

Although we take care of our face, skin and maybe our entire body to fight stress but we often forget our eyes – the most important organ of our body. We rarely pay attention to our eyes until there is some serious problem. Vision is one of the five important senses. The beauty of this universe is enjoyed and perceived through our eyes and if there is any problem in the eye then vision is affected.

Like other body organs, eyes also need care for better health and sight. These days both children and adults spend most of their time either in front of computers or watching TV straining their eyes and thereby inviting eye problems. The onset of these problems can be stymied with a little care, including a few changes in lifestyle and diet.

According to Ayurveda everything in this world is composed of five elements (Panchamahabhuta). So are the eyes. All these elements play a role in maintaining the health of the eyes. Earth (Prithvi) governs the muscular part of the eye, fire (Tejas) rules the blood vessels, air (Vayu) governs the color, water (Jala) dominates the white area, and space (Akash) controls the tear ducts and channels.

Here are some simple things you can do to prevent eye disease and improve your vision.

## GOOD EYE HABITS

- Clean your eyes with clean lukewarm water in the morning.
- Wash your hands before touching or rubbing your eyes. Avoid rubbing your eyes unnecessarily.
- If exposed to sunlight or after exercise wait 10 to 15 minutes till your body adjusts before splashing cool water on your face and eyes.
- If you are wearing glasses wash them once a week so that all the dirt and bacteria collected on it gets cleared.
- If you wear contact lenses, it is very important to wash and rinse hands thoroughly before handling the lenses. Eyes should be free of make-up when inserting the lens to avoid particles of mascara, kajal, surma etc from being trapped underneath the lens and causing irritation or even infection. Always use cleaning solutions as directed and do not allow them to expire. These solutions are vital for removing the build-up of protein from the lens.
- Eye make-up should be removed daily to allow the skin to breathe. Use a gentle removal solution and dab the eye, do not rub it. Never share make-up or your brushes/sponges with others as this significantly increases the risk of cross

infection. Avoid changing brands of eye cosmetics often.

- Get a good night of sleep to avoid sore and puffy eyes. Tired eyes can be rejuvenated by placing slices of cucumber or cold tea bags over the eye area for 10 minutes, to refresh the eyes.
- Don't smoke. Smoking makes eyes feel sore and dehydrated. More seriously, smoking can cause irritation to the delicate vessels behind the eyes leading to premature development of macular degeneration which can lead to loss of vision.
- Wear goggles if you are in places where debris or chemicals could go flying, such as in carpentry classes, laboratories, metal workshops and stone works. It is safe to wear suitable eye protection for games like hockey that could injure the eyes.
- Wear sunglasses if you are out in the sun a lot. Too much sunlight can cause vision problems later, such as cataract. Always wear suitable sunglasses or goggles that have a recognised UV filter to protect eyes from UV rays from the sun and from glare.
- Practice eye disease prevention. Eye disease is the number one cause of blindness. Most diseases that cause blindness, like glaucoma and diabetes, can be treated or their progression slowed down with proper diagnosis and management.

## YOGA FOR EYES :

Yoga plays a significant role in promoting eye health. A yoga routine replete with asanas, pranayama and meditation helps in achieving peace and tranquility. Yogic eye exercises strengthen the muscles of the eyes and thus help in curing many ailments of the eyes. Certain eye exercises are known to completely rectify eye problems. With yoga, people begin treating their eyes with care which reflects in good eye health.

## DIET FOR EYES :

- **Fresh vegetables:** Carrot, sweet potato, tomatoes, peppers (yellow), green peas, green beans, corn, pumpkin, eggplant, green leafy vegetables including spinach.
- **Dried fruits:** Walnuts, nuts, seeds, dried apricots.
- **Fruits:** Oranges, grapefruit, mango, papaya, cantaloupes.
- **Pulses and grains:** Meat, eggs, fish, poultry, milk, yoghurt, dairy products, cheese etc provide different types of micronutrients – all of which play an important role in maintaining ocular health.

**MEDICAMENTS AND PROCEDURES IN AYURVEDA:** Ayurvedic Acharyas mention local treatment procedures of netra (eyes) in the name of Netra Kriya Kalpa (Treatment Procedures) – Anjana, Seka, Aashchyotana, Pindi, Tarpana, Bidalaka, and Putapaka which improves the eyesight.

- Instillation of eye topical solutions in the form of drops (Aschyotana) from plants like triphala, shobhanjana, haridra etc.
- Application of medicine – Rasakriya's of plant Guduchi (*Tinospora cordifolia*), Babool patra (*Acacia arabica*) to the internal surface of lid margin from medial canthus to lateral canthus of eye (Anjana).
- If Triphala (an Ayurvedic preparation) is available, you can wash the eyes with 'Triphala water'. Put a teaspoonful of Triphala powder in a glass of water, and let it stay overnight. Strain the water and wash the eyes with it.
- Putting one drop of honey in each eye once a week is also beneficial to the eyes. It causes a bit of irritation, but cleans the eye. This must be done under the guidance of a Vaidya.

Triphala choornam a combination of Hareethaki-vibheetaki and amlakki in equal quantity is an ideal internal eye tonic for regular use for people above 40 years. Take one teaspoon of Triphala choornam, mix with honey to make a paste and have it. Take it at bed time. Take it for three months and stop for a month. This can prevent almost all age related and physiological related eye diseases. Triphala is said to be a panacea for all eye diseases in Ayurveda.



# A lesson in compassion

Samita Rathor  
New Delhi

**E**XACTLY a month ago, the 17th Gyalwang Karmapa Ogyen Trinley Dorje, shared his wisdom on altruism and compassion with followers at the India Habitat Centre. He imparted instructions on specific techniques and practices which would help us cultivate these qualities in our daily lives.

While the teachings of the Karmapa were independent and complete in themselves, they formed the basis for the next teachings of His Holiness, the Dalai Lama on 19 to 21 March. These powerful, analytically stimulating sessions were for four hours on each day organised by The Foundation for Universal Responsibility of His Holiness, the Dalai Lama. His Holiness gave in-depth teachings on the cultivation of altruism and compassion as a means to personal happiness and global peace, followed by an initiation into a practice with the deity Avalokiteshvara.

The teachings were planned for a group of about 125 people, reaching out to those with a deep interest in Buddhism. The event was created for practical learning, talk and debate. It was not necessary to be a Buddhist or commit oneself to becoming one in order to attend the teachings and derive value from them. The Dalai Lama urges people to learn from all traditions. Any long term dedication to a particular faith or teacher needs to be arrived at only after profound consideration and reflection.

Colourful hues of red, yellow and orange daisies decorated the orange walls of the hall where the teachings were held. The dominant mantra, *Om Mani Padme Hum*, resonated in the background.

The core teachings of Buddhism are based around 'The Noble Eightfold Path' which describes the way to end suffering, laid out by Siddhartha Gautama. It is a practical guideline to ethical and mental development with the goal of freeing the individual from attachments and delusions. The Noble Eightfold Path finally leads to understanding reality.

Following the Noble Eightfold Path helps a person realise that greed, jealousy and selfishness cause all worldly suffering. With this new understanding, one's suffering may finish. The Eightfold Paths are:

- Right Knowledge
- Right Thinking
- Right Speech
- Right Conduct
- Right Livelihood

## KEY POINTS :

- Eat a good, balanced diet with lots of fresh fruit and vegetables.
- Blink your eyes periodically
- Look away at short intervals to keep from straining the eyes.
- Try to maintain regular and clean bowel movements. Constipation weakens the eyesight. In addition too much anxiety, mental stress, grief, anger and worry are harmful for the eyes.
- Apply warm oil (coconut oil, sesame oil etc) and give a slight massage to your



Dalai Lama

- Right Effort
- Right Mindfulness
- Right Concentration

The focus of the Dalai Lama's teachings were based on 'A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life' written by the great Indian Buddhist Sanskrit scholar Shantideva, a Buddhist monk at the Nalanda Monastic University in India around 700 AD and one of the Dalai Lama's much loved and revered teachers.

The Dalai Lama pointed out the importance of opening our minds and seeing reality. Below are a few vital points which formed part of the teachings.

## ON IGNORANCE

- Man created his own problems as he was unable to see reality.
- Ignorance means lack of knowledge about reality.
- To be able to see reality it is essential to have a calm mind.
- A calm mind helps bring inner peace which is very healthy for the body and mind.

## ON COMPASSION

- Compassion and forgiveness help maintain the

balance of our internal system.

- Education, commonsense and reasoning, bring more awareness to the value of compassion.

## PEACEFUL MIND

- Mental peace is important.
- Good sound sleep is essential.
- Analytical meditation brings reasoning and analysis.
- Mind is a continuation of the past, present and future.
- The mind should be channelised and trained to focus.
- Through proper meditation and yoga, dissolution of suffering occurs.
- All suffering should be eliminated. This can be done by finding the cause of suffering. No sentient being wants to suffer deliberately.

## ON SUFFERING

- Anger and attachment lead to suffering.
- The cause of suffering is ignorance due to short sightedness.
- We must utilize our deep potential positively.

## ON NON VIOLENCE

- Non violence is a sign of strength and self confidence.
- Non violence creates virtues that bring about a good life.

## ON ALTRUISM

- Altruism brings about a feeling of fulfillment.
- Jealousy brings harm and retards progress.
- Satisfaction on a sensory level is transitory.
- Serve and help others as much as you can.

In a nutshell, the spirit of the teachings was on how by developing compassion and altruism one can nurture a greater sense of tranquility and calm in everyday life.

What fascinated me was His Holiness, the Dalai Lama's complete focus. Despite being in his mid 70's, his ability to sit upright without moving for four hours was inspiring. Midway, participants got a tea break. His Holiness remained seated and very warmly welcomed all those who came forward to offer their respect or get books signed by him. Talking continuously for four hours depletes energy but he did not show any exhaustion or weariness.

His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, struck me as a warm person, very elegant with a contagious sense of humor. Despite the intensity of the teachings I felt relaxed.

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sole every night. This will improve your eyesight and give you very good sleep.

- Drink plenty of water throughout the day.
- Regular eye exercise maintains perfect eyesight.
- Protect your eyes from dust, smoke, strong sunlight and strong wind. Avoid staying long in such conditions. In case you have to stay, blink often and massage the closed eyes gently with your palms.
- Get your eyes tested regularly.

E-mail: vaidya.ganga@frlht.org, Dr GG is a senior physician with FRLHT, Bangalore.

# Calm mind, peace within

SAMITA RATHOR

FOR human intelligence to function constructively and be able to investigate the real truth about life, a calm mind is essential. A disturbed mind cannot see reality accurately in totality and develops biased views. It makes an object appear negative.

Whether a person is a believer of God or not the truth remains that a calm mind brings peace. A non believer also needs peace. People rely on alcohol, drugs and different kinds of distractions to attain peace, but peace will always be unattainable if one seeks it in external objects. Even the smallest creature in this world thrives for inner peace.

*"Inward calm cannot be maintained unless physical strength is constantly and intelligently replenished."* Gautama Buddha.

#### Signs of a disturbed mind

- When one gets easily annoyed and anxious
- Constant agitation
- Difficulty in falling asleep
- Lack of focus
- Frantic thoughts
- Irrational uncertainties
- Intolerance
- Anger
- Unkindness
- Addictions

According to the Dalai Lama the two benefits of a calm mind are:

A calm mind brings inner peace and happiness. This helps to maintain the equilibrium of a healthy body. A calm mind makes the physical body function normally.

A calm mind helps human intelligence to func-

tion effectively. It helps to analyse truth. It provides proper functioning of the brain and when that occurs objects can be seen more positively.

#### HOW TO DEVELOP A CALM MIND

A self centered 'I' attitude creates disturbances. Concern for the well-being of others can reduce

#### SOUL VALUE

this self grasping and self centered attitude. More compassion and respect for the desire of others reduces a dangerous self centered attitude. A strong sense of self is determination of self confidence. Spiritual progress is difficult without a sense of self. At the same time it is necessary to make a distinction between a negative and positive sense of self.

Analyse the circumstances. For example, a severe pain. Think about the pain. If there is a way to overcome the pain, then there's no need to worry because there is a solution. If there is no solution to overcome it, then there is no point in worrying too much, as there is not much that can be done. A comparison can be made from a prior pain experience that was worse. When the mind analyses that, feelings develop, that, in comparison to the old pain, today's pain is easier. Therefore the mental attitude towards an object plays an important role. Even in the case of a minute incident, if you look at it intimately, it appears very big, beyond your control. If you look from a diverse angle, from a distance, the identical crisis seems smaller. So a positive mental attitude helps in developing a calm mind.

When we are not at ease we invite disease. In such a situation we are unable to keep our energy levels consistent and that's when we invite all kinds of malfunctioning in our physical body. This gives rise to a disturbed mind. If we take adequate measures and learn to release stress and tension then we have more chances of developing a calm mind. Wanting to possess a calm mind is totally scientific and a natural need of man.

*"Every human being is the author of his own health or disease."* Gautama Buddha.

If we are thoughtful, patient, kind, forgiving and compassionate in our thoughts and actions, we do not have the time to harm other beings. If one is truly and sincerely able to pardon someone with all their heart, then they have created immense positive energy. It is hard to think pessimistic thoughts, or hurt someone, while we are in a state of compassion.

Hatred, jealousy and excessive attachment cause suffering and agitation. Only compassion can help us overcome these negative emotions and move us into a calm state of mind. Compassion is not just being kind to your companion. That is sheer attachment because it is based on expectation. True compassion is when you do something good devoid of expectations, even without knowing the other person. It is in identifying a connection and oneness and that we are all similar beings with similar qualities. Compassion stems from wisdom. Where there is compassion and wisdom there is always more room for a calm mind to evolve.

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## PRODUCTS

### MIGHTY UMANG

The Mahila Umang Samiti in Almora district, Uttarakhand, an initiative of the Pan Himalayan Grassroots Development Foundation, produces a range of jams, jellies, honey, pickles under its brand name, Kumaoni.

To promote organic farming Mahila Umang markets grains, pulses and nuts under their brand name Himkhadya. The Samiti evolved from being a conglomeration of Self- Help Groups (SHG) into becoming a company. Some 1500 simple hill women are its members. They have ambitions to grow big.

Grassroots has helped set up a shop, Umang, for them in Naini village. If you go to the hills this summer, visit Umang. You can order online too.

Website: [www.grassrootsindia.com](http://www.grassrootsindia.com)  
Phone: 05966-221516  
E-mail: [apaul@grassrootsindia.com](mailto:apaul@grassrootsindia.com)



# Changing Lives



## Watershed Development

"Insufficient rainfall and water scarcity was a constant problem in Sollepuram village located in the Sarangapalli Panchayat, Hosur, Tamil Nadu. Srinivasan Services Trust, in collaboration with NABARD and the local panchayat, started a watershed development program to help increase ground water levels here. Three check dams and one percolation pond were constructed to conserve rainwater. These completely filled up this year giving dramatic results. The ground water levels in bore wells rose by 20 to 30 feet." It is now possible for me to irrigate 4 acres farm with water from bore well. The SST agronomist advised us to grow crops that require minimum water, resulting in increased crop yields.

Sri Rajappa, Secretary,  
Sarangapalli Watershed Project,  
Hosur, Tamil Nadu.

#### Achieved as on March 2010

Number of Water users and Watershed association formed	144
Area covered under watershed development ( Ha)	12466
Area covered under Dry land horticulture ( Ha)	5564
Number of Rain water harvesting structures constructed	241
Water table increase in meters	9 - 16
Number of farmers benefited by changing cropping paten and got increased yield.	4578
Landless families provided with Income generation activities.	1605

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**HE LET HIS  
DREAMS SOAR,  
SO THAT HIS  
VISION COULD  
TAKE WINGS.**

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Celebrating the 171st  
birth anniversary of our Founder  
Jamsetji Nusserwanji Tata.

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